

ICF Credentialing Exam

-Exam Preparation 2.0-

Revised 3.28.24

The ICF offers us sample questions to practice with. Below are the scenarios and options to choose from. These are quoted directly from the ICF's information page, minus the answers, so that you can self-identify your answer before proceeding to the answer key.

More details may be found here: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/credentialing-exam>

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Logistics:

- There are 81 scenarios. Each scenario is based on a 1:1 coaching interaction.
- There are two parts. Part 1 has 41 scenarios. Part 2 has 40 scenarios.
- Once the first part is complete, that part closes and the next part opens. You cannot return to the first part once the second part opens. *Within a part, you can flag scenarios to come back to.*
- Top score is 600. You must get 460 to pass. (Scenarios are weighted for difficulty as well.)
- 3 hours are offered. Be sure you give yourself the entire time.
- HOME TESTING: You are allowed one 5 minute break in the middle if you choose to take it. An internet search showed many frustrated people who tried to use the Pearson at-home test option, but couldn't meet criteria at the time of testing (even after the "check your device" option that Pearson offers) and ended up having to go to the testing center anyway. Mac requires permissions, making it challenging.
- CENTER TESTING: You are allowed one 5 minute break in the middle if you choose to take it. The testing center technology is set up and runs smoothly. Do expect to go through an anti-cheating process: 2 security checks, 2 forms of ID, palm heat signature verification, fingerprints at some centers, photographs, and they have you pat yourself down in front of the proctor, lift your hair (if it is long) and empty your pockets.
- NO cheat sheet/open book or anything is allowed. You are only allowed to use your own brain and nothing else.
- For each scenario you are given 4 responses a coach might have to the scenario. From those responses, you need to choose the BEST response and the WORST response.
- RESULTS: You are given your results right away. At home, it shows on the screen; in the center, they give you a printout. And the results also come in an email about 2 hours later.

Tips:

- Many responses are VERY similar to each other, with only slightly modified wording. For example: "Ask them why they did what they did" and "Ask them what factors influenced their decision to...". Reading the entire scenario and options and considering the distinctions helps you to choose the most coach-like response.
- The WORST suggestions sometimes still seem like reasonable actions sometimes. If this happens, double-check on what PART of the coaching session is being discussed. Are we in Agenda setting, or are we in Active Listening? Understand context, can help you identify the most coach-like answer. Consider the Code of Ethics: "Which is worst ethically than the other?"
- **Scenarios often included executive coaching scenarios where coaches are contracted with a 3rd party to provide services for a specific person. Consider: "What is the heart of what's going on?" They reflect the same ethical considerations. → We've provided additional tips on 3rd party contracting on page 25.

DIRECTIONS: Please read the scenario, then considering the context, pick the answer that would be the “best”, or most effective coaching response. Next identify what you see as the “worst” response, or most ineffective, coaching approach.

After you have your answers, then scroll to the answer key on page 11. In the answer key, you will find explanations and rationale for each option.

SCENARIO 1 -

“A coach is meeting with a prospective client who is growing a new business. The coach and potential client quickly establish an easy connection. The coach is excited about the opportunity to work with the client. As the coach and client are ending their conversation, the prospective client briefly mentions the name of their new business. The coach recognizes the business, as the coach is an investor in a more established competitor business in the same community. What should the coach do?”

What is the BEST action?

1. Not say anything. Try to keep their role as an investor in a competing business separate from their role as a coach.
2. Share that the business name sounds familiar and make a mental note to determine whether it is a competitor business later that evening.
3. Share their role as investor in the competitor business only if the potential client follows up to pursue coaching with the coach.
4. Share their role as an investor in a competing business and acknowledge the possibility of a conflict of interest with the client.

What is the WORST action?

1. Not say anything. Try to keep their role as an investor in a competing business separate from their role as a coach.
2. Share that the business name sounds familiar and make a mental note to determine whether it is a competitor business later that evening.
3. Share their role as investor in the competitor business only if the potential client follows up to pursue coaching with the coach.
4. Share their role as an investor in a competing business and acknowledge the possibility of a conflict of interest with the client.

SCENARIO 2 –

“A client struggles with delegating tasks at work to other team members. During the last session, the client shared that an important project they are leading is falling behind schedule. The coach supported the client in identifying strategies to delegate tasks to other team members. At the next session, the client reports back and shares, “In the end, I decided to complete all the tasks myself. That was the only way to get them done on time.” The coach feels disappointment that the client did not follow through on their plans to delegate. What should the coach do?”

What is the BEST action?

1. Immediately reflect back on their last session with the client and identify what they could have done differently to support the client in following through on their plans.
2. Take a breath and acknowledge that the client is responsible for their own choice of whether to follow through with their stated plans or not.
3. Set aside their disappointment for now and focus on the current session with the client. Decide to reflect on this situation during an upcoming session with their mentor coach.
4. Praise the client for meeting the project deadlines, but ask why the client failed to support their team members’ development.

What is the WORST action?

1. Immediately reflect back on their last session with the client and identify what they could have done differently to support the client in following through on their plans.
2. Take a breath and acknowledge that the client is responsible for their own choice of whether to follow through with their stated plans or not.
3. Set aside their disappointment for now and focus on the current session with the client. Decide to reflect on this situation during an upcoming session with their mentor coach.
4. Praise the client for meeting the project deadlines, but ask why the client failed to support their team members’ development.



SCENARIO 3 -

“A client comes to a session appearing stressed. When the coach asks what the client wants to talk about, the client frantically lists a major event they are planning at work, a large family gathering they are organizing, and caring for their aging parents. What should the coach do?”

What is the BEST action?

1. Ask the client if they need to take a moment before starting the coaching sessions, since they seem stressed.
2. Ask the client to share more about their aging parents.
3. Acknowledge that the client has shared three significant challenges that they are facing, and ask the client which one they would like to explore first.
4. Ask the client to begin with the major event they are planning at work, since they mentioned it first.

What is the WORST action?

1. Ask the client if they need to take a moment before starting the coaching sessions, since they seem stressed.
2. Ask the client to share more about their aging parents.
3. Acknowledge that the client has shared three significant challenges that they are facing, and ask the client which one they would like to explore first.
4. Ask the client to begin with the major event they are planning at work, since they mentioned it first.

SCENARIO 4 -

“A university biomedical researcher is working with a coach to improve their interactions with colleagues. The client is a very analytical thinker and can easily explain detailed data points and complex graphs, but seems reluctant share anything personal with the coach. In previous sessions, the coach encouraged the client to describe how they felt at social events, but the client seems highly uncomfortable, answering only with short, one-word responses. When the client arrives to their session today, the client silently hands the coach a journal. The client has written several, detailed entries over the last week about their experience attending a university luncheon, a faculty party, and a staff development workshop since their last session. While the client says little to the coach in the moment, their entries show deep reflections about the anxiety the client experienced at these events and their desire to overcome social anxiety. What should the coach do?”

What is the BEST action?

1. Acknowledge the reflection work the client has done, and ask the client if they feel comfortable exploring some of the emotions they described in their journal.
2. Ask the client if they would summarize the entries they detailed in their journal for the coach.
3. Ask the client to identify some steps they can take to overcome the anxieties they wrote about.
4. Ask the client what new awareness they developed about themselves through the journaling process.

What is the WORST action?

1. Acknowledge the reflection work the client has done, and ask the client if they feel comfortable exploring some of the emotions they described in their journal.
2. Ask the client if they would summarize the entries they detailed in their journal for the coach.
3. Ask the client to identify some steps they can take to overcome the anxieties they wrote about.
4. Ask the client what new awareness they developed about themselves through the journaling process.

SCENARIO 5 -

“A coach recently began working with a client to help them plan for retirement. The client is a well-respected teacher who has taught for 30 years at a local elementary school. The client consistently arrives highly prepared and organized for coaching sessions, routinely reporting progress between sessions and identifying specific topics to focus on during coaching conversations. The client shares they are looking forward to retirement, but they discuss their retirement plans in a very matter-of-fact way. During the current session, the client shares that they have two weeks left before their retirement begins. They would like to focus on a few remaining plans they need to make. Suddenly, the client begins to cry and says, “I’ve spent half my life at this school! I adore my students and my colleagues are my best friends. I can’t imagine what my life is going to be like when I no longer walk through the front doors of the school each morning!” What should the coach do?”

What is the BEST action?

1. Pause for a moment, then ask the client to identify the remaining plans they would like to focus on today.
2. Ask the client if they are sure they want to retire.
3. Acknowledge that retirement is a significant life transition and that emotional responses are normal.
4. Pause, then acknowledge the emotional impacts the transition seems to be having on the client, and ask if they would like to spend some time with those feelings.

What is the WORST action?

1. Pause for a moment, then ask the client to identify the remaining plans they would like to focus on today.
2. Ask the client if they are sure they want to retire.
3. Acknowledge that retirement is a significant life transition and that emotional responses are normal.
4. Pause, then acknowledge the emotional impacts the transition seems to be having on the client, and ask if they would like to spend some time with those feelings.



SCENARIO 6 -

“A client is working with a coach to support them during an important career transition. The client currently holds a demanding role as Chief Operating Officer of a company, while also raising two young children and serving as primary caretaker for their aging parents, who live with the client. The client recently received job offers from three different companies, each requiring the client and their family to relocate. The client comes to the session excited about the new job opportunities and hopes to gain clarity through the session on which offer to choose. The client starts by discussing the things they are looking for in a new job, energetically listing opportunities for growth, challenging responsibilities, a talented team to lead, and the potential for travel. When the coach asks what the client’s children and aging parents may need in a new community, the client’s excited smile disappears and they are suddenly quiet. What should the coach do?”

What is the BEST action?

1. Repeat the question to the client to give them another opportunity to respond to the coach’s inquiry.
2. Ask the client if they are okay to proceed with the session, or if they need a break.
3. Pause for a moment, then share with the client that they noticed a change in the client’s energy. Ask if the client would like to explore what they are feeling in this moment.
4. Support the client in weighing the offers they have received by inviting the client to explore each of the characteristics they listed for a new job.

What is the WORST action?

1. Repeat the question to the client to give them another opportunity to respond to the coach’s inquiry.
2. Ask the client if they are okay to proceed with the session, or if they need a break.
3. Pause for a moment, then share with the client that they noticed a change in the client’s energy. Ask if the client would like to explore what they are feeling in this moment.
4. Support the client in weighing the offers they have received by inviting the client to explore each of the characteristics they listed for a new job.

SCENARIO 7 -

“A coach is working with a client who is an experienced marathon runner writing a book on training for endurance races. This is a long-held dream for the client. The coach notices that the client often uses running metaphors when talking about their challenges and progress in their writing. The client is typically upbeat and energetic, but they arrive at today’s session appearing tired and discouraged. They share with the coach that they have recently “hit a wall” in writing, with three chapters remaining. When they sit down to write, the client says they can barely come up with anything, and nothing that is worth publishing. The client says they are afraid they won’t be able to complete the book on time and that all of their work toward this goal will be lost. What should the coach do?”

What is the BEST action?

1. Ask the client if they would like to explore their fear of not finishing the book.
2. Remind the client that they have achieved extremely challenging goals in the past and can meet this big goal, too.
3. Ask the client if there was a time when they were running a marathon and felt like they couldn’t finish. Invite the client to share how they handled that challenge in the race.
4. Support the client in identifying strategies to help them move forward in writing the remaining chapters of the book.

What is the WORST action?

1. Ask the client if they would like to explore their fear of not finishing the book.
2. Remind the client that they have achieved extremely challenging goals in the past and can meet this big goal, too.
3. Ask the client if there was a time when they were running a marathon and felt like they couldn’t finish. Invite the client to share how they handled that challenge in the race.
4. Support the client in identifying strategies to help them move forward in writing the remaining chapters of the book.

SCENARIO 8 -

“A coach has worked for one year with a client. The client has been identified by their supervisor as a potential leader in the organization based on their high-quality work, good relations with peers, and innovative ideas for future projects. However, the client rarely speaks up in meetings with senior leaders and when they do, they often downplay or diminish their ideas. The client’s supervisor recommended coaching to improve the client’s executive presence, with the ultimate goal of developing as a leader in the organization. At the start of coaching, the client was often self-critical. However, the client has made tremendous progress in recent months. During their closing session, the coach notices that the client has a confident, easy smile. When the coach shares their observation with the client, the client responds by saying, “I feel different, empowered, ready to take on new challenges.” The client adds, “And I was just nominated by the CEO to be part of a leadership development program for emerging leaders in our company!” What should the coach do?”

What is the BEST action?

1. Acknowledge the client’s growth in confidence over the past year, and invite the client to share how they plan to celebrate their selection for the leadership development program.
2. Invite the client to identify challenges they would like to take on next.
3. Ask the client what they may need to maintain their new confidence.
4. Suggest to the client that they extend their coaching engagement to work toward a new goal of being promoted to a leadership role.

What is the WORST action?

1. Acknowledge the client’s growth in confidence over the past year, and invite the client to share how they plan to celebrate their selection for the leadership development program.
2. Invite the client to identify challenges they would like to take on next.
3. Ask the client what they may need to maintain their new confidence.
4. Suggest to the client that they extend their coaching engagement to work toward a new goal of being promoted to a leadership role.

ANSWER KEY & RATIONAL

Understanding the rationale can help you identify the correct answer with greater ease. The goal is to identify the most “coach-like” answer.

SCENARIO 1 -

“A coach is meeting with a prospective client who is growing a new business. The coach and potential client quickly establish an easy connection. The coach is excited about the opportunity to work with the client. As the coach and client are ending their conversation, the prospective client briefly mentions the name of their new business. The coach recognizes the business, as the coach is an investor in a more established competitor business in the same community. What should the coach do?”

What is the **BEST action**? What is the **WORST action**?

1. **Not say anything**. *Try to keep their role as an investor in a competing business separate from their role as a coach.* → This is a clear ethics breach.
2. *Share that the business name sounds familiar and make a mental note to determine whether it is a competitor business later that evening.* → This is falsifying because the coach clearly did know and an ethics breach.
3. *Share their role as investor in the competitor business only if the potential client follows up to pursue coaching with the coach.* → This is withholding information that is important in the client’s decision-making process.
4. **Share their role** *as an investor in a competing business and acknowledge the possibility of a conflict of interest with the client.* → Err on the side of full disclosure, integrity and transparency.



SCENARIO 2 –

“A client struggles with delegating tasks at work to other team members. During the last session, the client shared that an important project they are leading is falling behind schedule. The coach supported the client in identifying strategies to delegate tasks to other team members. At the next session, the client reports back and shares, “In the end, I decided to complete all the tasks myself. That was the only way to get them done on time.” The coach feels disappointment that the client did not follow through on their plans to delegate. What should the coach do?”

What is the **BEST action**? What is the **WORST action**?

1. *Immediately reflect back on their last session with the client and identify what they could have done differently to support the client in following through on their plans.* → This is the coach taking the direction.
2. *Take a breath and acknowledge that the client is responsible for their own choice of whether to follow through with their stated plans or not.* → This allows the coach to reset and return to neutral so that they can honor the client.
3. *Set aside their disappointment for now and focus on the current session with the client. Decide to reflect on this situation during an upcoming session with their mentor coach.* → 1) Setting aside the disappoint doesn't reset the coach to neutral. 2) Mentoring is not the correct method here. Mentoring is about skill development. Supervision, addressing bias we have as a coach, would be the appropriate approach.
4. *Praise the client for meeting the project deadlines, but ask why the client failed to support their team members' development.* → This is the coach taking the lead. It is more effective to see what the client is needing in that moment than point out a failure, or praise the client in a way that may not serve their bigger picture.



SCENARIO 3 -

“A client comes to a session appearing stressed. When the coach asks what the client wants to talk about, the client frantically lists a major event they are planning at work, a large family gathering they are organizing, and caring for their aging parents. What should the coach do?”

What is the **BEST action**? What is the **WORST action**?

1. **Ask the client if they need to take a moment before starting the coaching sessions, since they seem stressed.** → While asking can be supportive, it is the coach assuming stress and leading the client. It can be more effective to not assume and invite the client to self-determine what is next.
2. **Ask the client to share more about their aging parents.** → When a coach chooses the direction the session, instead of the client, it is leading. It is also a missed opportunity to laser into what matters most to the client.
3. **Acknowledge that the client has shared three significant challenges that they are facing, and ask the client which one they would like to explore first.** → This approach acknowledges all of the issues the client brought forward and honors the client to self-identify the priority.
4. **Ask the client to begin with the major event they are planning at work, since they mentioned it first.** → This approach over-rides the client’s authority and needs.

SCENARIO 4 -

“A university biomedical researcher is working with a coach to improve their interactions with colleagues. The client is a very analytical thinker and can easily explain detailed data points and complex graphs, but seems reluctant share anything personal with the coach. In previous sessions, the coach encouraged the client to describe how they felt at social events, but the client seems highly uncomfortable, answering only with short, one-word responses. When the client arrives to their session today, the client silently hands the coach a journal. The client has written several, detailed entries over the last week about their experience attending a university luncheon, a faculty party, and a staff development workshop since their last session. While the client says little to the coach in the moment, their entries show deep reflections about the anxiety the client experienced at these events and their desire to overcome social anxiety. What should the coach do?”

What is the **BEST action**? What is the **WORST action**?**

1. **Acknowledge** the reflection work the client has done, and ask the client if they feel comfortable exploring some of the emotions they described in their journal. → The acknowledgement demonstrates support of the client’s work and inquires into how the client would like to proceed.
2. *Ask the client if they would summarize the entries they detailed in their journal for the coach.* → This is leading and ignores the work the client just presented.
3. **Ask the** client to identify some steps they can take to overcome the anxieties they wrote about. → This approach jumps straight into strategy without first exploring what the client needs and wants.
4. *Ask the client what new awareness they developed about themselves through the journaling process.* → While this question may help later, it is more effective to acknowledge the work the client has done and then inquire into how the client would like to proceed, as in example #1.

NOTES: This scenario also might be a situation where the client is referred to a therapist to address the social anxiety. Being that not all issues require a referral, it is best practice to start with an exploration of the issues. This approach can help both parties determine if a referral would be appropriate.



SCENARIO 5 -

“A coach recently began working with a client to help them plan for retirement. The client is a well-respected teacher who has taught for 30 years at a local elementary school. The client consistently arrives highly prepared and organized for coaching sessions, routinely reporting progress between sessions and identifying specific topics to focus on during coaching conversations. The client shares they are looking forward to retirement, but they discuss their retirement plans in a very matter-of-fact way. During the current session, the client shares that they have two weeks left before their retirement begins. They would like to focus on a few remaining plans they need to make. Suddenly, the client begins to cry and says, “I’ve spent half my life at this school! I adore my students and my colleagues are my best friends. I can’t imagine what my life is going to be like when I no longer walk through the front doors of the school each morning!” What should the coach do?”

What is the **BEST action**? What is the **WORST action**?

1. **Pause for** a moment, then ask the client to identify the remaining plans they would like to focus on today. → This 100% ignores and overrides the emotional component of what just surfaced for the client. This also ignores the potential new agenda that just surfaced.
2. **Ask the client if they are sure they want to retire.** → While this response addresses what just happened, it is leading the client and a closed question.
3. **Acknowledge that retirement is a significant life transition and that emotional responses are normal.** → While this response appears supportive, it is telling the client what is “normal”. This response is counseling.
4. **Pause, then** acknowledge the emotional impacts the transition seems to be having on the client, and ask if they would like to spend some time with those feelings. → This approach empathizes and demonstrates care for what is front and center for the client. It also invites the client to self-determine if they want to shift the focus.

SCENARIO 6 -

“A client is working with a coach to support them during an important career transition. The client currently holds a demanding role as Chief Operating Officer of a company, while also raising two young children and serving as primary caretaker for their aging parents, who live with the client. The client recently received job offers from three different companies, each requiring the client and their family to relocate. The client comes to the session excited about the new job opportunities and hopes to gain clarity through the session on which offer to choose. The client starts by discussing the things they are looking for in a new job, energetically listing opportunities for growth, challenging responsibilities, a talented team to lead, and the potential for travel. When the coach asks what the client’s children and aging parents may need in a new community, the client’s excited smile disappears and they are suddenly quiet. What should the coach do?”

What is the **BEST** action? What is the **WORST** action?

1. **Repeat the** question to the client to give them another opportunity to respond to the coach’s inquiry. → This response completely ignored what just happened for the client. There was a clear shift in the client's disposition. It is most effective to follow the client.
2. *Ask the client if they are okay to proceed with the session, or if they need a break.* → This response assumes the “quiet” is a negative. In coaching, it is best to avoid assuming, interpreting or evaluating the meaning for the client. Instead, we can inquire into an observation objectively and invite the client’s response.
3. **Pause for** a moment, then share with the client that they noticed a change in the client’s energy. Ask if the client would like to explore what they are feeling in this moment. → This approach is offering a neutral observation into the non-verbal communication. It also includes the client’s desired direction for support.
4. *Support the client in weighing the offers they have received by inviting the client to explore each of the characteristics they listed for a new job.* → This response completely ignored what just happened for the client. (Same as #1)



SCENARIO 7 -

“A coach is working with a client who is an experienced marathon runner writing a book on training for endurance races. This is a long-held dream for the client. The coach notices that the client often uses running metaphors when talking about their challenges and progress in their writing. The client is typically upbeat and energetic, but they arrive at today’s session appearing tired and discouraged. They share with the coach that they have recently “hit a wall” in writing, with three chapters remaining. When they sit down to write, the client says they can barely come up with anything, and nothing that is worth publishing. The client says they are afraid they won’t be able to complete the book on time and that all of their work toward this goal will be lost. What should the coach do?”

What is the **BEST action**? What is the **WORST action**?

1. *Ask the client if they would like to explore their fear of not finishing the book.* → This is a general approach, not as customized.
2. **Remind the client** *that they have achieved extremely challenging goals in the past and can meet this big goal, too.* → While this statement appears to be supportive, it ignores the needs of the client in the moment. Furthermore, the coach is “telling” the client. These types of statements can increase the coach’s liability because the coach is offering an evaluation of the situation as if they are an expert of the client.
3. **Ask the client** *if there was a time when they were running a marathon and felt like they couldn’t finish. Invite the client to share how they handled that challenge in the race.* → This approach is aligning with, the client's framework, honoring the client’s past experiences and customizing the session to the client.
4. *Support the client in identifying strategies to help them move forward in writing the remaining chapters of the book.* → This is still at the beginning of the session. Action comes at the end. It is also moving into strategy before the client has had an opportunity to process, or shift. It is more effective to invite exploration and a new perspectives before diving into action.

SCENARIO 8 -

“A coach has worked for one year with a client. The client has been identified by their supervisor as a potential leader in the organization based on their high-quality work, good relations with peers, and innovative ideas for future projects. However, the client rarely speaks up in meetings with senior leaders and when they do, they often downplay or diminish their ideas. The client’s supervisor recommended coaching to improve the client’s executive presence, with the ultimate goal of developing as a leader in the organization. At the start of coaching, the client was often self-critical. However, the client has made tremendous progress in recent months. During their closing session, the coach notices that the client has a confident, easy smile. When the coach shares their observation with the client, the client responds by saying, “I feel different, empowered, ready to take on new challenges.” The client adds, “And I was just nominated by the CEO to be part of a leadership development program for emerging leaders in our company!” What should the coach do?”

What is the **BEST** action? What is the **WORST** action?

1. **Acknowledge the** *client’s growth in confidence over the past year, and invite the client to share how they plan to celebrate their selection for the leadership development program.* → This is responsive to what the client just shared and honors the previous coaching work completed.
2. *Invite the client to identify challenges they would like to take on next.* → This overrides what the client just shared. A question like this might show up later in the final session wrap up.
3. *Ask the client what they may need to maintain their new confidence.* → This overrides what the client just shared. A question like this might show up later in the final session wrap up.
4. **Suggest to** *the client that they extend their coaching engagement to work toward a new goal of being promoted to a leadership role.* → This has nothing to do with what the client just offered and is more about the coach.



ADDITIONAL STUDY MATERIAL OF KEY DISTINCTIONS & CORE COMPETENCIES

DIRECTIONS: Please read the the scenario presenting. Then, considering the context. Which core competency is the scenario showing up in. Last, based on the competency pick the answer that would be the “best”, or most effective coaching response.

Competencies to choose from include:

1. Foundation
2. Co-Creating the Relationship
3. Communicating Effectively
4. Cultivating Learning and Growth

After you have noted your answers, scroll to the answer key on page 21 for explanations and the rationale of each.

Scenario 1 -

“The client is a high-energy manager with a generally positive outlook. Just before coming to the coaching session, the client was told that their responsibilities are about to drastically change and will no longer be doing the work they are passionate about. The client has come to the session in a particularly negative mood, and has expressed the desire to address this situation during today’s session. What is the BEST way for the coach to proceed?”

- A. “Ask the client about all of the potential positive outcomes from this situation.”
- B. “Remind the client that the agenda for this session was set at the end of the last session.”
- C. “Explore the outcomes for the session and ensure that the client and coach are both clear on them.”
- D. “Point out to the client how extremely important it is to be passionate about the work we do.”



Scenario 2 -

"A client is explaining a situation to a coach, who senses that there is more that the client is not sharing. How should the coach approach the situation?"

- A. "Interrupt the client and ask for greater disclosure."
- B. "Give the client the "bottom-line" read on the situation."
- C. "Ask the client's permission to probe a little deeper."
- D. "Give the client feedback on the importance of honesty in coaching."

Scenario 3 -

"When dealing with a client who brings many issues to the table, it is best for the coach to pick the option:"

- A. "Where the coach has the most expertise."
- B. "Of asking what the client would like to start with."
- C. "That looks most likely to be handled in the time available."
- D. "That the coach thinks can do the most good for the client."

Scenario 4 -

"An appropriate role for a coach in goal setting, planning, and prioritizing with a client is:"

- A. "Critiquing and embellishing a client's goals."
- B. "Letting the client self-determine the need for goals."
- C. "Taking charge of the process to ensure it is completed accurately."
- D. "Facilitating a process around the client's goal setting, planning, and prioritizing."

Scenario 5 -

"Every coaching conversation should include:"

- A. "An action plan."
- B. "An agenda identified by the client."
- C. "Review of fieldwork."
- D. "A summary by the coach of the client's progress."



ANSWER KEY & RATIONAL

Understanding the rationale can help you identify the correct answer with greater ease. The goal is to identify the most “coach-like” answer.

1. Core Competency: Co-Creating the Relationship

“The client is a high-energy manager with a generally positive outlook. Just before coming to the coaching session, the client was told that their responsibilities are about to drastically change and will no longer be doing the work they are passionate about. The client has come to the session in a particularly negative mood, and has expressed the desire to address this situation during today’s session. What is the BEST way for the coach to proceed?”

Out of all possible answers, C is the most coach-like.

- A. **“Ask the client about all of the potential positive outcomes from this situation.”** → Jumping into coaching questions before Agenda Setting is ineffective coaching. Always establish the agenda first.
- B. **“Remind the client that the agenda for this session was set at the end of the last session.”** → The session agenda is 100% always set by the client and the client has the right to shift gears at any point, even mid-session.
- C. **“Explore the outcomes for the session and ensure that the client and coach are both clear on them.”** → The scenario indicates we are starting the session, so we are under Agenda Setting.
- D. **“Point out to the client how extremely important it is to be passionate about the work we do.”** → This would be counseling, mentoring or advising, and is not coaching. Telling the client what they should think, or feel counts against coaching ethics.



2. Core Competency: Co-Creating the Relationship

"A client is explaining a situation to a coach, who senses that there is more that the client is not sharing. How should the coach approach the situation?"

Out of all possible answers, C is the most coach-like.

- A. **"Interrupt the client and ask for greater disclosure."** → This option is assumptive. The coach is assuming they have assessed the client correctly. We don't want to assume our assumptions are correct, or that the client should disclose something.
- B. **"Give the client the "bottom-line" read on the situation."** → If they client hasn't identified they want a bottom-line read, this approach is invasive to the client's process. Giving a bottom-line read is leading the client away from their own answers and considered counseling or consulting.
- C. **"Ask the client's permission to probe a little deeper."** → This is the most coach-like approach. If you as the coach, sense there is more, you can inquire into it to see if your assumption or intuition is correct, or not. Our intuitions can serve as long as they are not over-riding the client's intuition of themselves. This approach also keeps the client in the driver's seat.
- D. **"Give the client feedback on the importance of honesty in coaching."** → This is also assumptive. See response to "a" above.



3. Core Competency: Communicating Effectively

"When dealing with a client who brings many issues to the table, it is best for the coach to pick the option:" → Out of all possible answers, B is the most coach-like.

- A. **"Where the coach has the most expertise."** → In coaching we focus on the client as expert, not the coach.
- B. **"Of asking what the client would like to start with."** → This is the most coach-like answer because the client is in the lead and identifying the priority. The client will know exactly the hot-spot of their issue. When the coach invites the client to lead in this way, that is effective coaching.
- C. **"That looks most likely to be handled in the time available."** → With this option the coach is assessing, operating off an assumption, and directing the session.
- D. **"That the coach thinks can do the most good for the client."** → With this option the coach is assessing, operating off an assumption and directing the session.

4. Core Competency: Cultivating Learning and Growth

"An appropriate role for a coach in goal setting, planning, and prioritizing with a client is:" → Out of all possible answers, D is the most coach-like.

- A. **"Critiquing and embellishing a client's goals."** → This is not coaching. This is assessing, assuming and directing.
- B. **"Letting the client self-determine the need for goals."** → This is a coach-like answer. However, D is even more supportive of the client's process.
- C. **"Taking charge of the process to ensure it is completed accurately."** → This is not coaching. This is directing, assessing and assuming.
- D. **"Facilitating a process around the client's goal setting, planning, and prioritizing."** → This option covers many bases under the competency of Facilitating Learning & Results. This is the best approach.



5. Core Competency: Foundation

“Every coaching conversation should include:” → Out of all possible answers, B is the most coach-like.

- A. **“An action plan.”** → Maybe. The client may identify that the agenda is to process and not every session may include an action plan at the end.
- B. **“An agenda identified by the client.”** → Yes. A coaching session is not a coaching session without the session direction established by the client. Every session needs this to become an effective coaching session.
- C. **“Review of fieldwork.”** → This would be up to the client and may or may not show up in a session. Client discretion.
- D. **“A summary by the coach of the client’s progress.”** → The summary of the client’s progress is most effective when the client is invited to do the progress review. (Marker 8.1)

**** Understanding Executive & Sponsored Coaching Engagements**

If you do not have experience, or these types of scenarios do not apply to your coaching, here are things to consider to help you understand the ethics behind third party contracting.

- ✓ A “sponsor” is the person, or company paying for coaching on behalf of the client.
- ✓ A sponsor does not have rights to session content. Session content remains confidential and any disclosures, or progress reporting, would need to be agreed upon between coachee and sponsor.
- ✓ A coach should disclose the parameters of confidentiality up-front to the sponsor.
- ✓ A coach may facilitate a conversation, or coach, the coachee/sponsor to determine the desired reporting agreements.
- ✓ A coach should disclose that they are there for the best interest of the client and will honor the client’s chosen direction at all times. Sometimes a sponsor may have a desired outcome, or agenda, for the coachee they are sponsoring. Open communication and establishing agreements before a coaching engagement starts minimizes issues occurring.
- ✓ It is best practice to place all agreements in the signed contract before proceeding with the coaching engagement.



ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR PASSING

Approach #1 – Begin with the answers.

Some coaches found it helpful to read the responses first. You know one of them will be the worst, and one of the responses will be considered the best. After reading the responses, reading the situation will make more sense. This is an excellent approach to help you prevent overthinking the scenario.

Approach #2 – Align with the root coaching principles.

It is normal to feel overwhelmed or worry that you must memorize every single one of the Core Competencies verbatim. If you happened to memorize them, that is great! However, memorizing them is not required to pass the exam. Being educated on the underlying principles of what coaching is and isn't in its purest form *is* required. It is helpful to read and re-read the ICF Core Competencies so you can absorb them into your understanding.

View BEST responses through the lens of: Which response demonstrates the ICF Core Competencies? You can choose the answer that reflects the most competencies.

The coach demonstrates client-centered responses and unbiased curiosity, is supportive and inviting, and 100% honors the client. The coach responds to what the client just offered (not switching gears on the client).

Examples:

- Following the client's lead
- Curious / unassuming
- Transparent, open, honest
- Responsive to client's needs / offers
- Ethical responsiveness



View WORST responses through the lens of: Did the coach do two things that were not client-centered, or just one? Pick the response that reflects two or more ways a coach could go against any Core Competency.

Coach introduces their bias in their response, switches gears on the client, makes assumptions, directs the session, ignores emotional content, gives their opinion, or ignores what the client just offered and heads in a different direction than the client without permission.

Examples:

- Directing
- Leading
- Assuming
- Hiding bias / agenda
- Unethical / lack of ethical awareness

Approach #3 – Create a plan.

You've already done the hard work. The hard part is the education, mentoring, all of the practice hours, taking on clients, and learning the coaching approach.

This exam is only here to confirm what you already know. The ICF is not trying to provide trick questions. They are allowing an opportunity to point out nuances.

The exam is 3 hours, to give you plenty of time. Creating a mindset of spaciousness can help. Reminding yourself, "I have plenty of time." Take a deep breath and smile to reset your nerves. Some people will take all three hours to answer and review their answers. Others complete early. There is no penalty for early completion.

There are two parts. Each part allows you to flag a scenario if you want to return to it. The scenarios with obvious answers, you can answer and then move on. This approach will save you time to go back to any flagged scenarios.

If you feel anxious, go into the exam with a plan to calm your nervous system. Deep breathing to recenter. Remember, you know coaching. Trust yourself and trust your gut. If it helps, you can have an affirmation ready, like: "I know exactly what coaching is and is not. I've got this."



ADDITIONAL ICF MATERIALS & STUDY

Private Tutoring:

If you took a break in your program and there was a gap in your education between when you started and when you graduated, or if you graduated from a Level One program and you are feeling less confident, you can always work one-on-one in private tutoring.

ICF Video Series on Core Competencies:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMBtOVpaN5DjRt-VAJla0Xe0MLuA-LZNk>

ICF Core Competencies:

<https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/core-competencies>

ICF Code of Ethics:

<https://coachingfederation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>

ICF PCC Markers:

<https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/performance-evaluations/pcc-markers>

Words of Encouragement...

Remember, you've done the hard work. You've graduated from an ICF Accredited program which is no small feat. You know the distinctions. Trust your knowledge of coaching. Trust your knowledge of the competencies.