

## **GENERAL DEFINITION OF SKILL LEVEL FOR EACH CREDENTIAL**

### **ASSOCIATE CERTIFIED COACH (ACC)**

An Associate Certified Coach is a coach who demonstrates a beginning level of knowledge and competence in their use of coaching skills and also demonstrates a basic knowledge of the difference between coaching and other professions in the way they use their coaching skills.

### **PROFESSIONAL CERTIFIED COACH (PCC)**

A Professional Certified Coach is a coach who demonstrates a clear knowledge of coaching skills, but is still somewhat dependent on tools from their coach training and still learning how to fully partner with the client and put all of the tools together in a way that serves the client powerfully. A PCC also demonstrates a firm knowledge of the difference between coaching and other professions in the way they use their coaching skills.

### **MASTER CERTIFIED COACH (MCC)**

A Master Certified Coach is a coach who demonstrates a fluent and easy use of coaching skills in a way that powerfully partners with the client and serves the client exploration and learning. A MCC also demonstrates a clear and deep knowledge of the difference between coaching and other professions in the way they use their coaching skills.

**SHORTHAND VERSION:** An ACC demonstrates the core competencies some of the time, a PCC demonstrates the core competencies a good portion of the time, and an MCC demonstrates an easy and fluid use of the competencies almost all of the time.

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## **KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PCC AND MCC LEVELS OF SKILL COMPETENCY BY COMPETENCY**

A master coach is someone who can generate innovative coaching, in a way that is individually tailored to the client, intuitively connected with the very moment and extraordinary in creating something unique. A master coach "can" not really do all this. Maybe he or she is only humble enough and not knowing enough to become an instrument for gifts that happen between client and coach. Peter Szabo, MCC.

Keeping the gentle reminder of Peter's lovely thought in mind, key differences between ACC, PCC, and MCC levels of skill appear at the end of each competency.

**1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards** - Understanding of coaching ethics and standards and ability to apply them appropriately in all coaching situations

- a. Understands and exhibits in own behaviors the ICF Standards of Conduct (see list)
- b. Understands and follows all ICF Ethical Guidelines (see list)
- c. Clearly communicates the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions
- d. Refers client to another support professional as needed, knowing when this is needed and the available resources

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** This competency will no longer be scored. It is well tested on the written exam and we are now requiring testing on ethics in all ACTP final exam processes. We will have a place on the score sheet to indicate whether the applicant coaching demonstration indicated ethical concerns that should prevent the awarding of a credential. In addition, if an applicant is not clear on what coaching is, that lack of clarity in skill use should be reflected in the score for each competency. For example, if the applicant give almost exclusively advice or indicates that a particular answer chosen by the coach is what the client should do, the scores for direct communication and powerful questioning should be lowered.

**2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement** - Ability to understand what is required in the specific coaching interaction and to come to agreement with the prospective and new client about the coaching process and relationship

- a. Understands and effectively discusses with the client the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship (e.g., logistics, fees, scheduling, inclusion of others if appropriate)
- b. Reaches agreement about what is appropriate in the relationship and what is not, what is and is not being offered, and about the client's and coach's responsibilities
- c. Determines whether there is an effective match between his/her coaching method and the needs of the prospective client

**ACC Level:** Coach takes what client says they want to work on at surface level. Attends to that agenda, but little further exploration is done.

**PCC Level:** Coach takes what client says they want to work on. Attends to that agenda with some exploration as to measures of success for each topic in session.

**MCC Level:** Coach explores fully what client wants from session, establishes measures of success for client in session, and ensures that client and coach are both clear about coaching purpose. Coach returns to check regularly of whether direction of coaching is continuing to serve client's coaching purpose and makes changes in direction if necessary based on feedback from client.

**3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client** - Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust

- a. Shows genuine concern for the client's welfare and future
- b. Continuously demonstrates personal integrity, honesty and sincerity
- c. Establishes clear agreements and keeps promises
- d. Demonstrates respect for client's perceptions, learning style, personal being
- e. Provides ongoing support for and champions new behaviors and actions, including those involving risk taking and fear of failure
- f. Asks permission to coach client in sensitive, new areas

**ACC Level:** Coach attends to client's agenda, but is attached to his/her own performance and therefore trust and intimacy is not the strongest competency.

**PCC Level:** Coach may have some degree of trust in client and connected relationship to client. Coach still conscious of presenting image of "good coach", so less willing to risk or not know which stands in way of complete trust in and intimacy with coach's self, the client, and the coaching relationship

**MCC Level:** Coach is connected to complete trust in new and mutual state of awareness that can only arise in the moment and out of joint conversation, coach is comfortable not knowing as one of the best states to expand awareness in, coach is willing to vulnerable with client and have client be vulnerable with coach, coach confident in self, process, and the client as a full partner in the relationship. Sense of complete ease and naturalness in conversation; coach does not have to "work" to coach

**4. Coaching Presence** - Ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident

- a. Is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment
- b. Accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing - "goes with the gut"
- c. Is open to not knowing and takes risks
- d. Sees many ways to work with the client, and chooses in the moment what is most effective
- e. Uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy
- f. Confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action
- g. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions, and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client's emotions

**ACC Level:** Coach attends to client's agenda, but is attached to his/her own performance and therefore presence is diluted by coach's own attention to self. Coach substitutes thinking and analysis for presence and responsiveness much of the time.

**PCC Level:** Coach will attend to client's agenda, but drives the coaching and choice of tools. Coach will choose objective or subjective perspective, but rarely hold both simultaneously. Coach will evidence need to have direction toward solution versus simply being in the moment with the client. Coach will be choosing ways to move versus letting client teach coach ways to move. Partnership is present, but mixed with coach as expert and greater than client. Coach may be present to whether and how much value they are adding to client

**MCC Level:** Coach is a completely connected observer to client. The connection is to whole of who client is, how the client learns, what the client has to teach the coach. The coach is ready to be touched by the client and welcomes signals that create resonance for both the coach and client. The coach evidences a complete curiosity that is undiluted by a need to perform. The coach is in fully partnered conversation with client. The coach trusts that value is inherent in the process versus having any need to create value.

**5. Active Listening** - Ability to focus completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desires, and to support client self-expression

- a. Attends to the client and the client's agenda, and not to the coach's agenda for the client
- b. Hears the client's concerns, goals, values and beliefs about what is and is not possible
- c. Distinguishes between the words, the tone of voice, and the body language
- d. Summarizes, paraphrases, reiterates, mirrors back what client has said to ensure clarity and understanding
- e. Encourages, accepts, explores and reinforces the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.
- f. Integrates and builds on client's ideas and suggestions
- g. "Bottom-lines" or understands the essence of the client's communication and helps the client get there rather than engaging in long descriptive stories
- h. Allows the client to vent or "clear" the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move on to next steps

**ACC Level:** Coach hears what client says and responds to it, but only at obvious and surface level. In general, coach will evidence attachment to "what's the problem", "how do I help fix it", and "how do I give value in fixing it".

**PCC Level:** Coach is doing listening on a very conscious level. The listening is focused on the client's agenda and can change direction if the client changes direction. The direction change may or may not be best for the topic at hand. The coach is focused on what client is saying, but more from the perspective of gathering information that fits into coach's particular tool or discovery model. Listening tends

to be more linear and concentrates on content of words. Coach is listening for answers, next question to ask, or looking for what to do with what they hear and will try to fit what they hear into a model they understand. They will often respond out of that model rather than client's model. Listening will include some depth, but often will miss key nuances that a master level coach catches. Listening tends to be session by session versus cumulative.

**MCC Level:** The coach's listening is completely attuned as a learner and listening happens at the logical, emotional, and organic level at one time. The listening is both linear and non-linear and responses from the coach evidence learning about the client at many levels.. The coach recognizes both hers and the client's ability of intuitive and energetic perception that is felt when the client speaks of important things, when new growth is occurring for the client, and when the client is finding a more powerful sense of self. The coach's listening is in the present, but hearing also the client's future develop. The coach hears the totality of the client's greatness and gifts as well as limiting beliefs and patterns. The coach's listening is cumulative from session to session and throughout each individual session

**6. Powerful Questioning** -Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client

- a. Asks questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client's perspective
- b. Asks questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action (e.g., those that challenge the client's assumptions)
- c. Asks open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility or new learning
- d. Asks questions that move the client towards what they desire, not questions that ask for the client to justify or look backwards

**ACC Level:** Questions attend to client's agenda, but are generally seek information, are formulaic, and sometimes leading or have a "correct answer" anticipated by the coach. Generally, questions are very geared to solving issue set by client as quickly as possible.

**PCC Level:** Questions attend to client's agenda and generally are a mix of informational and powerful questions. Even powerful questions tend to focus toward solution of issue presented by client and may be more responsive to the agenda than to the client. Questions will tend to use coaching terminology or language easy for the coach versus using and exploring the client's language. Occasional leading questions will appear as well. The coach will tend to ask comfortable rather than uncomfortable questions.

**MCC Level:** The coach asks mostly, if not always, direct, evocative questions that are fully responsive to the client in the moment and that require significant thought by client or take client to a new place of thinking. The coach uses the client's language and learning style to craft questions. The coach are fully based in curiosity and the coach does not ask questions to which the coach knows the answer. The questions often require the client to find deeper contact with the client's shadow and light sides and find hidden power in himself/herself. The coach asks questions that

help the client create the future rather than focus on past or even present dilemmas. The coach is not afraid of questions that will make either the coach or the client or both uncomfortable

**7. Direct Communication** - Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions, and to use language that has the greatest positive impact on the client

- a. Is clear, articulate and direct in sharing and providing feedback
- b. Reframes and articulates to help the client understand from another perspective what he/she wants or is uncertain about
- c. Clearly states coaching objectives, meeting agenda, purpose of techniques or exercises
- d. Uses language appropriate and respectful to the client (e.g., non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon)
- e. Uses metaphor and analogy to help to illustrate a point or paint a verbal picture

**ACC Level:** The coach sometimes is fairly direct, but usually uses too many words or feels a need to “dress up” a question or observation. Questions and observations generally contain vocabulary from the coach’s training. Most communication occurs on a very safe level for the coach.

**PCC Level:** The coach is usually direct, but at times feels a need to “dress up” a question or observation. The coach occasionally treats their intuitions as the truth. The coach also occasionally does not say what is occurring for the coach for fear that the client is not ready to hear it. The coach may also evidence a need to soften communication for fear of being wrong. The coach tends to use some coaching language versus the language of the client. The coach has a sufficient, but not broad base of language tools to use with the client.

**MCC Level:** The coach easily and freely shares what is so for the coach without attachment. The coach shares directly and simply and often incorporates the client’s language. The coach fully trusts the client to choose the responses to the coach’s communication that is best for the client. The coach invites, respects, and celebrates direct communication back from the client. The coach creates sufficient space for the client to have equal or more communication time than the coach. The coach has a broad language base to use and play with and uses the client’s language to broaden that base.

**8. Creating Awareness** - Ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information, and to make interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results

- a. Goes beyond what is said in assessing client's concerns, not getting hooked by the client's description
- b. Invokes inquiry for greater understanding, awareness and clarity
- c. Identifies for the client his/her underlying concerns, typical and fixed ways of perceiving himself/herself and the world, differences between the facts and the interpretation, disparities between thoughts, feelings and action

- d. Helps clients to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them
- e. Communicates broader perspectives to clients and inspires commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new possibilities for action
- f. Helps clients to see the different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, background)
- g. Expresses insights to clients in ways that are useful and meaningful for the client
- h. Identifies major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching
- i. Asks the client to distinguish between trivial and significant issues, situational vs. recurring behaviors, when detecting a separation between what is being stated and what is being done

**ACC Level:** Awareness generated at level of what will solve problem or achieve goal. Limited generally to awareness of new techniques versus new learning about self.

**PCC Level:** The coach helps the client to create new awareness by engaging in problem solving. The majority of awareness geared to new technique; new awareness about who the client is more limited. In addition, awareness tends, as a result to be more defined in scope. The coach will generally help the client integrate new awareness as it pertains to a particular situation versus using learning to more fully broaden the scope of new awareness.

**MCC Level:** The coach's invitation to exploration precedes and is significantly greater than invitation to solution. The coach appears as much an explorer as well as client. The coach has not concluded what awareness should be (coach is willing not to know). The use of the client's greatness invited and welcomed. There is no evidence of "fixing" a problem or the client. The coach allows client to make coach aware and the client's voice more prevalent than coach's. There is a lovely sense of connected observation of totality of who client is and what client wants, sharing that with client, and creating space for client to share back. The coach does not force awareness.

**9. Designing Actions** - Ability to create with the client opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results

- a. Brainstorms and assists the client to define actions that will enable the client to demonstrate, practice and deepen new learning
- b. Helps the client to focus on and systematically explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals
- c. Engages the client to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions
- d. Promotes active experimentation and self-discovery, where the client applies what has been discussed and learned during sessions immediately afterwards in his/her work or life setting

- e. Celebrates client successes and capabilities for future growth
- f. Challenges client's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action
- g. Advocates or brings forward points of view that are aligned with client goals and, without attachment, engages the client to consider them
- h. Helps the client "Do It Now" during the coaching session, providing immediate support
- i. Encourages stretches and challenges but also a comfortable pace of learning

**ACC Level:** The coach tends to suggest homework and actions that they think would best handle the problem or achieve the goal. Actions tend to be one dimensional in nature.

**PCC Level:** The coach engages in some, but not a complete partnership with the client to develop actions. Again, the actions are attuned to solving the situational issue the client has presented rather than looking beyond the situation to other, broader learning that might be inherent in the situation. Finally, the PCC level coach is tends to define forward motion only in terms of physical action.

**MCC Level:** The coach works in complete partnership with the client to design actions or, in the alternative, lets the client lead in designing actions. The coach and client design actions that fit the client's goals, learning style, and pace of wanted or necessary movement. The coach allows actions to include thinking, creating, and doing. The coach engages the client in relating designed actions to other aspects of what the client wants, thereby broadening the scope of learning and growth. The coach encourages informed experimentation to help clients develop more powerful, leveraged actions.

## **10. Planning and Goal Setting - Ability to develop and maintain an effective coaching plan with the client**

- a. Consolidates collected information and establishes a coaching plan and development goals with the client that address concerns and major areas for learning and development
- b. Creates a plan with results that are attainable, measurable, specific and have target dates
- c. Makes plan adjustments as warranted by the coaching process and by changes in the situation
- d. Helps the client identify and access different resources for learning (e.g., books, other professionals)
- e. Identifies and targets early successes that are important to the client

**ACC Level:** The coach tends to adopt goals suggested by the client at their most obvious level. Planning and goal setting tend to be one dimensional in nature with the coach sometimes substituting his/her expertise for the clients.

**PCC Level:** The coach engages in some, but not a complete partnership with the client to develop goals and plans. Again, the actions are attuned to solving the situational issue the client has presented rather than looking beyond the situation to



other, broader learning that might be inherent in the situation. Finally, the PCC level coach is tends to edit plans presented by the client.

**MCC Level:** The coach works with the client to clarify and develop goals that achieve more than just the presenting concerns of the client. The coach lets the client lead in designing goals and planning or, in the alternative, works in complete partnership with the client to create goals and plans. The coach and client create goals and plans that fit the client's goals, learning style, and pace of wanted or necessary movement. The coach allows plans to include thinking, creating, and doing. The coach engages the client in relating goals and plans to other aspects of what the client wants, thereby broadening the scope of learning and growth.

**11. Managing Progress and Accountability** - Ability to hold attention on what is important for the client, and to leave responsibility with the client to take action

- a. Clearly requests of the client actions that will move the client toward their stated goals
- b. Demonstrates follow through by asking the client about those actions that the client committed to during the previous session(s)
- c. Acknowledges the client for what they have done, not done, learned or become aware of since the previous coaching session(s)
- d. Effectively prepares, organizes and reviews with client information obtained during sessions
- e. Keeps the client on track between sessions by holding attention on the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s)
- f. Focuses on the coaching plan but is also open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions
- g. Is able to move back and forth between the big picture of where the client is heading, setting a context for what is being discussed and where the client wishes to go
- h. Promotes client's self-discipline and holds the client accountable for what they say they are going to do, for the results of an intended action, or for a specific plan with related time frames
- i. Develops the client's ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop himself/herself (to get feedback, to determine priorities and set the pace of learning, to reflect on and learn from experiences)
- j. Positively confronts the client with the fact that he/she did not take agreed-upon actions

**ACC Level:** The coach tends to suggest forms of accountability that may feel a bit parental in nature. Accountability tends to be one dimensional.

**PCC Level:** The coach in some partnership with the client develops methods of accountability. Those methods are often reflective of or use coach training tools.

**MCC Level:** The coach has the client determine their own methods of accountability and offers support to those methods. The client helps determine or determines totally who should be on their accountability team and how to use each person, including the coach. The coach trusts the client to be accountable to

themselves and lovingly calls the client to account or discussion if agreed upon forward movement does not occur.

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