



Christian Coaching Competencies

This work represents the alignment of the Christian Coaches Network International (CCNI) with professional coaching standards provided by the International Coach Federation (ICF). We agree that the mechanics of coaching are powerful in their implementation to create awareness and move a client toward their personal or professional goals. We have adopted the ICF definition of professional coaching while affirming that CCNI's premise and underlying belief system is distinctive. Further, we have adopted the ICF Code of Ethics, at this time, as a model of professional conduct.

While ICF and CCNI have much in common, we recognize a clear distinction in Christian coaching. As Christians who often coach Christians, we allow for the expression of faith to be manifested and to guide client relationships and resulting coaching conversations.

In Christianity, we shift from humanism to a reality based on God's presence and indwelling. In addition, CCNI is in agreement with the following Christian faith tenets:

- Communion with God is foundational and integral to every aspect of a Christian's life.
- God has a plan for our lives.
- Circumstances in life are often guided by the hand of God.
- Choices may have eternal consequences.
- Our faith places certain mandates and callings that should not be ignored.

We allow for the expression of these beliefs within the boundaries of the coaching conversation.

ICF Competency #1 - Demonstrates Ethical Practice

Understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards of coaching

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

Christian Coaching Application

Professional ethics compares the needs of the professional with the needs of the client and determines what is ethical or unethical. Ethics for the Christian transcends professional ethics to that of morality based on scripture. Therefore, what might be deemed ethical conduct in a professional sense may be unethical from a biblical perspective.

The Bible is replete with moral direction and guidance (2 Tim. 3:16-17), the foundation of which is primarily love for God and secondarily love for others (Matt. 22:37-40). Christians recognize that our responsibilities as professionals may have eternal consequences, and we should conduct business with an eternal perspective in mind (Eccl. 12:13).

Please refer to the [CCNI Code of Ethics](#) for specific guidelines.

In addition to the guidelines expressed by the ICF for this competency, the CCNI credentialed coach:

- a. Understands and follows all CCNI Ethical Guidelines.
- b. Understands and follows all ICF, or other credentialing agency guidelines when such credentials are held.
- c. Uses the appropriate code of ethics to solve dilemmas. When warranted, uses an ethical decision-making model to help guide decisions.

- d. Understands that a violation of the CCNI code of ethics is subject to review by the CCNI Ethics Review Board.

ICF Competency #2 - Embodies A Coaching Mindset

Develops and maintains a mindset that is open, curious, flexible and client-centered

1. Acknowledges that clients are responsible for their own choices
2. Engages in ongoing learning and development as a coach
3. Develops an ongoing reflective practice to enhance one's coaching
4. Remains aware of and open to the influence of context and culture on self and others
5. Uses awareness of self and one's intuition to benefit clients
6. Develops and maintains the ability to regulate one's emotions
7. Mentally and emotionally prepares for sessions
8. Seeks help from outside sources when necessary

Christian Coaching Application

This competency embraces the essence of what it means to be a coach. CCNI coaches maintain a mindset of openness, curiosity, flexibility, and client-centeredness. Coaches are open to what God is doing in their own lives, is curious to learn what the Holy Spirit is teaching, and is flexible in moving in the way God is leading. The Christian coach takes responsibility for their own spiritual development - seeking to always be growing and maturing in their faith. The Christian coach is committed to the good of their clients and trusts God to bring that about. The coach commits to pray for the clients in preparation for each session and for their good throughout the coaching relationship.

In addition to the guidelines expressed by the ICF for this competency, the CCNI credentialed coach:

- a. Is respectful of the client's right not to have spiritual references incorporated into the coaching session. When included, however, the coach offers to understand the client's perspective of what God is doing in the client's life in order to support that work.
- b. Stays receptive and inquisitive instead of reverting to forms of ministry, preaching, mentoring, pastoring, advising or consulting.
- c. Does not allow genuine concern for client to translate into proselytizing (preaching).

- d. Shows up in a completely collaborative way, never as competitors, convincers, or cajolers; there is comfortable differing with clients on core matters of faith and belief, resisting the pull to agree as well as the pull to express disagreement.
- e. Maintains a positive and inquisitive view and remains hopeful in the client's potential in Christ.
- f. Does not leverage questions to lead the client toward the coach's view of what God wants for them.
- g. Trusts God's providence and timing and recognizes that it is God's purview to convict, not the coach's.
- h. Bases questions on what is heard from the client and from the Holy Spirit.

ICF Competency #3 - Establishes and Maintains Agreements

Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans and goals. Establishes agreements for the overall coaching engagement as well as those for each coaching session.

1. Explains what coaching is and is not and describes the process to the client and relevant stakeholders
2. Reaches agreement about what is and is not appropriate in the relationship, what is and is not being offered, and the responsibilities of the client and relevant stakeholders
3. Reaches agreement about the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship such as logistics, fees, scheduling, duration, termination, confidentiality and inclusion of others
4. Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to establish an overall coaching plan and goals
5. Partners with the client to determine client-coach compatibility
6. Partners with the client to identify or reconfirm what they want to accomplish in the session
7. Partners with the client to define what the client believes they need to address or resolve to achieve what they want to accomplish in the session
8. Partners with the client to define or reconfirm measures of success for what the client wants to accomplish in the coaching engagement or individual session
9. Partners with the client to manage the time and focus of the session
10. Continues coaching in the direction of the client's desired outcome unless the client indicates otherwise
11. Partners with the client to end the coaching relationship in a way that honors the experience

Christian Coaching Application

The emphasis of this competency is a clearly articulated agreement that performs two primary functions: It establishes the boundaries and guides the expectations of the coaching relationship as a whole. It also sets the framework for each coaching conversation.

From a biblical perspective, an agreement between two parties has been historically referred to as a covenant during which God was solemnly called upon to witness the transaction (Gen. 31:50). While the emphasis on God's presence as a witness has diminished, the spirit of "covenant" remains, upholding the integrity of our pledge to act in the best interest of our client.

Therefore, as we enter into agreement with clients, we pay careful attention to the needs and expectations of the client, give full disclosure of our faith, and explore the client's assumptions or concerns. At the same time, we assess our professional ability and internal value system and how these might support or hinder the client relationship. The ultimate goal for the coach is to fully stand for our clients in a way that supports their growth without compromising the tenets of our faith (Prov. 22:29; 22:21).

In addition to the guidelines expressed by the ICF for this competency, the CCNI credentialed coach:

- a. Establishes the "rules of engagement" for the coaching relationship addressing matters of faith as they relate to the overall coaching agreement as well as to the individual coaching sessions.
- b. Is comfortable referencing the client's relationship to God and to his call and plan for the client.
- c. Contracts with client to choose if, when, and how they would like to incorporate prayer into the session.
- d. Requests permission of client to explore possible connections between topics and faith elements that can be considered during coaching conversation.

Possible Questions

- How does faith play a role in your life? What role does it not play?
- Who in your life warns you of pitfalls and places of growth in Christian practice?
- What areas of spiritual growth are you most interested in?
- In what way do you want to be held accountable to yourself and your Christian walk? ☒
Give me an idea of how you want me to support you in areas of faith?

- What faith elements might be important to consider in connection with this session's topic focus?

ICF Competency #4 - Cultivates Trust and Safety

Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

1. Seeks to understand the client within their context which may include their identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs
2. Demonstrates respect for the client's identity, perceptions, style and language and adapts one's coaching to the client
3. Acknowledges and respects the client's unique talents, insights and work in the coaching process
4. Shows support, empathy and concern for the client
5. Acknowledges and supports the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs and suggestions
6. Demonstrates openness and transparency as a way to display vulnerability and build trust with the client

Christian Coaching Application

The emphasis of this competency is the coach's ability to create an atmosphere of trust that will enable the client to explore session topics, focuses and goals without judgment. Undergirding this competency is the assumption that the client has the capacity to discover and reach their potential provided they have been offered a safe environment. The term "unconditional positive regard" supports this notion. Unconditional positive regard is the total acceptance of another and is a prerequisite to establishing the trusting environment for the client.

Christian coaches offer a supportive environment that fosters a deep-abiding trust, but it is not assumed that the client will reach full potential without God's influence. Trust and safety are communicated when the coach fully respects the client's journey and the pace at which God is working with them.

Our efforts in providing a trusting and supportive environment model God's interest and care. Jesus invested considerable attention on the individual. The Holy Spirit is portrayed as "one who comes alongside" for the purpose of encouragement and instruction (John 14:6; Acts 4:31). The attributes necessary to foster trust are realized in the full expressions of the attributes of faith, hope and love (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

Not only do we provide a trusting relationship in which the client can explore without judgment, but we also place a high level of trust in God and invite Him into the coaching

conversation. The coach realizes that God is involved in the coaching process and is standing for both the client and the coach.

In addition to the guidelines expressed by the ICF for this competency, the CCNI credentialed coach:

- a. Honors each person as a unique creation of God, with a specific calling and gifts.
- b. Communicates trust and safety by fully respecting the client's journey and the pace at which God is working with them.
- c. Provides an atmosphere where the client can explore delicate issues without judgment from the coach.
- d. Respects the client's doctrinal perspectives.
- e. Respects the client's understanding of scripture and level of spiritual maturity.
- f. Respects the client's right to be coached without a spiritual reference.
- g. Respects the client's right not to honor their faith.
- h. Recognizes that both the coach and client are fallen persons and in a process of sanctification.

ICF Competency #5 - Maintains Presence

Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident.

1. Remains focused, observant, empathetic and responsive to the client
2. Demonstrates curiosity during the coaching process
3. Manages one's emotions to stay present with the client
4. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong client emotions during the coaching process
5. Is comfortable working in a space of not knowing
6. Creates or allows space for silence, pause or reflection

Christian Coaching Application

The ability to be fully present—heart, mind and body—with the client is known as the skill of presence. Many coaches view mastery of coaching presence as the hallmark of an excellent coach. The coach provides cues—through their use of tone, pace, openness, flexibility,

unbiased inquisitiveness, and reflective comments—which convey that the coach is fully present *with* the client and the client is an important priority who is safe from judgment.

A biblically definitive example of presence was modeled by Jesus as he was traveling to heal a dying girl. Through the pandemonium of the crowd and the urgency of the moment, Jesus was able to separate himself and be fully present—heart, mind and body—with a sick outcast who had interrupted his journey. He displayed no judgment. There was no rush in his voice, no sense of irritation, no divided attention. Everything faded except his deep interest in what was occurring in the outcast’s life (Luke 8:40-48).

By being fully present with her, Jesus conveyed two truths: she was important, and she was safe from judgment. He highly regarded the *current state* and *future being* of the woman as equally important as the competing priorities. It is with this same spirit of “high regard” and “deep interest” that we as coaches become fully present with our clients.

In addition to the guidelines expressed by the ICF for this competency, the CCNI credentialed coach:

- a. Imitates God’s incarnational presence; as God is with us, we are fully and powerfully present with our clients.
- b. Places confidence in God’s goodness and provision.
- c. Believes the very best for the client and has confidence that God’s plan is good.
- d. Couples intuition with reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- e. Expresses true Christian humility by remaining in a posture of not being in control or trying to control the client, the conversation, or the outcomes.
- f. Is open to not knowing everything and becomes sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s inspiration that could shape a question, observation, direct communication or designing actions.

ICF Competency #6 - Listens Actively

Focuses on what the client is and is not saying to fully understand what is being communicated in the context of the client systems and to support client self-expression.

1. Considers the client’s context, identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs to enhance understanding of what the client is communicating

2. Reflects or summarizes what the client communicated to ensure clarity and understanding
3. Recognizes and inquires when there is more to what the client is communicating
4. Notices, acknowledges and explores the client's emotions, energy shifts, non-verbal cues or other behaviors
5. Integrates the client's words, tone of voice and body language to determine the full meaning of what is being communicated
6. Notices trends in the client's behaviors and emotions across sessions to discern themes and patterns

Christian Coaching Application

Active listening has two components: listening and responding reflectively. In coaching, listening is the ability to perceive the expressed idea, concern, perspective, attitude or belief from the client's point of view without judgment. This includes listening to what the client says and does not say. Responding reflectively is the coach's ability to reflect back what is heard from the client in an inquisitive manner.

In Christian coaching, the coach listens for another voice—that of the Holy Spirit. God is active in every person's life and will provide the client evidence of that activity. There is no specific method or strategy that would guarantee hearing the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, assurance is provided when wisdom and discernment are sought (Prov. 20:27; Isa. 30:21; Luke 11:13; John 16:13; 1 Cor. 12:13; James 1:5, 15, 19).

The Christian coach listens for what is going on in the client as a whole—body, soul, mind, and spirit—and how these interrelate and influence the client's life, relationships, and faith. For example, we listen for the client's sense of identity and for incongruence between words and actions. We listen for beliefs, attitudes, and emotions so that we might bring what we hear to their awareness.

In addition to the guidelines expressed by the ICF for this competency, the CCNI credentialed coach:

- a. Creates space for the client to hear God's voice.
- b. Recognizes that the client is in the best position to discern God's activity and voice.
- c. Supports the client in listening deeply and carefully without creating spiritual discord which would detract the client from hearing God's voice or the client's own thinking.

ICF Competency #7 - Evokes Awareness

Facilitates client insight and learning by using tools and techniques such as powerful questioning, silence, metaphor or analogy.

1. Considers client experience when deciding what might be most useful
2. Challenges the client as a way to evoke awareness or insight
3. Asks questions about the client, such as their way of thinking, values, needs, wants and beliefs
4. Asks questions that help the client explore beyond current thinking
5. Invites the client to share more about their experience in the moment
6. Notices what is working to enhance client progress
7. Adjusts the coaching approach in response to the client's needs
8. Helps the client identify factors that influence current and future patterns of behavior, thinking or emotion
9. Invites the client to generate ideas about how they can move forward and what they are willing or able to do
10. Supports the client in reframing perspectives
11. Shares observations, insights and feelings, without attachment, that have the potential to create new learning for the client

Christian Coaching Application

The ability for a person to change is limited in the absence of new awareness or paradigm. The famous adage by Mark Twain, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got," reflects the limits of our human capacity to break old cycles of thinking or doing. The effectiveness of the coaching partnership is augmented by the coach's ability to help the client reach new awareness. With new awareness comes the potential for lasting change.

In creating opportunity for new awareness, and therefore possible lasting change, the coach allows space for God's revelation of His plan and nature within the context of the coaching partnership. As a part of integrating and interpreting sources, the coach also helps the client watch for hidden or inward thoughts that God is bringing to their awareness. Together coach and client identify perspectives, attitudes, emotions, beliefs, values or life actions that may be incongruent with the client's faith or with the client's perception of God's direction or will.

The skill of creating awareness assumes a deeper dimension when it is coupled with seeking to know what God might be speaking into the situation and with identifying the measurement of new awareness with the "upward call of God" (Phil. 3:13-14).

Direct communication has two roles in coaching. First, it helps to provide a clear, articulate, jargon-free communication style for the coach. Second, it provides a platform for the coach to speak directly into the client's situation.

Direct communication is usually prefaced by something the coach heard or did not hear the client say. It may also be sparked by the voice of the Holy Spirit or even the coach's own inner voice. Jesus used direct communication quite effectively. However, unless Scripture specifically indicates, it is difficult to ascertain if his comments were based on human perception, the gift of spiritual discernment or revelation knowledge from God (Matt. 11:14-16; Mark 10:39; John 4:17; 14:6).

The coach may or may not experience revelatory knowledge or employ the gift of spiritual discernment but can nonetheless offer the gift of direct communication to assist the client. Direct communication is most effective when we offer our insights to the client in an inquisitive manner and come from the perspective of love, grace and truth.

There is always a risk in offering direct communication. Direct communication can interrupt the flow of discovery as we interject a new paradigm into the consciousness of the client. That said, we coach not from fear of offending the client, but we offer our insights in faith that God is directing the coaching process. We offer direct communication in terms of allowing the client to reject or accept that communication.

The art of asking a properly placed question has a rich history. However, its function as a tool to help another reach a new paradigm is seldom used in everyday conversation.

Often times, instead of announcing, teaching, or explaining, Christ purposefully used the tool of powerful questioning to create new awareness for those who followed him. He modeled the use of questions, as well as parables, to help his followers develop new insights and to grasp spiritual principles (Mark 8:27-29). His questions helped his followers to see hidden motives and attitudes, but he also used them to draw from the follower their own answers—right, wrong or indifferent.

In addition to the guidelines expressed by the ICF for this competency, the CCNI credentialed coach:

- a. Partners with the client in discovering how or what God might be speaking into the client's life.
- b. Helps the client explore how scripture and prayer can inform the session focus or the client's goals.

- c. Is comfortable with the client disagreeing with God, even when scripture has given a clear command or instruction on a matter being considered by the client.
- d. Follows the model of Jesus in using questions, parables, stories and statements to give opportunity for the client to think creatively and explore new possibilities.
- e. Recognizes and encourages new awareness from God while not relying on direct revelation as the only source of new awareness in the coaching relationship.
- f. Follows the model of Jesus in using questions and statements to give opportunity for the client to think creatively and explore new possibilities.
- g. Is sensitive to their own tone when asking questions related to faith. Tone should not indicate judgment or an expected “right” answer.
- h. Avoids employing direct communication to direct or lead the client toward a particular belief, action or solution.

Possible questions

- What are the opportunities that God is presenting in these circumstances?
- What is the connection of this topic to what is God is speaking into your life?
- How open are you to what God might be saying?
- How does this affect your identity as a child of God?
- What part of this is important to you in God’s scheme of things?

ICF Competency #8 - Facilitates Client Growth

Partners with the client to transform learning and insight into action. Promotes client autonomy in the coaching process.

1. Works with the client to integrate new awareness, insight or learning into their worldview and behaviors
2. Partners with the client to design goals, actions and accountability measures that integrate and expand new learning
3. Acknowledges and supports client autonomy in the design of goals, actions and methods of accountability
4. Supports the client in identifying potential results or learning from identified action steps
5. Invites the client to consider how to move forward, including resources, support and potential barriers
6. Partners with the client to summarize learning and insight within or between sessions

7. Celebrates the client's progress and successes
8. Partners with the client to close the session

Christian Coaching Application

These action-oriented coaching skills assist the client in discovering options, taking risks, exploring new territory, accomplishing goals and taking ownership. Actions bring real change into the client's life, often replacing old habits, attitudes or belief systems. The opportunity for the client to experience new awareness, insights and learning is a natural result of moving forward. It is a competency that celebrates and challenges the client in terms of their stated goals and progress.

In Christian coaching, we fully support this type of exploration and action. Planning and goal setting are encouraged in scripture (Prov. 6:6-11). We further encourage our clients to consider actions that align with God's priority for their lives (Prov. 21:5; Matt. 6:33-34; James 4:13-15). The fact that God has plans for our lives speaks of His loving nature and the assurance of eternal works. Further, we are assured that as we make room for God to speak into our situations, He will determine our steps (Prov. 16:9).

In addition to the guidelines expressed by the ICF for this competency, the CCNI credentialed coach:

- a. Includes faith in discussions about motivation and accountability while maintaining appropriate ownership of awareness and decisions with client.
- b. Recognizes prayer as a legitimate action, while remaining sensitive to clients who may use prayer as a euphemism for "doing nothing."
- c. Recognizes that the client may choose actions that the client feels may be morally or biblically unethical and is able to navigate that opportunity with the client without compromising the coaching conversation.
- d. Uses scripture as a source for learning, when appropriate.
- e. Asks, "What do you think God wants?" as a truly curious question and never as leading question.
- f. Leverages the client's faith and values in crafting questions that will resonate and draw forth the client's best thinking.
- g. Shares perception or intuition but does not assume it is truth; seeks to confirm insight with the client.
- h. Invites, and sometimes challenges, the client to consider different perspectives without assuming there is a right perspective or that the coach's perspective should be adopted, even on matters of faith.

- i. Incorporates prayer when it is an appropriate and natural part of the coaching relationship and process. Prayer is not avoided or forced or overly incorporated into the coaching relationship.
- j. Speaks boldly but does not confuse own voice with the voice of God or the leading of his Spirit.
- k. Offers metaphors and analogies found in Scripture when appropriate to create reflection for the client and recognizes they are not designed to “make the point” for the coach.

Possible Questions

- Which course of action is most consistent with what God is already doing in your life?
- What courses of action align best with the biblical principles you are discussing?
- How do these actions line up with the eternal perspective?
- In light of what you have learned, what needs to happen?
- What are you willing to do?
- Where do you need God’s grace to complete what’s before you?
- What will help you keep going when you feel stuck?
- What do you need if you get discouraged?
- How important is it for you to achieve this goal?
- What is your reason for the timeline?
- How do you typically celebrate major successes?
- If you were to consider what God might be saying to you, what would that be?
- From a heavenly perspective, how does that change things?
- Where might your faith play a role in what you’ve presented?