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The Powerhouse Guide to ACC, PCC, and MCC Coaching

Published by

Powerhouse Global

Orlando, Florida

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Ordering Information:

Quantity sales are available for purchase by corporations, associations, and others.

For details, contact the publisher at the email address above.

Cover and book design by xxxxxx

ISBN xxxxxxxx TBD

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was made possible by the inspiration of countless coaches and students over the years. Without their input, questions, ideas, breakthroughs, and genuine love for coaching, this book would not come to be.

Special thanks and credit go to Kenneth McKellar, Eric Goeres, Denise Krumlian, and Judy Schenck for painstakingly sifting through the manuscript and pointing out areas that needed clarity and additional content. They were enormously helpful in moving this book closer to its final version.

Finally, to Powerhouse Coaching's co-founder and Director of Education, Mark Tucker, who has been absolutely integral in maintaining the school's vision and supporting our students on their ICF credentialing journey. This book honors that spirit, and we hope it helps as many coaches as possible reach the highest level of coaching.

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on taking an interest in your career as a coach and in the International Coaching Federation's (ICF) competencies and credentials. You're in for a highly informative journey toward understanding what is expected of you as a credentialed coach AND increasing your confidence and competence as a true professional in this field.

THE GOALS OF THIS BOOK:

- Highlight the differences between ACC, PCC, and MCC levels of coaching
- Give coaches clarity and direction on their path towards mastery
- Help coach educators and mentors feel more equipped to guide others
- Inspire the reader to preserve coaching's original meaning, intent, and purpose

THIS BOOK IS FOR:

- Coaches who have a foundational understanding of coaching principles
- Coaches who are ICF-curious and/or ICF credential-curious
- Credentialed or non-credentialed coaches who wish to expand their coaching skills
- Credentialed coaches who are curious how the ACC, PCC, and MCC levels differ
- Coaches who have gotten off track and want to come back to "pure" coaching
- Mentor coaches who seek a tool to guide their training and mentoring
- ICF-aligned schools that seek a text to support their educational programs

ABOUT THIS BOOK:

The *Powerhouse Guide to ACC, PCC, and MCC Coaching* is a comprehensive guide to understanding the intricate details of, and differences between, the three credentialing levels of ICF coaching. Wherever you are in your coaching or credentialing journey, this book promises to fill in any gaps in understanding and add clarity to your process.

SECTION 1

Focuses on the value of ICF, its Competencies, Markers, and Credentials AND explores how and why you might want to pursue your ICF credential. There are also some Common Questions to help you get clear on the details of the credentialing process.

SECTION 2

Takes a deep dive into the similarities and differences between the ACC, PCC, and MCC levels of coaching. Here, you'll find each of the eight ICF Core Competencies defined and dissected in a user-friendly format with plenty of examples. There are also Quick Reference charts, Best Practices, Non-Passing Behaviors, and Reflection Questions to help you internalize the information around each competency.

SECTION 3

Offers additional things to consider as you continue your journey toward growing your understanding of coaching and putting into practice all you learned in this guide.

Plus, you'll find a hearty list of Resources and ICF Reference Materials for further support and guidance.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

Because this book assumes you have a foundational understanding of coaching principles, what you won't find here are coaching models or basic instruction on how to coach. Instead, it is meant to be used as a manual or reference guide for the well-studied or practicing coach interested in understanding the ICF credentialing levels and/or pursuing their own.

If you are a new or recent coach or have been away for a while and want to refresh your knowledge, you may want to start at the beginning and read it

cover to cover to take in all the information first, before using it as a tool for reference in the future.

Although this is the recommended approach, if you have a general understanding of the ICF credentials and the process of earning your ACC, PCC or MCC, you can jump to Section 2, where you can learn about how the ICF competencies look and feel at each of the three levels of coaching.

Additionally, if you are a mentor, trainer, or educational provider, you may want to use this book as your go-to reference or textbook to support your students' and mentees' understanding of the ACC, PCC and MCC levels of coaching.

Regardless of how you choose to use this book, it is our hope that you find what you are looking for and continue to refer to it as a powerful educational tool throughout your coaching journey.

**The International
Coaching Federation
is important**

because
it leads the way in
establishing teachable
and repeatable standards
of excellence to safeguard,
sustain, and insure the
credibility of the rapidly
emerging coaching
industry.



– Judy Schenk, Certified Coach





SECTION ONE

AN ARGUMENT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COACHING FEDERATION (ICF)

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high ethical standards, providing independent certification, and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches across a variety of coaching disciplines.”

To learn more, visit coachingfederation.org

Some “coaches” say that they don’t align with, believe in, or need the ICF. They report that they don’t like to have restrictions placed on them or have their liberties and creativity stripped from them. Some don’t want to be forced to play by an establishment’s rules or meet requirements to qualify as a coach. And for these reasons (and more) some “coaches” will vehemently argue against the efforts of the ICF.

But this is not unusual.

Many modern, established, highly credible professions started out with this sort of pushback.

However, nearly all professions will eventually benefit from the standardization, qualification, and/or licensing of their professionals and the benefits enjoyed by the clients they serve.

Safety, ethics, quality, credibility, confidence, and selectivity are all enhanced when a profession has proper standards, guidelines, and certifications in place, and when its professionals adhere to these standards.

And, like other professional industries, coaching benefits from a governing body that supports its legitimacy, credibility, and preservation. This is where the International Coaching Federation shines.

The ICF sets the standards in education, ethics, and competency through establishing definitions, guidelines, minimum skill requirements, assessments, and testing to credential the coaching professional.

Is a person who read some law books as equipped to defend you as a person who passed the bar exam?

Doctors and surgeons hang their degrees on their wall for a reason. Board Certified? Even better.

Who do you trust more to do your taxes, a Certified Professional Accountant or someone that calls themselves an “accountant”?

Therapists are only qualified to treat you if they have a master’s degree and a license to practice.

Shouldn't the coaching industry have a set of expectations and requirements to qualify its professionals?

THE ICF CREDENTIALS, COMPETENCIES, AND MARKERS/MINIMUM SKILL REQUIREMENTS

A few definitions:

- A COMPETENCY is a skill.
- A MARKER or MINIMUM SKILL REQUIREMENT is a sign that proves that the COMPETENCY exists.
- A CREDENTIAL is an award earned when certain MARKERS or MINIMUM SKILL REQUIREMENTS are successfully demonstrated.

We'll start with the Credentials to give context to the Competencies and Markers.

THE ICF CREDENTIALS

There are three levels of ICF Credentials:

- Associate Certified Coach (ACC)
- Professional Certified Coach (PCC)
- Master Certified Coach (MCC)

Each level has a certain set of education, experience, skills, and knowledge that is required to earn that credential.

In the simplest terms, here are the requirements:

Credential	Coach Education	Coaching Experience	Mentor Coaching	Assessed Coaching Sessions	Written Exam
ACC	60 Hours	100 hours	10 hours	One	Required*
PCC	125 Hours	500 hours	10 Hours	Two	Required*
MCC	200 Hours	2500 hours	10 hours	Two	Required*

**As of July 2022, you are required to take the updated ICF Credentialing Exam when you apply for the next credential level, even if you took the now outdated CKA exam. However, once you take and pass the updated exam, you will not be required to take it again to renew your credential or move to a higher credential thereafter.*



Coach Education

Training programs, courses, or classes designed to teach you the art and skill of coaching. Some may also include other resourceful information that a coach can benefit from, such as business building, specialty areas, coaching methodologies, or models, etc. This coach education can come from a Certification Program or an ICF Accredited Program. (See the box on the next page).



Coaching Experience

You are required to log a minimum number of hours spent coaching clients outside of your Coach Education program. These hours can include paid, pro bono, bartered, or reciprocal coaching with a minimum of eight different clients.



Mentor Coaching

This involves spending a minimum of ten hours with a qualified, accredited mentor coach who holds at least the same credential that you are pursuing. Mentor coaching hours must consist of coaching and feedback that increases your capability in coaching in alignment with the ICF Core Competencies. These mentor coaching hours might be included as part of your Coach Education Program. If they are not, you will have to find a qualified mentor coach to work with and you will then indicate on your application that you completed the ten hours independently with an ICF Accredited Coach.



Assessed Coaching Sessions

You are required to submit recordings of you coaching real clients to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the ICF Ethics and Competencies and Minimum Skill Requirements. These Performance Evaluations might be included as part of your Coach Education Program. If they are not, you will submit them separately with your credentialing application, and the ICF will assign an evaluator to assess your recordings.



Written Exam

This is the final step in your credentialing process. Once you have submitted all of the above, and it has been approved, you will be invited to sit for the ICF Credentialing Exam. Taken in a testing center or online, it is a proctored, multiple-choice exam that you are allotted up to three hours to complete.

There is often some confusion about the difference between a Certified Coach and a Credentialed Coach

Here are a few definitions to help you discern the differences:

Certification Program - A coach education program that offers a certificate of completion at the end of the program.

There are many coach education programs that certify you in their proprietary methodology, philosophy, model, assessment tool, etc. Any individual or school can do this. They write the material, teach it to you, and give you a certificate of completion at the end of the program.

Certified Coach - The designation given to a person who completes a coach education program that offers a certificate of completion at the end of the program (Certification Program).

If you complete any coach education program that awards you a Certificate of Completion at the end, you can call yourself a Certified Coach. For example, ABC Coaching Institute could offer a program that “certifies” you as a coach. And if you complete the course, you will be a Certified Coach by ABC Coaching Institute.

ICF Accredited Program - A coach education program that has been approved by the International Coaching Federation. This means the program material went through a rigorous review process to validate that it aligns with the ICF definition of Coaching, Core Competencies, and Code of Ethics.

Completion of these programs may also award you a Certificate of Completion and result in you becoming a Certified Coach. But the difference is that your Certificate of Completion comes with the stamp of legitimacy, quality, and credibility from the International Coaching Federation.

ICF Credentialed Coach - A coach who has met stringent education and experience requirements and has demonstrated a thorough understanding of the coaching competencies as defined by the International Coaching Federation.

NOTE: When you are a Certified Coach from an ICF accredited program this is NOT the same as being an ICF Credentialed Coach. The educational programs that certify you are only one component of earning your ICF credential.

To become an ICF Credentialed Coach you must meet a set of criteria defined by the ICF. This includes education hours (hours you earned in your Certification Program) PLUS coaching experience, mentor coaching, coaching assessments, and exam completion.

THE ICF CORE COMPETENCIES

The ICF states:

The ICF Core Competencies were developed to support greater understanding about the skills and approaches used within today's coaching profession as defined by ICF. These competencies and the ICF definition of coaching serve as the foundation of the Credential process, including the ICF Credentialing Exam. ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

The ICF Core Competencies are organized into four domains based on commonalities and interdependencies between competencies within each domain. There are no domains nor individual competencies that are weighted—they do not represent any kind of hierarchy. Rather, each competency is considered core and critical for any competent coach to demonstrate.

DOMAIN	CORE COMPETENCY
FOUNDATION	1. Demonstrates Ethical Practice
	2. Embodies a Coaching Mindset
CO-CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP	3. Establishes and Maintains Agreements
	4. Cultivates Trust and Safety
	5. Maintains Presence
COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY	6. Listens Actively
	7. Evokes Awareness
CULTIVATING LEARNING AND GROWTH	8. Facilitates Client Growth

**See the REFERENCE SECTION for a full description of the ICF Core Competencies*

THE ICF MARKERS + MINIMUM SKILL REQUIREMENTS

Each Competency (skill) has a set of corresponding Markers or Minimum Skill Requirements (a sign that proves that the skill is present).

For example, Competency 3: Establishes and Maintains Agreements, has four PCC Markers:

3.1: Coach partners with the client to identify or reconfirm what the client wants to accomplish in this session.

3.2: Coach partners with the client to define or reconfirm measure(s) of success for what the client wants to accomplish in this session.

3.3: Coach inquires about or explores what is important or meaningful to the client about what they want to accomplish in this session.

3.4: Coach partners with the client to define what the client believes they need to address to achieve what they want to accomplish in this session.

**See the REFERENCE SECTION for a complete list of the PCC Markers*

As mentioned, the above PCC Markers act as guides that help coaches meet expectations defined by the ICF.

For years, the only Markers ICF provided were PCC Markers. This meant coaches were driving with a map when heading for their PCC credential, but those preparing for their ACC or MCC had fewer guidelines to “mark” their ACC or MCC skills.

To remedy this, in 2019 the ICF released a set of Minimum Skill Requirements for ACC and MCC coaching. These requirements outlined a list of skills within each competency on which ACC and MCC applicants are assessed as part of the performance evaluation. So, while the Markers for the PCC credential remain the same, there are no stated Markers for the ACC and MCC levels, but there are Minimum Skill Requirements.

**See the REFERENCE SECTION for a full list of the ACC and MCC Minimum Skill Requirements.*

It is these PCC Markers and ACC and MCC Minimum Skill Requirements that we will address in this guide and that Powerhouse Coaching and other ICF accredited schools use to teach and evaluate coaches' level of competency.

That covers the basics. But you may be asking “Why should I go through the hoops to learn all of this and earn an ICF credential?”

“

The dedication and effort I put into obtaining my ICF credential provided me with knowledge and education about the field of coaching; but the impact extended far beyond my professional growth. It also gave me an opportunity to look at myself as a human being.

As I learned about the competencies of coaching and the role of a coach, I gained profound insights about myself. The process allowed me to delve deeper into self-exploration, and when I did, my coaching abilities flourished.

In short, the time and commitment I invested in becoming an ICF credentialed coach made me a more authentic and compassionate person.

– Ken McKellar, MCC

”

WHY YOU SHOULD EARN YOUR ICF CREDENTIAL

Many coaches ask themselves or others, “Why should I go through all the work to get an ICF credential?” It’s a valid question. And embedded in the question is the very reason one might be deterred...all the work.

Sure, there is some work that at first glance may seem daunting, but there are plenty of reasons why it’s worth the effort.

Here are a few:

You’ll be a better coach.

When you go through the education and prepare to pass the Performance Evaluation and ICF Credentialing Exam, your coaching will dramatically improve. You don’t know what you don’t know. You will know much more by going through the process of earning your credential.

You’ll increase your coaching confidence.

Once you do the work to prove you meet the requirements, you can stop wondering if you’re “good enough” or “doing it right.” You’ll have the proof in the form of a certificate, letters after your name, and a shiny gold pin.

Your clients will experience greater results.

Being a better and more confident coach will result in your clients having deeper shifts and creating sustainable change. This may be motivation enough for those who want to deliver the highest level of service possible.

You’ll gain credibility and legitimacy among your peers.

Every credential you earn places you in a different light, and your peers, who know what it takes to get there, will notice.

You will set yourself apart from other people who call themselves “coaches.”

Just a few years ago, only a few coaches understood what it meant to be an ICF Credentialed Coach, let alone anyone outside of the coaching profession. But as coaching continues to evolve and become more valued, it’s not only your peers that respect your credentials. During the last few years, the rest of the world has also started to take notice.

You’ll have more employment opportunities.

Many third-party coaching platforms use the ICF credential as criteria to qualify employable coaches. They know that it serves as an excellent filter because it

proves that the applicant has done the work to learn to coach at the recognized industry standard and their skills have been assessed and approved. But of even greater note is that many companies are requesting and/or requiring the ICF credentials as part of their job description requirements.

So, if you want to coach, but you don't want to do the marketing to get your own clients, these third-party platforms are a perfect way for you to do the work you love without requiring you to have a complex marketing strategy. They'll find the clients, and you simply show up and coach.

You'll increase your earning capacity.

Some third-party coaching platforms may pay a PCC more than an ACC, and an MCC more than a PCC. Also, as an independent coach you can command higher fees when you learn to coach at these different levels. When you provide more quality coaching, your clients obtain greater results. They share their positive experience with others, referrals come in, demand goes up, ergo, your fees go up.

If any of the above has piqued your interest in earning your ICF credential, let's see what it takes to get you there.

**I was motivated to earn
my ICF credentials**

”

because I want to be one of the best coaches in the world. I have experienced the powerful results of pure ICF style coaching both as a client and a coach and it convinced me that it is worth the time and practice to continue my credentialing journey.

– Denise Krumlian, ACC

HOW TO APPLY FOR YOUR ICF CREDENTIAL

Here is a simplified list of what you need to do to prepare and apply for your ICF credential. For more comprehensive information see the Common Questions section below or visit the ICF website at www.coachingfederation.org.

- ☐ Complete the required number of coach education hours for your desired credential.
(60 coach education hours for ACC, 125 for PCC, and 200 for MCC)
- ☐ Complete and log the required amount of client coaching hours.
(100 hours for ACC, 500 for PCC, and 2,500 for MCC)
- ☐ Complete a 10-hour Mentor Coaching Program with an ICF credentialed coach.
- ☐ Record the required number of coaching sessions to be assessed.
(One recorded session for ACC, two for PCC, and two for MCC)
- ☐ Produce a verbatim transcription of your recordings.
- ☐ Submit all of the above on your credentialing application.
- ☐ Wait for approval.
- ☐ Pass the written exam.
- ☐ Do a jig, toast yourself, and celebrate your new credential.

NOTE: Many of the above requirements will be fulfilled through completion of an accredited Level 1 or Level 2 coaching program or the now outdated ACTP path to credentialing.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Where do I go to initiate my credential application?

You will first need to determine which application path you are eligible for. To do so, complete the Credential Path Survey provided by the ICF at www.coachingfederation.org

How will I know if my coach education qualifies?

Determine if your education hours are ICF accredited hours. If you are not sure, ask the school or individual that provided the education if the course is accredited by the ICF. And if so, how many CORE and RESOURCE hours it fulfills. You can also use the ICF Education Search Service (a free, searchable directory of coaching education that is accredited by ICF) to see if your education qualifies. www.coachingfederation.org

Will the ICF ask me to share my coaching log to prove I have the required coaching experience?

No. On your application you will need to ATTEST that you have logged the required hours. Due to privacy laws, you will not be asked to share it with the ICF. However, it is said that if they audit your application, you may be asked to share some information on your log, so be sure to keep one. *See Resource Section for a Log Template

Do I need my clients' permission to include their name and contact on my log?

Yes. Ideally, you get your client's permission at the start of each coaching engagement by adding this to your coaching agreement. If you haven't done this, simply send each client you plan to include in your log an email asking for their permission. You may also want to share the exact information you have logged for them (amount of hours, time period, etc.) in the case of an audit.

Can I include group coaching hours in my log?

Yes. Include the total number of hours you coached the group and include the name of ONE participant as the client in your log.

How many pro bono hours can I count?

The ACC can include up to 25 pro bono hours, the PCC up to 50 pro bono hours, and the MCC can include up to 250 pro bono hours. Also worth noting is that any trade, barter, or reciprocal coaching hours can be counted as paid hours.

What if my coaching hours were logged as an internal coach?

Simply request from your employer a letter (on letterhead) stating the number of coaching hours you have completed. Keep that in your records in lieu of a coaching log.

What qualifies as Mentor Coaching hours?

According to ICF, Mentor Coaching for an ICF Credential consists of coaching and feedback in a collaborative, appreciative and dialogued process based on an observed or recorded coaching session to increase the coach's capability in coaching, in alignment with the ICF Core Competencies.

Mentoring provides professional assistance in achieving and demonstrating the levels of coaching competency and capability demanded by the desired credential level.

This means that all ten hours of mentor coaching must focus on skill building, not marketing or branding or other resource type topics.

Do I have to get all ten mentor coaching hours with the same mentor coach?

No. You can use as many mentors as you want to earn your ten hours as long as they are ICF credentialed coaches at the level you need to achieve or higher. But be aware that just because a coach is credentialed does not mean they are qualified to deliver quality mentorship. Choose wisely.

TIP: *Mentor coaches and schools who are solely dedicated to this process are the most likely to give you the quality mentorship you will need to pass your coaching assessment.*

What else do I need to know about mentor coaching hours?

- Your mentor hours must be with a mentor who holds the credential you are applying for or higher.
- ACC coaches must have renewed their credential once before they are qualified to mentor ACC applicants.
- The ten hours must take place over a minimum of three months.
- The full ten hours may be completed in a one-on-one basis or in a group setting for seven hours + one-on-one for three hours.

How long do my recorded sessions need to be?

Each session must be a minimum of 20 minutes long and no more than 60 minutes. If it is a second less than 20 minutes or a second more than 60 minutes, ICF will not accept it.

When I record a client session, do I need to show within the recording that the client has given their permission to record them?

Some coaches begin the session with something like “I am recording this for assessment purposes and will only share it with my mentor coach and the assessor. Do I have your permission to do so?” However, it is not necessary since ICF requires that you have the client’s permission in writing.

Can my client for the recorded session be a coach?

Yes, but the coach you are coaching must be an ongoing client of yours. In other words, it can’t be a one-off coaching session.

How do I get my recording transcribed?

Use a service to get this done versus trying to do it yourself. It’s inexpensive and worth every cent. Make note of the specific criteria that must be met for ICF to accept it.

How will I know if my recorded session is good enough to submit?

One of the best ways to prepare for the assessment portion of the application is to make sure you complete your ten hours of mentor coaching with a qualified mentor coach who can help you understand how the competencies look and feel at your level.

Then you should expect to practice, get feedback, record, listen, self-assess, record again, and listen with your mentor coach (during the three hours of individual mentor coaching). Your mentor coach will give you feedback on the skills and competencies you are proficient in AND areas you may need to improve. Use this information to decide if the recording is one you could consider submitting.

What if ICF does not approve my recorded sessions?

No problem. Breathe and recognize that this happens ALL THE TIME. You are not a failure and there’s no shame. Simply review the assessor’s notes and listen to your recording while referencing their feedback.

If you're still left befuddled as to what you did wrong, employ your mentor coach to review it with you to clarify. Then, make required adjustments and record a new session to submit.

What if I submitted two recordings (PCC or MCC applicants) and I passed one but failed the other?

You would only have to resubmit one additional recording. If you failed both, then obviously, you would resubmit two recordings. If you elect to resubmit, you will need to do so within six months from the date of your results letter. Each recording comes with a fee to cover the re-assessment process. (Note that ACC applicants only submit one recording and the resubmission process is the same if it doesn't pass.)

Will I have to wait the same amount of time to get a response as I did for my initial application?

You will not have to resubmit an application, and the turnaround is typically quicker when resubmitting just recordings.

At what point do I take the written exam?

Once the ICF has reviewed and approved all elements of your application, they will send you an email with instructions to take the ICF Credentialing Exam.

How long will it take ICF to review and approve all elements of my application?

Each Credential application is reviewed thoroughly and can take many weeks to review. Be patient. It's worth the wait.

Where and how do I take the exam?

You can take the exam in a testing center or at home with a virtual proctor. See the Resource Section for an informational video about exam administration.

How many questions are on the written exam?

There are 81 scenario-based items. For each item, candidates will be asked to select the best action and then select the worst action among the options provided for that scenario. You will have up to three hours to complete the exam.

How can I prepare for the exam?

In the Resource Section you can find a practice test with sample questions and an explainer video about the exam and how to prepare for it.

What if I don't pass the exam?

Simply apply to take it again! There is no limit to the number of retakes, but there is a fee to do so.

Can I bypass the ACC and PCC and go straight to the MCC?

No. You must earn your PCC first before you can apply for your MCC.

Can I bypass the ACC and go straight to the PCC?

Yes, if you meet the required education and coaching hours.

I have more questions about the credentialing requirements! Where can I find answers?

Head to www.coachingfederation.org

Where can I find a qualified provider for meeting the credentialing requirements?

Head to: www.coachingfederation.org and use their Education Search Service (ESS) to find your initial education provider and then to www.phcoach.com for a variety of programs designed to help you earn your ICF credential.

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My ICF credential is important to demonstrate to clients the degree to which I take the art and science of coaching seriously. For corporate and governmental clients, in many cases the credential is a pre-requisite.

– Eric Goeres, PCC

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SECTION TWO

Although the first ICF Credentials were awarded at the ICF conference in Scottsdale, Arizona in 1998, it wasn't until recently that many coaches began to ask in earnest, "What is the difference between the ACC, PCC, and MCC levels of coaching?"

And as time goes by, more and more coaches have a growing interest in understanding what coaching looks like at different levels. When asked what makes them so curious, some of the most common responses are:

- To know if I am doing it "right"
- To expand my coaching competence and increase confidence
- To have a clear roadmap to the next level
- To bring more value to my clients
- To pass the Performance Evaluation and earn my credential
- To be able to explain it to my own students and mentees
- To create advanced training for my coaching school

Regardless of your response to the question, we are thrilled that you're asking it. Not only for your own validation, improvement, and success, but also for the coaching profession's validation, improvement, and success.

The way we see it at Powerhouse Coaching, there is power in numbers. If more coaches show interest in understanding and learning how to coach at these ICF credentialed levels, the better chance we have of drowning out the other versions of coaching that muddy the waters and confuse clients. This will support the legitimacy and advancement of pure coaching as it was intended.

So, what you are about to learn is good for YOU, good for your CLIENTS, and good for the PROFESSION.

THE SIMILARITIES AMONG ACC, PCC, AND MCC

Before we look at how the ACC, PCC, and MCC differ, it is important to note that there are some things that remain consistent across all three levels of coaching. While this is not an exhaustive list, here are the main similarities:

Ethical Standards

The ICF offers ethical guidelines that apply to every member of the association, whether they are credentialed or not. Coaches at all three credentialing levels are equally ethical and held to the same set of ethical standards.

Industry Definitions

What coaching is and what coaching isn't is the same across all three levels. A client is a client, a sponsor is a sponsor, etc. Everything remains the same in terms of the general industry definitions.

Coaching Engagement Agreements

Every coach, at every level, must have an agreement in place before working with a client and/or a sponsor. All parties must understand and agree on the client's goals, how coaching will support the client in achieving those goals, and who's responsible for doing what, when, for how much, and for how long.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is held the same at every level and at every moment.

Competencies

The eight core competencies defined and set forth by the ICF always remain the same in definition. What changes is how the competencies manifest across the different levels.

Levels or Styles?

When referring to their credentials, the ICF speaks in terms of LEVELS. For example, the ICF states:

Every Master Certified Coach (MCC) started as a beginner. They progressed through an intermediate level of skill, and became masterful, where the hallmark is deep evidence of the coach's role as learner about the client. ICF's three levels of Credentials reflect the continuum of growth and learning along the coaching journey.

The belief that the MCC (Master) is a better coach than the

ACC (Associate) and PCC (Professional) makes logical sense. But what if we looked at this a little differently? What if we looked at each credential as a STYLE of coaching versus a LEVEL of coaching? What if each credential was equally valuable, supportive, and beneficial to our clients, just different?

Consider the professional artist that only knows how to paint in watercolors. She's very skilled at it, and her work is very attractive to those who love and want watercolor art.

Let's say she expands her knowledge to include painting in acrylics. She now has two different mediums she can use to create art for her clients. Then she learns to paint with oils. Now she has three! She may be considered a better painter because she has more mediums to create art. But when she only knew watercolor, she was a great artist, but with just one medium to offer.

Because MCCs have more education and experience, they are more proficient in the different styles of coaching they can offer. And the truth is that some clients need different styles of coaching to get where they want to go. Some clients may even prefer one style to another.

The ACC and PCC credentialed coaches may have fewer styles of coaching at their disposal but are still valuable coaches for those that need or prefer that style of coaching.

Having said all of that, there is a certain "evolution of coach" that must take place to move from the ACC to the MCC credential. This evolution requires coaches to make some internal shifts in their thinking, redefine their values, build trust in self/process/client, let go of knowing, be vulnerable, and more. Education and experience support this evolution, but there is usually a fair amount of self-awareness and internal introspection that must happen as well.

As this guide is focused on the basic differences in levels/styles of coaching, we will not be covering the process of this evolution, but it is imperative that you are aware of this as you begin to understand and embody the following information.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ACC, PCC, AND MCC

To help to understand the difference between an ACC coach, a PCC coach, and an MCC coach, compare the role of a coach to a passenger in a vehicle the client is driving.

Following that metaphor, think about the manner in which a coach partners with their client in terms of the number of hands the coach has on the wheel.

Picture it like this...

- **The ACC** coach has two hands on the wheel.
- **The PCC** coach has one hand on the wheel.
- **The MCC** coach has no hands on the wheel.

Here's how that looks in a coaching session...

With two hands on the wheel, ACCs work hard to influence results because they feel responsible for a positive outcome. After all, they have two hands on the wheel and want the drive to go smoothly, so their performance seems at least equally as important as their client's. The ACC's energy and focus are on how the coach is doing/performing, and with this comes a fair amount of performance anxiety.

ACCs are determined to arrive at the client's desired destination as soon as possible, so they don't waste time pulling over to check under the hood. They've got their eyes on the prize, and they want to win it: reaching goals, creating action steps, and holding clients accountable is where they shine. As a result of keeping their gaze on the road, however, they may not witness nuances around what the client is experiencing, thinking, or feeling.

The ACC is eager to help the client drive better and arrive faster or more safely, so they listen for opportunities to offer solutions.

- If the client gets a flat tire, the ACC may give the client a tool to fix it.
- If there's a shortcut to save time and gas, the ACC may show the client the way.
- If the client isn't sure how to turn on the windshield wipers, the ACC may show them.
- In short, if there is a problem, the ACC wants to solve it.

Clients will learn what they need to move forward, identify tools, and commit to actions that support them in moving forward. What a wonderful gift the ACC is for clients who want to get somewhere quickly with very few detours or pit stops to “look under the hood.” Solving problems, identifying best practices, and completing projects was never so easy!

With one hand on the wheel, PCCs trust that the client doesn’t need as much help to arrive, but still feels a bit responsible for a positive outcome. After all, they want to make sure the client gets where they want to go without driving into a ditch. So, PCCs are somewhat focused on their own performance, but less than the ACC coach.

The PCC’s energy and focus are split between what the coach is doing and what the client is doing. So, PCCs may experience a bit of performance anxiety but not as much as the ACC.

PCCs are interested in helping the client arrive at their desired destination and may even have a special model or plan to help the client get there. And if, on the way, a client wants to pull over and look under the hood, the PCC is okay taking the time to do so.

PCCs want what the client wants, but they also want to do a good job, and they don’t like not knowing what to do or how to move the client down the road.

Goals, action steps, and accountability are still important to PCCs, but they understand that the client is doing most of the driving and their one hand on the wheel can only influence so much. Plus, by dividing their gaze between the road and the client, they are able to pick up on subtle shifts in the client’s experience and feelings.

PCCs are curious about how the client can drive better, arrive faster or more safely. So, they listen for ways to facilitate that.

- If the client gets a flat tire, the PCC may offer a tool to fix it or ask the client what ideas they have.
- If there’s a shortcut to save time and gas, the PCC may offer it or ask the client what they might need to find a shortcut.
- If the client isn’t sure how to turn on the windshield wipers, the PCC may ask if they can show the client how or ask the client how they might figure it out on their own.
- In short, if there is a problem, the PCC wants to help solve it by tapping into their own resources and also the client’s resources.

Clients will learn about both their situation and their own resourcefulness along the way. How awesome the PCC is for clients who benefit from a partner who believes in them and is also willing to provide an occasional tool to help them reach their goals!

With no hands on the wheel, MCCs show up quite differently than ACCs and PCCs. The MCC is still in the front passenger seat, fully present and in partnership with the client, but with no need to control anything. MCCs take their hands off the wheel because they totally trust that the client can drive and arrive wherever they need to go without the coach's resources, shortcuts, or instruction.

Instead, they focus their energy on their burning curiosity about the client and their journey. The MCC wants to know what makes the client's objective so important and what skills or strengths the client can lean on to get there.

MCCs are curious about the path the client is taking and what makes it the best one. And throughout the journey, they are always listening for hesitation, grinding, rubbing, or grumbling in the engine because the MCC knows that regardless of who's driving and how determined they are to get somewhere, the arrival depends on many factors and lots of moving parts that can't be ignored. So the MCC is ready to pull over to look under the hood as often as the client finds it useful.

MCCs demonstrate full confidence in the client's driving skills (hence, no hands on the wheel) so they can focus more of their attention and gaze on the client. This allows them to pick up many more subtle clues about what the client is feeling, thinking, and experiencing. But they also know there are always blind spots when driving, so they keep an eye out for them and gently bring them to the client's attention.

Of course, MCCs have the client's destination as a goal, but they are in no rush to get there. They're not on their own timeline, they're on the client's timeline.

In short, there is no problem for the coach to solve, because the MCC is there to help clients find their own solutions, in their own time.

- If the client gets a flat tire, the MCC will ask the client what they think may have caused it.
- If there's a shortcut to save time and gas, the MCC would help the client to tap into their greatest strengths, wisdom, beliefs, thoughts, or intuition to come up with one.

- If the client isn't sure how to turn on the windshield wipers, the MCC coach trusts the client can figure it out and will help them do so through some self-discovery.
- In short, if the client has a problem, the MCC knows the client has the best solution but may need some help getting out of their own way to find it.

Clients will learn more about who they are, what they want, and the internal obstacles getting in their way. How great the MCC is for those who want to do deeper work, feel empowered, make sustainable changes, remove blind spots, and view the journey as a marathon not a sprint.

Who knew there were so many ways to be a passenger in a car and a partner to your client...yet so many similarities too? Think about it.

Each coach:

Sits next to their client.

Allows their client to choose the destination.

Always keeps their client's destination in mind.

Is committed to helping their client get to their destination.

Looks out for things that will help their client reach their destination.

Stays present for their client in a way that supports their forward movement.

Has a certain level of trust in their client.

What changes is:

When and if the coach touches the wheel.

How the coach listens and observes.

What the coach is curious about.





How much the coach shares.

How the coach views their role.

How the coach defines their value.

How comfortable the coach feels to let go.

Now that you get the general idea, let's dive into each of the eight core competencies and dissect how they look and feel at each level.



**WITHOUT A CLEAR
SET OF ETHICS,
HOW WOULD WE
KNOW WHAT'S
RIGHT?**

ICF COMPETENCY 1

Demonstrates Ethical Practice

ICF Definition: Understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards of coaching.

1. Demonstrates personal integrity and honesty in interactions with clients, sponsors, and relevant stakeholders
2. Is sensitive to clients' identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs
3. Uses language appropriate and respectful to clients, sponsors, and relevant stakeholders
4. Abides by the ICF Code of Ethics and upholds the Core Values
5. Maintains confidentiality with client information per stakeholder agreements and pertinent laws
6. Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy, and other support professions
7. Refers clients to other support professionals, as appropriate

ICF states:

Familiarity with the ICF Code of Ethics and its application is required for all levels of coaching, and the standard for demonstrating a strong ethical understanding of coaching is similar for an ICF Credential at any level – Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC) or Master Certified Coach (MCC).

SIMPLE SUMMARY

Competency 1 - Demonstrates Ethical Practice focuses on the coach's ability to understand and embody the ethics set forth by the ICF inside and outside of a coaching session. Although your recorded coaching session will not be directly assessed on a checklist of ethical skills, you must demonstrate ethical behavior in your Performance Evaluation recording, or you won't pass.

As mentioned earlier, ethics apply to all coaches regardless of level, so there is no need to distinguish between ethics at the ACC, PCC, or MCC levels.

Three key factors that determine ethical practice inside a session at any level are:

Ask vs. Tell

An ICF coach will ask the client questions vs. tell the client what to do (like a consultant).

To be clear, a coach may offer a tool or resource to the client, or even a best practice that another client has had success with. However, if the coach is mostly telling, offering, and providing as opposed to mostly asking and eliciting the client's own resources and tools, this would constitute a breach of ethics.

Present or Future vs. Past

An ICF coach will inquire about the client's present or future thoughts, feelings, needs, experiences vs. exploring the client's past (like a therapist).

This doesn't mean the coach can't briefly ask the client about a past experience or lesson. The trick is to not continue the inquiry there and avoid asking about past emotions.

So, a coach might ask, "When was a time that you were successful at xyz?" as long as they bring it back to the present by following up with something like, "How can you use that success to support you here and now?"

But a coach would not ask, "How did you feel about your relationship with your mom when you were young?" or "So tell me about a time when you felt lost as a child. What was that like for you?"

Acceptance vs. Agreement

An ICF coach is sensitive to their client's identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs and will demonstrate respect, nonjudgement, and acceptance toward the client. This does not mean that the coach needs to agree with or align with the client's beliefs, values, and identity. They just need to accept and honor them.

If a client has a certain belief system that conflicts with the coach's, the coach would not say "I don't agree with that. The way I see it is..." But they might say, "I totally respect your point of view."

The caveat comes when any misalignment of beliefs gets in the way of the coach's ability to maintain respect for the clients and stakeholders or integrity with themselves. In this case, the coach has an ethical responsibility to address it through honest communication, coaching supervision, or by removing themselves from the coaching relationship.

Hopefully, it goes without saying that the coach uses language that is respectful to the client at all times, and a breach of that would definitely result in a failed performance evaluation.

As you can see, there are a few ways an assessor will evaluate your ethical practice in your recorded coaching session, but your complete understanding of the ICF Ethics will be tested when you sit to take the ICF Credentialing Exam, so be sure to have a good understanding of their meaning and application.

**See the REFERENCE SECTION for a complete list of the ICF Ethics and Guidelines.*

QUICK REFERENCE

Competency 1- Demonstrates Ethical Practice		
ACC	PCC	MCC
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Demonstrates personal integrity and honesty in interactions with clients, sponsors, and relevant stakeholders.▪ Is sensitive to clients’ identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs.▪ Uses language appropriate and respectful to clients, sponsors, and relevant stakeholders.▪ Abides by the ICF Code of Ethics and upholds the Core Values.▪ Maintains confidentiality with client information per stakeholder agreements and pertinent laws.▪ Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy, and other support professions.▪ Refers clients to other support professionals, as appropriate.		

All content on this page was directly sourced from ICF literature, publications, and/or the ICF website, www.coachingfederation.org

NON-PASSING BEHAVIORS

- An applicant must demonstrate alignment with the ICF Code of Ethics in the performance evaluation. An applicant who commits a clear violation of the ICF Code of Ethics within a performance evaluation recording would not pass this competency and would be denied a Credential.
- An applicant must also remain consistently in the role of coach within the performance evaluation. This includes demonstrating a knowledge of the coaching conversation that is focused on inquiry and exploration, and a focus based on present and future issues.
- An applicant would not pass this competency if they focused primarily on telling the client what to do or how to do it (consulting mode) or if the conversation is based primarily in the past, particularly the emotional past (therapeutic mode).
- If an applicant is not clear on basic foundation exploration and evoking skills that underlie the ICF definition of coaching, that lack of clarity in skill use will be reflected in skill level demonstrated in some of the other competencies. For example, if a coach almost exclusively gives advice or indicates that a particular answer chosen by the coach is what the client should do, trust and safety, presence, active listening, evoking awareness, and facilitating client growth will not be present and a credential at any level would be denied.

BEST PRACTICES

- Ask and explore more than you tell and assume.
- Avoid language like “I want you to check out this tool.” Or “You should think about doing xyz.”
- Don’t be afraid to borrow something from the client’s past, but don’t linger there. Bring it back to the present and future.
- Explore the difference between agreeing with your client and accepting your client.
- Show respect for your client’s emotions, ideas, identity, environment, experiences, values, and beliefs. A safe standby is “I respect your ideas/perspective/beliefs, etc.”
- Check in with your integrity. If something feels off and it is affecting your ability to coach effectively, address it immediately.
- Seek coaching supervision to work through and resolve any ethical challenges.
- If you sense another professional (i.e., therapist) might support the client’s needs, inquire about it, and offer a referral, if appropriate.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stands out for you here?

What might you need to change, let go of, or adopt?

What will you try on or experiment with?

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**MINDSET IS
EVERYTHING.**