

## APPPC RBD Follow-up Notes Ethics 2023

### Coaching Outcomes

We began by discussing how we know we are making a difference in coaching. Here are a few points that emerged:

- There was wide agreement that some kind of measurement is helpful. People had a wide range of techniques for this—the use of formal assessments, standard post-coaching debriefs, check-ins with clients, etc.
- There seemed to be a sense that outcomes can span a continuum from completely subjective (e.g., the client is satisfied with the coaching) to some combo of subjective/objective (e.g. the client feels more motivated and this seems to be apparent to their colleagues) to highly objective (e.g. performance metrics at work).
- There are, perhaps, concentric circles of how directly we affect outcomes. For example, coaching might most directly impact psychological dimensions such as motivation, self-awareness, and clarity. It might, more indirectly, affect the behaviors that stem from those psychological outcomes, such as asking for a raise or experimenting with giving critical feedback. Then, it might, even more indirectly, affect basic performance (in health, work, etc.) which is also influenced by many other variables.
- We heard several provocative questions that are worth considering:
  - “Is conducting coaching ethical?” (Are we, as coaches, “using a scalpel” in the same way that psychotherapists are “using a scalpel”?)
  - “What might you notice in your clients if coaching was ‘working’?”

### Ethics

We framed ethics not as a list of rules but as a process. That “ethics” is really “ethical decision-making.” Here, we are less concerned with following specific rules than we are about thinking through the gray area situations that we inevitably encounter. I’d like to extend our discussion with a few notes here:

1. There are some obstacles to being an ethical coach:
  - Going with the gut as a primary mechanism for making decisions
  - Not being part of a professional organization or having a formal ethics code

- Not planning on doing anything wrong (“I plan to be ethical so I don’t have to worry about this stuff”)
  - Being unaware of ethical principles
  - Feeling constricted, not wanting to “follow rules”
2. There are at least 4 sources for thinking through gray-area issues:
- Contract with client
  - Core values of coach
  - Colleagues
  - Code of Ethics
3. There are expanding levels of ethical responsibility:
- Responsibility to self (self-care; ethical lapses are more common in those facing burnout)
  - Responsibility to client (do no harm; promote well-being)
  - Responsibility to the profession (be honest and accurate in words and actions)
  - Responsibility to society (do what you can to promote justice)

### Coaching Fishbowl:

Contracting. We all know that there are basic architectural features of setting the agenda such as asking about a desired/measurable outcome for the session. Beyond these basics, however, we discussed other aspects of contracting. One was length. By extending the contracting the coach was able to use it as an intervention by helping to center the client, calm the client, and help the client gain clarity before the coaching proper. If I had to create levels of sophistication for the contracting it might look like this:

#### Level 1:

- What would you like to be coached on?

#### Level 2:

- What would you like to be coached on?
- What would you like to take away from coaching on this topic?

#### Level 3:

- What would you like to be coached on?
- What would you like to take away from coaching on this topic?
- How will we measure that?

#### Level 4:

- What would you like to be coached on?
- What is important about this topic?
- Why now?
- What themes might emerge as we discuss this topic?
- What is the heart of this topic?
- What would you like to take away from coaching on this topic?
- How will we measure that?

Questions. Generally, coaches will agree that there are many different options for which question a coach might ask at a particular moment. There are many variations in phrasing and many options for which direction to take a topic. That said, could there also be instances where there is a strong preference for a singular, identifiable question? We saw a good example of this today. The client said “I want to know what I am doing is okay for my clients. I do not want to waste their time. I am all over the place. You [the coach] are raising even more questions for me. What is bugging me about this?” To which the coach responded, “What is bugging you?” This is a nice example of times that clients pose questions to themselves. In these instances, it feels like that is the best option for the question.

Go big or go small. All of us have some flexibility in our styles. We can be more upbeat or more serious. We can be quick or slow things down. One of these shifts is whether to engage in more minimalist coaching or whether to be more verbose. It is interesting to consider the various reasons why we might opt for one or another in a particular session.