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CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT TERMINATING COACHING CONTRACTS/AGREEMENTS¹

Teri-E Belf and Liora Rosen

Whereas the authors are members of the ICF Ethics Committee, the perspectives and information presented below are the sole opinions of the authors and are not necessarily an official position of the ICF.

ICF Ethics Code #19: “I will respect the client's right to terminate at any point during the process, subject to the provisions of the agreement or contract. I will be alert to indications that the client is no longer benefiting from our coaching relationship.”

The coaching relationship deals with change. In the process of life and work, circumstances change and the coaching relationship changes as well, sometimes leading to termination of the coaching relationship.

The purpose of this article is to emphasize the importance of providing a clear termination clause in the coach-client contract along with perspectives and considerations to guide your thinking. For the purposes of this article, contract and agreement are being used interchangeably.

Termination clauses, in the eyes of the law, ensure that either or both parties have the right to terminate or cancel a contract. The ICF Ethics Standard does not mention any circumstances necessary in order for the client to terminate.

We allow clients to terminate the coaching relationship because it is congruent with our underlying coaching philosophy, i.e., clients know their answers. If that is so, then we must honor their decision in knowing when it is appropriate to stop the coaching relationship.

Client's Point of View

Some reasons clients want to terminate may include:

- Financial considerations
- Coaching is not meeting client needs
- Change in personal or professional circumstances/priorities
- Encountering a deep or emotional obstacle that hinders the client from benefiting from coaching
- The need for coaching diminishes in proportion to the financial investment
- The process is different from what was expected
- Increasing discomfort with the coach's style, approach or personality
- An organization changes strategic direction and eliminates or decreases coaching funds and or support.

We do not believe that clients need to have a reason, justify their reason or that coaches need to know the reason. For our own purpose we may ask the client for an exit interview and or an evaluation.

An examination or the addition of a termination clause to your agreement might be worth your time. Think about how you would like to protect your time and fiscal commitment at termination. Here are some questions for you to consider regarding a termination clause:

- Do you have to have a reason for termination?
- Do you need to know the client's reason?
- Are some reasons "better" than others?
- Is "I'm done" an acceptable reason?
- Who makes the final decision regarding what is a "legitimate" or "good" reason?
- Would you like advance notice and how much? In writing?
- Would you exempt certain emergencies/situations from this advance notice?
- If yes, what kinds?
- Who decides what is "an emergency"?
- What do you consider fair compensation for termination?
- Do you want to charge an administration fee for early termination?
- What would you like others to say about you? Consider your reputation.
- Do the termination terms have an impact/hardship on the client or on you?

Application

Consider whether you wish to:

- Give a full refund
- Charge only for services rendered until date of termination
- Offer client the opportunity to come back at a later point

- Offer a referral to another coach and transfer funds

Coach's Point of View

What if you, the Coach, decide to terminate the relationship?

Here are some reasons why coaches may choose to terminate a coaching contract:

- They perceive the client is no longer benefiting.
- What is needed becomes outside the realm of the definition of coaching.
- When the client is not creating the time and energy to participate fully
- When the coach feels intuitively that he or she is not the best person to be the coach
- When the coach feels that the client has already received maximum benefit and the coach feels complete.

As you ponder these considerations, think about your answers and please review your coaching contract / agreement. When we ask our clients to focus on their values to guide their actions, it is only fair that we do the same.