

# Coaching Ethics

Paul Smith

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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to all coaches with the moral compass to coach with ethics in mind. To those who pride themselves on their professionalism and wish to build and contribute towards a positive view of our profession. To those who always do what is right, even when no one is looking.

May this book inspire you to become a positive ambassador of the coaching profession.

'In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock'

**Thomas Jefferson**

## **Purpose of this Book**

This book was originally created as part of an Accredited Coach Training Programme with the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), aimed at supporting coaches in enhancing their business and professional skills.

The programme offers a comprehensive curriculum designed to equip coaches with the knowledge and tools necessary to succeed in the dynamic field of coaching. Participants will benefit from interactive workshops, online study and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. Join a community of experienced professionals dedicated to advancing the coaching profession.

Upon completion of the programme, coaches receive five years' accreditation from the EMCC, a globally recognised accreditation body. This credential demonstrates to potential clients a commitment to excellence in coaching practice and signals a high standard of professionalism. To enrol in the programme, scan the QR code below. Access our online learning hub for coach development and collaboration projects.

All tools discussed in this book are available in the 'Coach Library' within our hub.



**The CM Hub**

## Foreword

I am honoured to be asked to write the foreword for this book. As a trainee coach with Paul's organisation Coaching Minds (at the time of writing) I see firsthand the effort and importance he and the programme put on ethics and developing an ethical coaching practice. As a data protection professional I see plenty of overlap between how I approach my data protection clients and ethical coaching. Not just the need for personal data compliance and governance, but integrity, confidentiality, and putting people at the centre.

Paul's desire to improve standards in the coaching profession and to be a leader in ethical coaching shine through in all his work. He practices what he preaches and is a model of an ethical coach. I agree with him that ethics is an essential aspect of coaching, too often overlooked by other organisations. I commend him for his efforts to raise standards across the industry.

This practical book provides clear information on what ethical coaching is and how to build an ethical coaching practice. It asks searching questions of the reader with specific calls to action. It covers a wide range of topics giving a clear steer on what's required and what you need to consider.

The book includes Coaching Minds' professional code of conduct, which Paul created to build on and advance existing industry ethics codes. He saw a gap between current codes and the ethical coaching standards he wanted to promote. The result is an outcome-focused code with clear overarching principles, five key competencies and indicative behaviours. It is easy for coaches to understand what's required, to assess themselves, and to see where they need to improve. It provides a clear picture of what an ethical coach looks like.

Continuing professional development is crucial in most industries and this book is useful not only for those training with Coaching Minds, but to all coaches - trainee or qualified - who are interested in ethical coaching or looking to improve their own business practices.

Consider this book your essential toolkit for building an ethical coaching practice.

**Emma Butler**

**Privacy Consultant**

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## **An Introduction to Ethics**

‘The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones.’

### **Confucius**

How important are ethics in coaching? How is the coaching profession regulated? Is there a code we need to adopt into our practice? The Coaching Industry, at present, remains a non-regulated profession. This means that anyone and everyone can label themselves a ‘Coach’ and offer what they believe are ‘Coaching Services’. No qualifications, no training and no experience necessary. If you want to publish yourself as a ‘Certified’ Coach, you can pay as little as £20.00/\$25.00 for a short series of ‘training’ videos and gain yourself a ‘Certificate’ in Coaching. However, this piece of paper or electronic image, does not provide you with the tools, training and standard of service needed to deliver impactful coaching.

The problem with this type of certificate is that it creates too many risks for those who need coaching or those who could be perceived as vulnerable due to their current life circumstances. If we find ourselves with a coach who hasn’t invested in their practice, who hasn’t obtained the necessary skills and who does not hold themselves accountable to a high standard of practice, then we are essentially giving someone permission to enter our mind and personal space without the necessary experience. It is almost like allowing a surgeon to operate on you with a hammer and chisel. It may sound like an odd analogy, but as a Coach we are dealing with the mind and the mind is a weird yet wonderful place. If we do not approach this with care and a proper ethical

code, we run the risk of causing more damage than actual help to our clients.

'Life Coaching' or people's idea of Life Coaching is becoming increasingly popular, and the industry has become one of the fastest growing in the world. The coaching industry has seen significant growth and development over recent years. In 2023, the global coaching market was valued at approximately \$5.34 billion and is projected to grow each year. This represents a substantial compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.43% as captured by sources Coach Ranks and Profile Tree.

There exists a wide range of niches, including business coaching, which alone was valued at \$14.2 billion in the U.S. in 2022. Health coaching is another significant sector on the rise, with the global market size reaching nearly \$14.5 billion in 2021 and expected to grow to \$25.95 billion by 2030. This is according to a journal published by Mindvalley.

The problem we have is that a large majority of 'Life Coaches' are not actually coaching because they lack a full understanding of what coaching really entails. Instead, they are providing advice and telling clients what they should do. This takes responsibility away from clients, disempowering them and creating a dependent relationship.

Additionally, coaching often appears to be merged with self-help, motivational speaking and spirituality and, whilst these three can be powerful when used correctly in combination with each other, many 'coaches' are unaware of how to do this properly. To explain in more detail, we can take motivational speaking as an example:

**'We cannot bring motivational speaking into a coaching space, but we can bring coaching into a motivational speaking space.'**

Motivational speaking is a way of articulating wisdom, stories and experiences with an aim to motivate others to take action. It can be powerful, but its effect is often temporary. Motivational speeches are nothing more than personal development 'candy'. It tastes good, gives you momentary pleasure and can be addictive, but too much of it is not good for our health.

Motivational speaking is not coaching, and it must not be brought into a coaching space. A one-to-one coaching session is not a place for you to sit and share your wisdom and inspiring words on life whilst your client takes notes. This is a big 'no'. Similarly, we cannot bring and define a 'self-help' plan for our clients to follow because we have evidence that it worked for ourselves and others. This goes against coaching ethics. It is intrusive, it is egotistical, and it is not focused on the client.

On the other hand, we can bring our coaching skills and tools into our motivational speaking to make our inspiring talks more impactful. For example, instead of giving people advice and just making powerful statements, ask a powerful question. Questions can have the biggest impact and when we are asked a question, we are programmed to respond. We always stop to think. Whether we choose to answer the question or not is a different story, but we always think about a question. Are you stopping to think right now?

Our role as a coach is not to provide the right answers but to ask the right questions. Without the right questions, there are no 'right' answers. We do not 'fix' our clients, we empower them to take the necessary action to 'fix' themselves. Remember that we see our clients as whole, just the way they are. Nothing needs fixing, they just aren't performing at the level they wish they were performing at.

The first step into beginning to understand ethics, is to understand that coaching is its own entity, and it is 100% client focused. Understanding this is crucial for anyone already within,

or entering, the coaching profession, as it highlights our ethical responsibility to maintain clear boundaries and ensure the client's autonomy and self-efficacy are always prioritised. Effective coaching requires the ability to articulate what coaching is and how it differs from other support roles, ensuring clarity and alignment with ethical standards.

In this book we will explore the standards we must adopt as coaches through ethical codes, how to set professional boundaries and how to construct our coaching business in a legal and ethical way. Ethical coaching helps you be the best coach you can be, which in turn helps your clients be the best that they can be.

## **Morals, Ethics and Law**

‘Good people do not need laws to tell them how to act responsibly and bad people will always find a way around them.’

**Plato**

What do we mean when we use the word ethics? What is the difference between ethics and morals? Are ethics legally enforceable? If you are asking these questions, you are already thinking like a professional and ethical coach. Whilst there are similarities between morals, ethics and law, there are significant differences we must understand as a coach. In this chapter, we will explore these differences, discuss where conflict may arise and provide practical examples you may find useful for your practice.

### **2.1 What are Ethics?**

When we talk about ethics in coaching, we refer to a set of terms or guidelines (collectively a code) that stipulates what we should and shouldn't do as a coach. Ethical codes are not legally enforceable (only legal terms within them are), and only act as an agreement between you as a member of a coaching organisation and the organisation itself. In a nutshell:

**‘Here is a set of guidelines you must follow, in exchange for which we give you “this” and allow you to do “that”. If you**

**breach these terms we take “that” away from you by way of punishment.’**

You can find codes of ethics in most, if not all, professions. However, where the profession is regulated, such as with psychology and counselling, the regulating body has the power by law to issue fines and penalties for non-compliance. As a non-regulated industry, there is no such power granted to any organisation in coaching.

Ethics are also not morals. Morals are a set of values and beliefs we have built within ourselves to define what we see as ‘right or wrong’, which acts as our compass to navigate through life (our moral compass). Something that may be defined as ethical by an organisation, may be viewed as immoral by you. For example, you may find it morally correct to give people advice, however, ethically in coaching this is not acceptable. But it is not unlawful.

As a professional coach we must also be aware of the laws that apply to our business. We cover this in detail below, but for now it is important to note that we have legal obligations. These obligations start with the obvious, which reminds us not to facilitate or perform any criminal activity through our business and expand into more commercial responsibilities and safeguarding.

## **2.2 Understanding Crossovers**

Where the lines blur and can get confusing for some, is when morals, ethics and law cross over. While they are three completely different terms, they do intertwine in various scenarios. A code of ethics is a system of principles that guide behaviour in terms of what is considered right and wrong within a particular community or profession and which may also refer to certain laws. Law is a system of rules created and enforced by governmental institutions to regulate public behaviour; these

laws might not always sit well with us morally. Morals are personal beliefs, often influenced by culture, religion and personal experiences.

It is likely that an ethical code incorporates certain laws. For example, an ethical code in the medical profession might include guidelines on patient confidentiality that reference relevant legislation. A breach of these guidelines would constitute not only a breach of the ethical code, but also a violation of the law. Similarly, in corporate settings, codes of ethics often include provisions related to data protection that align with legal requirements, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), in the UK, for example. In these cases, following an ethical code can demonstrate compliance with the law.

When it comes to morals, you may find that you resonate more with a code where it aligns with your values or beliefs. For instance, if you believe strongly in honesty and integrity, you might be more inclined to adhere to a professional code of ethics that emphasises transparency. However, codes based on ethics do incorporate morals (they just may not always align with your personal moral beliefs). For example, a coach might have an ethical code that prioritises profit, which could conflict with your personal moral belief in prioritising social impact.

Understanding these distinctions is important for dealing with any ethical dilemmas that may arise in our coaching practice and ensuring that our actions are not only legally compliant but also ethically sound and morally justifiable. This awareness helps us maintain integrity and trust, both as individuals and as a profession.

## 2.3 Three Practical Examples of Alignment

When morals, ethics and law align themselves, business seems to flow, and we feel a passion for what we do. Here are three practical examples where an alignment may present itself in coaching.

### Confidentiality

Legally, we are required to protect client information under laws such as GDPR (different regulations apply depending on our location). Ethically, we are expected to maintain confidentiality even when legal requirements are met. Morally, we may feel a deep personal commitment to safeguarding client privacy beyond what is legally required. Here we feel a sense of alignment and it is easy for us to protect privacy.

### Conflict of Interest

Ethical codes in the coaching profession prohibit us from engaging in relationships that present a conflict of interest. Legally, failing to disclose a conflict of interest could lead to professional sanctions or lawsuits. Morally, we might feel it is wrong to engage in any activity that could compromise our objectivity and the trust of our clients. Again, we have an alignment that makes it easier for us to identify and act upon any conflicts of interest that may arise.

### Informed Consent

Legally, we must obtain informed consent from clients before beginning any coaching relationship, ensuring clients understand the nature and terms of the coaching process. Ethically, we are also obligated to ensure that clients are fully

aware of their rights, the scope of confidentiality and the potential outcomes of coaching under the ethical codes. Morally, we may believe it is fundamentally right to respect the decision-making capacity of our clients. An alignment is formed, and it becomes natural for us to always seek consent.

Observing and noticing alignments (and misalignments) helps us shape an ethical coaching practice. If something doesn't feel quite right, stop, reflect and seek a little support and guidance.

**Figure 1: The difference between morals, ethics and law**

<b>Morals</b>	<b>Ethics</b>	<b>Law</b>
<p data-bbox="252 1084 507 1173">Set by us through our internal beliefs and values.</p> <p data-bbox="260 1308 499 1431">If we act against our morals we can cause internal emotional distress.</p>	<p data-bbox="651 1084 898 1207">Set by organisations or companies as a set of rules or 'code' for all of it's members.</p> <p data-bbox="635 1308 890 1464">If we act against ethics we can lose our job, credentials or licence that we hold with that organisation.</p>	<p data-bbox="1043 1084 1283 1240">Set by the government or delegated body and are national rules we must all follow.</p> <p data-bbox="1043 1308 1283 1431">If we act against the law we face a penalty/fine or imprisonment.</p>

## 2.4 Theory into Practice

In this chapter we have explored morals, ethics and laws, the importance of each and how they might cross over in practice.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

-  **Reflecting on this chapter, where do your personal morals clash with existing laws or ethics, and why?**

## **SROs and Current Ethical Standards**

‘Keep your eyes on the stars and your feet on the ground.’

**Theodore Roosevelt**

If the coaching industry is not regulated, who sets our ethical standards? What organisations uphold these standards? Why should we adopt them? These are all questions you may be asking. In this chapter, we will clarify the current position of the coaching profession, discuss the different organisations that self-regulate and explore the possibility of the profession becoming regulated in the future.

### **3.1 Self-Regulated Organisations (SROs)**

Self-Regulated Organisations (SROs) are non-profit organisations created to set professional standards for the coaching profession. SROs can operate at national or international level, creating ethical codes, demonstrating best practice and hosting events that bring coaches together. They work closely with coaching schools and academies that have chosen to adopt their standards, putting programmes and courses under scrutiny to assure a high quality of training delivered to the appropriate levels of competency. If they deem the school or academy to be satisfactory, they will award accreditation. This accreditation can then be filtered down to students and coaches on completion of accredited programmes.

## **3.2 Steps to Adopting an Ethical Practice**

The first step towards adopting an ethical practice is to build credibility by obtaining Certification and Accreditation (true certification; not a \$25 certification). If you are reading this as a Certified or Accredited Coach, then you are already on the right path. However, it is important for us to understand the difference between the two.

### Step 1: Membership of a Self-Regulated Organisation

Taking an ethical approach to your coaching begins with making the decision to join a Self-Regulated Organisation (more on these below). As a member you expand your coach network, begin to understand the standards of the profession and open yourself to several different events from coaches, supervisors and leaders in the profession.

### Step 2: Certification with an Accredited Organisation

True certification in the coaching profession is earned by completing a coaching programme with an accredited organisation. Here, the organisation (and training programme) is accredited, and you receive certification as a coach through their accreditation status.

### Step 3: Accreditation with a Self-Regulated Organisation

Accreditation is awarded directly to you from a Self-Regulated Organisation (SRO) (more on these organisations below). However, in order to receive accreditation, there are certain requirements you must meet. One requirement is to first receive certification from an accredited organisation (as explained above). There are also different levels of accreditation with SROs that you can work towards.

As an established certified or accredited coach, you should have your next steps towards building your credibility ready, whether that is working towards accreditation from certification or completing the requirements for the next level of accreditation with your chosen SRO. Building credibility is a continuous part of your coaching journey and plays a vital role in safeguarding coaches, clients and the industry from claims, penalties and disrepute.

### **3.3 Credible Self-Regulated Organisations**

Although the profession is non-regulated, professional coaching standards are set through a number of SROs, of which the biggest and most credible are:

1. The International Coaching Federation (ICF)
2. European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)
3. Association for Coaching (AC)

#### **Figure 2: Logos of the most Credible Self-Regulated Organisations**



Accreditation with any of these three organisations will demonstrate a high degree of professional standards and credibility. The ICF is known to be the most stringent, with the EMCC a close second.

There are many other SROs both at national and international levels all with different standards and requirements for accreditation. It is important that when choosing an accreditation,

you select the one you feel will give you the most credibility for yourself and your clients. Here are some points to think about:

1. At what level do I want my accreditation to be recognised?
2. What resources and benefits are provided by the SRO?
3. What are the costs of membership and accreditation?
4. What SROs are known to my clients?
5. Which SRO would I like to work with or for?

Holding a membership and accreditation with an established SRO is a huge step to developing an ethical coaching practice. It provides you with higher standards of coaching, a stronger coach network and accountability for the service you deliver. Begin by researching the SROs above and plan your necessary steps to become associated with them.

### **3.4 Regulating the Coaching Profession**

Whilst SROs offer some fantastic standards, events and learning, it remains questionable as to whether self-regulation is enough to protect the public from the various scams that exist across our profession. The number of registered coaches within SROs is considerably low. To put this into perspective, while the UK alone has recorded over 100,000 practising coaches identified through registered companies, sole-traders and partnerships, fewer than 50,000 coaches globally are registered under these organisations.

In addition, the guidelines and benchmarks set by some SROs may be lenient and lack enforcement - which is a problem most self-regulated professions face. SROs hold very little power and authority and don't want to be seen to 'police' the industry. A breach of the code will only result in removal of your accreditation, certification, association and affiliation with that organisation. As there is no such thing as a licence to coach,

there is no fine, no penalty and no removal of a licence. A coach can breach ethics, lose their accredited status but still practice.

This alone highlights a need for a shift towards a more professional and ethically recognised service in the industry and a need for SROs to start thinking differently. An important part of ethics, as you will begin to understand, is to uphold and ensure a positive reputation for the profession. Given the world's current situation, the increasing prevalence of online work and the continuous rise in reports of mental health difficulties, it is time for the coaching industry to step up. But will we see the coaching profession shift towards regulation?

The debate over whether the coaching profession should become regulated hinges on several key arguments. Those in favour of regulation argue that it can provide quality assurance, ensuring that coaches meet certain standards of competence and ethics. This is crucial for protecting clients from unqualified or rogue coach practitioners. Additionally, regulation can enhance client protection by establishing clear guidelines and standards, which can safeguard clients from fraud and malpractice. Furthermore, having a regulated profession could provide mechanisms for addressing complaints and disputes, building greater trust in the profession.

Regulation can also enhance the professional credibility of the coaching profession. By setting high standards for training, certification and practice, regulation can help distinguish professional coaches from those who may be less qualified or inexperienced. This, in turn, can enhance the overall legitimacy of the profession and help clients make more informed decisions when selecting a coach. It will offer a wider understanding of what coaching entails and attract more people to it. Consistent standards across the industry can ensure a high level of service and effectiveness in coaching practices, which benefits both clients and coaches.

However, there are arguments against regulation, too. One significant concern is that regulation could limit innovation and flexibility within the industry. The coaching profession thrives on diverse approaches and methodologies, which might be restricted by rigid regulatory standards. Coaches need the freedom to adapt their practices to meet the unique needs of their clients, and regulation could limit this flexibility.

Another consideration is the cost and accessibility of coaching services. Regulation could increase the cost of becoming a coach, potentially limiting accessibility for individuals who are passionate about the profession but cannot afford the higher costs. These increased costs could also be passed on to clients, making coaching services more expensive and potentially less accessible to those who could benefit from them. However, regulation could also lower costs and offer fair pricing within the profession, removing the barriers to entry that exist already.

In conclusion, whether the coaching profession should become regulated involves balancing the need for client protection and quality assurance with the desire to maintain innovation and flexibility. Stakeholders, including coaches, clients and SROs, should engage in a dialogue to determine the best way forward that addresses these concerns. As it stands, there is no motion towards a regulated profession.

## 3.5 Theory into Practice

In this chapter we have explored the current level of regulation within the coaching profession, understanding that whilst there is no true 'regulation' there are a number of reputable bodies setting standards for our profession.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

- ✍ **Reflecting on this chapter, which SRO do you plan to join and how will you improve the standards of your coaching?**

## **Ethical Codes of Conduct**

‘We need timeless principles to steer by in running our organizations and building our personal careers. We need high standards - the ethics of excellence.’

**Price Pritchett**

Which ethical code should we adopt in our practice? How much do the codes differ? How do we choose the right one? As discussed above, each Self-Regulated Organisation (SRO) adopts its own standards and way of influencing the coaching profession. This results in a number of different codes all with similar standards. In this chapter, we will explore the different codes available, Coaching Minds’ Professional Code of Conduct and how we as a profession can raise the benchmark.

### **4.1 Ethical Codes within the Coaching Profession**

The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) has made great progress over recent years in developing a unified code that allows other SROs to become signatories. This code can be seen as the leading document on ethics, alongside that developed by the International Coach Federation (ICF). The EMCC is more globally recognised across SROs, but the ICF holds the most registered coaches, which suggests that the ICF Code of Ethics is more globally practiced.

The ICF and the EMCC both have robust codes of ethics, but they differ in focus and structure. The ICF Code of Ethics emphasises global standards, client-centric practices and core

competencies, with stringent guidelines on confidentiality and continuous professional development. It is organised into four main sections and includes a formal complaints process and an ethics pledge for its members.

In contrast, the EMCC Code of Ethics has a stronger European influence and is organised around five key principles: Competence, Context, Boundary Management, Integrity and Professionalism. The EMCC places significant emphasis on understanding the broader context of coaching, including cultural and organisational factors, and provides detailed guidance on maintaining boundaries and roles. It also stresses the importance of supervision and support for coaches and encourages ethical reflection and dialogue within the coaching community.

## **4.2 Which Code should we Adopt?**

Choosing between the ICF and EMCC codes of ethics depends on our professional goals, location and personal values. The ICF Code of Ethics is ideal for coaches aiming to work globally, emphasising core coaching competencies and continuous professional development. It offers a strong client-centric approach with stringent confidentiality standards and transparent practices, making it suitable for those who prioritise client welfare and international reach.

On the other hand, the EMCC Code of Ethics is more suited for coaches working primarily in Europe or those who value contextual sensitivity in their practice. It focuses on understanding and adapting to cultural and organisational factors, providing detailed guidance on boundary management and ethical reflection. The EMCC's holistic approach includes the importance of supervision and support, making it a good fit for coaches who seek a comprehensive ethical framework that considers the broader context of coaching relationships.

Both are highly credible and will help you boost trust in your practice, opening doors to more clients and contracts worldwide.

### **4.3 Coaching Minds' Professional Code of Conduct**

As the Managing Director of an Accredited Coaching Academy (Coaching Minds), I took it upon myself to lead a steering group to review the ethical codes across the industry with the aim of improving and adopting a more user-friendly document. We wanted to create a shift from a list of terms to something more measurable. As a result of the steering group, we published the 'Coaching Minds Professional Code of Conduct'.

Our Professional Code of Conduct has been written to raise the benchmark above that set by SROs, with an intention to train, build and develop professional coaches who hold ethics at the heart of their coaching practice.

The code takes a more outcomes-focused approach to self-regulation that concentrates on providing expected positive outcomes which, when achieved, will show that we are operating within the code. Additionally, it offers coaches an understanding of 'indicative behaviours' that demonstrate best practice. The code offers a clear understanding of what is expected of us and allows us to measure the standards of our professionalism. From a client's perspective, it also provides them with a clearer document they can understand, allowing them also to observe the outcomes being achieved within the coaching practice, and giving them the power to question and hold coaches accountable to their code's standards.

Our full Professional Code of Conduct can be found annexed to the back of this book. I recommend browsing through this once you have finished this book to understand in more detail the standards we want to set across our profession. We will explore

important parts of the code in the proceeding chapters within this book. However, only by reading the code itself will you obtain the full picture of the professional standards.

## **4.4 Raising our Coaching Standards**

As a professional coach we must continuously work to raise our coaching standards actively seeking ways to improve our service. Ethics should be at the heart of our coaching practice, raising the standard of our professional services, improving our credibility and maintaining an excellent reputation. Here are five practical ways we can consistently build upon our standards.

1. Test our understanding of ethics
2. Monitor and audit our practice
3. Adopt an outcomes-based regulation
4. Continuous learning
5. Observe and mitigate ethical dilemmas

### Testing our Understanding of Ethics

Reading about ethics and coaching standards is one thing, understanding and adopting an ethical code is another. As a professional coach, we must test our understanding of what ethical codes teach us and ensure we implement the guidelines into our coaching practice.

Many coaches may get the temptation to browse through codes of conduct, publish them on their website and then treat ethics as a tick-box exercise. It is not enough only for us to read about ethics. We must assess our client journey, explore our governance and ensure that our business operates on these

principles, taking a practical approach that safeguards both clients and ourselves.

In many credible certification programmes, ethics are often overlooked, which could explain why coaches often treat them as a tick-box element of coaching. It is almost as if there is an underlying assumption that all those training to become coaches understand what an ethical practice looks like. This is not always the case and there are many 'coaches' exposing themselves to lawsuits and operating their practices unlawfully due to this gap in their knowledge.

Alongside our own Professional Code of Conduct, at Coaching Minds we also designed a full 18-lesson module which covers the contents of this book and more. The purpose is to put professionalism at the forefront of what we do, and ensure our coaches build professional processes into their coaching practice.

In order to pass this module, coaches must sit an online multiple choice ethics exam and achieve an 80% pass rate. This is one of the key requirements for certification from our academy. Coaches who fail are required to resit the exam.

We understand that not every coaching school offers this, so we have included one of our exams as a test for you, annexed to the back of this book. See if you can hit the pass mark. If so, excellent work, you have a sound understanding of ethics and you can give yourself a pat on the back. If not, then you may want to explore more resources via our Coach Library. You can access our library at the end of the annexed exam.

## Monitoring and Auditing our Practice

As explained above, ethics is not a tick-box exercise. It is not something we review once, it is something we constantly temperature-check and improve. If we want to raise our coaching standards we must observe where we are excelling in our service and - more importantly - where we fall short, with an aim to improve what we do.

At Coaching Minds, we perform yearly audits to test that our coaches are operating within our professional code. From the list of coaches that have chosen to annex themselves to our brand after certification, we randomly select a handful whose coaching we review. They are asked to submit a recording of a coaching session dated within the last three months, which is then assessed against our competencies. Detailed feedback is given, along with suggestions for any improvements. This helps both the coaches monitor their practice and Coaching Minds to monitor the impact of our coaches through our brand.

We encourage you to continually monitor the standards of your coaching, seeking feedback from your clients and peers to ensure you are consistently improving your practice.

## Adopting an Outcomes-Based Regulation

Currently, the SROs of our profession list a set of guidelines for coaches to follow, rather than providing them with ways in which to measure adherence to a code. With only a list of rules it is difficult to assess whether we are operating to the professional standards set. However, with a set of outcomes and indicative behaviours, we can ask ourselves more informed questions to measure our standard of coaching.

At Coaching Minds, our Professional Code of Conduct is not a list of rules, but bullet-pointed outcomes and indicative behaviours expected of a professional coach that allows us to effectively measure our standards to that of the code. As we explore the code further in this book, we will be asking questions for our readers to temperature-check their practice. This will help you identify any gaps in the professionalism of your coaching and come away with a list of corrective actions.

### Continuous Learning

As the coaching profession evolves, ethical standards evolve and so should our coaching practice. It is important that we continuously learn and keep up-to-date with the coaching industry and what new trends are having an impact in the coaching world. We all know the biggest trend at the moment is Artificial Intelligence (AI) and this not only leads to questions about how the profession will operate in the future as technology progresses, but also about what regulation and laws will evolve around it.

### Observing and Mitigating Ethical Dilemmas

As our coaching practice grows, so will the risk of ethical dilemmas. We have already discussed the difference between ethics, morals and law. However, we need to observe where our ethical standards and moral beliefs may present a conflict. We will explore how ethical dilemmas arise as we go through the rest of this book, along with strategies for mitigating them. For now, we can begin by asking ourselves the following questions:

1. How do I manage conflict where I might be coaching a friend of a friend or family member?


2. What do I do if my client's actions do not align with my personal beliefs?
3. How do I continue to coach a client if that client triggers me?
4. What do I do if I don't feel competent enough for a specific client?
5. What if I develop a friendship with or attraction for a client?

As we go through the next chapters of this book, we will provide guidance on these questions. At this stage, it is important to understand where an ethical dilemma may arise and for us to start asking the most appropriate questions to help us mitigate and manage them.

## **4.5 Theory into Practice**

In this chapter we have explored the different ethical codes of conduct that exist within our profession.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

-  **Reflecting on this chapter, consider how your coaching practice currently operates. How can you raise the coaching standards of your practice?**

## **Creating and Setting Professional Boundaries**

‘When we fail to set boundaries and hold people accountable, we feel used and mistreated.’

**Brene Brown**

How do I prepare my business to adopt professional standards? Where can I get guidance on contracts? Are there any boundaries that I should have in place? One of the most fundamental aspects of coaching is having the ability to create, set and maintain professional boundaries with our clients. In coaching this is generally called ‘contracting’. By setting clear boundaries with our clients, we mitigate the risk of breaching our ethical code. Contracting is essential for a professional coaching practice. In this chapter we will explore the 8 key elements required for setting professional boundaries and the foundations we need to have in place to ensure an ethical coaching practice.

### **5.1 The 8 Key Elements of Professional Boundaries**

When adopting an ethical code of conduct into our business and improving the standard of our coaching practice, it is crucial that we review the service we offer our clients. Poor service is generally the first indicator of an unethical practice, but it also provides an easy opportunity to improve.

When setting professional boundaries, we must embed the following 8 key elements into our practice as a minimum:

1. A clear and client-friendly service
2. An ability to explain our service
3. Informing clients of our obligations as a coach
4. Safeguards
5. Transparent and fair pricing
6. Clear methods of contact
7. Term of contract
8. Policies in place

Having clearly set boundaries that address the 8 key elements above also allows us to begin to build better rapport with our clients. The better the service we provide, the happier our clients will become. Let's explore each of these elements in more detail.

**Figure 3: The 8 Key Elements of Professional Boundaries**



## 5.2 A Clear and Client-friendly Service

The most important element to build into our coaching business to help set professional boundaries is a clear and client-friendly service. Here, we must explore the journey for our clients and how easy it is for them to reach us. An unclear or unfriendly service is a key indicator that boundaries have not been set.

If a new client were to arrive on your metaphorical doorstep, what journey would they be taken on? How would you excite them? What would attract them to you? We need to know the answers to all these questions, if we want a successful coaching practice.

With the development of AI, it is now easier than ever to create a clearly defined customer journey that is user-friendly for our clients. We take you on this journey of AI and its power in our ***Coaching with AI*** book, which will help you automate parts of your business and build efficiency. However, for now, we must consider the following questions:

1. How can potential clients find you?
2. How can potential clients book a session with you?
3. Are you going to offer a free discovery call?
4. How long will your discovery call be?
5. How will clients receive confirmation or notification of bookings?
6. Will clients receive reminders for each session?
7. What is the format of the meetings? (online, face to face etc.)
8. If online, what platform or software will you and your client use?
9. If offline, where will you host the session?
10. What information do you need to provide the client?
11. How and when will your client pay?
12. How will you issue invoices?
13. How can clients cancel or reschedule a session?

14. What is your policy if they cancel or reschedule?
15. How will you manage actions and notes?
16. What happens between sessions with clients?

There is no best or set way to do this in coaching. This is where we can get creative and become service-oriented, making it as easy as possible for our clients to get results. The important takeaways here from an ethical standpoint are that our client is fully aware of what to expect and we don't break the boundaries and expectations we have set.

It is also important at this stage to note that breaking a boundary and changing a boundary are not the same thing. If a boundary is not working for us, we can re-contract with our client and change our boundary to something that works better. The key thing is sticking to the commitments we make with our clients.

### **5.3 Ability to Explain our Service**

Coaching is not as clearly understood as other support services such as therapy and counselling. The public does not have an understanding of what coaching is, which leaves the burden of explaining what we do with ourselves. It is important that we can fully explain to our clients what coaching is and the extent of our competencies and services as a coach. For example, there could be a time when a client brings into the coaching space that they suffer from anxiety or depression. Whilst we can continue to coach if this occurs, it is important not to step into the role of a therapist or into advice mode. In terms of ethics, this boundary must be created in order to manage our client's expectations.

We must not over-promise results for our clients, and we must not blur lines between coaching, therapy and counselling. Below is a four-step 'DEED' model we have developed at Coaching

Minds to help coaches explain what they do in their first sessions. We perform the DEED of explaining coaching to clients.

**Figure 4: The DEED Model**



**Define Coaching:** In your first interaction with a client, it is important that you set their expectations by explaining what coaching is. It is useful to create and develop your own definition of coaching, tailored to your niche, explaining how you help others through your adopted coaching style. Avoid using ‘coach lingo’ and keep the explanation simple for clients to understand.

You may find that the client is familiar with coaching, so you may not want to teach them how to suck eggs. However, it is important to explain what they can expect from your coaching services and the level of professional standards you will deliver.

**Educate what Coaching is Not:** It is also vital that your clients understand the difference between coaching and other support services available. Your client must be clear that you are not a qualified therapist, and that you are not acting as a mentor or a

consultant. You are acting in the capacity of a coach. Coaching is an alternative to therapy or counselling.

It is however possible, that a client has both therapy and coaching at the same time. If this occurs, then as a coach you must instruct your client to inform their therapist that they are also receiving coaching from you. There needs to be transparency in the support services for a client, and both coach and therapist must set clear boundaries on how they will help the client. If any conflict arises between the coaching and the therapy, we must be prepared to manage this or to terminate the coaching contract.

**Explain that you do not give advice:** It is common for clients who are new to coaching to expect a coach to give advice about what they should and shouldn't do to improve their life. It is very important that you clearly explain to your client in the first instance that you do not offer advice as a coach but through listening, questioning and the use of various tools, you will guide the client to find their own answers and course of action. You could explain this using one of the following examples, or simply create your own:

**'Coaching is not about giving you answers, it is about helping you find your own answers. Often, we can't find the right answers because we aren't asking the right questions. I'm here to ask you the right questions.'**

**'In our sessions I won't be providing you with answers, but I will be providing you with tools, techniques and strategies to guide you to the right answers.'**

**Discuss your limitations:** The final part of our DEED Model reminds you to discuss your limits openly with your client. It is so important that your clients know the extent of your services. For example, if your focus is on confidence and goal setting, make your clients aware this is your area of expertise or niche. It is also

important that you do not act or proceed with a client if their needs are beyond your competencies as a coach. For example, if your area is confidence and goal setting, you should not proceed with a client who is looking for relationship coaching. As much as you might need or want an extra client, you must always ask the question:

**‘Am I the right coach to be supporting this client?’**

Under our Professional Code of Conduct it is also important that you honestly represent your coaching experience and qualifications. Explain to the client whether you are a trainee, certified or accredited and let them know how long you have been coaching. The beauty of Coaching Minds is that we have a network of coaches working collaboratively together and if a client seems to be outside our own area of expertise or competence, then we can refer them to another, more suitable coach. I strongly advise that you begin to grow your coaching network, collaborate with other coaches and work together to make a difference to the lives of others.

## **5.4 Making Clients Aware of our Obligations as a Coach**

It is also important that our clients understand our obligations under the Professional Code of Conduct or ethical codes we have chosen to adopt. We can easily perform this duty by providing clients with an electronic copy of the Code after our discovery session and highlighting that we operate by the code and its service standards. For example, we could say something like:

**‘As a Coaching Minds Coach, I am bound by our Professional Code of Conduct which sets out guidelines on**

**how we operate as Coaches. I will send you a copy by email after our session, so you have all the information you need, but I would just like to highlight a couple of key points...'**

The key points to highlight when explaining this to your client are confidentiality and conflicts of interest. We will discuss these in more detail further in this book to give you a deeper understanding.

## **5.5 Safeguards**

A professional practice has an eye for safeguarding and client protection. We discuss a lot of legal obligations later in this book. However, at this stage, the most important safeguard to note is that of confidentiality. How do we honour and respect our client's privacy? How do we ensure we have strict data protection measures in place? How do we provide a safe space for our client?

Walking the client through confidentiality at the outset of our coaching is one of the most important parts of contracting. Reassuring your clients that everything discussed during your coaching is strictly confidential, creates a safe and secure space. This helps to build rapport right at the outset.

In addition, we must also explain when we might have to share certain information from a session and step outside our duty of confidentiality should we think there may be a risk of harm to the client or others, or where they have given express consent to do so, usually for the purposes of supervision. More on confidentiality later.

Additional safeguards that we cover later in this book are around working with children and vulnerable people, working with

neurodiversity and tri-partite contracts (where a third party is involved in the coaching). For now, let's note that we must have safeguards in place to protect both ourselves and our clients and these form an important part of contracting.

## **5.6 Transparent and Fair Pricing**

Pricing and methods of payment are further key aspects that are important for clients and setting professional boundaries. Whether or not we as coaches should display our prices remains another ethical debate within our profession. Some argue that keeping your prices hidden until a discovery session sparks curiosity for potential clients, which gives the coach a great opportunity to get them on a Zoom call and sell their services. The concern is that high prices may deter clients, but low prices will create a perspective of a lesser service. At Coaching Minds, we are strong advocates against hidden fees and high costs, advising coaches to be transparent and fair with their pricing.

Following several incidents and cases where we have had to mediate disputes around pricing, we have designed and implemented what we call a 'Fair Pricing Guidance Note', which is annexed to the back of this book. The purpose of our guidance note is to assist coaches with fair pricing for the standard of their services and to encourage clear and transparent costs. Nobody likes hidden fees; complex pricing models or steep costs and they are prohibited under certain consumer laws in some countries. It is important to keep our pricing clear and concise, providing simple payment methods with appropriate financial security. We explain this in more detail later in this book.

For now, if you haven't established a payment method yet, here are a few platforms that are great for taking payment and managing finances:

1. PayPal
2. Stripe
3. Square
4. Go-Cardless

Be mindful that your client may not have an account or access to the payment method you choose, so be prepared to explain and walk them through your payment process. Check the security status of the platform you choose to ensure it has sufficient encryption and protects the client's bank details.

In addition to setting up a payment method, it is important that we publish a menu of prices for our services that is visible on our website or social media, and that we cross-reference our 'pricing menu' with our terms and conditions.

## **5.7 Clear Methods of Contact**

This one seems straightforward; however, as coaches, we can sometimes fall so much into the trap of really wanting our clients to progress, that we fail to set boundaries and methods of contact. Suddenly, weekly coaching sessions through Zoom turn into late night WhatsApp calls and hundreds of messages. The next thing we know, we reach a stage of burnout, and we fail to offer value to our clients. It is therefore important for both you and the client that boundaries of contact and availability are clearly set.

There is no harm in offering access to private messaging in between sessions. We must, however, ensure that our clients are fully aware of how they can contact us, at what times and how frequently. It is also good practice to set expectations of how long it takes us to respond to messages.

## **5.8 Term of Contract**

It is important that we value our time in a coaching session and that we have clearly set boundaries on the length of our sessions. It is for us to determine the length of our sessions. I would recommend no less than 45 minutes and no longer than 90 minutes to ensure we offer value and preserve our energy. Bringing a session to a close can be a challenge at times, but remember, if you allow a client too much time outside of an allotted session, you run the risk of this becoming a habit. Set time boundaries and stick to them. Ensure the client is fully aware of the number of sessions they are contracting to, their frequency and duration.

## **5.9 Putting Policies in Place**

Having clear policies in place demonstrates a professional practice. At times clients may need to cancel their sessions or we may need to cancel because of a family emergency or due to ill health. It is important to discuss a policy for cancellations at the outset of our coaching. It is most useful to put this into a written contract or have it available on our terms and conditions on our website. The important thing is to ensure that our client is aware of how to cancel and whether we offer refunds. Some points to consider:

1. What time period or window will you accept cancellations in?
2. How can the client rebook?
3. Under what circumstances will you issue a refund?
4. What percentage of refund will you issue?
5. What is your process if you need to cancel or reschedule?

We offer a contract template that can be used by all of our coaches at Coaching Minds. It does not replace legal advice or the need to have terms looked over by a lawyer, but it is a useful start for those just setting up their coaching practice. It provides a sample cancellation and refund policy with all the contract terms necessary to run a coaching business. However, every business operates differently, and terms need to be tailored to the individual coach.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of policies that we need to draft and implement for our coaching business:

1. Cancellation Policy
2. Refund Policy
3. Data Protection Policy
4. Privacy Notice
5. Cookie Policy (for websites)
6. Complaints Policy
7. Emergency and Crisis Policy
8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
9. Payment Policy
10. Compliance Policy

With these 10 policies in place and the contracting points we have discussed above, we can start to build a professional coaching practice that protects both ourselves and our clients.

## 5.10 Theory into Practice

In this chapter we have explored professional boundaries and the eight key elements that are essential for a professional coaching practice.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

- ✍ **What actions can you take and safeguards you can put in place to ensure your professional boundaries are set?**

## Psychological Contracting

‘Clients thrive when the expectations of the psychological contract in therapy are clear—when they feel heard, valued, and understood.’

**Carl Rogers**

Are there any other types of contracts in coaching? What about unspoken expectations? Do we explore psychological contracting in coaching? A contract does not necessarily need to be written or verbal. Often, coaches and clients may hold expectations that can form an unconscious contract. Within the framework of Transactional Analysis, we have a third type of contracting in coaching, a concept known as ‘Psychological Contracting’.

Psychological contracting is about coming to an understanding of what the client wants and expects from us as a coach. When coaching our clients and psychologically contracting with them, it is important for us to become aware of the four elements below:

1. Conscious/Unconscious
2. Expectations
3. Client’s norms
4. Assumptions

Psychological contracting calls for a shared understanding of the nature of our engagement with our clients. The better we understand the psychological contract, the better our relationship will be with our client. Let us explore this further.

## 6.1 What is Psychological Contracting?

The term 'psychological contract' originated in the 1960s and is attributed to the work of organisational and social psychologists, particularly Chris Argyris, later expanded by Edgar Schein.

Chris Argyris introduced the concept in 1960 in his book, *Understanding Organizational Behaviour*, in which he explored the unwritten and implicit agreements between employees and employers that influence workplace behaviour. We have included the book in the Additional Reading section for those who might be interested in pursuing coaching within organisations.

Edgar Schein then further developed the idea in the 1960s, describing it as the set of unwritten expectations and mutual obligations between organisations and their employees.

The concept was introduced into therapy when Charlotte Sills designed the 'Contracting Matrix' in her book *Contracts in Counselling & Psychotherapy* (also referenced in the Additional Reading section), first published in 1997. This matrix offers a framework for understanding different types of contracts in therapeutic settings, considering variables such as the 'hardness' or 'softness' of goals and the individual's level of self-understanding. Whilst developed for counselling and therapy, the concept is highly applicable and transferable to coaching.

## 6.2 Sills' Contract Matrix

Sitting at the core of Psychological Contracting in coaching is the model of 'Sills' Contract Matrix'. Through her research Sills found that people enter different psychological contracts based on the hardness/softness of the contract and the degree of client awareness. When we explore Sills' Contract Matrix, together with

Psychological Contracting, we uncover an unwritten contract with our clients, which identifies any underlying assumptions and any hidden expectations. We can then use this contract to understand what our client wants and expects from our coaching.

According to Sills' Contract Matrix, there are four different types of psychological contracting depending on how hard/soft the contract is (objective/subjective) and how high/low the client's awareness with regards to their goal or desire. The terms 'hard' and 'soft' refer to the nature of the agreements or goals established in the coaching relationship. These distinctions help clarify the structure and focus of the work being done:

**Figure 5: The Differences between 'Hard' and 'Soft' Contracts**



	Hard Contract	Soft Contract
Definition	Clear, explicit and often measurable goals or outcomes that the client and coach agree upon.	Broad, exploratory or relational goals that focus on deeper understanding, personal growth, or emotional processing.
Example	'I want to improve my public speaking skills,' or 'I want to reduce anxiety symptoms by 50% in six months.'	'I want to feel more confident in myself,' or 'I want to explore why I struggle with trust in relationships.'
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Task-oriented and specific.</li> <li>- Emphasises concrete results.</li> <li>- May involve timelines or performance benchmarks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focuses on internal, subjective experiences.</li> <li>- Open-ended and flexible in nature.</li> <li>- Allows space for the client's journey to evolve without predefined outcomes.</li> </ul>

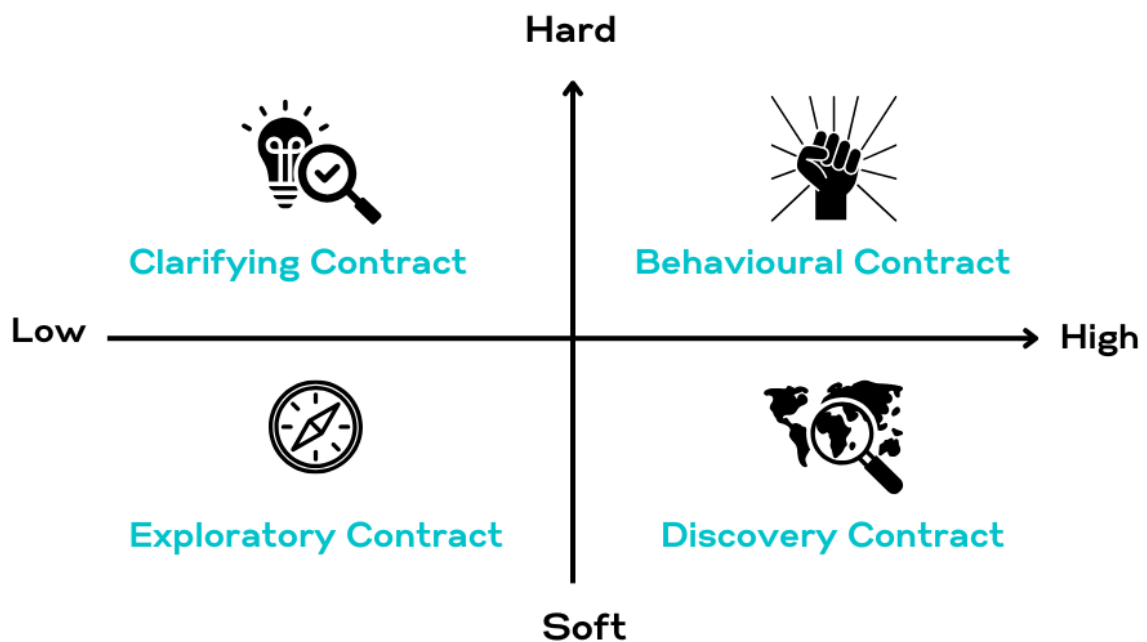
By understanding the four different types of contracts, we can subjectively place our clients into one of the four boxes of the model and reflect on what type of role we will play with them in our psychological contract.

The four types of psychological contracting are:

1. Behavioural Contract
2. Clarifying Contract
3. Exploratory Contract
4. Discovery Contract

Each contract will create a different role for us as a coach. We will explore each of these in turn below. For visual learners, figure 6 *below* illustrates the axis and quadrants for the model.

**Figure 6: Sills' Contract Matrix**



## **6.3 Behavioural Contract**

In the top right corner of the axis above, we have what is known as a behavioural contract. Under this type of contract, the client is able to define what it is they want and need (objectively), and they also know what they must do to achieve it. A behavioural contract is a hard and high contract. The goal is easily measurable, which makes the contract 'hard', and the client is fully aware of their desires, which makes for a 'high' level of awareness.

In practice, a behavioural contract could involve us agreeing with client-specific, observable actions to achieve a goal. For instance, a client may agree to complete a set of exercises or tasks between sessions, such as journaling for 10 minutes each day to reflect on their progress. We, in turn, commit to providing timely check-ins and adjust the approach as needed. The contract might also include an accountability measure, such as a follow-up discussion at the next session to review the client's commitment to the agreed actions, reinforcing clear expectations and mutual responsibility.

## **6.4 Clarifying Contract**

With a clarifying contract, which can be found top left in figure 6, the client can define what they want, but they have no idea how to achieve it. This is a hard (objective) and low (awareness) contract.

In practice, at the start of a coaching relationship, we might agree on the purpose of the client's work together, which, for example, could be focused on the client's leadership skills. We would then discuss what success looks like, the client's responsibilities and our role in shaping some clarity for the client. This agreement ensures we are aligned and clear about the process and actions.

## **6.5 Exploratory Contract**

Moving to the bottom left of the diagram, under this type of contract the client is unsure of who they are and therefore are unable to define what it is they want to achieve. Here a client may feel lost, depressed or unfulfilled, but they don't know what they want or need to make them feel better. This is a soft (subjective) and low (awareness) contract.

In practice, we might agree with the client to explore underlying beliefs and values impacting their career decisions, relationships or a specific area of their life, without setting a specific outcome. Our role here is to create a safe space, ask reflective questions and guide the client through the process. The contract is flexible, allowing the client to uncover insights and patterns as these emerge, emphasising personal progress and growth rather than defined goals and outcomes.

## **6.6 Discovery Contract**

Finally, in the bottom right of figure 6, we have the discovery contract. Here, the client has a high level of awareness of what they have achieved, they are happy and fulfilled in life, but they want to achieve something a little more. The issue is that they cannot define what that something more is. This is a soft (subjective) and high (awareness) contract.

In practice, we may find ourselves with a client seeking, for example, greater work-life balance who agrees to explore with us how they spend their time and what truly matters to them. Over a period of two weeks, the client commits to tracking their daily activities, noting moments when they feel energised or drained. During their sessions, we help the client identify patterns, uncover the values driving their decisions and experiment with small changes, such as setting boundaries or prioritising personal hobbies or family. The coaching contract becomes one of curiosity and learning, allowing insights to

emerge naturally as the client gains clarity on what balance means to them.

It is important to begin to understand the psychological contract we have with our clients so that we can adapt ourselves to best serve them. As we can observe from the four types of contracts above, they are four different approaches.

Psychological contracting is not something we explicitly walk through with our clients but is a useful tool we can use as coaches to ask the right questions to help understand what type of contract is in play. From understanding the type of contract, we can make a bigger impact and create more value in our coaching sessions.

## **6.7 Theory into Practice**

In this chapter we have explored the concept of psychological contracting and the four different types of contracts that we could form with our clients.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

 **Reflecting on your coaching practice, what psychological contracts have formed with your clients? Is there a trend or a regularly occurring contract?**

## **The Professional Code of Conduct**

‘Peace of mind comes when your life is in harmony with true principles and values.’

**Stephen Covey**

What service standards should I set for my coaching? Where can I get guidance on how I should conduct my business as a coach? Which ethical codes do I need to be aware of? We have already discussed above, when we explored SROs, the different published codes of ethics. At Coaching Minds, we have designed a Professional Code of Conduct that embeds the European Mentoring and Coaching Counsel’s Global Code of Ethics but takes more of an ‘outcomes’ approach to ethical standards rather than a set of rules. The purpose of this is to simplify the EMCC Global Code of Ethics and outline the outcomes coaches should be achieving, along with inductive behaviours that signal a coach is acting within the principles of coaching ethics. We have broken down the code into seven principles. In this chapter, we will explore the structure of our Professional Code of Conduct.

### **7.1 The Four Parts of our Code**

Our Professional Code of Conduct is split into four Parts. Part 1 sets out the principles, outcomes and indicative behaviours that must be followed by all coaches when offering and performing coaching services. Here we will find all the appropriate guidance with regards to the coach-client relationship and behaviour that is expected of us when performing our coaching services. At Coaching Minds all of our coaches agree to fully read,

understand and operate by our Code of Conduct at all times within their coaching practice. If you are a coach who is not affiliated with Coaching Minds, it may be useful to look at how you can adopt these standards and analyse where you might be falling short of the service standards set.

Part 2 of our Professional Code of Conduct lays out the principles, outcomes and indicative behaviours that must be followed by coach supervisors when offering and performing supervisor services. This part includes all the appropriate guidance with regards to the supervisor-coach relationship and the behaviour that is expected of us when performing our coaching supervisor services. All coach supervisors at Coaching Minds adopt this part of our Professional Code.

Part 3 of our Professional Code of Conduct lays out the principles that must be followed by all organisations offering and performing coaching services. Here we will find all the appropriate guidance with regards to how coaching practices/organisations should be operating. It is becoming more common to see groups of coaches establish coaching firms, and the creation of coaching academies is on the rise. Coaching Minds follows these principles, and we mean to set an example for all other organisations within our profession.

Part 4 of our Professional Code of Conduct sets out the processes for an identified or potential breach of the Code. Here is included all the appropriate guidance on code breaches. We will find the necessary information on:

1. How to Report a Breach
2. The Coaching Minds Investigation Process
3. Possible Remedies
4. Consequences of a Breach

These processes apply to clients, coaches, supervisors, organisations or any other party that wishes to report a breach of our Professional Code of Conduct to Coaching Minds. As long as we have the capacity, we will offer to mediate and try to resolve any dispute or breach brought to us. One of the key findings of our study prior to writing our own Code of Conduct was a lack of support and policing of the industry by SROs. The EMCC make it clear they are there to work with professional and ethical coaches, not to police the profession. At Coaching Minds, we slightly disagree with this approach and believe action needs to be taken where coaches fall short of the professional standards we are setting.

Coaching Minds is a strong advocate for regulating the coaching profession and our Code of Conduct is a small step towards demonstrating this. We hope to see SROs take more action towards regulating the profession and we will continue to advocate for this where we can.

## **7.2 The 7 Principles of the Code**

To make our Professional Code of Conduct easy to remember, we have established seven overarching principles. Each principle highlights a key ethical behaviour which we believe all coaches should adopt in their practice. You can find a copy of our Professional Code of Conduct at the back of this book, and we will go deeper into each of these principles in the following chapters.

### **Figure 7: The 7 Principles of our Code of Conduct**

**01** Acting with integrity

**02** Acting in the best interests of each client

**03** Providing a proper standard of service to our clients

**04** Maintain trust in the provision of coaching services

**05** Complying with our legal obligations

**06** Running our business effectively with proper governance

**07** Encouraging equality and respecting diversity

Each principle carries equal weight, and no principle is more or less important than the others. As a coach who adopts high service standards and an ethical practice, we should grasp all seven principles and observe how we implement these into our practice.

### **7.3 Outcomes and Indicative Behaviours**

In addition to the 7 Principles set out in our Professional Code of Conduct we have established a list of outcomes that our coaches should be achieving in order to demonstrate that they are operating their practice in line with our code, along with certain indicative behaviours that demonstrate best practice. Our outcomes and indicative behaviours fall under 5 high-level

competencies that should be observed. These competencies are:

### Figure 8: Our 5 High-Level Competencies



**Client Care**



**Equality and  
Diversity**



**Conflicts of  
Interest**



**Confidentiality**



**Excellent Practice**

#### Exercising Client Care

Exercising client care as a coach involves creating a safe, supportive and respectful environment where our clients feel valued and heard. In a nutshell, this includes actively listening, maintaining confidentiality and establishing clear boundaries and expectations through contracting. We should demonstrate empathy, adapt our approach to meet the unique needs of each client, and ensure our coaching process aligns with the client's goals and values, regularly checking in on the client's wellbeing and progress, providing constructive feedback and building trust.

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The competency of equality and diversity involves ensuring an inclusive environment in which all clients feel respected, valued and free from discrimination. This requires acknowledging and addressing our biases, embracing cultural differences and ensuring that our practice is accessible and equitable for everyone. We must actively listen and adapt our approach to meet the unique needs of our clients, considering their backgrounds, identity and experiences.

Equality and diversity forms not only a high-level competency but is also a principle of our Code of Conduct.

## Observing and Mitigating Conflicts of Interest

The competency of observing and mitigating conflicts of interest involves maintaining professional integrity by identifying and addressing situations where personal, professional or financial interests could compromise the coaching relationship. We must remain vigilant and transparent, disclosing any potential conflicts to the client and taking appropriate steps to ensure that the client's best interests are always prioritised. This includes setting clear boundaries, avoiding dual relationships that could blur our professional lines, and seeking supervision or guidance when necessary.

## Duty of Confidentiality

The competency of upholding our duty of confidentiality in coaching involves safeguarding all personal and sensitive

information shared by clients. We must ensure that details of sessions are not disclosed without the client's explicit consent, except in situations where legal or ethical obligations require otherwise, such as imminent harm to self or others or for the purposes of our coaching qualifications (where written consent from the client has been obtained). This includes securely managing records and being transparent with clients about confidentiality boundaries during the contracting process. Confidentiality plays a key role in our Data Protection obligations, which we explore below in chapter 12.

### Developing and Maintaining Excellent Practice

The competency of developing and maintaining excellent practice in coaching involves a commitment to continuous personal and professional growth. We must stay informed about the latest research, tools and methodologies within coaching, regularly engaging in training, supervision and reflective practice to develop our skills. This involves maintaining ethical standards, adhering to our legal obligations, seeking feedback and consistently evaluating the effectiveness of our service to clients.

All of our 5 high-level competencies contain outcomes and indicative behaviours which will be explored as we work through the 7 principles in more detail.

For now, let's note that as ethical coaches we should be achieving specific outcomes that demonstrate the 5 high-level competencies above. Alongside these outcomes, there are also indicative behaviours (actions we can take) to demonstrate we are coaching to these competencies. By achieving these competencies, we create a sound ethical practice that abides by the 7 principles of our Professional Code of Conduct.

## 7.4 Theory into Practice

In this chapter we have explored the structure of the Coaching Minds Professional Code of Conduct with an introduction to our principles, outcomes, indicative behaviours and competencies.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

- ✍ **Reflecting on the high-level competencies, which of these do you believe is your strongest and which is your weakest? How might you improve?**

## **Principle 1: Acting With Integrity**

‘Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.’

**C.S Lewis**

What is integrity? How do I demonstrate it? How can I apply this principle of the code? The first principle in our Professional Code of Conduct is to ensure that we are always acting with integrity. It is the principle that feeds into the whole of our code. By reading this book and exploring the topic of ethics, we are already tapping into demonstrating integrity. In this chapter we will dive a little deeper into the meaning of integrity.

### **8.1 What is Integrity?**

Integrity is the quality of being honest, ethical and consistent in our actions, words and values, regardless of the circumstances or external pressures. It involves a commitment to doing what is right, even when it is difficult or, as C.S Lewis says, when no one is watching. A person with integrity aligns their behaviour with their principles, demonstrating trustworthiness and reliability. Integrity creates respect - both self-respect and respect from others.

In a nutshell, integrity is about living a life of accountability and transparency, where our actions are guided by a clear sense of right and wrong. It encompasses fairness, responsibility and a willingness to admit when we make mistakes. Integrity also

requires resisting the temptation to compromise ethical standards for personal gain.

It is important to note that integrity isn't about 'always doing the right thing', it is about doing what we believe is right and correcting ourselves where we may get it wrong.

## **8.2 Accurately Representing our Professional Qualifications**

It is important to understand that personal integrity is central to our role as the client's trusted coach. Under this principle, there are several outcomes we should be achieving and indicative behaviours we can demonstrate to show a coaching practice that embeds integrity.

Our code explains that we must accurately and honestly represent our relevant professional qualifications, professional body to which we belong, experience, training, certifications and accreditations to our clients, sponsors and colleagues. An unethical coach will lie or exaggerate their qualifications for the purposes of gaining business and making themselves look more attractive. An ethical coach, on the other hand, will be honest about their competencies and experience in coaching. If they are still in training, they will be open about it. If they have been awarded Master Practitioner (the highest grade of accreditation with the EMCC) they will remain humble about it. We gain more respect and trust from clients when we are open about our qualifications.

There are four points to consider when accurately representing our qualifications to clients:

1. **The level of coaching we are at.** Are we still in training? Are we certified? Accredited? How long have we been coaching for?
2. **Where we received or are receiving our coach training.** Are they a reputable school or academy? What level of programme do they provide? How long have you been training with them?
3. **The accredited body we are associated with.** What SRO are we a member of? What level of membership do we hold? What level of accreditation are we working towards?
4. **The Ethical Code of Practice you adopt.** What professional standards do you set yourself? Which code are you embedding into your practice? Where can your clients find out more information about this code?

At Coaching Minds, we advise all our coaches in training to approach this by explaining the following, which you may wish to tailor to your own circumstances:

1. State that you are a Trainee Coach at Coaching Minds and currently working towards your certification through our Level 5 Practitioner Programme, which provides you with 165 hours of approved coach training.
2. The Coaching Minds certification programme is accredited by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and holds a Global Quality Award (EQA).
3. The EMCC is a globally recognised organisation that ensures the best practice in coaching and mentoring services.
4. We are governed by the Coaching Minds Professional Code of Conduct and the EMCC's Global Code of Ethics.

In addition to accurately representing our level of coaching to our clients, we must also ensure that when in communication with any party, we always accurately and honestly represent the value we provide as a coach and ensure that no false or misleading claims are made, or implied, about our professional competence, qualifications or accreditation in any published, promotional material or otherwise. It is important for us to act with integrity not only with our clients but in all interactions with members of our industry and the public.

### **8.3 Attributing Ownership and Credit of Work**

As a coach, we may find ourselves writing articles, blogs, posts for social media, content or research. Acting with integrity is also about attributing ownership and credit of work to its original and lawful owner. An unethical coach will take the words of others and try to publish them as their own. They will copy work or look for ways to hide the identity of the original author. A common trick on social media is to display the words in large font and then credit the author in small font at the bottom of the post. Some coaches will go to the extent of creating a number of lines with symbols, so it takes effort and a lot of scrolling through the caption of posts to find the original author.

Ethical coaches, on the other hand, will take pride in crediting the work to the original author. They will openly speak about where they heard the words of wisdom or who provided them with the guidance they are passing on. If we found words from a book, we quote and credit the author; if we heard what we are sharing on a podcast, we share the name and host of the podcast. We gain more respect and trust by honestly attributing ownership of work. The exact wording we use in our Professional Code of Conduct which is mirrored in the EMCC Global Code of Ethics is this:

**‘It is fundamental that we always attribute ownership and credit of work, ideas and materials of others, to the originator and not claim it as our own.’**

Not only are we acting with integrity, but we are also abiding by copyright laws.

## **8.4 Acting within Applicable Laws**


Finally, under this first principle, we must ensure that we act within applicable laws and not in any way encourage, assist or collude with conduct which is dishonest, unlawful, unprofessional or discriminatory. This includes any criminal activity, such as accepting bribes and committing fraud or money laundering, as well as any other type of dishonest or unlawful behaviour.

We discuss our legal obligations in detail in chapter 12 in relation to our civil/commercial obligations. But it is important to understand that there are essentially two types of law: criminal as well as civil. When we act with integrity, we are acting within the law. We avoid criminal activity, and we keep our business professional. The biggest threats to our industry are online scams. Unfortunately, there are many vulnerable people who are investing in ‘coaches’ or ‘coaching academies’ that do not abide by the law and have not gone through any rigorous training or quality assurance. There are many cases where coaches have taken clients’ money and not delivered the service. There have even been instances where clients have been abused by coaches and where ‘coaching communities’ have formed brainwashing cults. As an ethical coach who adopts high professional standards, we stay clear of this activity and, more importantly, we find the courage to speak out when we witness it.

## 8.5 Theory into Practice

In this chapter we have explored principle 1 of the Professional Code of Conduct and how we can act with integrity in coaching.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

-  **Reflecting on your own practice, in what ways do you currently demonstrate your integrity through your coaching?**

## **Principle 2: Acting in the Best Interests of Each Client**

‘To serve is beautiful, but only if it is done with joy, a whole heart and a free mind.’

**Pearl S. Buck**

How do I act in the best interests of each client? What do we mean by best interests? How can I apply this principle to my coaching practice? The second principle of our Code of Conduct is to act in the best interests of each of our clients. Let’s explore what important points and actions we can take away from this chapter.

### **9.1 What are ‘Best Interests’?**

‘Best Interests’ in coaching essentially means prioritising the client’s needs, goals and wellbeing above all else throughout the coaching relationship. It is about remaining impartial, avoiding imposing our own agendas, and focusing on empowering clients to make decisions that align with their values and objectives. This includes upholding our ethical standards, maintaining confidentiality and addressing conflicts of interest transparently. By acting in the best interests of clients, we build and demonstrate an ethical practice.

In order to do this, we must understand that each of our clients is individual and has different needs, challenges and goals they wish to achieve. Whilst it might appear that we have helped a

similar client with a similar goal, we must remember that there is no 'one size fits all' approach in coaching. Everyone who knocks on our door has lived a different life, has a different background and has lived different experiences. Just because a solution worked for one client, does not mean it will work for another.

## **9.2 Observing and Mitigating Conflicts of interest**

Just as we act in the best interests of each client, we must also be able to spot conflicts of interest and understand when to terminate coaching based on the emergence of such a conflict. There are two types of conflict that can arise in coaching: self-interest and interest conflicts. A self-interest conflict occurs when our personal or professional interests, such as financial gain, professional reputation or personal preferences influence the coaching process and decision-making. For example, a coach might be tempted to recommend certain services or products they provide, which could benefit them financially, rather than what is most beneficial for the client.

An interest conflict arises in situations where there is a dual relationship, meaning the coach has multiple roles with the client, such as a coach who is also a supervisor, mentor or even a friend or where the coach has a relationship with someone closely connected to the client. This dual role can create bias, leading the coach to favour certain outcomes or decisions that benefit their personal connection with the client, rather than acting impartially.

Both types of conflicts undermine the coaching relationship by compromising trust, objectivity and the best interests of the client. To maintain ethical coaching practices, we must spot and mitigate these conflicts through clear boundaries and transparency.

Here are three key questions we should always ask ourselves as coaches to help us identify a conflict of interest:

- 1. 'Am I the best person to be providing support to this client?'**
- 2. 'Does my coaching conflict with any other relationship that I hold with this client?'**
- 3. 'Is there any personal gain (other than the financial payment for the coaching) to me by coaching this client?'**

These questions ensure that the client is getting the right support they need, no relationships are being compromised and there is no personal gain or interest.

We can demonstrate that we have some measures in place to identify a conflict of interest by putting how we would manage conflicts of interest into a business policy. We can also keep an up-to-date client database (in line with Data Protection Laws) to identify where a client may have a relationship with another one of our clients.

Potential conflicts of interest can arise when we coach two or more clients who may be related or hold a relationship or vested interest together. For example, we must avoid coaching a husband and wife (unless it is for couples coaching) as this causes a conflict with our duty of confidentiality. Some other examples to be mindful of:

1. Coaching business partners
2. Coaching siblings or other family relationships
3. Coaching clients who are close friends

In some circumstances, it might be acceptable for us to coach where one of the above scenarios applies, but only where the goals and what the clients are seeking are completely different in nature and do not involve the other client. For example, you may coach a husband on a business goal and his wife on personal goal provided there is no mention or involvement of each other in the sessions.

In addition, we must never act if there is a 'self-interest' conflict. We demonstrate compliance with Principle 2 by choosing not to coach family, friends or partners or engage in any other coach-client relationships in which we may hold a vested interest, unless they are acting as practice clients as you start to build your coaching skills. However, once you are certified, it is advisable to avoid coaching friends and family.

Furthermore, we must also never exploit a client or seek to gain any inappropriate financial or non-financial advantage from the relationship. By setting appropriate boundaries in terms of the agreed number of sessions and creating a fair pricing and refund policy, we demonstrate compliance with this outcome. We must never manipulate clients into further sessions to gain more revenue from them.

Finally, to avoid any conflict of interest, we must distinguish a professional relationship with a client from other forms of relationship. Where we are aware of the potential for conflicts of interest of either a commercial or personal nature arising through the coaching relationship, we should address them quickly and effectively to ensure that there is no detriment to our client. If we identify a conflict of interest, we will disclose it openly with our client and agree to withdraw from the relationship if a conflict arises which cannot be managed effectively. By following these outcomes, we demonstrate compliance with Principle 2.

## 9.3 Our Duty of Confidentiality

Another important point to note under this principle is that we must always observe our duty of confidentiality to our clients. It is essential as coaches that we understand our duty of confidentiality and in what cases we are permitted to step outside of this duty. In order to help our clients feel at ease and comfortable in our coaching space, we must remind them of our duty of confidentiality and that everything they share is strictly confidential.

As coaches we only share information outside of our duty of confidentiality where:

1. The information shared gives rise to a potential risk of harm to the client or others.
2. As part of your ongoing studies for coaching qualifications, where express written consent has been given.
3. We are required to do so by law.

If information shared by the client gives rise to a potential risk of harm to themselves or others, then our duty as a coach is to notify the relevant authorities (especially where we believe the threat of harm to be imminent). It is important for us to have contacts for local authorities in our area. If the client is based in another state or country, then we must notify the authorities in that state or country.

Where the threat of harm to themselves is not imminent but the client may have shared, for example, that they have been having suicidal thoughts, we can point them to resources that can assist them, rather than contacting the authorities. At Coaching Minds, we provide coaches with wellbeing contacts around the world. A good tool/website to add to your toolkit is <https://findahelpline.com/> which will help you find crisis and helplines by country. If you are based in the UK, a must-have

toolkit for wellbeing is the Hub of Hope: <https://hubofhope.co.uk/> where you can find local crisis lines and support.

If we find ourselves in a position of needing to notify the authorities, we advise that the coaching contract be terminated once the client has been transferred. Here at Coaching Minds, we understand that such situations can be tricky and we offer our coaches support and advice if an instance like this occurs or if our coaches are unsure where to signpost their client. We advise that all coaches contact their supervisor in cases like this.

To show compliance with this outcome, we must inform the client of our duty of confidentiality in our introductory sessions and remind them at the beginning of each coaching session that everything shared is strictly confidential

The other important outcome to note with regards to confidentiality and Principle 2, is where we are coaching minors or vulnerable people (see chapter 16 for more guidance on this). If our client is a child or vulnerable adult, we must plan with the client's sponsors or guardian to ensure an appropriate level of confidentiality in the best interests of the client, whilst also complying with all relevant legislation.

We demonstrate an understanding that at times confidential information may need to be shared with a sponsor or guardian, but we will always do so in line with our legal obligations and with the client's best interests at heart.

## 9.4 Theory into Practice

In this chapter we have explored mitigating conflicts of interest and our duty of confidentiality as coaches under Principle 2 of the Professional Code of Conduct.

- ✍ **Reflecting on your coaching practice, what action can you take right now to prepare yourself for a conflict of interest or a scenario where you might need to step outside your duty of confidentiality?**

## **Principle 3: Providing a Proper Standard of Service to Your Clients**

‘Good governance is the art of putting wise thought into prudent action in a way that advances the well-being of those governed.’

**Diane Kalen-Sukra**

What is a ‘Proper Standard of Service’? What standard does my coaching practice need to be? How can I demonstrate this principle through my coaching? Principle 3 of our Professional Code of Conduct is all about the service we provide to our clients before, during and after our coaching sessions. In order for us to demonstrate an ethical practice, we must ensure the service we provide is a professional one. In this chapter we will explore further what we mean by a ‘proper standard of service’.

### **10.1 A Proper Standard of Service**

A proper standard of service in coaching refers to the consistent delivery of professional, ethical and client-centred business that supports our clients in achieving their goals. It is about operating with integrity, providing clear and realistic expectations, continuously developing our skills, and using evidence-based methods to guide our clients toward solutions and outcomes.

Principle 3 goes hand-in-hand with Principle 2. Part of providing a proper standard of service is always acting in the best interests

of each client. When following principle 3, we must ensure that we provide a proper standard of client care, including exercising competence, skill and diligence, considering the individual needs of each client. To check that we are complying with this principle, we can ask ourselves the following questions when taking on new clients:

1. Are my client's needs within my level of competence and skill?
2. Do I have the capacity and time to take on this client?
3. Do I have a clearly defined structure to my coaching business and is my client aware of this?

We should always be mindful of what we can give in terms of value to our clients and whether we have the capacity to deliver their expectations.

## **10.2 Coaching within our Competencies**

One of the key ways to satisfy this principle is by working within the boundaries of our competencies. This means we must operate within the scope of our training, experience and expertise, ensuring that the support we provide our clients aligns with the recognised practices of coaching. Straying beyond these boundaries risks not only the quality of the client's experience but also the credibility of the coaching profession as a whole. There are three key points we must keep in mind when coaching within our competency:

1. Knowing when to refer
2. The importance of transparency
3. Safeguarding the client's interests

Let's discuss each of these in turn:

### Knowing When to Refer

It's essential to recognise when a client's needs exceed the scope of coaching and require specialised support, such as therapy or counselling. While coaching is a powerful support method, it is not designed to address mental health diagnoses, trauma or other clinical concerns. If a client presents issues that require deeper psychological intervention, it is both ethical and responsible to refer them to a qualified therapist or specialist. This referral is not a sign of inadequacy on our behalf but a demonstration of professionalism and care for the client's wellbeing.

As a professional and ethical coach, we should work to expand our network with therapists and other specialists to whom we can refer clients if the situation arises. In the process of doing so, we must be mindful of the process of referral and hold the space for the client within our level of competence whilst we transfer them to a therapist or specialist. To help illustrate this, an approach to a referral could look something like this:

**'I appreciate you sharing this with me, and I understand that this is a difficult time for you. I want to ensure that you are getting the best support you possibly can, and if I'm honest with you, I feel like this falls outside of the scope of my work. I'm happy to listen and hold the space for you whilst you find some alternative support and I'm happy to assist you with finding the right support.'**

After being open and honest, we can then work with the client to find the support they need, providing them with the space to do so.

## The Importance of Transparency

In some cases, clients may be receiving coaching and therapy at the same time. Transparency in such situations is vital to avoid conflicting approaches or misaligned goals. We should encourage open communication about these dual engagements, ensuring that the client's therapist is aware of the coaching relationship and vice versa, where appropriate. We can do this by asking the client if they are receiving any other support regarding their challenge or goal and then informing them of the importance of transparency and the risk of misaligned goals or conflicting approaches in the help they are receiving. Ask them to inform their therapist about the coaching. We would then ask the client in each session about progress in their therapy so as to keep an ongoing dialogue and transparency.

## Safeguarding the Client's Interests

By coaching within our competencies, we safeguard the client's interests and maintain the integrity of the coaching profession. This commitment involves ongoing self-assessment, regular professional development and a willingness to seek supervision or consultation when faced with challenging situations. It also means maintaining an open dialogue with clients, being honest about what coaching can and cannot achieve, and prioritising their best interests above all. Never over-promise or attempt to work miracles.

Ultimately, coaching within our competencies ensures that we provide ethical, effective and meaningful support, demonstrating a proper standard of service.

## 10.3 Building Credibility

Providing a proper standard of service also includes our ability to build credibility in our coaching practice. As a starting point, we must ensure we:

1. Turn up to sessions on time.
2. Follow up with commitments made to the client.
3. Handle any issues, challenges or complaints professionally, effectively and officially.

Credibility is built by creating a client-focused service and meeting the expectations we set for the client. The moment we start to turn up late for sessions, fail to send notes or not deal with any issues professionally is the moment we begin to fail to meet the standards of Principle 3.

Beyond punctuality and professionalism, credibility is also created by delivering coaching sessions with clarity, structure and intention. Each session should be thoughtfully prepared to align with the client's goals and progress, demonstrating our commitment to their success. We must ensure to recap on notes from previous sessions and to attend with our best energy. When clients feel that we are fully engaged, prepared and invested in their development, trust deepens, and the coaching relationship becomes more impactful.

Another key aspect of building credibility is communication. Clear and transparent communication about the scope of coaching, confidentiality and expected outcomes establishes a strong foundation of trust. This includes setting realistic expectations and being honest about what coaching can and cannot achieve. Additionally, we should explain methods and frequency of contact between sessions, and support we offer, if any, outside of the coaching sessions.

Credibility is not built overnight but through consistent effort and alignment with our principles. Coaches who prioritise their client's needs, honour their commitments and continually strive for excellence build a reputation of reliability and trustworthiness aligned with our Professional Code of Conduct.

## **10.4 Handling Challenges and Complaints**

Providing a proper standard of service extends to how we respond to situations where things might not have gone as planned. Essentially, how do we handle challenges and complaints, and take on board the feedback from our clients?

We must understand that handling challenges or complaints effectively is not just about resolving the issue at hand, but also about demonstrating accountability and a commitment to improvement. This includes listening actively to the client's concerns, responding with empathy and taking steps to address the issue. Documenting and reflecting on these situations can help us improve our practice and prevent similar challenges in the future, as we set up new systems and improve processes to provide a better service.

We will cover this in more detail when we look at Principle 6, Running our Business with Effective Governance in chapter 13, but for now we must note that by having a complaints policy and process in place that specifies how a client can raise concerns, what they can expect from you in terms of resolving the matter and where they can appeal, is the most effective way to show we take complaints seriously. We must then respond to concerns in a timely manner and work to a resolution with the client, seeking support from a supervisor if necessary.


In addition, it is always good practice to regularly seek feedback and suggestions for improvements from your clients. It is

common to develop blind spots in our service and those we work with are best placed to help us see where we can improve. By holding ourselves to the highest standards, we ensure that our coaching practice not only meets but exceeds client expectations, providing a standard of coaching aligned with our Professional Code of Conduct.

## **10.5 Theory into Practice**

In this chapter we have explored how we can provide our clients with a proper standard of service, exploring the client journey and Principle 3 of the Professional Code of Conduct.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

-  Where could you improve the service, you provide to your clients? What action could you take to provide a better service?**

## **Principle 4: Maintaining Trust in the Provision of Coaching Services**

‘The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.’

**Ernest Hemingway**

How do we maintain trust in the provision of coaching services? What does this actually mean? How can I apply this to my coaching practice? Principle 4 extends beyond our coaching sessions and explains how we represent the profession as a whole. In this chapter we will explore what this means and how you can demonstrate compliance with this section of our Professional Code of Conduct.

### **11.1 Ambassadors of the Coaching Profession**

As coaches, we are not only responsible for building trust within individual coaching relationships, but also for upholding the reputation and integrity of the coaching profession as a whole. Each of us serves as an ambassador for the industry, and our actions reflect not only on our personal practice but on the credibility of coaching as a respected and valuable service. Acting in ways that maintain and build trust in the profession is essential for ensuring its continued growth and recognition.

While we have called this principle, ‘Maintaining Trust’, it is important for us to emphasise ‘Building Trust’. Unfortunately, there is a force within the coaching profession that does not paint the coaching industry in a good light. Courts within the UK have had to close down coaching groups for lack of financial

transparency and for 'cult-like' behaviour. Famous social media influencers are labelling themselves 'coaches' creating schools and developing curriculums that fall short of ethical standards. People are labelling themselves 'certified coaches' or misleading people about their level of experience after completing only short, inadequate courses on Udemy and other E-Learning Platforms. This means that as an ethical coach and an ambassador of the coaching profession, we have some work on our hands to build the reputation of the coaching industry.

As an ambassador of the profession, we can get involved in social impact projects to make a real difference, host sessions that create awareness around professional coaching and collaborate with other ethical coaches to spread a positive impression. The power of how we shape our profession lies with us. To demonstrate compliance with this principle we must choose to be a positive influence and role model for our profession.

## **11.2 The Key Aspects of Building and Maintaining Trust**

To build and maintain trust within the coaching profession as a whole can be achieved by adopting and implementing the six key aspects we have highlighted below.

### **Adhere to Ethical Standards**

Upholding ethical guidelines, such as adopting our Professional Code of Conduct, is essential for maintaining trust in our profession. This includes implementing everything we discuss around the principles in this book, thereby achieving the outcomes defined in our Professional Code of Conduct and demonstrating the indicative behaviours.

## Serve as Positive Role Models

As ambassadors for the coaching profession, our behaviour sets the tone for how coaching is perceived. This means demonstrating professionalism in all interactions, including punctuality, reliability and respectful communication. Coaches who act with integrity and accountability inspire confidence in clients and the wider community, enhancing the profession's reputation.

## Avoid Harmful or Negative Behaviour

Engaging in unethical or unprofessional behaviour, such as breaching confidentiality, failing to honour commitments or exploiting clients for personal gain, not only damages the coach-client relationship but also reflects poorly on the entire profession. Such actions can lead to a loss of trust, making it harder for other coaches to build credibility with potential clients.

## Promote Transparency and Accountability

Transparency builds trust by ensuring that clients and the public understand the role and limitations of coaching. We should clearly articulate our services, set realistic expectations and provide honest feedback. When challenges or mistakes arise, addressing them promptly and professionally demonstrates accountability and a commitment to maintaining high standards.

## Advocate for Professionalism in all Contexts

Every interaction, whether with clients, colleagues or the public, contributes to the perception of the coaching profession. We


should model respect, empathy and inclusivity, creating a culture of collaboration and excellence. We must also remember to have the courage to speak up if we see another coach or representative of our profession falling short of our standards.

Trust is the foundation upon which the coaching profession is built. It enables clients to engage openly and confidently in the coaching process, knowing they are supported by ethical, competent professionals. Beyond individual relationships, the trustworthiness of the profession influences public perception and willingness to engage with coaching services. Become a positive ambassador.

### **11.3 Theory into Practice**

In this chapter we have explored the importance of becoming a positive role model for our profession under Principle 4 of the Professional Code of Conduct.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

-  What action could you take to help build trust in the coaching profession right now?**

## **Principle 5: Complying with our Legal Obligations**

‘It is not only for what we do that we are held responsible, but also for what we do not do.’

**John Baptiste Molière**

What are my legal obligations as a coach? Are there any laws I should be aware of? How can I ensure my coaching practice is legally compliant? Alongside our ethical codes, there are also legal obligations we have as a coach, obligations that can get us into trouble if we do not comply with them. In this chapter we will explore all of our legal obligations and what we must consider when setting up our coaching practice. While we make reference to the laws of England and Wales, at Coaching Minds we have coaches from around the world, so we have provided guidance on what to explore in other countries or states. No matter where we are based, we have legal obligations, they will just differ based on the national laws.

### **12.1 The Seven Core Legal Obligations**

Under Principle 5, ‘we must never engage in any activity that is unlawful or dishonest or otherwise falls outside of our legal obligations’. We discussed the difference between criminal and civil law earlier in this book. As a reminder, as a coach we must not involve ourselves in any criminal activity.

In addition, we must fully understand and comply with the relevant laws that apply to the running of our coaching practice. This includes but is not limited to tax law, privacy law, Data Protection, contract law, and Intellectual Property. Here are seven core legal considerations every coach should work through when setting up their practice:

- 1. 'How is my coaching practice going to be legally structured?'**
- 2. 'Is my business adequately insured?'**
- 3. 'What is the applicable tax law in my country or state?'**
- 4. 'Do I have measures in place to comply with Data Protection laws?'**
- 5. 'Do I understand the basic principles of contract law in my country and state, and do I have a clear set of terms and conditions?'**
- 6. 'Do I understand the basics of Intellectual Property?'**
- 7. 'Do I understand my duties under consumer protection law?'**

It is always best to seek legal advice when setting up a new business. However, I understand that lawyers are expensive so this book provides some rough guidance on each of the above as a starting point, so you can build your coaching practice with some basic legal protection and reduce the costs of a lawyer when getting it reviewed. Please note that the guidance below is based on UK law and may vary depending on the law in other countries and states. It is not legal advice and should not replace the need to seek a commercial lawyer.

## 12.2 Structuring our Coaching Business

In the UK, it is common practice for coaches to begin to set up their business as a Sole Trader whilst their client base and income are low. However, if we wish to do so, we can set up as a Private Limited Company by shares or enter into a Partnership Agreement with one or more coaches at any stage we like. If you are a coach outside of the UK, it is important to explore the different ways in which you can operate a business in your country or state.

### Setting up as a Sole Trader

There is no formal registration for setting ourselves up other than notifying HMRC (the governing body for tax in the UK) that we are self-employed or that we are taking on coaching for extra part-time income.

Registering as a Sole Trader is not as administratively heavy as other forms of business and is a great starting point for our coaching business. We must keep track of our income and expenses, calculating our revenue along with invoices and sales receipts. We must manage the general administration of our business and regularly review, and update general policies and processes.

The applicable taxes for a sole trader in the UK are Income Tax and VAT. VAT is only payable if we are earning over £90,000 (as of January 2025). We can check the latest VAT threshold here: <https://www.gov.uk/how-vat-works/vat-thresholds>.

As a Sole Trader, we can operate under our own personal name or choose to operate under another name.

## Registering as a Partnership

A Partnership operates in the same way as a Sole Trader in many ways, the only difference being is that a Partnership consists of more than one person and is governed by something known as a Partnership Agreement.

To set up as a Partnership, we must enter a Partnership Agreement with our business partners. The contract must include each partner's obligations and role, how profits and liabilities will be shared, and how the contract can be terminated, along with other legal clauses. The administration under a Partnership agreement will be the same as for that of a Sole Trader. However, it will be divided between the partners as per the terms in the contract.

Each Partner is responsible for their own tax with regards to the income they receive from the Partnership and the applicable taxes are Income Tax and VAT. Again, VAT is only payable when earning over the current threshold.

As a Partnership we can operate under the names of the partners or choose to operate under another name. It is something that needs to be agreed. Many Partnerships take the second names of all the partners, for example: Smith & Jones.

## Setting up as a Private Limited Company

A Private Limited Company operates in a very different way to a Sole Trader and Partnership. It becomes its own separate entity and is subject to different laws. In order to set up a Private Limited Company in the UK, we must submit an application online through Companies House for a small fee. A Private Limited Company can be limited by either shares or by

guarantee. The most common forms are Private Limited Companies by shares. If we are looking to set up a Private Limited Company by shares then we must begin to think about our share capital, the nominal value of each share, who will be shareholders in the company and what proportion of shares they will hold. More information can be found on the Companies House website below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house>

A Private Limited Company is governed by a constitution. We can create our own or adopt what is known as the 'Model Articles' in the UK, which is a template constitution setting out how the business will be run. There is a lot more administration for a Private Limited Company. We are required by law to keep our business up to date, registering any changes with Companies House. In addition, we are required to produce Director Reports, and implement various policies and processes to ensure we are compliant with our legal obligations.

As a requirement, each Private Company must have at least one Director who is responsible for running the company. A shareholder who holds over 50% of the shares will need to be registered as a 'Person of Significant Control'. There is the option to appoint a Company Secretary, but this is not mandatory.

The applicable taxes for Private Companies are Corporation Tax (for business revenue), Income Tax (for personal revenue) and VAT if earning over £90,000 (as of January 2025). This changes each year, so it is important to check.

As a Private Limited Company, we can create any name that hasn't already been registered with Companies House, providing it follows certain rules set out by the Secretary of State. Guidance will be given at the point of registration, and any problems will be

raised by Companies House, who hold the power to reject your company name.

## 12.3 Insuring our Coaching Business

The nature of our coaching services and assets that we own or acquire for our business, will determine the type of business insurance that we need. At a minimum, every coach must obtain Professional Indemnity insurance. This protects us if we are found to be at fault for a specific event, such as misjudgement. If you plan to coach exclusively online, then this is all you will need. Let's look at the different types of insurance available to us and when they become applicable.

### Professional Indemnity Insurance (PI)

**Purpose:** It protects us against claims of negligence, errors or omissions in the advice or services we provide.

**Why it's needed:** If a client alleges that our coaching caused them financial or personal harm, this insurance covers legal defence costs and any compensation awarded.

**Key considerations:** Ensure the policy covers the scope of your coaching practice, including areas such as business coaching, life coaching or specialised niches.

### Public Liability Insurance (PL)

**Purpose:** Covers claims if someone is injured or their property is damaged during a coaching session or event.

**Why it's needed:** Essential if we work in-person with clients, especially in rented spaces, co-working environments or at events.

**Example:** A client trips over equipment in our office and sustains an injury; PL covers medical costs and legal fees.

### Employers' Liability Insurance (EL) *(if applicable)*

**Purpose:** A legal requirement in the UK for businesses with employees, covering claims if an employee is injured or becomes ill due to their work.

**Why it's needed:** If we employ administrative staff, associate coaches or others, we must have this insurance by law

### Personal Accident and Health Insurance

**Purpose:** Provides income protection if we are unable to work due to injury or illness.

**Why it's needed:** As a self-employed professional, our income may depend entirely on our ability to work. This insurance ensures financial stability in unforeseen circumstances.

### Office or Equipment Insurance

**Purpose:** Covers damage or theft of physical assets like computers, furniture or coaching materials.

**Why it's needed:** If we operate from a dedicated office or rely heavily on specific tools, this insurance minimises disruptions

from loss or damage. If we work from home, then it is worth checking whether our office equipment is covered by our household insurance.

### Legal Expenses Insurance

**Purpose:** Covers the cost of legal advice and representation for disputes, such as contract issues or tax investigations.

**Why it's needed:** Legal challenges can be costly and time-consuming; this insurance helps us access expert advice without bearing the full financial burden.

Other types of insurance that are worth looking into are cyber insurance, income protection insurance and event insurance. It is important for us to fully understand the scope of our coaching business and services to determine which insurances we need to acquire.

Generally, insurance companies will assist you with what insurance you need based on the services of your business. However, we must also be mindful they may try to sell us more than is required.

Another important point to note when it comes to insurance is that many companies now require you to hold a credible accreditation in coaching before insurance is accepted. In this instance, you will need to find a credible Coaching Academy that holds accreditation with the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), the International Coach Federation (ICF) or the Association for Coaching (AC). If you are unsure where to search, you can explore Coaching Minds and see if our values align.

If you are a coach in training who requires a specific number of hours for accreditation, then it is fine to offer free practice

coaching session online or with family and friends without insurance. However, it is important to note that if you are taking any form of payment (even as small as a coffee in return for the session) you should have Professional Indemnity in place. Some countries will offer insurance to coaches in training, so it is worth doing a little research in this area.

## **12.4 Managing Taxes in our Country or State**

It is important that we always fall in line with the tax laws of our country or state. We must therefore research the current tax law and/or speak to an accountant or our governing body to ensure we are operating within the law. When it comes to tax we need to understand:

1. Which expenses we can offset against our revenue and how.
2. What constitutes an 'expense' for our business.
3. Our financial processes, including bank account, collection of payments and invoicing.
4. How we record our finances.
5. Applicable tax for our business.
6. What is the threshold/amount of income we can make before we have to pay tax.
7. The tax bracket we fall under and the percentage that must be paid.
8. Dates and deadlines to submit tax forms and accounts.

Tax is a topic of its own and we could write a whole book on finance to explain the ins and outs. However, as a coach it is important to note we have tax obligations that are required by law and if numbers are not a strength, it is best to outsource our financial management or hire a reputable accountant to manage our accounts.

## 12.5 Complying with Data Protection Law

Most countries now have some form of law relating to personal information handling. In some countries this is called data protection, in others privacy. This is about putting measures in place to protect all our client data. This guidance does not replace the need to speak to a data privacy expert or check a local regulator's guidance but should steer us into a more compliant business. Some important points we must consider:

1. It is necessary to understand what personal data you collect, use, store and share, and provide that information to any clients. Usually this is through a privacy notice or statement that explains what we collect, what we do with it, who we share it with, how long we keep it for and what rights the client has. The laws of some countries set out the specific information you are obliged to provide.
2. Actual and potential clients need to have access to this Notice or statement at any time. If you have a website, you can publish it there. If not, send the client a copy as part of the communications you have with them before starting work.
3. Use reputable software with security measures in place and features you can use to enhance security, such as encryption, password protection, access controls and backups. Check that the software complies with any local requirements for provider contract terms or overseas data transfers (where the software provider / data is in another country).
4. If you need to share personal information with others, take appropriate measures such as password-protecting the document or providing time-limited access to a specific document or folder on your cloud storage.

5. Put in place a strong password on your portable devices (such as laptops) and use multi-factor authentication for all logins.
6. Keep your laptop and other equipment used for coaching safe, secure and locked away when not in use. Use a privacy screen if using the laptop in public and be cautious about using public Wi-Fi.
7. Store your client records for only as long as you need to and take account of any legal requirements for what to keep and for how long.
8. Understand the rights that your client has under the laws of your country or state and organise your client records to be able to comply with those rights.
9. Have a process in place to manage any complaints or incidents.
10. Be aware of local legal requirements, such as registering with a regulator, records you need to keep, rules about website cookies / tracking, rules for marketing, and whether you need to be or appoint a data protection officer.

Once you have set up your governance you need to consider how you will stay up to date with legal requirements and regulator guidance. If you employ other people, you will need to consider what training they need at the outset and on an ongoing basis.

The rise in the use of Artificial Intelligence is adding new considerations for data protection, which we will cover in Chapter 20, Artificial Intelligence and Ethics.

## 12.6 Contract Law in Coaching

When we coach clients, we are essentially entering into a contract with them whether verbally or written. It is therefore important for us to understand some basic principles of contract law in our governing country or state. This will help inform us of our obligations under our contract. Some points to note:

1. Where we choose to have a website, we must have a 'website terms of use' (terms associated with how people use our website), this can incorporate our terms and conditions if we wish.
2. If we do not have a website and we offer a written contract, this must be written with terms that are easy to understand and are not ambiguous.
3. Our written contract must not contain any 'unfair' terms.
4. If we only have a verbal contract, we must note that this is still a contract, and we can still be liable for failure to fulfil our commitments.

Whilst it is not a legal obligation to have a written contract as a coach (unless hosting a website), it is highly recommended to do so. There are two types of contracts for written terms and conditions: unilateral or bilateral. A unilateral contract is one in which we send our terms and conditions out to our clients without the need for a signature. Terms and conditions on a website are an example of a unilateral contract. The contract is entered into when the client signs up to our coaching services. A bilateral contract, on the other hand, is a written document containing our terms and conditions that is sent to the client to sign. Once signed, the contract is then counter-signed by us and both the coach and client store a copy of it. At a bare minimum our terms should include:

1. Definition of key words in the contract.
2. Identification of who the parties are, including ourselves.
3. At what point a contract is entered into (when an offer is made, and acceptance occurs)
4. Detailed information on the services we provide.
5. How we will collect payment and the systems we use to do so.
6. An explanation of our refund policy.
7. An explanation of our cancellation policy.
8. An explanation of our complaints policy.
9. Details on how the contract may be terminated.
10. Confidentiality
11. A limited liability clause (in line with the Unfair Contract Terms legislation).
12. A severance clause (keeping the terms of the contract valid if one is found to be unlawful or invalid)
13. Jurisdiction Clause (what laws apply to the contract).

If a contract issue arises, such as when a client seeks a refund or they claim you have breached a term in your agreement, then it is important that we know how to respond. Having all the above in place will put us in a good position for handling business challenges, concerns or complaints. Without written terms, we have no legal protection, and the law will most likely fall in favour of the client as a result (even if the client is not in the right).

## **12.7 Intellectual Property Law**

As an ethical coach we also need to be aware of our obligations under Intellectual Property law. This covers copyright, trademarks and, on rare occasions, patents.

### Copyright

When we publish content, we must ensure that we do not commit what is known as a copyright infringement. This is essentially stealing credit for someone else's work. We must therefore always accurately credit work to its original owner when we publish work and never claim another's work as our own.

In terms of protecting our own work, you will see some people attach a copyright symbol, ©. This only acts as a deterrent for people who may wish to steal our work but holds no legal validity. If a dispute were to reach court, it would be resolved based on who can prove the earliest copy and authorship of the work.

## Trademarks

Trademark law is another area for us to consider. If we wish to have a logo that we want to protect, then we must follow the correct legal procedures of our country or state to register our logo as a legal trademark. Without this protection, other companies can use our logo or take ideas from it.

Just like the © sign, there are two ways to signify a trademark. The first is ™, which those in the legal world jokingly say stands for 'totally meaningless'. As with ©, it can act as a deterrent against those who may want to appropriate our trademark and is used by people who wish to protect an idea but have not gone through the formal registration process to register their idea. The legal trademark that *does* carry legal weight is the sign ®, which means that the logo or idea has been registered as a legal trademark.

## Patent

A patent is a legal right granted by a government to an inventor or an entity that provides them with the exclusive right to make, use, sell and distribute their invention for a specific period, typically up to 20 years from the filing date. It will be very rare to come across these in the coaching profession unless someone is inventing some new product, device or design that is going to reshape the profession.

It is important to note that all of the above is guidance only to help point you in the right direction and to give you more of an understanding of your legal obligations as an ethical coach. It is not legal advice. We advise all coaches to seek the correct legal advice in their country or state for whatever area they need support in.

## **12.8 Consumer Protection Law**

It is also worth noting that in most countries, we have a duty to protect the rights of our clients under consumer protection law. We have covered a lot of important actions for consumer protection above in relation to terms and conditions, insurance, professional boundaries, data protection and adopting an ethical code. However, there are a few additional important points we must consider, especially if we are operating within the UK or Europe.

### The Right to Cancel

Under certain laws, customers have the right to cancel contracts for services or goods. In order to honour this right, we must have a cancellation policy in place. For coaches practicing in the UK

(and within Europe), if we sell services online or over the phone, there is a law that stipulates clients must have a 14-day cooling-off period in which they can cancel and receive a full refund. As a large amount of coaching is now done online through platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and other conferencing software, this will apply to us (unless our business is strictly in-person).

Within our cancellation policy, we must inform the client of the 14-day cooling-off period. In some cases, we might want to extend this period and offer money-back guarantees. However, the client must have a minimum of 14 days to change their mind. If a client does change their mind within these 14 days (provided services have not begun) we must honour a full refund.

The 14-day cooling-off period will begin from the point at which the contract is entered into. This will vary depending on how we set up our business and how we choose to enter a legally binding contract with the client.

Where our first session has commenced within 14 days and services have begun, we may not have to issue a full refund, provided we have stipulated to the client in our refund/cancellation policy that we will not issue refunds for any sessions that have taken place. If there are any remaining sessions booked after the first session as part of a 'package' then we must seek to honour a refund for these.

When the 14-day cooling off period has expired, this does not mean we are 'refund-free'. The client always has a right to raise a dispute and request a refund based on professional incompetency or other reasonable grounds.

For any other services that we offer outside of our coaching sessions (such as courses or programmes) it becomes a little more complex. For example, if a client has registered for our course and accessed all of our content, downloaded it and then

asks for a refund within the 14-day cooling off period, would refusing a refund be unreasonable? This would probably count as an exception to the rule, provided that we can prove the client has accessed the materials and used our services. It is therefore important that we explicitly capture how we are going to conduct business in our terms, ensuring we are being transparent about when and how we will issue refunds and on what basis. A 'strictly no refunds' policy in coaching is a big 'no'.

Finally, it is often common practice to issue proportional refunds for cancellations that fall outside of the 14-day cooling-off period. This is usually based on when the client cancels. For example, we may wish to issue only a 50% refund where the client cancels within 48 hours of the scheduled session. Consumer Protection law ultimately boils down to fairness and transparency. It is important that we always exercise our duty of care towards our clients.

### Complaints Policy

Whilst we might believe we will deliver a pristine service and that we won't attract any complaints, under consumer protection laws clients have a right to make a complaint. It is therefore important that we include a complaints policy within our terms and conditions, along with contact details and the agreed timeframe in which we will respond to such complaints. It is common practice to include an email for written complaints as a bare minimum, but we may also wish to provide a contact number to allow the client to speak to us first.

Additionally, we must also implement a clear, easy-to-follow escalation process and inform clients how they can escalate unresolved complaints to an independent body, such as the Small Claims Court, a self-regulated body such as the EMCC or ICF or an ombudsman (if relevant).

## Setting up a Virtual Office


A final point to think about is whether we provide an address to our clients. Neither the ICF nor the EMCC explicitly require coaches to provide their physical address to clients. However, professionalism and transparency encourage making your contact information accessible. Including a correspondence address in your coaching contract or agreement can enhance professionalism and build trust with clients.

If you don't feel comfortable giving out your home address for privacy reasons, it might be advisable to set up a virtual office. A virtual office is a service that provides businesses with a professional address and other office-related services without requiring them to rent a physical office space. It allows you to work remotely while maintaining the appearance of a professional business presence. There are many different virtual offices across the UK (such as Regus, Virtual HQ or WeWork) that offer varied packages, from accepting mail to providing hot-desk and meeting room facilities, to a physical office space.

## **12.9 Theory into Practice**

In this chapter we have explored our legal obligations and how we can build a coaching practice that is compliant with the law.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

-  How do you plan to build your coaching business, and what legal support will you need to get this up and running?**

## **Principle 6: Running Our Business Effectively with Proper Governance**

‘Corporate governance is not a matter of right and wrong; it is about what is right and what is best.’

**Narayana Murthy**

What is proper governance? How do I effectively run my business? How can I apply this principle to my coaching practice? When setting up our own coaching business, it is important for us to do so with proper governance. Regardless of whether we set up as a sole trader, partnership or a private limited company, we need to consider how our business will be run. In this chapter we will explore the principle of running our business with effective governance and highlight the key differences between this Principle 6 and Principle 3 (providing a proper standard of service).

### **13.1 Governance and Strategy**

Under Principle 6 of our Code of Conduct, we must ensure our business is well run for the benefit of our clients. This is all about providing excellent practice, understanding our business processes and the journey for our clients. We can demonstrate compliance with this principle by having clearly defined business processes that we follow, and a clear journey for all our clients.

It begins with establishing the governance and strategies of our business. Essentially, this means drafting a strong business plan, building a sound business model and putting policies in

place that state how decisions within the business are going to be made. When scoping the governance of our business we must ensure we have:

1. Drafted a business plan
2. Created a business model
3. Established our business values
4. Designed a brand
5. Understood our company constitution (if a Private Limited Company)
6. Drafted necessary policies around governance
7. Designed a structure for the business on how decisions will be made
8. Adopted an Ethical Code and Professional Standard of practice

All of the above are of equal importance and play a part in ensuring we are running our business effectively with proper governance. Some of these concepts may be new to you and we can't go into too much detail about each of them here as they are each substantial topics in themselves. A little further research into them is recommended in order to gain a greater understanding. We have therefore added some resources in our additional reading section below.

## **13.2 Policies and Procedures**

Sitting under our business plan, business model and overall governance should be a set of policies that stipulate how we manage our business. These policies should clarify how we execute our coaching services with our clients. Having these policies and processes in place is a key indicator that we are complying with this Principle 6 of our Code and are running our business with proper governance.

We have already discussed a few of them, but here is a non-exhaustive list of policies we may want to draft and implement in our coaching practice:

- Client Agreement Policy
- Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy
- Complaints and Grievance Policy
- Supervision and Professional Development Policy
- Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Record-keeping and Documentation Policy
- Marketing and Advertising Policy and Processes
- Session Management Processes
- Referral and Collaboration Policy
- Financial Management Policy
- Refund Policy
- Technology Use (or Appropriate Use of IT) Policy

When drafting our governance through our business plan and business model, which policies and processes we will need in place should become apparent. The above list covers a few important policies we will need, but ultimately each coaching practice is different, and it depends on how we choose to do business.

It is easy to confuse this Principle 6 with Principle 3, which, as you may recall, is all about providing a proper standard of service. The easiest way to distinguish between the two is to remember that Principle 3 (providing a proper standard of service) is concerned with our outward-facing business - the service and elements of our business that are seen by our

clients. Principle 6, on the other hand (running our business with proper governance), covers our back-end setup and policies, of which only parts may be seen by our clients.

### **13.3 Executing Excellent Practice**

Setting up our governance is just the first step in running our business effectively. Once we have our plans, policies and processes in place, we must execute them and work towards an excellent practice. In order to achieve excellent practice, we must stay up to date and compliant with all relevant statutory requirements in the country in which our professional work takes place, as well as work within any organisational policies and processes we have set. As discussed, we must also ensure that we have the appropriate professional indemnity insurance to cover our coaching work in the country/countries in which we operate.

Furthermore, we must understand the consequences of a breach of our legal obligations or the codes of conduct we adopt. We must ensure that we always behave in a way that at all times reflects positively upon, and enhances the reputation of, the profession.

As part of our governance and the execution of excellent practice, it is also important for us to understand where we can receive help and support: to help us continue to build our coaching skills and maintain excellent practice, we should engage in supervision at a level of frequency that is appropriate to our coaching. We should ensure that we discuss any ethical dilemmas and potential or actual breaches of this code with our supervisor or through any communities we are in (where we feel comfortable to do so). Seeking help from others is not a weakness and demonstrates our commitment to a professional and ethical practice.

Finally, to build an excellent practice we will develop our level of coaching competence by continuously participating in relevant and appropriate training and/or continuing professional development (CPD) and contribute to the professional community that is appropriate to our level of expertise.

## **13.4 Theory into Practice**

In this chapter we have explored setting up and running our business with proper governance under Principle of the Professional Code of Conduct.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

-  What policies and processes do you need to draft for your coaching business to ensure proper governance?**

## **Principle 7: Encouraging Equality and Respecting Diversity**

‘Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.’

**Verna Myers**

How do we observe equality and diversity in coaching? Do I need to publish an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion statement? How can I demonstrate compliance with this Principle? At the heart of our Professional Code of Conduct lies the encouragement of equality and respect for diversity. As a professional and ethical coach, we must observe our practice, become aware of our biases and work to provide an environment that supports everyone, regardless of their cultural background. In this chapter we will discuss some of the ways in which we can demonstrate compliance with this Principle and explore some scenarios that may present themselves in our coaching.

### **14.1 Avoiding and Challenging Discrimination**

Principle 7 is all about encouraging equality and respecting diversity. Under this final Principle, we are committing to avoiding knowingly discriminating on any grounds, and that we will seek to enhance our awareness of possible areas of discrimination.

In addition, as part of our role to encourage equality, we will always actively challenge any colleagues, employees, service

providers, clients, coaches or participants who are perceived to be using discriminatory behaviour and commit to challenging this in a constructive manner.

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 provides protection against discrimination based on certain characteristics known as 'protected characteristics'. These are designed to ensure equality and prevent discrimination across a range of areas. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act are:

1. **Age:** Protection against age-related discrimination, regardless of whether someone is young or old.
2. **Disability:** Protects individuals with physical or mental impairments that have a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
3. **Gender Reassignment:** Protection for individuals who are undergoing, have undergone or are planning to undergo gender transition.
4. **Marriage and Civil Partnership:** Protects against discrimination based on marital status, including being married, single or in a civil partnership.
5. **Pregnancy and Maternity:** Protects individuals from discrimination during pregnancy and maternity leave, as well as protection against less favourable treatment due to pregnancy-related illness or maternity leave.
6. **Race:** Protects against discrimination based on race, which includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin.
7. **Religion or Belief:** Protects individuals based on their religion or philosophical beliefs, or lack of religion or belief.

**8. Sex:** Protects against discrimination based on being male or female.

**9. Sexual Orientation:** Protects individuals from discrimination based on their sexual orientation, including being heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual.

These protections apply in various areas, including employment, education, access to goods and services, housing and public functions. As a professional coach who provides coaching services, it is important for us to observe these protected characteristics and ensure we do not discriminate, harass or victimise anyone in the course of our business. Discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on these characteristics are unlawful under the Equality Act, which seeks to ensure equal treatment and opportunity for all.

Principle 7 is not only about encouraging equality and diversity but also about stopping any discriminatory behaviour we may observe in the industry. It is about having the awareness to spot discriminatory behaviour and the courage to intervene. We can gain awareness of discriminatory behaviour by taking the time to develop a deep understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion principles. This begins with educating ourselves on the protected characteristics outlined above from the Equality Act 2010, and recognising the subtle and overt forms discrimination can take, such as microaggressions, unconscious bias and systemic barriers.

Building the courage to intervene requires a commitment for us to uphold these values of fairness and inclusivity in our coaching practice. We can prepare to intervene by learning effective communication strategies to address discriminatory remarks or actions in a constructive manner. We can also build a support network of like-minded professionals to provide us with encouragement and guidance when tackling any challenging issues around equality and diversity. To demonstrate how we

could approach challenging someone for a discriminatory comment or action let's walk through a short exercise.

Let's take a scenario where you are in a break-out room on Zoom or in a group coaching space with members of the coaching profession in person discussing various topics around coaching. One member of the group makes a dismissive comment about another coach's ability based on their accent or cultural background. With your awareness of the principles of equality and diversity you know that this is not an acceptable comment, and you wish to challenge this individual. How do you feel about adopting the response below?

**'Can we pause for a moment? I want to address the comment you just made. I feel it's important to ensure that our discussions remain inclusive and respectful. Comments like that can unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and create a sense of exclusion, which goes against the values we aim to uphold in this profession.**

**I know this may not have been your intention, but it's crucial that we respect the diversity of perspectives and experiences that everyone brings to this session. Perhaps we can refocus on the topic at hand and ensure our dialogue reflects the professionalism we all value.'**

Initially, this response seems like a good approach. It acknowledges the issue, maintains respect, reframes the focus of the session and encourages dialogue. However, reflecting on it further, what could be an issue here?

Whilst the wording of the dialogue is sound, the approach itself may cause a further issue. Addressing the situation during the session could risk unintentionally spotlighting or further victimising the individual who was the subject of the discriminatory comment, and additionally creating a sense of embarrassment for the individual who made the comment (which may not have been intended to be discriminatory). A slightly

better approach would be to have a private conversation with the person who made the comment after the session. Here's how that might look:

**'Thanks for taking a moment to talk with me. I wanted to bring up something that happened earlier during the discussion. You made a comment about [Coach] and their background, and I feel it's important to reflect on how that might have come across.**

**I understand that you may not have intended any harm, but comments like that can be perceived as dismissive or discriminatory, and they might make others feel excluded or undervalued. As coaches, we have a responsibility to create a safe, inclusive space for everyone, and that includes being mindful of how our words might affect others.**

**I wanted to share this with you because I know you value inclusivity and respect, and I thought this could be a good opportunity for us all to grow and align our actions with those principles.**

**I don't know if you want to reach out and have a chat with [Coach] to apologise, that is your choice, but I wanted to make you aware of what I observed.'**

This might be a better approach as it avoids victimisation and shame. After all, we do not know how that comment is being received by the individual subject to it and our judgement could create an issue during the session that is not there. However, if numerous comments are being made and we get a sense that the individual is uncomfortable, then the first approach would be more appropriate. It all depends on the context and dynamic, and we must consider how our actions may impact all those around us while staying true to the values of equality and diversity.

By modelling ethical and inclusive behaviour and speaking out when discrimination occurs, we not only protect our clients but also stay true to the principles of our profession.

## 14.2 Becoming Aware of our Biases

To adopt a coaching practice that aligns with the principles and values of equality and diversity we must go a little deeper and work to become aware of our own unconscious biases. In certain circumstances, while we may have the best intentions, some of our acts or behaviour may be discriminatory. Although we may do our best to consciously include everyone, there may be occasions when our unconscious biases are at play. Developing an awareness of this starts with engaging in developmental activities that are likely to increase your self-awareness in relation to equality and diversity.

Engaging in continuous professional development, such as workshops and training on anti-discrimination and cultural competence, helps us develop the skills to identify behaviours or practices that may be discriminatory. Additionally, reflecting on our own biases and assumptions is crucial, as self-awareness helps us grow and learn more about ourselves, our behaviour and the impact we have on others. Here are some examples of biases that we may be unaware of:

**Similarity Bias:** Preferring individuals who share similar backgrounds, interests or experiences.

**Confirmation Bias:** Seeking out or interpreting information that confirms pre-existing beliefs or stereotypes.

**Attribution Bias:** Attributing someone's success to external factors (for example, 'they got lucky') while attributing failures to internal traits ('they're incompetent').

**Age Bias:** Making assumptions about someone's abilities or relevance based on their age.

**Gender Bias:** Stereotyping individuals based on their gender.

**Cultural Bias:** Valuing certain cultural norms or behaviours above others.

**Appearance Bias:** Judging someone based on their physical appearance, including their weight, height or style of dress.

**Name Bias:** Making assumptions based on someone's name because of its associations with a particular cultural or ethnic background.

**Neurodiversity Bias:** Assuming individuals with neurodiverse traits (such as ADHD or autism) are less capable than others in certain areas.

**Accent Bias:** Judging someone's intelligence or competence based on their accent.

**Parenthood Bias:** Making assumptions about someone's availability, commitment or priorities based on their status as a parent.

**Socio-economic Bias:** Favouring or discriminating against individuals based on their economic status.

A useful exercise to help us become conscious of these biases is to reflect and consider where in life someone may have displayed prejudice towards you based on one of the above. We can then go into a deeper reflection and think about where we might favour some individuals and why? Do any individuals we favour fall into one of the categories above? How can we work on this unconscious bias we may hold?

## 14.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statements

A key indicative behaviour for Principle 7 of our Professional Code of Conduct is to publish an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Statement for our coaching practice. An EDI Statement is a formal declaration that outlines our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). It serves as a guiding document to demonstrate values, intentions and actions for creating an environment where all of our clients, potential clients and everyone we interact with are treated fairly, are respected and given equal opportunities through our practice, regardless of their background or characteristics.

Before we go into how we might construct our EDI statement, it is important to note that this must not be a 'check-box' exercise. When drafting our statement, we must possess the values to promote equality and diversity and give thought to how we will embody and demonstrate these values through our coaching.

Generally, an EDI statement will include these five elements:

1. **Commitment to Equality:** A pledge to treat everyone equally and fairly, ensuring no one is disadvantaged or discriminated against based on the characteristics we have discussed above, such as age, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or socioeconomic status.
2. **Promotion of Diversity:** Recognition of the value and strength in having diverse perspectives, experiences and backgrounds.
3. **Support for Inclusion:** A dedication to creating spaces where everyone feels welcomed, valued and supported to contribute fully, free from exclusion or marginalisation.

4. **Practical Steps and Actions:** Outlining tangible measures we will take to uphold EDI principles, such as implementing policies, providing training or addressing systemic barriers.
5. **Accountability and Transparency:** A promise to regularly review practices and gather feedback.

These five elements will form the skeleton of our EDI statement, and it is for us to flesh them out based on how we decide to build and operate our coaching business. Here are some considerations we may need to make when setting up a coaching practice aligned to our EDI statement:

- How do we make our coaching practice accessible to everyone?
- How do we tailor our language and communication?
- How do we make our pricing and payment options affordable and transparent?
- How do we find further training on EDI to enhance our knowledge?
- How do we filter EDI initiatives into our policies and processes?
- How do we create a safe and inclusive space for everyone?
- What action do we take if others breach our EDI values?

This is a non-exhaustive list but gives us an idea of what we should be thinking about when drafting our EDI statements.

It is not a legal obligation to hold an EDI statement for our coaching practice, but it is highly recommended as a way to demonstrate your values and the action you are taking to ensure a profession that promotes equality, diversity and inclusion.

## 14.4 Choosing to Niche with Demographics

As we build our coaching practice, we begin to explore a niche or specialisation to serve a particular set of individuals. A question that crops up regularly in practice with regards to EDI is:

**‘By choosing a niche that only works with a particular demographic of people, am I building a practice that does not align with equality and diversity?’**

It is important to note that choosing a niche that focuses on a particular demographic of people does not mean your practice is misaligned with equality and diversity principles. In fact, specialising can be beneficial and empowering when done with inclusivity. There are important factors to consider with our practice to ensure our ‘niche’ aligns with equality, diversity and inclusion values.

Here are three important factors we should consider:

1. **Meeting Specific Needs:** Are we meeting a specific need that is not being met elsewhere? Specialising in a demographic can be a way to address the unique challenges, experiences or barriers faced by a specific group. For example, a coach who works exclusively with women in leadership roles or with neurodiverse individuals, has the opportunity to fill a gap in support services.
2. **Expertise and Empathy:** Are we creating our specialisation to increase our expertise and strengthen our empathy? By focusing on a specific group, we can deepen our understanding of their needs and tailor our approach to provide meaningful coaching that helps overcome a specific challenge.

- 3. Empowerment not Exclusion:** Are we empowering or excluding? A niche that is intentionally inclusive - for example, providing support to marginalised or under-served communities - can contribute positively to diversity and equality by elevating voices that might otherwise be overlooked or excluded in other environments.

A general rule of thumb is to ask ourselves this question:

**‘Am I excluding individuals or am I working to empower a specific group of individuals?’**

As an example, let’s take a coach who works with women in leadership as a niche. It is a very different approach from saying: ‘I don’t coach men’ to ‘I coach women in leadership with a mission to ensure equal rights and opportunities in the workplace.’ One statement excludes a group based on gender, the other places emphasis on a particular group and challenge we are helping to tackle.

While defining our niche and the demographic of people we wish to work with, we must also be aware of potential risks that may make our practice discriminatory. One risk to be aware of is that of closing access to others. Even when we have chosen to work with a particular group, we must not close access to others who have an interest and value in our area of work, as doing so could be viewed as discriminatory. We must therefore ensure access to others, where it is appropriate to do so. For example, if our specialisation is to work with women in leadership to help create and ensure equal opportunities, whilst we choose to work predominantly with women, we should not close access to men who are keen to be coached on how they can assist with ensuring there are equal opportunities for women in the workplace.

Another risk we must become aware of is that of reinforcing stereotypes. For example, in the same scenario of coaching

women in leadership, we should avoid such assumptions as: ‘All women prioritise work-life balance over career progression’ or ‘women inherently struggle with assertiveness.’ Making these assumptions not only reinforces stereotypes but also limits the client's potential by having been labelled with predefined narratives.

A further risk we must be aware of is ignoring additional factors of diversity within our chosen group of people. We must recognise the diversity within our chosen demographic. For example, if we focus on coaching women in leadership, we must remember that factors such as race, religion and socioeconomic status shape their experiences differently. It is important to ensure our coaching of ‘women in leadership’ is inclusive of women from all backgrounds.

In summary, there is no harm in setting out to work with a specific demographic of individuals. However, we must understand the benefits of doing so and the associated risks.

## **14.5 Cross-Cultural Coaching**

When exploring equality and diversity within our coaching practice, it is important to consider cross-cultural coaching. These days, we have the ability to coach anybody from anywhere, thanks to the power of technology. Coaching people from diverse cultural backgrounds at first glance seems like a good approach to align ourselves with the principles and values of equality and diversity. However, cross-cultural coaching presents a mix of benefits and risks, and we must tread carefully.

On one hand, cross-cultural coaching creates inclusivity, promotes understanding and supports clients with challenges unique to their cultural identity. When done effectively it can be powerful for promoting equality and diversity. However, the question of whether we should engage in cross-cultural coaching

requires careful consideration. It is not just about whether we can coach someone from a different culture, but whether we are equipped to do so in a way that acknowledges and respects our cultural differences. Without this awareness, cross-cultural coaching can unintentionally create bias, misunderstanding or harm.

For instance, there is a big clash between western and eastern cultures. What is accepted in eastern culture may not be accepted in western culture and vice versa. A coach from a western background might view certain behaviour from a client with an eastern background negatively, unaware that it is perfectly appropriate in the client's culture. If this cultural difference goes unexamined, the coach may misinterpret the client's actions, potentially leading to misguidance or a breakdown in the coaching relationship. In such cases, the risks of miscommunication and cultural insensitivity are high.

So, should we engage in cross-cultural coaching? The answer is 'yes', but with caution. We must be aware of the risks and actively work to mitigate them. This involves acknowledging our own biases, gaining cultural knowledge and practicing cultural humility. It requires an openness to learning about the cultural contexts that shape clients' perspectives and behaviours, ensuring that coaching methods are adaptable and respectful. It requires us to refrain from all judgement and assumptions and to always enter our sessions with an open mind. We are there to guide our client, not to judge them.

In instances where the clash in culture is evident and the client's actions go against our values, making it difficult to coach, we should look to terminate the coach-client relationship and refer the client to another coach, who may be better suited to support.

Only by being fully prepared to address the complexities of cultural differences can we engage in cross-cultural coaching in

a way that truly supports our clients' growth, without imposing our own cultural assumptions.

## 14.6 Theory into Practice

In this chapter we have explored encouraging equality and respecting diversity as part of Principle 7 of the Professional Code of Conduct.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

 **What actions can you take to ensure your coaching practice is aligned to our principle of equality and diversity?**

## Neurodiversity in Coaching

‘The future belongs to people who think differently.’

**Steve Silberman**

What about neurodivergent clients? How do I tailor my business to cater for neurodiversity in coaching? Is there any guidance within the Professional Code of Conduct for working with neurodivergent clients? As the coaching profession continues to evolve, we must adapt to the diverse needs of our clients. One of the most important areas for adaptation is understanding and integrating neurodiversity into our coaching practices. The Professional Code of Conduct does not give detailed direction on this, it is generically covered within equality, diversity and inclusion.

However, neurodiversity is not explicitly listed as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, unless the neurodivergent condition is classified as a disability (which in many cases it is not). This therefore creates a ‘grey area’ within the law and neurodiversity can often be overlooked. We therefore believe it is important to explore neurodiversity in detail as a significant element in developing an ethical coaching practice that supports all individuals. In this chapter we explore what neurodiversity is, ethical considerations around neurodiversity and how we can tailor our coaching practice to neurodivergent clients.

## 15.1 What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the idea that neurological differences, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia and other conditions, are not disorders but natural variations of the human brain. The term is thought to have been coined in the late 1990s, primarily within the autism community, to describe the idea that neurological differences should be recognised and respected as a natural part of human diversity. It challenges the traditional view that neurological conditions such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia are disorders that need to be ‘fixed’ or ‘cured.’

To give an example, someone with ADHD might experience challenges with focus and organisation but at the same time possess exceptional creativity, energy and problem-solving abilities. Similarly, a person with autism may have difficulty with social interaction but might demonstrate incredible attention to detail and analytical skills. Neurodiversity is about acknowledging these variations without judgement or a need for correction.

An established and widely referenced definition of neurodiversity comes from Steve Silberman, an author and advocate for neurodiversity. In his book *NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity*, Silberman defines neurodiversity as:

**‘...the idea that neurological differences are any different from physical differences. A wide range of human neurotypes - each with its own strengths and challenges - exists to enrich the human experience.’**

This definition further highlights the idea that neurodivergent conditions are variations of the human condition that should be respected and valued as part of diversity, rather than being seen as deficits that need to be filled. We have provided details of his

book in our Additional Reading section below for those who wish to study neurodiversity a little further.

## **15.2 Neurodiversity and Ethics**

As coaches we hold an ethical responsibility to create a safe and supportive environment for all clients, including those who are neurodivergent. Building on what we have already explored in the previous chapter, we must ensure that our practice is inclusive and that our methods do not unintentionally harm or disadvantage neurodivergent clients.

One of the key ethical considerations which we have already discussed above, is avoiding assumptions. We may work with a client who we believe shows behaviours associated with neurodiversity, such as difficulty focusing in our sessions, or who has a challenge communicating with us. However, it is essential we do not jump to conclusions about the client's abilities or limitations based solely on their apparent neurological profile. These challenges are not weaknesses, and we should never make any negative assumptions about the ability of the client to achieve their goals. Each client is an individual, and coaching should focus on their unique strengths, goals and needs, rather than trying to fit them into predefined categories or labels or treating them any differently.

Another ethical consideration is the importance of clear and open communication, communicating with neurodivergent clients in a way that is suitable for them. Neurodivergent clients may not always express themselves in ways that are immediately understandable. We must be willing to engage with empathetic listening and ask clarifying questions when needed. For example, a client with autism may struggle with making eye contact, but this should not be interpreted as a lack of interest in or engagement with our coaching. It's important for us to

communicate with the client about their preferences and how they feel most comfortable expressing themselves, providing them with the space they need to do so. We should also be patient, recognising that some clients (whether neuro-divergent or not) may need extra time to process information or respond during coaching sessions.

When working with neurodivergent clients we can create a coaching plan that aligns with their specific learning style and pace. We can adapt the length and frequency of sessions, we can implement more breaks in sessions or change the format, and work with the client to define the best methods of contact outside of the coaching sessions.

A neurodivergent client may benefit from more structure or more flexibility. Open and honest communication will help us understand better and design a coaching approach best suited to the individual. This may not be defined specifically within our codes of conduct but is a very important ethical consideration we must put into practice.

### **15.3 Adapting Coaching Methods for Neurodivergent Clients**

As discussed above, when coaching neurodivergent clients, we can adapt coaching methods to suit their specific needs. This means understanding their strengths and challenges and tailoring our approach accordingly. To help explain how this might look, here are five practical strategies we can implement in our coaching practice:

## Using Clear and Direct Communication

Often, we believe that we are great communicators and that everyone will understand what we say. However, this is not always the case. Many neurodivergent clients, especially those on the autism spectrum, may prefer clear and unambiguous communication. A straightforward 'say what we mean' with 'no fluff' approach. To achieve this, we can avoid using vague language or metaphorical expressions that might be difficult to interpret or run the risk of being taken literally. Be straightforward and ensure that instructions and feedback are easy to understand. It is also useful to ask the client if they have understood and to seek how they would like to receive information from you, to ensure the best form of communication.

## Build Structure and Routine

Work with a neurodivergent client to build a structure that is effective and comfortable for them. Some neurodivergent clients, particularly those with ADHD or autism, may benefit from a structured coaching environment. Setting clear expectations, creating visual schedules and breaking tasks down into smaller, manageable steps can help the client feel more comfortable and supported. Consider the use of flashcards, visual boards or an easy method of helping clients track tasks and actions.

## Allow Time for Processing

Sometimes as coaches, we can be hasty and very goal-oriented, and this approach may be particularly challenging for those neurodivergent clients who need more time to process information. It is essential to be patient and avoid rushing the

client to respond or make decisions. Allow for pauses and give the client time to reflect before asking for feedback. The effective use of silence is a core skill in coaching and one that is excellent to use when coaching neurodivergent clients.

### Be Flexible and Adaptable

As we develop our coaching practice, it is easy to develop a structured approach to how we host our sessions and deliver our service. While some neurodivergent clients may prefer routine (as outlined above), others may prefer a more flexible environment. It is important for us to be adaptable and to ask the client how they feel most comfortable, what works best for them? For example, a client with ADHD might find it helpful to take breaks during coaching sessions to maintain focus, while a client with autism may prefer to focus on a single topic for an extended period. We must remember that every client is different and the best way in which we can guide them is by asking the simple question, 'How would you like to structure our sessions in a way that works best for you?'.

### Use Strength-Based Approaches

In coaching, we may decide to take a holistic approach to our coaching when understanding our client's challenges, but this may not always be beneficial for neurodivergent clients. Instead of focusing solely on challenges, it is important for us to highlight and develop the client's strengths. A strength-based approach can build confidence and help the client see their neurodivergent traits as assets rather than obstacles. For example, a client with dyslexia might be an excellent problem-solver or creative thinker, which provides us with the opportunity to shine the spotlight on this ability.

Neurodiversity is a wide subject and we are only scratching the surface with ways in which we can tailor our coaching for neurodivergent clients. As we increase our knowledge and understanding of both coaching and neurodiversity, we can explore further to adapting the tools and systems we use and building on our toolset to include many models that have been proven to assist in the coaching of neurodivergent clients.

## **15.4 Observing Ethical Dilemmas**

While there are clear benefits to incorporating an awareness of neurodiversity into our coaching practice, there are also potential ethical challenges that may present themselves. One of the biggest concerns is the risk of unintentional harm due to a lack of understanding or awareness of neurodivergent experiences. For example, we may unintentionally reinforce stigma or create an environment where a neurodivergent client feels isolated or misunderstood. This could happen if we are unaware of the client's needs or fail to acknowledge their way of processing information. Additionally, we may unintentionally appear to be 'normalising' certain behaviour by encouraging the client to conform to neurotypical standards rather than celebrating their strengths and diversity.

Another ethical dilemma could arise where we lack the expertise or experience to effectively work with neurodivergent clients. In these cases, we must go back to our ethical roots and ask the question 'Am I the best person to coach this client?' We have already discussed in earlier chapters how crucial it is for us to recognize our limits and seek out additional training or support when needed. We should never assume that we can effectively work with all clients without the proper knowledge or skills. Referring clients to specialists or experts in neurodiversity, when appropriate, is an ethical obligation to ensure that the client's needs are met in the best possible way.


Finally, we must always respect the autonomy of neurodivergent clients. It is important to remember that, like all clients, neurodivergent clients have the right to make their own decisions about their coaching process. We should never adapt our approach in such a way that we become leading. We should always avoid being overly prescriptive or controlling and should instead empower the client to take charge of their own growth. This is in fact the same approach we should be taking for all clients.

In reflecting on possible dilemmas, we must remember that as coaching becomes increasingly diverse, it is crucial that we adapt our practices to meet the needs of all clients, including neurodivergent clients. By embracing neurodiversity and integrating it into our ethical frameworks, we ensure that coaching remains a truly inclusive and empowering profession.

## **15.5 Theory into Practice**

In this chapter we have explored the importance of adapting our coaching for neurodivergent clients.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

-  How can you adapt your coaching to cater for any neurodivergent clients who may sign up for your coaching?**

## **Coaching Minors and Vulnerable Adults**

‘The foundation of every state is the education of its youth, with ethics as the cornerstone.’

### **Diogenes**

Are there any specific rules when coaching children or young people? What about coaching people who may be classified as vulnerable? Are there any safeguards we should put in place? As part of our ethical practice, it is important for us to be aware of when we need to put safeguards in place to protect certain people. We have already explored how to tailor our practice for neurodivergent clients, in this chapter we are going to discuss how we tailor our coaching when we are contracting with minors or those defined as ‘vulnerable’ within the definition of the law.

### **16.1 Coaching Children or Minors**

Some of us may have a desire to work with children, teenagers or young adults. There are many challenges that youngsters face in today’s world, and seeking coaching can be more desirable as a means of support than going to a therapist. As a result, we must fully understand how to approach coaching minors, our legal obligations and what safeguards we must put in place.

An important point to note is that when coaching minors, we are bound by the laws of the country in which the minor is based, not the laws where we are based. Online coaching provides us with the opportunity to coach worldwide. However, if we wish to work with children online in the United States, for example, United States law will be applicable; if we wish to work online with

children based in South Africa, then South African law will apply. That being said, we will find that due to the high risks associated with children being coached online, the majority of coaching for children is done in person and more likely to be provided by those who are giving a different method of support, such as teachers or social workers. It is becoming popular now for teachers and social workers to adopt coaching skills and techniques in their practice.

Before we begin coaching minors, we must first understand what the legal definition of a minor is and what that means for us.

## **16.2 Definition of a Minor**

The definition of a minor changes from country to country and state to state. When researching the law of the country in which our client is based, we must begin by understanding if they fall within the legal definition of a minor.

Under the laws of England and Wales, specifically the Children Act 1989, a minor is defined as someone under the age of 18. This is the most widely used definition in contexts involving child welfare, parental responsibility and safeguarding. It is the definition applicable to our coaching for children based in England and Wales.

If we are planning to coach anyone under the age of 18 within England and Wales, then we must ensure we have safeguards in place to provide extra protection for our clients. As a rule of thumb, if we are coaching anyone under the age of 25 internationally, we should check the local laws for their rules, regulations and definitions of a minor.

## 16.3 Safeguards for Minors in Coaching

Once we have established that we are going to be coaching a minor or minors, we must then understand the specific safeguards we are required to put in place before entering into a coaching contract. Again, this will vary from country to country and state to state. For the UK there are ten important safeguards we need to have in place:

- 1. Parental Consent:** Anyone defined in law as a minor cannot enter into a legal agreement. Therefore, before starting a coaching relationship with a minor, written consent from a parent or legal guardian is required. This consent confirms that the parent or guardian is aware of the coaching relationship and approves of it. Essentially, we are entering into a contract with the parent or guardian.
- 2. Safeguarding Policies and Processes:** We must ensure we adopt a code of conduct within our practice, hold the necessary accreditation from a reputable organisation and have policies in place for coaching minors. This includes processes for reporting any safeguarding concerns to the appropriate authorities, such as local authorities, the police or relevant child protection agencies. This is in line with the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004.
- 3. DBS Checks (Disclosure and Barring Service Checks):** If we are planning to work with minors, we must undergo an Enhanced DBS check. This involves having our criminal history checked to confirm that we are not barred from working with children.
- 4. Safeguard Training:** When working with minors we should undergo training in safeguarding and child protection. This will equip us with the skills to recognise signs of abuse, neglect or distress and to handle such situations

appropriately. Coach training alone is not adequate when working with children.

- 5. Clear Boundaries:** It is crucial for us to set clear boundaries with minors. This includes maintaining appropriate physical and emotional boundaries and ensuring that any interactions remain professional at all times. We must also communicate in a manner that is respectful, non-coercive and appropriate for the minor's developmental level.
- 6. Confidentiality:** Coaching minors brings in additional element when it comes to confidentiality. We must agree at the outset what can and cannot be shared with the parent or guardian as part of the coaching relationship (where it has been agreed the parent or guardian will not be present). It is important to also recognise that there are certain situations in which confidentiality may be breached for the safety of the minor. If we believe a minor is at risk of harm (for example, from abuse or neglect), we must report it, even if it involves breaking confidentiality. A final point to note is that unlike with clients of legal age, we cannot step outside of our duty of confidentiality for our own learning and development (for example, submitting the recording for assessment on our coaching programmes).
- 7. Supervision and Support:** We should have access to regular supervision and support if we are choosing to coach minors. This provides an opportunity to discuss any challenges or concerns we may have regarding coaching minors and ensures that our practice remains ethical and safe.
- 8. Emergency Procedures:** We must have clear procedures in place for dealing with emergencies, including medical emergencies, and must know how to contact appropriate emergency services quickly if needed. Basic training in first

aid, emergency response and mental health first aid is a must.

- 9. Environmental Safety:** The environment where our coaching takes place (whether physical or virtual) should be safe and appropriate for minors. For example, in a physical setting, this includes ensuring that the area is free from hazards, the equipment is in good condition and there is adequate supervision. In certain circumstances we may find ourselves coaching the minor with their parent or guardian present.
- 10. Regular Feedback:** Regular feedback from the minor and their guardian can help ensure that our coaching relationship is effective, ethical and meeting the minor's needs. Feedback mechanisms should be in place to allow for concerns to be raised by both the minor and their guardian.

Having these safeguards in place are a must before we enter into any coaching agreements with minors.

## **16.4 Coaching Vulnerable Adults**

Broadly speaking, a vulnerable adult is anyone over the age of full legal responsibility whose ability to protect themselves from violence, abuse or neglect is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, through old age or otherwise.

The definition of a vulnerable adult will differ from country to country and state to state. Under the laws of England and Wales the Mental Capacity Act 2005, Section 2 defines a vulnerable adult as follows:

**‘A person is unable to make a decision for themselves if they are unable:**

- **(a) to understand the information relevant to the decision,**
- **(b) to retain that information,**
- **(c) to use or weigh that information as part of the process of making the decision, or**
- **(d) to communicate their decision (whether by talking, using sign language or any other means).’**

Whether we choose to specialise in working with vulnerable adults through our coaching or not, we must be aware of this definition. With the access we have to the internet today it may be possible that we are approached by a client who meets the definition of a vulnerable person. In such instances we must always check if this client has a carer, guardian or legal representative before entering into a coaching contract. Whilst a vulnerable person may wish to have confidential conversations with us as their coach, it is best practice to at least speak to the carer, guardian or legal representative with regards to our general coaching practice and inform them that we are looking to coach the vulnerable adult. In a straightforward situation, the carer, guardian or legal representative would essentially be acting as a sponsor for the vulnerable adult.

## **16.5 Safeguards for Vulnerable Adults**

When coaching vulnerable adults, we must ensure we have various safeguards in place to offer added layers of protection for the client. These are similar to those we have highlighted above for minors, but with the following differences:

**Consent:** For minors, consent must come from a parent or guardian. For vulnerable adults, if they lack mental capacity,

consent may need to come from a legal representative or power of attorney.

**Legal Considerations:** Minors are protected by child protection laws, while vulnerable adults are protected by both adult safeguarding laws and capacity laws (for example, the Mental Capacity Act 2005).


**Capacity:** The concept of mental capacity is unique to vulnerable adults. If a vulnerable adult lacks capacity, decisions must be made in their best interests by a legal representative.

As with minors, we must undertake DBS checks, have safeguarding policies in place, gain sufficient training for working with vulnerable adults and apply all ten safeguards outlined above.

## 16.6 Theory into Practice

In this chapter we have explored what safeguards we must put in place if we are coaching minors or vulnerable adults.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

 **How would you adequately safeguard your coaching practice if you were to begin coaching minors or vulnerable adults?**

## **Tri-partite Contracts**

‘The essence of a contract is not the form it takes, but the mutual agreement of the parties involved.’

**Henry David Thoreau**

How do we adapt our coaching where a third-party might be involved? Is there anything we should be aware of if we are being paid by a company to coach their employees? How can we cater for such scenarios? If we decide to coach within organisations or are an in-house coach within an organisation, then we will find ourselves in what is known as a tri-partite contract. In this chapter, we will dive into tri-partite contracts and how we must approach them from an ethical perspective.

### **17.1 What is a Tri-Partite Contract?**

A tri-partite contract (also known as a tri-partite agreement) is a contract involving three parties who are each bound by the terms and conditions laid out in the agreement. In this type of contract, each party has certain rights and obligations that are agreed upon collectively. Tri-partite contracts can be common in coaching and take various shapes and forms. Examples of where we might find ourselves in a Tri-partite contract include:

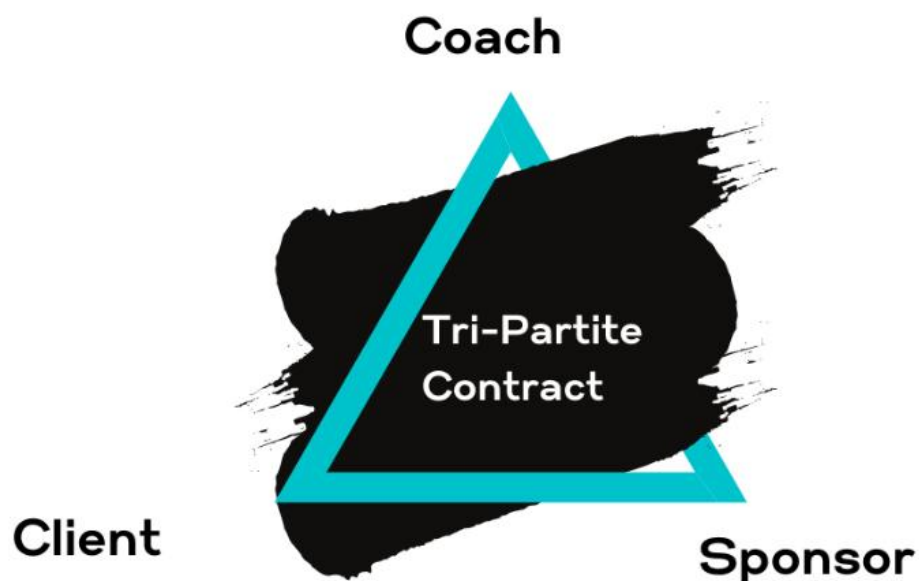
1. A manager of a business paying for coaching for an employee.
2. A parent or guardian paying for coaching for their child.

Here, the manager or the parent/guardian becomes the sponsor, with the employee or child becoming our client. Whenever we find ourselves in a tri-partite contract, we must consider the following:

1. The level of involvement of the sponsor
2. Sponsor-led desires
3. Confidentiality
4. Reporting of progress

We will explore each of these four elements in detail below.

**Figure 9: A Tri-Partite Contract**



## 17.2 The Level of Involvement of the Sponsor

At the outset of the tri-partite contract it is important to get a full understanding of the sponsor's role within the contract. This will help us avoid any difficult situations that may present themselves

during the coaching relationship. Some important questions we can ask ourselves with regards to this are:

- Is the sponsor going to be attending the sessions, or some of the sessions?
- How engaged is the sponsor going to be with the coaching?
- Are we contracting to any meetings/sessions with the sponsor?

We must understand if the sponsor is just paying for the coaching and playing a remote role in the relationship or if they are looking to be actively involved with the progress of the client. Each scenario impacts the dynamics of the coaching relationship and our responsibilities as a coach.

Where a sponsor wishes to be actively involved in the coaching, we must set out all the expectations and the role of each party in the coaching within a written contract, ensuring that both ourselves and the sponsor understand their role within the contract.

### **17.3 Sponsor-Led Requirements**

In addition to the level of involvement, we must also discuss what the sponsor is hoping the client will achieve from the coaching. Here are some questions to consider:

- What benefits or outcomes is the sponsor hoping the client will receive from our coaching?
- What is the sponsor's vested interest in the coaching contract?
- When does the sponsor expect to see results from the coaching?
- What happens if the sponsor's expectations are not met?

It is important to discuss the above with sponsor (preferably with the client present) so we can understand the sponsor's needs. Ultimately, we are trying to capture all expectations to avoid any difficult conversations or challenging situations during the contract when unspoken expectations might present themselves.

## **17.4 Confidentiality**

Even though the sponsor is paying for the coaching, we still hold a duty of confidentiality to the client. It is therefore important for us to ensure the sponsor is fully aware of our duty and that we cannot share any information with the sponsor without the client's consent. Here are some questions to consider in respect of this aspect:

- What information can I share with the sponsor?
- How will consent be collected from the client?
- When might I be required to break confidentiality?

Having an open and honest conversation about this with the client present will help reassure the client that they can be open within our coaching space, and that they do not have to worry about sensitive information being shared with the sponsor. It also sets boundaries with the sponsor by highlighting what can and cannot be shared. It is always best practice to define the extent of confidentiality at the outset.

With regards to breaking confidentiality, we hold the same level of responsibility as with any other client and can only break our duty of confidentiality in a tri-partite contract where we believe there is an imminent risk of harm to self or others.

## 17.5 Progress Reporting

Some sponsors may wish for us to report the progress of the client on an agreed frequency. It is therefore important for us to define the frequency of progress-reporting and the method by which progress will be reported to the sponsor. When discussing progress we can consider the following questions:

- In what format will we provide progress updates?
- At what frequency?
- How do we measure progress in the coaching contract?
- What happens if the client is not satisfied with the progress that is being made?

Again, it is important for us to define these expectations and set boundaries around progress-reporting to avoid any surprises down the line. At all times we must observe our duty of confidentiality.

Tri-partite contracts can be tricky as we are essentially coaching the client, but the sponsor is our customer. We can often find ourselves in situations where the client does not want the coaching but is attending because they have been asked to by their manager. Breaking this barrier to coaching takes time but the key is building trust and confidence with the client, explaining we are there to provide a service to them and that we always have their best interests in mind. Having a clear contract with established boundaries and roles is the start to illustrating this and building up the credibility we need to help the client succeed.

## 17.6 Theory into Practice

In this chapter we have explored important factors to consider when entering a tri-partite contract.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

- ✍ **What checklist would you draft before entering a tri-partite contract with a client and a sponsor?**

## **Fair and Transparent Pricing**

‘Price is what you pay. Value is what you get.’

### **Warren Buffet**

How much do I charge for my coaching services? What is the average cost for a coach? What would be a good business model? An often-overlooked element of coaching ethics is pricing. The codes of conduct within the profession do not give any guidance as to what we should or shouldn't charge for coaching services, and leave us with slight commentary around transparent pricing. Within the organisation I run, Coaching Minds, our mission is to make coaching affordable and accessible around the globe. As part of this mission, we researched and studied pricing across the profession and reached a conclusion that pricing appears to be a barrier to entry within our profession. Those who could benefit from coaching often can't afford a coach because of the high prices. In this chapter we will discuss some of the elements around pricing in coaching and indicators of what a fair charge might look like for our services.

### **18.1 Our Fair Pricing Guidance Note**

As the coaching profession continues to grow, it is crucial for us to adopt ethical pricing practices that create trust and remove barriers to our service. Transparent and fair pricing is not only important for maintaining our client relationships, but it also supports our profession as a whole. At Coaching Minds, we recognise the significance of fair pricing and encourage all

coaches to implement these ethical principles into their practice. Our guidance in this chapter and in our 'Fair Pricing Guidance Note' annexed below is designed to help coaches with the complexities of pricing their services ethically, ensuring fairness and transparency.

## **18.2 What Are Transparent Costs?**

Transparent pricing involves providing clear and easily understandable information about the costs associated with our coaching services. Transparency ensures that our clients know exactly what they are paying for, including our sessions and any additional services or charges that may arise during the coaching process. Transparency helps avoid confusion and puts our clients at ease.

We should therefore make our pricing structure transparent and accessible. This means listing our fees for coaching sessions, additional services and any other potential expenses in a way that clients can easily access, whether it's on a website, in promotional materials or during our discovery sessions (initial meetings with clients). We should also be prepared to answer any questions about our pricing and ensure there is no ambiguity regarding costs.

An example of transparent costs could be where we charge £40 for a one-hour session with this fee clearly stated on our website, along with any additional charges for services, such as follow-up materials or extended sessions. We state whether VAT is included in the price (or excluded) and confirm that there are no hidden fees. We then do not later charge the client for anything we have not previously discussed. In this way we are complying with the rules around fair pricing.

## **18.3 What Are Hidden Fees?**

Hidden fees are charges that are not disclosed up front but which may appear unexpectedly on a client's bill or invoice. These unexpected fees undermine transparency and can damage trust with our clients. It is important for us to avoid hidden fees so as to ensure that our clients feel confident in the services they are receiving and the costs associated with them.

To align ourselves ethically with fair pricing, we must communicate all potential fees up-front, including administrative fees, cancellation fees and charges for optional services. We should clearly stipulate all of these in our written contract. A transparent breakdown of costs should be readily available to clients upon request, and any new fees should not be introduced without prior notification and agreement.

An example of compliance with this guidance could be where we inform clients of a £20 cancellation fee for sessions cancelled within 24 hours of the session. This policy is clearly stated in the coaching agreement before any sessions take place; we highlight it to them in our initial meeting and we ensure that they are aware of the fee well in advance. If we do not make the client aware of this fee and then attempt to charge them for a cancellation, this will result in an unethical attempt to charge a hidden fee.

## **18.4 What Is Price Discrimination?**

Price discrimination refers to the practice of charging different prices for similar services based on various factors, such as a client's income or perceived ability to pay. Whilst it is not entirely unethical, price discrimination can be problematic if it is based on unfair or discriminatory practices. Coaches must ensure that any price variations are justified and transparent, with a strong reason behind them. This does not include any changes to

pricing for all at a future date, provided we reserve the right to change our pricing, and we make our clients aware of the change.

To ensure our variation in pricing is just, we may choose to offer different prices based on factors such as a client's financial situation. However, it could be viewed as price discrimination if the variation of price is based on protected characteristics, such as race, gender or disability. We should also ensure that we can clearly justify any differences in pricing, and we should be prepared to explain these decisions if questioned.

We are able to adjust our pricing model, including offering discounts or promotional rates, to meet changing market demands or business needs for temporary periods, as long as we do not exclude certain people from accessing our promotions and discounts.

An example of fair pricing with varied costs would be where we offer discounted rates for students. In such a scenario it would be useful to also define what we mean by 'student' in our terms and conditions.

## **18.5 What Is Pricing to Competency?**

Pricing to competency involves adjusting our fees based on our level of experience, expertise and qualifications. If we have more training or a proven track record, we may choose to charge higher fees, reflecting the added value we bring to our clients. However, we must ensure that our prices are aligned with our actual competencies and the outcomes we are able to deliver.

When setting prices, we should consider our qualifications, experience and client testimonials. We must ensure that our fees reflect our actual ability to help clients achieve results. Overpricing based on credentials alone is unethical, particularly

if we cannot demonstrate our effectiveness or deliver on the promises made. For example, if we are a newly certified coach, we should offer services at a lower price while building our reputation. As we gain more experience and positive client feedback, we can increase our fees to reflect our growing expertise. Here we are showing compliance with pricing competency and the Fair Pricing Guidance Note.

## **18.6 Why Should We Provide Refunds?**

Offering refunds is an important ethical practice that provides clients with recourse if they are dissatisfied with the services provided, or if unforeseen circumstances prevent them from continuing with the coaching. A clear and fair refund policy demonstrates our commitment to client satisfaction and reinforces trust.

To align with fair pricing guidance, we should clearly outline our refund policies before services begin, ensuring clients understand the circumstances under which a refund might be issued. Policies should address such situations as dissatisfaction with a session, illness or emergencies. Refunds should be processed promptly and professionally to maintain positive client relationships.

An example of a fair refund policy could be where we offer a full refund for the first session if the client is dissatisfied. Our policy may also state that no refunds will be offered after subsequent sessions, except in cases of extenuating circumstances, such as illness or emergencies. It would also be advisable to include in our refund policy a statement around when refunds will be issued if it is proven we have not delivered our coaching service to the standards we have adopted in our chosen ethical code.

## 18.7 Seven Guidance Points for Pricing

To help us align our coaching practice with fair pricing, we have developed a seven-point checklist. It might be a useful exercise to walk through these seven points and capture any actions we can take to tailor our service to fair pricing.

- 1. Fee Structure Clarity:** We should clearly define our fee structure, including whether we charge per session, hourly or based on a package deal. Any payment terms, such as deposits or instalment plans, should also be specified.
- 2. Scope of Services:** The scope of services covered by our fees should be clearly defined, including session duration, frequency and any additional resources provided outside of sessions.
- 3. Revision of Fees:** We must notify clients of any changes in pricing or services in a timely manner. Adequate notice should be provided to allow clients to adjust to the new terms.
- 4. Compare Pricing:** It would be useful for us to conduct a comparative pricing analysis to ensure that our fees align with industry standards and are competitive within the market.
- 5. Value-Based Pricing:** We should consider adopting value-based pricing, where fees reflect the perceived value of our coaching services rather than just time spent with clients.
- 6. Accessibility:** We should explore ways to make our services accessible to clients from different socio-economic backgrounds, such as offering sliding-scale fees or pro bono services for underserved communities. We will discuss more about pro-bono work in the following chapter.


**7. Client Feedback:** We should regularly seek feedback from clients about our pricing and their overall satisfaction so that we can refine our pricing, strategies and value where necessary.

By following these ethical pricing guidelines, we can build trust with our clients, ensure fair practice, and contribute to the overall professionalism and integrity of the coaching industry.

## **18.8 Theory into Practice**

In this chapter we have explored the importance of fair pricing and transparent costs for our coaching practice.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

 **What adjustments do you need to make to your coaching practice to ensure you align with the guidance on fair pricing?**

## **Social Responsibility in Coaching**

‘Live your life in such a way that you'll be remembered for your kindness, compassion, fairness, character, benevolence, and [as] a force for good who had much respect for life, in general.’

### **Germany Kent**

How might I make a greater impact with my coaching? Should I offer free coaching sessions? What projects should I get involved in? Whether we are conscious of it or not, all coaches have a duty to act in ways that benefit society. We can call this ‘social responsibility’. The impact we make by exercising our social responsibility can be delivered through various initiatives, such as becoming involved with non-profit organisations, offering a certain number of free coaching sessions or working to tackle global issues, such as climate change. In this chapter we discuss the concept of social responsibility and how we can make a social impact as a professional and ethical coach.

### **19.1 What is Social Responsibility?**

Social responsibility is about considering the impact we have on society. What this essentially means is thinking beyond our personal needs and considering how our actions impact others and the world around us. For instance, when we recycle, volunteer our coaching hours

or support ethical businesses, we're practicing social responsibility.

Social responsibility is not an ethical obligation, but implementing social responsibility practice into our coaching is an excellent way to demonstrate our commitment to a professional practice. It demonstrates our wider values, goals and vision and how we ultimately want to impact the world.

## **19.2 Making a Social Impact**

Making a social impact through our coaching practice can be achieved in a number of ways. By identifying the core values of our coaching and what societal or global challenges we would like to tackle, we can exercise our social responsibility and make an impact.

Wherever we are on our coaching journey, it is never too early or too late to think about the impact we want to make on the wider society. By adopting social responsibility thinking into our practice, we will build more trust with the public and with our clients. Below you will find six easy ways to exercise our social responsibility through our coaching business:

1. Set wider goals that aim to make a positive impact on society. How do you want to make a difference? What global issues are you passionate about?
2. Get involved in collaborative projects that are focused on social impact. Who do you know who is working on projects? How might you find social impact projects?

3. Educate the general public on coaching and the benefits of it. What workshops could you put on to support the general public? How can you increase awareness of the impact coaching can have on people?
4. Take on one or two clients pro-bono who need coaching but may not be able to afford it. How do you offer free or discounted services to those less fortunate? Who might benefit the most from your coaching?
5. Share and implement ideas on how we can all play a role in helping to shape society. How might you design your own project? What initiatives could you start?
6. Attend events with a focus around social responsibility or social impact events. Where could you find such events? What types of events would you be interested in and would provide the most value?

Making an impact on society rewards us in many ways. It will open us to a wider network and more connections, it will provide us with a sense of satisfaction, and it will bring more opportunities for us to learn and grow. The above points are simple actions we can take. If we wish, we can dive much deeper into social responsibility and actively involve ourselves in projects, leading and also advocating the benefits whilst providing solutions to global issues.

### **19.3 Eco-Coaching and Environmental Sustainability**

Making a social impact can take on many forms. One way in which we can begin to implement social responsibility into our

coaching practice is by exploring our part in helping tackle global environmental challenges.

As the global community increasingly focuses on addressing climate change and promoting sustainable practices, the coaching profession also has the opportunity to contribute to environmental sustainability. The relatively recent concept of 'eco-coaching' incorporates environmental awareness and sustainability into the coaching process. It encourages both us and our clients to consider the ecological impacts of our decisions and actions.

Peter Hawkins is a prominent figure in the field of eco-coaching. As a global thought leader in systemic coaching, executive teams and board development, he has been instrumental in integrating ecological and systemic thinking into coaching practices. Through his work, Peter emphasises the importance of moving from an egocentric to an eco-centric approach in coaching, encouraging us to consider the broader ecological systems in which we operate.

He has contributed significantly to the development of eco-systemic coaching, which combines awareness of self, team, organisation and ecosystem. This approach aims to create sustainable and future-fit coaching practices that make a positive contribution to the ecological and social challenges of our time.

It is worth noting that Peter's work has also given rise to criticism on the basis that, by introducing the subject of ecosystems and environmental sustainability into our coaching sessions, we are moving away from a client-led session to a coach-led session. The concept of coaching is to allow clients to set the agenda. When incorporating such thinking into our practice we must do so in a way that is not leading. This can be achieved by observing where opportunities might arise during our coaching sessions for us to ask questions related to ecological and environmental factors. Essentially eco-coaching begins with coaches becoming

‘eco-conscious’ and developing an intuition to ask questions at the appropriate times.

Without going into too much depth, it is important for us to understand that we are uniquely positioned to influence and inspire change, not just on an individual level with our clients but also on a broader societal scale. Through our work, we can encourage other coaches and clients to adopt sustainable practices in their personal and professional lives, whether by reducing their carbon footprint, supporting green initiatives or aligning business strategies with environmental goals. However, we must remember that it starts with us. We must first adopt our own sustainable practice.

So, how do we adopt a sustainable practice? We can begin to embed sustainability into our practice by modelling eco-friendly behaviours, such as reducing paper usage, adopting virtual coaching sessions to minimize travel-related emissions, and supporting green office initiatives. Here are a few ideas we encourage all coaches to begin with:

- Make all documents, tools, handouts and exercise packs that we use in our coaching editable online to avoid printing.
- Ensure any branded products are consciously made with our planet in mind. Partner with companies that use organic materials and renewable energy to produce items such as hoodies, t-shirts and other merchandise or clothing.
- Hold ‘environment’ as an important value in our practice and a factor for us to consider when entering into partnerships with other organisations, refusing to partner with any organisations that could be seen to be affecting the environment negatively.
- Consciously encourage others within the coaching profession to think about the impact they have on the

environment and the influence they can have on others through their coaching practice.

- Host events or co-host events that actively promote action towards saving our planet.
- Encourage the use of online activities and look at innovative ways to perform business digitally. While being mindful that electronic data and processes use significant amounts of energy, and that datacentres have a significant environmental footprint.
- Reduce the use of physical notebooks and journals.
- Adopt e-signature software and ensure all contracts are e-signed and documented rather than being signed printouts.
- Become conscious of our carbon footprint and look at ways to reduce it.
- Join the SME Climate hub and engage.

In addition to the above, we can develop programmes that specifically address environmental challenges, such as leadership training focused on corporate sustainability or workshops on developing eco-conscious habits. Incorporating environmental sustainability into our coaching is becoming more than an optional add-on; it is fast becoming an ethical requirement. The coaching profession as a whole has a responsibility to address pressing global challenges, including climate change and ecological degradation. It all begins with us.

## 19.4 Pro-bono Coaching

One of the benefits of our Certification Programme at Coaching Minds, and which makes us unique, is the opportunity for our coaches to find clients through our Coach Centre. At Coaching Minds, we are on a mission to make coaching accessible and affordable around the globe. One of the ways in which we make this happen is through our Online Coach Centre. This gives anyone around the world access to coaching, for free. No matter where they come from or what they are going through, they can make an application through Coaching Minds and access a coach.

The initiative creates a win-win situation where our coaches in training gain clients as part of their accreditation hours and at the same time make a social impact by offering their services for free. Pro-bono coaching is another way in which we can make a social impact, and we encourage our coaches to continue this offer for one or two clients even after accreditation.

Providing pro-bono coaching to those who may not be able to afford it reflects a commitment to social responsibility and ethical practice and helps to bridge gaps in accessibility. By acting generously, we demonstrate that our coaching practice is not solely a business for profit but also a way in which we make a positive societal impact. Pro-bono work enables us to connect with a broader range of clients, providing us with more experience and understanding of diverse challenges.

Ultimately, offering pro-bono services aligns with the values of fairness and inclusivity (which we have covered in this book), reinforcing the potential for providing coaching to all, regardless of their financial circumstances and ultimately helping to make coaching accessible and affordable around the globe.

## 19.5 Theory into Practice

In this chapter, we have explored how we might begin to exercise our social responsibility to make a wider impact with our coaching practice.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

- ✍ **What initiatives or actions can you take to exercise your social responsibility? What is important for you with regards to serving others?**

## **Artificial Intelligence and Coaching Ethics**

‘Our future success hinges on our ability to embrace AI and use it for good.’

**Brad Smith**

Will Artificial Intelligence replace coaches? How can we use Artificial Intelligence in coaching? Are there any rules and regulations around how we use Artificial Intelligence? Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly having an impact on the world and the coaching profession is no exception. This chapter is not about how we can use AI in coaching (new tools are being released daily and so this book would quickly become outdated), but about the ethical considerations around the use of AI that we must be aware of if we choose to use AI in our coaching.

### **20.1 What is Artificial Intelligence?**

Artificial intelligence has been around since the 1950s, but in the 2020s has experienced an explosion in popularity. It became available to the public via OpenAI in 2016 and since then its use has exploded across many industries thanks to how accessible and user-friendly it has become.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is broadly defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as:

**‘The capacity of computers or other machines to exhibit or simulate intelligent behaviour; the field of study concerned**

**with this. In later use also: software used to perform tasks or produce output previously thought to require human intelligence, esp. by using machine learning to extrapolate from large collections of data.'**

In a nutshell it is a set of machines or software that are capable of performing human tasks. Within the coaching profession there are many tools we can use to assist with our interactions, administration and service of our business. We can use AI to communicate with potential clients, track and produce session notes and automate many business tasks, such as content creation, data analytics and marketing.

It is important to note that, if we choose to adopt AI into our business, we must do so in a way that is ethically sound. The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) have published some guidance for coaches using AI and technology in their business, which you can find reference to in the additional reading section of this book. If you plan to use AI in your coaching practice, it would be beneficial to put aside some time to read the publication.

## **20.2 Key Ethical Considerations**

The use of AI in coaching arrives with a number of key ethical considerations we must be aware of. These include concerns around data privacy and intellectual property, algorithms and data accuracy, and maintaining human connection and accountability.

Data privacy and security have become a major concern with the advent of AI. By using AI, we run a greater risk of breaching our duty of confidentiality and data protection laws. In order to mitigate these risks, we must prioritise the confidentiality of client information. To function effectively, AI systems often require large

amounts of data, raising concerns about how this data is stored, shared and protected. We should ensure that any AI tools we use comply with data protection laws. A key rule of thumb is to never put personal data into an AI system.

For example, Zoom offers an AI tool that records what is being shared in the session and can also capture the session in the form of meeting notes which we may then share with our clients. This saves time writing up notes after the session and allows us to give our clients our full attention without needing to take notes during the session. Whilst this is a great tool, as a professional and ethical coach we should always ask for explicit consent from clients before turning on this AI functionality and we must be conscious of how Zoom stores that information. For best practice, it is recommended to delete the notes from Zoom once they have been downloaded and sent to the client. We do not want to keep sensitive information on systems any longer than necessary.

Algorithms and data accuracy also create cause for concern in the ethical realm. Algorithms run the risk of holding biases, but they are only as unbiased as the data they are trained on. For example, if an AI tool relies on datasets that reflect societal prejudices, there is a risk that it will amplify those biases. To help us understand this a little better, AI is only as accurate as the data entered into it. If that data is inaccurate, discriminatory or fake, then the outputs will be inaccurate, discriminatory and fake. As a coach with ethics at the heart of our practice, we should critically evaluate the AI tools we plan to use before adopting them into our practice, questioning the sources, accuracy and diversity of the data.

A further risk is the potential loss of human connection through the use of AI. While AI can assist coaching, it cannot replace the understanding and empathy that we bring to our work. We should use AI as a supportive tool rather than a substitute for our coaching, ensuring that the human connection remains at the

core of the coaching relationship. We must never use AI to replace our services.

A final ethical consideration is the risk to our competence and accountability. Whilst AI can be useful to assist our business, we must remain accountable for the outcomes of our sessions, even when AI tools are involved. Any mistakes an AI tool makes will affect our competency. Avoiding this requires a thorough understanding of the technology we use and a commitment to ongoing education around AI.

### **20.3 Building an AI Ethical Coaching Practice**

In order to continue to build an ethical coaching practice, there are certain actions we should take around the use of AI to ensure compliance. Below are four key ways to build an AI ethical coaching practice.

The first action is to always be transparent in our use of AI and technology. It is important that we inform clients about what tools we are using in our coaching practice, how they work and their potential limitations, giving clients the choice to consent or refuse.

The second action is to always offer an AI tool to our coaches before using it. As with any coaching tool, we must never force them on clients. So, if we want to work with ChatGPT to find ideas for a client's goal, offer it first. If we wish to use a specific AI tool to help with a client's productivity, offer it. The choice of the use of AI must always be that of the clients.

The third action to note is the need for continuous professional development around the use of AI and technology. We should always stay informed about advancements in AI technology and its ethical implications. Engaging in professional development

ensures that we continue to responsibly integrate AI into our practices.

Finally, the last action for us to note is to become an advocate for active collaboration. Take the lead and seek collaboration with other coaches, AI developers and ethics experts to create tools that align with the values of our profession. With first-hand experience, we can provide valuable insights into the practical applications of AI, helping developers design tools that address the needs of our profession and improve tools for the benefits of our clients.

## **20.4 The Future of AI in Coaching**

As AI continues to evolve, its role in coaching will likely expand and transform our profession in profound ways. This evolution presents an opportunity for us to redefine our practice, integrating AI-driven tools to deliver more personalised, efficient and impactful experiences. From advanced data analytics that provide actionable insights to automated scheduling systems that save us time, AI continues to offer tools that can streamline our business and improve the quality of our client engagement.

However, as these technologies become more embedded into coaching, the importance of maintaining ethical standards grows. We must stay conscious of challenges around client data privacy, algorithms and human-centric connections in an increasingly digital environment. By proactively engaging with the ethical considerations discussed above, we can continue to use AI responsibly.


In embracing this proactive approach to ethics, we have the chance to position AI for the greater good, aligning with the core values of our profession. By doing so, we will not only enhance the credibility and integrity of our work but also set a standard for

how technology can be used to promote reliable, equitable and inclusive coaching across our industry. Ultimately, we demonstrate our adherence to the Professional Code of Conduct by the responsible way we use AI.

## **20.5 Theory into Practice**

In this chapter, we have explored the ethical considerations we must take when using Artificial Intelligence in our coaching practice.

To integrate these concepts into your own approach, take a moment to consider the question below:

-  What measures will you take in your coaching practice to mitigate the risks associated with AI?**

## **Additional Reading**

For those who are interested in learning more, here is an additional recommended reading list:

### Books

- 1. Conversations on Ethics** - Alex Voorhoeve
- 2. Ethical Dilemmas in Coaching Today** - Maria Biquet (EMCC)
- 3. Understanding Organisational Behaviour** – Chris Argyris
- 4. Contracts in Counselling & Psychotherapy** – Charlotte Sills

### Guidance Documents

- 1. EMCC Global Code of Ethics** – The European Mentoring & Coaching Council
- 2. Professional Code of Conduct** – Coaching Minds
- 3. Fair Pricing Guidance Note** – Coaching Minds
- 4. Ethics Guidance for Providers of Coaching, Mentoring and Supervision Using Technology and AI** - The European Mentoring & Coaching Council

Appendices

## **Annex A: Professional Code of Conduct**

Gain free access to our full Professional Code of Conduct by joining our hub below.



**The CM Hub**

Appendices

## **Annex B: Fair Pricing Guidance Note**

Gain free access to our full Fair Pricing Guidance Note by joining our hub below.



**The CM Hub**

## **Annex C: Practice Ethics Exam**

Test your knowledge of ethics below with one of our previous exams. The answers follow the ten questions below. At Coaching Minds, we set the pass rate at 80%.

### **Question 1**

**Which of the following is permitted under our Duty of Confidentiality?**

- A) A client informs you that they are going to assault their colleague because of a sustained period of bullying in the workplace. You decide to contact the local police.
- B) A client informs you that a few years ago they used to steal from their local shop on a daily basis. They have been struggling. You decide to contact the local police.
- C) A client discusses something outside of your area of competence and you are unsure what to do. You decide to discuss this with another coach at Coaching Minds sharing the name of your client.
- D) A client tells you that they used to have suicidal thoughts, but these are now under control. You decide to contact the local authorities and refer the client to a therapist.

## **Question 2**

**Which of the below is not a Principle of the Coaching Minds Professional Code of Conduct?**

- A) Maintaining Trust in the Provision of Coaching Services
- B) Acting with Integrity
- C) Acting with our Duty of Confidentiality
- D) Acting in the Best Interests of Each Client

## **Question 3**

**Outcome: 'You do not exploit a client or seek to gain any inappropriate financial or non-financial advantage from the relationship' applies to which competency?**

- A) Conflicts of Interest
- B) Exercising Client Care
- C) Exercising our Duty of Confidentiality
- D) Ensuring Excellent Practice

#### **Question 4**

**Where we identify a 'behavioural' psychological contract, we understand that our role is going to be more about which of the following?**

- A) Helping the client on a road to deeper self-discovery and awareness.
- B) Exploring options with the client for how they can achieve their goal.
- C) Acting as an accountability partner for our clients.
- D) Helping the client gain clarity on their goals.

#### **Question 5**

**When we talk about 'Acting in the Best Interests of Each Client' we mean...?**

- A) Always acting in good faith and doing our best for each of our clients and observing our obligations with regards to conflict of interest.
- B) Accurately and honestly representing our relevant professional qualifications and attributing ownership and credit of work, ideas and materials of others to the originator and not claim it as our own.

- C) Providing a proper standard of client care, including exercising competence, skill and diligence and taking into account the individual needs of each client.
- D) Ensuring that our business is well run for the benefit of our clients and understanding our business processes and the journey for our client through our services.

### **Question 6**

**Which of the following is NOT a legal obligation as a Coach?**

- A) Complying with our duty of confidentiality and having measures in place for data protection.
- B) Avoiding copyright infringements.
- C) Having a signed agreement with our clients.
- D) Accurately representing our coaching qualifications.

### **Question 7**

**Which of the following is NOT one of the protected characteristics under the UK Equality Act 2010?**

- A) Gender Reassignment
- B) Religion or Belief
- C) Neurodivergent Individuals
- D) Sexual Orientation

### **Question 8**

**Which of the following is NOT one of the 8 Key Elements for Professional Boundaries outlined for an ethical coaching practice?**

- A) A clear and client-friendly service
- B) Transparent and fair pricing
- C) Term of contract
- D) Availability for unlimited client contact

### **Question 9**

**What is the primary purpose of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) statement in a coaching practice?**

- A) To fulfil legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
- B) To demonstrate a commitment to fairness, respect and inclusion in coaching practices.
- C) To ensure clients agree to non-discrimination policies.
- D) To avoid having to address systemic barriers in coaching.

### **Question 10**

**What is the primary ethical consideration when integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into a coaching practice?**

- A) Ensuring AI tools are used to replace human interaction
- B) Gaining explicit consent from clients before collecting or analysing their data
- C) Prioritising the speed of AI tools over ethical guidelines
- D) Using AI tools exclusively for business growth without considering ethical implications

## **Answers**

1. A 2. C 3. A 4. C 5. A 6. C 7. C 8. D 9. B 10. B

## **Join Our Mission**

We are on a mission to make coaching affordable and accessible across the globe. If you have gained insight from this book and would like to explore coaching further, we invite you to join us on this mission and to become a Coaching Minds' coach today.

Simply scan the QR code below to get started.



**The CM Hub**

