8 SPECIAL EDITION

BUSINESS
COACHING

CO-CREATING **THE RELATIONSHIP**

Section B

Section A
September 2020.

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EDITORIAL

In front of you is a new issue of our Special Edition format of the magazine “Business Coaching”.

This is actually a continuation of the story of coaching and the necessary competencies and skills set by the ICF, (International Coaching Federation). Certified coaches, who apply the recommendations given by the ICF, can provide their clients with the gold standard of coaching. This edition is our contribution to the promotion of coaching as one of the most powerful tools for people development.

Cherie Silas processes the ICF guidelines in a very detailed and understandable language and thus creates value added for coaches, but also all managers involved in people development.

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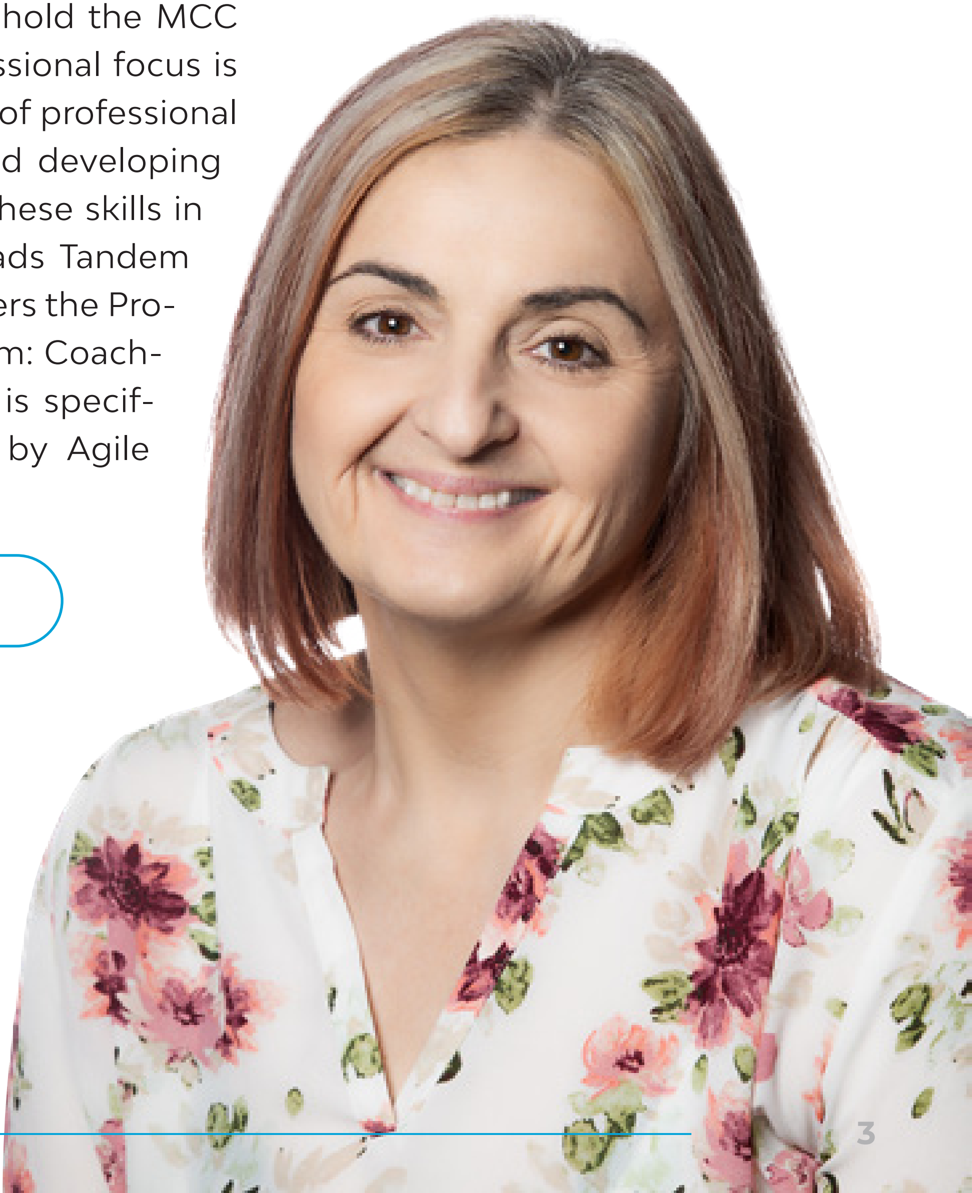
ABOUT **AUTHOR**

Cherie Silas is the first Scrum Alliance Certified Agile Coach (CTC and CEC) to hold the MCC cre¬dential from ICF. Her professional focus is bring¬ing the discipline and art of professional coaching to the agile world and developing agile coaches' ability to utilize these skills in their work with clients. She leads Tandem Coaching Academy which delivers the Professional Coach Training Program: Coaching in Agile Environments that is specifically designed and delivered by Agile Coaches for Agile Coaches.

Tandem Coaching Academy



CO-CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP

With the release of the new Core Competency Model, ICF has taken an expanded approach to competency in co-creating the coaching relationship with the client. In the new model, section B focuses on three competencies needed to properly co-create the relationship with the client:

- 3. Establishes and Maintains Agreements
- 4. Cultivates Trust and Safety
- 5. Maintains Presence

In the next several articles, will cover these competencies specifically.

ICF defines the competency of Establishes and Maintains Agreements as partnering with the client and relevant stakeholders to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans and goals. It further expands the competency to include establishing agreements for the overall coaching engagement as well as those for each coaching session.

This focus on the coaching relationship has been much needed and I'm encouraged to see ICF moving in this direction as an overall focus of coach competency. My experience has been that coaching schools have not appropriately focused on the entire relationship with the coaching client including establishing the relationship and closing the relationship. In my experience as a client I have noticed that when starting a relationship with a new coach I am often surprised to find out that the coach doesn't start that relationship co-creating the engagement with me. Schools have focused on creating the coaching agreement in the coaching session, which is extremely important, but have often failed to equip coaches to have strong full engagements with the client by managing the expectations, understanding of coaching, and setting and managing goals and progress with the client.

I developed a model to help me in my coaching practice called STORMMES. This model helps the coach develop a strong relationship agreement with the client at the onset of the engage and provides a way for them to schedule regular check-ins to measure progress and adjust overarching goals. STORMMES © is an acronym that stands for the following conversations a coach and client should have when co-creating their relationship.

As with using any model, these may not be discussed in the order presented. Coaches should always be responsive to client's needs above holding tight to using a model as presented.

• **S – SUBJECT** (overall focus of the coaching engagement)
• **T – TIMEFRAMES** (engagement length, progress checks, session length, regularity)
• **O – OUTCOMES** (desired outcomes of the coaching engagement- goals)
• **R – ROLES** (education on what to expect in the coaching process, confidentiality, ethics, responsibility for change, role of coach, role of client, preparation for sessions, reflecting after sessions, work between sessions, how to make engagement most effective, client needs, coach needs, legal terms, ending the engagement, etc.)
• **M – MEASURES** (how coach and client will know goals are met, milestones)
• **M – MOTIVATION** (why goals are relevant and the value they will bring to the life of the client, why the client is seeking coaching at this point in their life, what will happen if the client doesn't make changes)
• **E – ENVIRONMENT** (what systemic factors promote and prevent success for the client, who are the stakeholders that may impact progress)

THE RELATIONSHIP AGREEMENT

The last article introduced the use of the STORMMES Model © in co-creating the relationship agreement with the client. In this article, we take a closer look at competency 3 Establishes and Maintains Agreements.

The first three competency markers in this section help us to understand what a good relationship agreement contains.

1. The coach explains what coaching is and is not and describes the process to the client and relevant stakeholders

2. The coach and client reach an agreement about what is and is not appropriate in the relationship, what is and is not being offered, and the responsibilities of the client and relevant stakeholders

3. The coach and client reach an agreement about the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship such as logistics, fees, scheduling, duration, termination, confidentiality and inclusion of others (These markers are addressed in the T – Timelines, R-Roles, E-Environment portions of the STORMMES Model ©.)

A competent coach will take time prior to starting an engagement to ensure that the client understands the difference between coaching and other disciplines. For coaches who engage in multi-discipline work, it is important to clarify what coaching is and is not. If the work you are doing with a client includes other disciplines like consulting,

training, mentoring then it should be clear to both the client and the coach when and how these disciplines will be used throughout the engagement. I have seen a trend in multi-disciplined coaching engagements (such as agile coaching) where coaches have been frustrated because they want to coach but the client wants them to consult. This points to the need to clarify up front in the relationship agreement how the coach intends to interact with the client and how the client expects the coach to interact. If an agreement cannot be made or there is an unresolvable mismatch in the expectations the coach must consider the ethical ramifications of taking on the engagement. Please also note that as a matter of the competencies around ethics the coach should also address how coaching differs from disciplines such as counseling, therapy, other psychotherapy and support professions. Please take note that relevant stakeholders are part of the coaching agreement so for coaches who are working in organizations there may be several layers of the coaching agreement to consider.

As a provider of reflective coach supervision what I have noticed is that much of the challenge coaches have during engagements tie back to a weak relationship agreement. Whether the relationship agreement should be in a written formal contract or verbal agreement is not defined by ICF for competence. These are decisions left to the coach regarding how they manage their coaching practice as internal and external coaches.
Many of the items in marker three are easily handled and agreed upon through the coach's standard written contract. Some of what is contained in markers one and two could be contained in a written contract and is often contained in a SOW with corporations, however in practice much of this is verbal agreement between coach and client and gets adjusted throughout the engagement. For items relegated to verbal agreement, it is important for the coach to have

some process for ensuring that they have the relevant conversations with the client to set the pace of the engagement. I also recommend periodic check in points where the coach and client reflect on their relationship and make any further agreements and clarifications as needed.

THE COACHING PLAN

The last articles introduced the use of the STORMMES Model© in co-creating the relationship agreement with the client. In this article, we take a closer look at competency 3 Establishes and Maintains Agreements.

The next competency marker in this section help us to understand that every coaching engagement must have a clear plan and goals agreed on by the coach, client, and relevant stakeholders.

4. The coach partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to establish an overall coaching plan and goals

(These markers are addressed in the ***S – Subject, T-Timelines, O-Outcomes, M-Measures, M-Motivation, E-Environment, and S-Start*** portions of the STORMMES Model©.)

The first consideration to make to show competency in this area of Establishes and Maintains Agreements is who are the relevant stakeholders in the coaching engagement? For a client who engages and hires the coach as an individual and self pays, there may be no other relevant stakeholders. However, this is not for the coach to decide in isolation. There should be a discussion with the client regarding who might be relevant stakeholders to the coaching engagement and who the client might consider as stakeholders to success but not relevant to the coaching engagement. These relevant stakeholders may or may not be active participants in the coaching sessions or made privy to progress as outlined by the agreement between the coach and client.

For clients who engage and hire the coach with business funds, the goals may be for the individual being coached, but the organization or part of the organization might be considered as relevant stakeholders to the coaching engagement, often due to the agreement the client made with the business organization providing the funds.

For companies who hire the coach on behalf of the client there are usually one or more relevant stakeholders, including the terms of the SOW the coach and organization signed. What I have found in my experience is that the company level SOW is a written agreement outlining all the legal terms and overarching expectations.

As pertains to relevance, the coach client and stakeholders may need to determine the coaching plan and goals together. In scenarios where the coach is working with an organization as the client, there may be levels of relationship agreement needed. The coach may also need to consider what I call Triangle Agreements © which are agreements made between the coach, client, and relevant stakeholders concerning things like confidentiality, roles, accountability, plus any other items that need to be clarified with stakeholders outside of the immediate coaching relationship.

Examples:

A) The company contracts with a coach to work with multiple organizations, teams, and individual yet to be determined. There will always be a SOW outlining the terms of the engagement and the overarching compelling reason for the coach's work with the company.

B) As the coach engages organizations or departments inside the company, the coach should work with the leadership of those organizations and departments to define the coaching relationship. In my experience, the department level agreement is documented as a coaching plan and includes the goals, measures, outcomes, and includes relevant stakeholder collaboration in the creation of the plan. Applying the STORMMES Model © at this level and beyond is helpful to provide full clarity of the engagement.

C) As the coach engages with teams inside those organizations as client, there should also be a relationship agreement with each team outlining the specific work they are doing with the coach and who relevant stakeholders are that may have a say in the goals and outcomes. In my experience team level agreements are often documented in a coaching plan to capture their goals, outcomes, and measures and is built collaboratively with the team and coach plus any relevant stakeholder inputs.

D) In the event that the coach also works with individuals inside the company, it is necessary to outline a coaching relationship agreement with each individual. In my experience, the individual client level agreements are often verbal and may have short documentation of goals, outcomes, and measures. Unless otherwise agreed, these coaching plans are confidential between the coach and client. Triangle Agreements © often apply at this level.

PARTNERING WITH THE CLIENT FOR SUCCESS

The last few articles introduced concepts in co-creating the relationship with the client. In this article, we take a closer look at competency 3 Establishes and Maintains Agreements and how to make sure that you are appropriately matched with clients before committing to a relationship. This concept is supported by competency marker:
4. Partners with the client to determine client-coach compatibility

Having a successful coaching engagement starts off with ensuring compatibility. Most coaches do some sort of "chemistry" session with clients before entering a relationship. This session often includes a "getting to know you" conversation for the coach and client to make a more human connection and get to know the person they will have a personal relationship with for several months or possibly years.

During this conversation things discussed are usually some form of overview of the coach's background and what drew them to the profession of coaching. The coach's values and beliefs about coaching and coaching relationships and limited personal information that may help the client be more connected to them as a human. This conversation is also an important opportunity for the coach to get to know the client, why they are considering coaching at this point in their life or career, what their beliefs about coaching and what it can do for them, and what they wish to achieve through a coaching engagement.

Another important aspect of this conversation is that this is where the coach will get an understanding of the type of professional the client really needs. Some potential clients may disclose at this point that they are under the care of a mental health care professional. This does not mean that coaching is not relevant for them. However, it does indicate that a conversation about how coaching is different than therapy is necessary. The coach may ask the client if they have discussed coaching with their therapist and what topics or goals they believe are more pertinent to coaching than counselling.
In my opinion, while this initial chemis-

try session may produce an outcome of a new client under contract, it is not intended to be a sales conversation. From my point of view, this conversation is about gaining a dual understanding of if this is a compatible relationship. Some considerations the coach may make are:

• Is this the type of client that the coach loves working with?
• Does the client seem appropriately engaged in their own success?
• Do the client's needs, motivations, and goals for coaching fall into an area the coach feels competent and confident to work with?
• Do the client's personality and communication patterns mesh with the coach's ability to see them as creative, resourceful, and whole?

Considerations from the client's perspective are often:
• Is this coach someone I feel safe with?
• Do I believe this is someone I can be vulnerable with?
• Does this coach's values, beliefs, and background give me confidence that we can have a strong and successful engagement?
• Can this person challenge me to new awareness?
• Does this coach have a personality I feel comfortable working with?

I have noticed that for some coaches this initial contact with a potential client is often focused on the business perspective of just getting clients to work with. While I can completely understand this need for business success, I have also learned over time that what is most valuable is to work with a potential client prior to contracting with them to make sure that the two of you can have a compatible relationship. This sets the foundation for embarking on an engagement with a client; and for declining the opportunity if the coach or client believes that they are not compatible. The compatibility of the relationship is vital to both the coach and client's long-term satisfaction and success and is more important than simply "closing the deal."

KEYS FOR A STRONG SESSION AGREEMENT

The last few articles introduced concepts in co-creating the relationship with the client. In this article, we take a closer look at competency 3: Establishes and Maintains Agreements. These next markers of competency are all about creating a strong coaching session agreement The concepts in this article are supported by competency markers:

4. Partners with the client to identify or reconfirm what they want to accomplish in the session
5. Partners with the client to define what the client believes they need to address or resolve to achieve what they want to accomplish in the session
6. Partners with the client to define or reconfirm measures of success for what the client wants to accomplish in the coaching engagement or individual session

One thing that set a coaching conversation apart from just a general conversation is the coaching (session) agreement. The session agreement is how the coach and client partner to know what the coach and client want to achieve in the time they have together, how they will know they have achieved the purpose of the session, and how they need to go about working through the topic. A strong session agreement makes all the difference between a wandering conversation where the coach ends up trying to solve the client's problems for them and a focused conversation where learning and progress are made with the client holding the agenda. When done well, the client often makes a lot of progress and gains a tremendous amount of awareness while determining the session agreement. The key thing for the coach to remember is that the session agreement is not something that happens before the coaching begins – it is coaching.

When coaches look at the coaching agreement as something that happens before the coaching begins the agreement ends up being mechanical, check the box style, and "meets the competency markers" but doesn't provide the best value to the client. Coaches do best to understand that 1) *the purpose of coaching is to create awareness* *in the client* – not to just get to a list of next steps; and 2) *the coaching begins at "hello."* What I mean by "the coaching begins at hello" is that the coaching agreement isn't a checklist to get through so you can begin coaching. It is the coaching. When taking this approach, the coaching agreement can be a process of discovery for the client, not just about what they want to accomplish, but what's underneath.

Partnering with the client to identify what they want to confirm or accomplish in the session is a process of discovery. This means that the coach needs to dig beneath the surface and not just accept the first thing the client says as the goal. Clients often don't really know what they want to accomplish until they have explored a bit. They generally know the topic of the conversation but can rarely say, "Here is the goal and measures of success." The clarification of the goal and how the coach and client will both know that the goal has been achieved is a process. Therefore, the coach needs to dig beneath the surface with questions like: What is bringing this topic to the surface today? What is the impact of what is happening? What would you like to be different? What is stopping this from happening? What do you need to know in order to resolve this? Why is this important for you? Where are you on this topic right now? Where would you like to be? What's in the gap between where you are now and where you want to be? What will tell you that you have a feasible plan in place? How will you know that you have arrived at the destination of our conversation? What is the outcome you hope to achieve today through our conversation? What impact will this have when you leave? How does this tie back to your larger goals? What do you want to know when we are finished that you don't know right now?

Keep in mind that while I have given a list of example questions here, that doesn't mean that these are a checklist or that they will even fit appropriately into the conversation with your client. That's where presence and partnership with the client come in. You must be curious. You must listen to the client. You must pull on the strings that the client presents to you. It's your job to explore the human behind the topic. Your questions should be responsive and reflective of what the client just said. And, as the coach, you hold the process to ensure that the client moves through the coaching conversation in a way that brings them to where they want to be. To do that, you must first help them discover where they want to go.

MANAGING CLIENT FOCUS SESSION TIME AND RELATIONSHIP COMPLETITION

In this article, we take a closer look at competency: Establishes and Maintains Agreements.

These next markers of competency focus on the management of the coaching session and closing of the coaching relationship. The concepts in this article are supported by competency markers:

- *Partners with the client to manage the time and focus of the session*
- *Continues coaching in the direction of the client's desired outcome unless the client indicates otherwise.*
- *Partners with the client to end the coaching relationship in a way that honors the experience*

Every coaching conversation begins with the client's agenda and focus. The client holds the content and the coach holds the process. Together they partner to make progress towards the client's goals. The goal of coaching is to create client awareness. It is more important that the client learn and make progress toward the goals outlined in the beginning of the conversation than it is to get to the end, ring the bell and say, "We did it!"

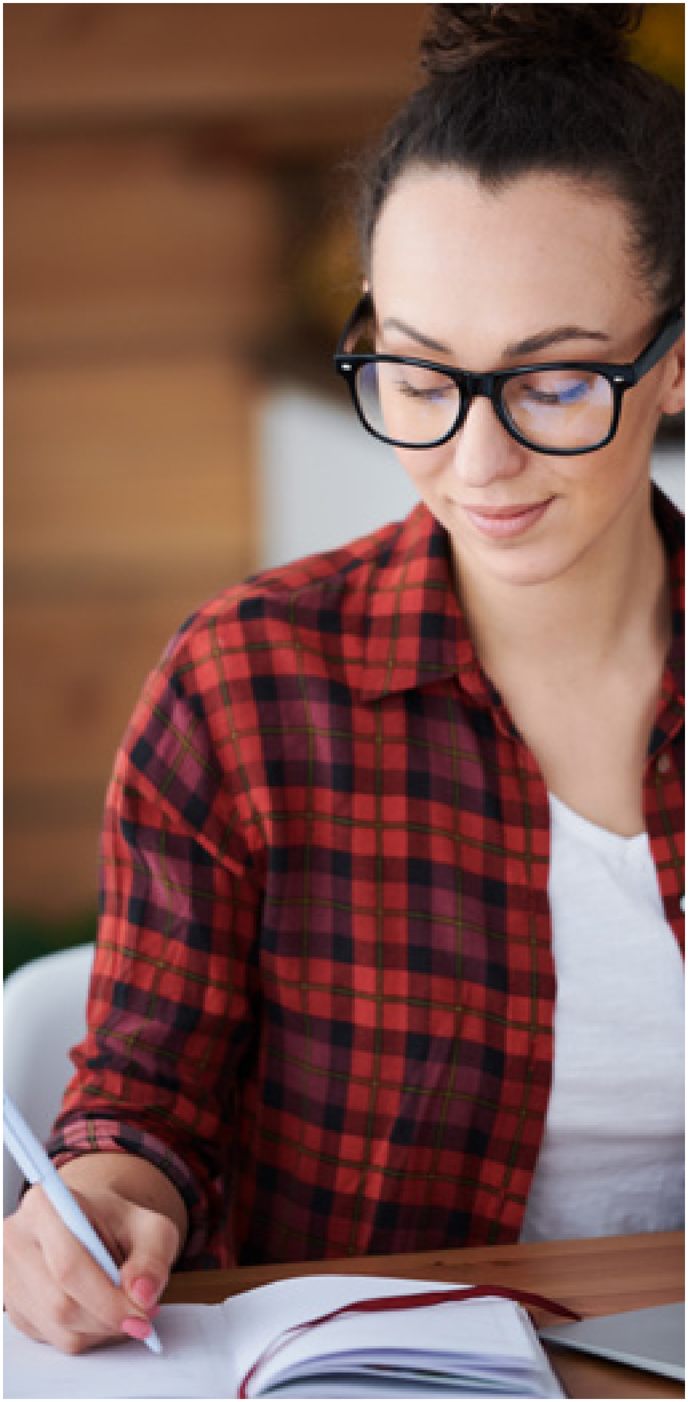
Coaches have to let go of getting to the finish line and focus on the journey to the finish line. In the process, the coach must manage the art of the conversation in a way that both promotes progress, holds the focus of the session, and manages time so that the arc can be complete before the end of the timebox.

It's important that the conversation wind down and come to a natural feeling end rather than an abrupt, "time's up!" ending. It is also important to respect the client by ending at or before the scheduled time. I find that, in general, the first 25-30% of the coaching conversation is focused on the coaching agreement. The final 25-30% of the conversation is focused on actions, accountability and reflection on progress and learning.

The rest is the body of the coaching conversation. It is the coach's responsibility to manage the timebox and the focus of the session. If the coach follows the client's lead, the conversation will focus on the client's agenda and move in the direction of the outcomes the client desires. The coach is resourceful and knows what they need to discuss to get where they want to be. So, ask the client where to go. Listen to the client and respond to their answers with questions that keep the conversation moving forward. If you hear that the client seems to be going in a new direction, check in to see if the conversation is still focused on what the client needs to get to the outcomes they desire. The client will confirm if the conversation has gotten off track or if it needs to continue forward in the current direction. Remember, the client knows what they need better than the coach does. Always follow the client rather than having the client follow you.

Similar to how a coaching engagement should start with structure, the closing of the relationship should also be structured. The coach has a responsibility to close the engagement in a way that honors the experience of coaching. In my coaching engagements we generally review the original goals of the client and determine how much progress has been made on each of the goals. Then, we discuss how the client will continue to make progress towards each of them.

Sometimes we develop a plan of attack the client can continue to follow after their engagement with me. Other times, the client decides that they still want to do some work on the goals in partnership with me, their coach. Additionally, we talk about the experience of coaching, how the client is different than when they started, and what the client has learned in the process. I generally ask the client if they are willing to provide feedback about their experience and if they would like to provide a client testimonial. Some clients provide a letter of reference I can use with future clients, some provide an online testimonial that gets displayed on my website, some provide an anonymous testimonial which preserves the confidentiality of our relationship, and others do not wish to provide feedback. What's most important is that the coach learns and incorporates feedback into their coaching practice so future clients can benefit. I also generally ask the client if it is okay for me to send an email in a few months to check in with them. I like to check in with my clients a few months after the engagement is over for two reasons. First, we are in a relationship and I'm truly interested in their success. Secondly, sometimes after a few months, the client decides they would like to engage in coaching again for their next set of goals.



UNDERSTAND, RESPECT, AND ACKNOWLEDGE

In this article, we take a closer look at competency 4: Cultivates trust and safety. ICF defines this competency as "Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust." The first three indicators that the coach is competent in cultivating trust and safety are:

1. Seeks to understand the client within their context, which may include their identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs

2. Demonstrates respect for the client's identity, perceptions, style, and language and adapts one's coaching to the client

3. Acknowledges and respects the client's unique talents, insights, and work in the coaching process

These three indicators focus on seeing and embracing the client for who they are and where they are at this moment in time. One reason coaches tend to niche themselves in a particular field is that it is easier to work with clients when you understand their world, what it's like to be in that world and the challenges they face. And yet, we will not always have the context to understand the client's world fully. In these moments, we must draw on our empathy as we listen to the client and look beyond the story to feel what it must be like to live with these unique challenges in the their environment. The coach's burden is to take the steps necessary to gain whatever context is needed to meet the client in their world with enough compassion to not dismiss the client's perspectives because they are very different from what the coach has experienced. For example, I am a native-born, English-speaking, white American. I have always lived in the US and have a privilege level with this background that I might naturally want to assume everyone experiences. The reality is that my experience of America is not the same experience of others who have received microaggressions, discrimination, and other racial injustice. As a coach who works with a large variety of people, it is my responsibility to be educated about the context of how my clients experience everyday life as a non-white American or a migrant to America. I must be open to understanding their world, respecting their viewpoints, and hold valid the context in which they experience life. In short, I must remain curious. Curiosity helps me to understand the progress the client is making and the courageousness it takes to make certain decisions and changes. Curiosity ensures that the empathy I feel will not convert to sympathy because sympathy assumes that the client is somehow broken. If I can't do this, then I will not be able to develop trust and safety in the relationship because my client can never feel seen, heard, understood, validated, and accepted by me. Curiosity also gives me the ability to genuinely celebrate success in partnership with the client. How can we be in a safe relationship if my client can't be sure that expressing their truth will be met with a non-judgmental, validating willingness to understand? Listening for and utilizing language the client's language is an important part of seeing the client as whole and respecting them in their world. Rather than expecting them to adjust to me, I must learn to adapt. To create a safe container, I must move into their space rather than expecting them to move to mine. Creating a genuine relationship can

EMPATHY, NEUTRALITY, AND VULNERABILITY

In this article, we take a closer look at competency 4: Cultivates trust and safety. ICF defines this competency as "Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust." The last three indicators that the coach is competent in cultivating trust and safety are:

1. Shows support, empathy, and concern for the client
2. Acknowledges and supports the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, and suggestions
3. Demonstrates openness and transparency as a way to display vulnerability and build trust with the client

Supporting the client begins with a true partnership. Empathy is not sympathy. Empathy connects with how it must be for the client and gives validation and acceptance. Sympathy feels pity for the client and expresses a belief in the client's brokenness. Concern is not worry. Concern communicates that you care about the client and want the best success for them. Worry expresses that you will somehow fix the client's problems if given a chance. Support creates an atmosphere that encourages clients to express their true feelings without worrying what the coach will think about them. To alleviate this worry, coaches must learn to control their responses to information shared by the client. Learn to take it in without the judgment reflex taking over. See information shared as data for the client to work with rather than data to be sorted, analyzed, and judged. Cultivate a habitual reaction of curiosity rather than shock, defensiveness, or judgment.

I learned to control the shock, defensiveness, and judgment reactions by becoming acquainted with my internal physical response when these responses are triggered. Each time I felt the trigger, I immediately checked my facial expression to ensure neutrality. I checked to make sure I was breathing normally. I relaxed my facial features, cleared my mind, and just listened. I reminded myself to be curious and to suspend judgment.

Doing this repeatedly outside of coaching conversations helped to condition my mind and emotions to detect the physical trigger and immediately respond likewise during coaching conversations. Remember, you can't control triggers. You can control how you react and respond. Please also take note that what I am recommending is not merely an external facade. Cultivate the belief that your client is unbroken. Become fascinated with what others might find shocking. Allow yourself to accept the client for who they are with all the things that are part of that package. Don't dismiss something as TMI (too much information). Instead, become curious about why the client is sharing this information with you. Consider how it is all part of the bigger picture.

It helps to apply systems thinking when fostering coach-client partnership. Seeing beyond the client into the world they inhabit can help you see through a wider lens and recognize how the client-generated the perceptions and beliefs they hold. It can help you gain context for their concerns and suggestions. Understanding is the first step to acceptance. It is also vital that the coach not assume connections in a world they haven't experienced. Instead, ask questions that allow the client to explore possible connections. It is also crucial that the coach doesn't presume to understand what it is like to be the client. Be forthright when you don't have experience in their domain and stress that you listen to understand more. Be open in disclosing that you might say something like, "I can imagine you to be feeling x," and permit to challenge the assumption and make the correction. Recognize that some attempts to empathize may fail and that you wish the partnership to be strong enough to withstand those mistakes. When you make observations or share intuitions with the client, always ask for the client's input. Questions following observation or intuition might be, "How does that observation resonate with you?" or "Am I getting that right?" or "What do you think?"

Coach vulnerability goes beyond transparency and willingness to be wrong. It is also yielding direction to the client. What I tell students in my coach training program is, when you find yourself thinking, “I don’t know what to ask” or “I don’t know where to go from here” or “I’m stuck,” that is always an indicator that the right next move is to ask the client. Be vulnerable enough to ask, “What would be the most helpful direction for us to go now?” or “Where shall we go from here?” or “What else would you like to say?” This passing of the power shows the coach’s willingness to be okay with not knowing what to do, and it offers a full partnership with the client. It may help to understand that you and the client are a system. When you are not sure where to go, this is an expression of the system. It tells you that you are trying to lead and are unsure where to go because the next move belongs to the client. Always listen to what the system is telling you.

MAINTAINS PRESENCE

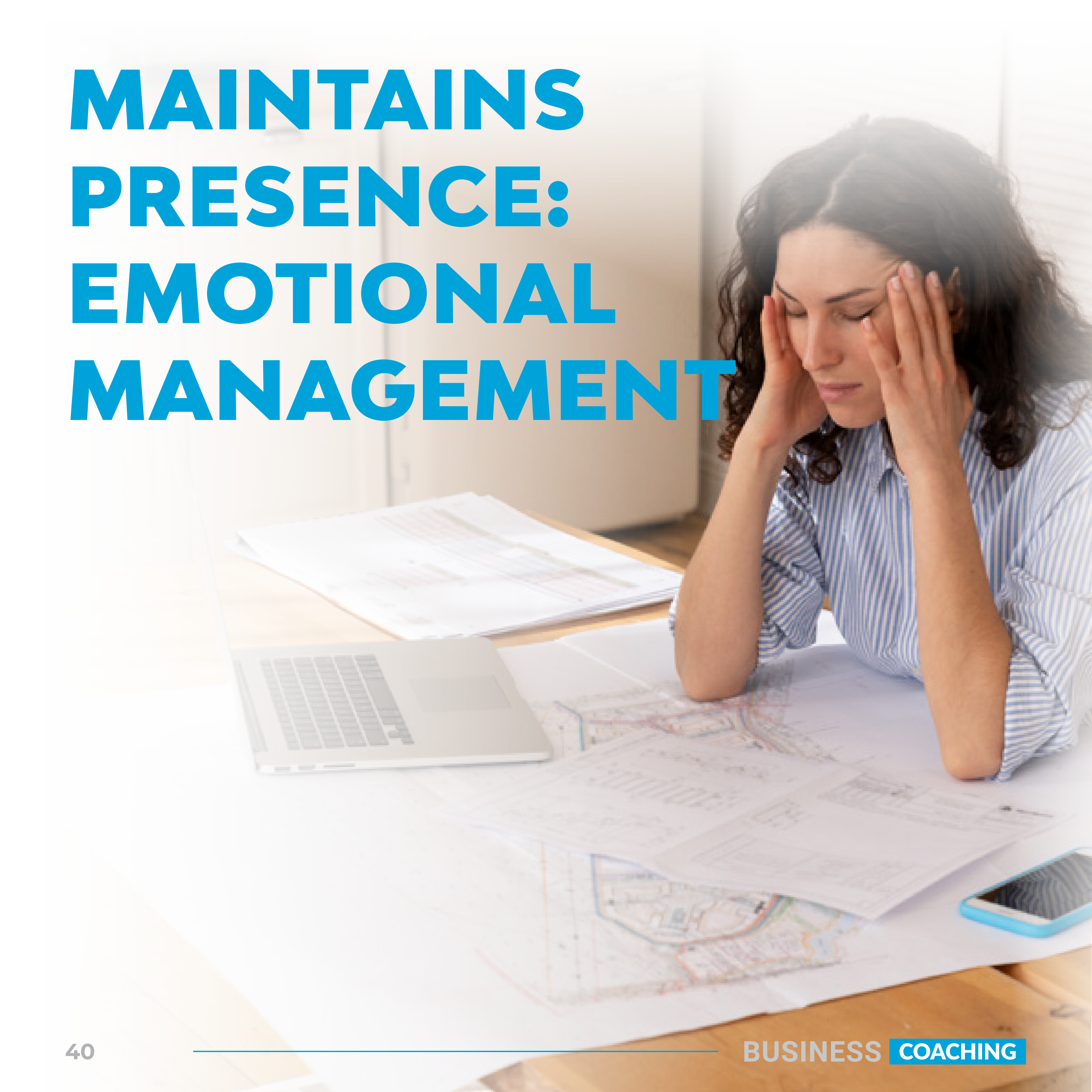
In this article, we take a closer look at competency 5: Maintains Presence. ICF defines this competency as "Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident." The first two that show the coach is competent in maintaining coaching presence are:

- Remains focused, observant, empathetic, and responsive to the client
- Demonstrates curiosity during the coaching process

Coaching presence starts with being "present" with the client. To do this, the coach has to have the ability to bring themselves into the coaching space, leaving everything else behind, and be fully attentive to the client. It is only when we are fully present with the client that we are able to hear the whole of what the client is communicating. We hear their words, what's behind their words, what they say with their facial expressions, their vocal patterns, and body language. We hear what they say with their hand movements, their breathing, and their eye cues. Are they thinking? Are they feeling? Are they remembering? What are they processing?

When we are fully present with the client, we are able to step in and be in the moment with the client where we can allow ourselves to be empathetic to what must be happening for the client. We are curious about what the client can discover and uncover. Not for our benefit, but for theirs. We are also able to take a step back and look at the client's world from an external vantage point that allows us to see patterns, inconsistencies, distortions, deletions, generalizations, and limiting beliefs that seem to be getting in the client's way of moving forward. Being observant and responsive to the client not only requires that we listen and notice but that we bring those things that we observe into focus for the client to decide what they wish to do with them. Being responsive also means that we can't be stuck in our own ideas or conclusions about what the client is communicating. We have to be flexible enough to see and hear when how we are working with them is resonating and moving them forward or not. Being curious means that we aren't listening to what the client says and internalizing it, analyzing it, and telling the client what we are learning and discovering through their words. Rather, we must have enough presence to hear their words and bring that curiosity to the client to analyze their own thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and ideas to see what they can discover. Being curious means pulling the information out of the client for them to speak out loud. So, when they start discussing it, they peel back the layers of their understanding and reveal something that was always there and yet remained undiscovered. In short coaching presence is being there with the client, for the clients learning and growth.

MAINTAINS PRESENCE: EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT



In this article, we take a closer look at competency 5: Maintains Presence. ICF defines this competency as "Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident." The second two markers that show the coach is competent in maintaining coaching presence are:

1. Manages one's emotions to stay present with the client
2. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong client emotions during the coaching process

Contrary to popular belief, there is crying in coaching. There is also a wide range of other emotions that show up, like fear, anger, frustration, joy, anticipation, hurt, excitement, etc. Coaching focuses on the whole person, not just the parts that are rational and logical. Learning to stay present with the client and allow them the space to process their emotions is critical if we are going to go beneath the surface and get to the root of faulty thinking. As coaches, it is important for us to provide a safe and supportive space for our clients to process what they are thinking and feeling, so they can move to the next stages. If we are not comfortable and confident with the client when strong emotion comes up we will side step, or try to move their emotions into a place that's more comfortable to us. What the client needs when they start crying is to have space to experience the emotion, not a box of tissues. Eventually they will process through the emotion and will be ready for a tissue. However, to hand them one at the first sign of tears sends the message, "I'm not comfortable with your tears, dry them up."

When clients are angry or frustrated about something happening they don't need us to calm them down. They need us to give them space to vent their frustrations, so they can experience them and then partner with them asking questions and making observations that enable them to process those feelings and gain from them. In short, when working with client emotions we need to be fully in command of our own emotions. We need to understand what emotions we are uncomfortable with and build a tolerance for witnessing these emotions from a neutral yet empathetic position where we can create a safe place for the client.

This said, remember that coaching is not therapy. There is a difference between incidental emotion and deep wounds from the past that need healing if the client is to move forward. Deep wounds, brokenness, ongoing depression, etc might need to be referred to a different helping profession. As a matter of ethics, coaches are responsible for making proper referrals rather than attempting to heal deep wounds they are not properly equipped to handle.

MAINTAINS PRESENCE: AMBIGUITY & SILENCE

In this article, we take a closer look at competency 5: Maintains Presence. ICF defines this competency as "Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident." The last two markers that show the coach is competent in maintaining coaching presence are:

1. Is comfortable working in the space of not knowing
2. Creates or allows space for silence, pause, or reflection.

The interesting thing about coaching is that as a coach, you don't need to know everything the client knows. We don't need all the details, we don't need all of our curiosities answered, we don't need to fully understand the client's domain and context, and we don't need to know every aspect of the client's challenge in order to help them move forward. If we are holding the client as creative, resourceful, and whole then we can trust that the client understands the details, so we don't have to. We bring the framework and process that assists the client in doing the work of resolving their own challenges, questions, concerns, desires, and actions. Since we are not doing the work, we don't need full context. We do, however, need to listen deeply to what the client is saying and work with what they present to help them become more aware. Part of the ability to help the client build awareness is giving them the space to do so. Silence in coaching is one of the three critical skills: listening, silence, questioning. Silence isn't about just not talking. It's about knowhen when to talk and when to remain silent for the client's benefit. One way to tell that it is time to remain silent and create a moment for the time to process and learn is when the client's eyes are looking upward, sideways, or downward. This means that they are thinking, remembering, or processing and need the space to do so. When they are ready, they will look back at you. Another way to tell your client needs silence is when you ask a question and they don't answer.

This is not the time to re-ask the question, give an explanation, or ask a different question. When the client doesn't answer, we have to trust that they are creative, resourceful, and whole and are capable of telling us what they need. If they don't understand the question or it doesn't resonate, they will tell you. Otherwise, wait in silence for what happens next. When the client is talking, then they stop and look away, they are not finished. Don't speak. Let them process. When they are ready they will either start talking again or they will look at you. Don't be in a hurry. It is more powerful to the client that you don't ask questions. A last place where the coach needs to leave space for the client is in between their responses and your questions. Don't jump right on top of the client's answer to ask the next question. This usually indicates that the coach was not listening. If you have a question to pile right on top of the clients last word, you were thinking and not listening. Instead, listen fully to what the client says. When they are finished, take a moment and perhaps a breath, think about the right question to ask, and then ask it. Don't be afraid to allow space and silence. You and the client both need processing time to be most effective.

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