

Essential Coach Qualities & Core Coaching Competencies

As part of its mission to infuse coaching concepts into education, work, and well-being, Coach Training EDU has identified and outlined 7 Essential Coach Qualities of a professional coach. In alignment with CTEDU's coaching model, based in Hope Theory, CTEDU emphasizes the characteristics - the agency and being - that a coach embodies to be a masterful coach. These qualities form the foundation of CTEDU's curriculum and exceed the standards set by coaching organizations such as the International Coach Federation (ICF). CTEDU's goal is to prepare you to easily pass the ICF's standards.

The goal of this document is to map the CTEDU Essential Coach Qualities to the ICF's Core Competency Model. The first part gives a brief overview of each of the seven Essential Coach Qualities. The second part goes into more detail for each of the seven qualities and maps out how each quality encompasses the ICF's core competency.

CTEDU	ICF
Professional	A. Foundation 1. Demonstrates Ethical Practice B. Co-Creating the Relationship 3. Establishes and Maintains Agreements
Empathetic	B. Co-Creating the Relationship 4. Cultivates Trust and Safety C. Communicating Effectively 6. Listens Actively
Empowering	A. Foundation 2. Embodies a Coaching Mindset
Curious	B. Co-Creating the Relationship 5. Maintains Presence C. Communicating Effectively 7. Evokes Awareness

Courageous	C. Communicating Effectively 7. Evokes Awareness
Confident	B. Co-Creating the Relationship 5. Maintains Presence 6. Space for Silence
Inspiring	D. Cultivating Learning and Growth 8. Facilitates Client Growth

Overview of Coach Training EDU's Essential Coach Qualities

1. Professional.

A coach sets ethical coaching agreements with clarity and cultural awareness. The central aspects of this quality are establishing clear expectations with the client and sponsor if present, maintaining confidentiality, designing an alliance, and addressing accountability.

Skill-check Questions:

“How well did the coach clarify expected outcomes or address accountability on a client's recent action steps?”

“How well did the coach use the TIME Model when setting a strategic or session agenda?”

2. Empathetic.

A coach actively listens empathetically (in Level 2 listening), using imagination and intuition while staying curious and attuned with a client to pick up on even subtle shifts in a client's emotion. An experienced life coach asks questions designed to provoke insight (evidence of Level 2 listening) rather than gather information for the coach's sake (evidence of Level 1 Listening).

Skill-check Questions:

“How well did the questions provoke new insights for the client, as opposed to seeking information or implying solutions?”

“To what degree did the coach recognize subtle shifts in a client’s energy, tone, or perspectives?”

3. Empowering.

A coach sees the client as the expert in their life, inviting the client to be proactive and craft both the coaching session agenda and eventual following action steps. A coach offers expert knowledge with curiosity to empower the client as well as adapts coaching tools to fit the client's unique situation.

Skill-check Questions:

“How well did the coach focus on the client, not the problem?
-and-

How well did the coach balance expert knowledge and information with empowering the client?”

“How well did the coach adapt the client's language and adjust standard coaching questions and tools to the client?”

4. Curious.

Coach continues to stay curious, even when clients experience strong emotion or realize epiphanies. The quality shows in a coach’s skill to dig for a deeper agenda in the TIME model to asking clients to give a name to an empowering perspective or new insight. A coach uses Powerful Questions which are short and open-ended (usually start with what, why, or how) and the coach invites the client do most of the work of uncovering insights in a coaching session.

Skill-check Questions:

“How well did the coach ask short, open-ended questions using a balance of learn-be-do questions that address a client's agency and pathways?”

“To what degree was the coach willing to lean into intuition while staying curious and holding space for the client to explore?”

5. Courageous.

A coach sets a safe space and demonstrates connection and vulnerability while also at times being fierce and sometimes asking uncomfortable but priceless questions.

Skill-check questions:

“How well did the coach address prickly points, ideas, or observations? (Either directly or through sharp questions.)”

“To what degree is the coach willing to take risks and share intuition and ideas without attachment to being right?”

6. Confident.

A coach shows confidence in the client's abilities by inviting the client to do much of work of exploring ideas and emotion in a coaching session. A coach trusts the coaching process and embraces pausing and silence while holding space for the client to arrive at useful action steps. Strong coaches show confidence that their client can build appropriate accountability.

Skill-check questions:

“How well does the coach demonstrate trust in the coaching process and comfort with pausing and silence during a coaching session?”

“To what degree does the coach trust that the action step will come from the client if sufficient learning and insight happens?”

7. Inspiring.

A coach inspires clients to take bold actions between coaching sessions while balancing learning and action steps while also designing ways to help clients stay accountable and follow through on action steps.

Skill-check questions:

“How effective was the coach at helping the client develop inspiring Well-Designed Actions?”

“To what degree does the action (pathways) also include aspects of learning and being (agency)?”

Coach Training EDU's Essential Coach Qualities with ICF's Core Competencies

1) Professional

- A. A coach establishes clear expectations about coaching process and adheres to high ethical standards.

A professional coach establishes clear expectations about coaching and the coaching process with the client and sponsor (such as a parent, university, or organization) if present. Establishing expectations also requires a coach to manage the various roles that a coach may play in a client's life. For example, in a university setting, an advisor might also be tasked with coaching students or an executive coach might also have extensive experience in a certain area and be called on as an advisor in some instances. Or a wellness coach might have expert knowledge in establishing an exercise routine. This quality is demonstrated by the coach's ability to define coaching succinctly, successfully set outcomes, and delineate the different roles a professional might take when working with clients, students, or athletes.

- B. A coach maintains confidentiality, respects a client's experience and identity, and knows when to refer clients to other professionals.

The second is to maintain confidentiality and avoid conflicts of interest and uphold the other ethical and professional standards, such as being aware of the boundaries of coaching and when to refer clients to additional resources. This also includes creating clear expectations and agreements with the sponsor if present.

C. A coach sets clear outcomes for the overall coaching relationship as well as effective agendas for each coaching session.

The third is establishing an effective agenda at the beginning of a coaching session sets a strong foundation for the rest of the session. Eliciting the agenda from the client empowers the client to look proactively at their life and choose what they want to focus on. Doing so underlines the principle that the client is the expert in their own life, and the role of the coach is to clarify and explore that agenda. An effective agenda includes exploring a topic, the importance of the topic, a way to measure the effectiveness, and the coach's echoing back to ensure understanding and clarity.

D. A coach designs an alliance with a client to empower the coaching relationship.

The fourth is to proactively design the way you as a coach work with your client. The technical term in the coaching world is Design the Alliance and it refers to directly addressing various points in how your client wants you to be as their coach, from the degree to how hard you push your client to how often your client wants to check in with you between sessions. A designed alliance is your opportunity as a coach to empower your client with the opportunity to make suggestions and give you feedback to make your coaching even more useful to your client. And for you as a coach to ask your client their preferences in your coaching style, categories of questions, or ways to help them follow through on action steps.

E. A coach addresses and co-creates systems to help clients maintain accountability and follow through on action steps.

Accountability is where the rubber meets the road. Managing progress and accountability is a skill that coaches display by combining curious questions with direct communication in order to help clients develop a plan - in addition to the action steps - to ensure follow-through. Oftentimes, the extra attention paid to helping clients think about accountability and why it is important for clients to follow through, helps boost chances that your client will complete the designed action plan.

A large part of the value a client receives from coaching is in having a coach accountable.

ICF's Core Competency

This quality includes the ICF's core competency A. Foundation: 1. Demonstrates Ethical Practice and B. Co-Creating the Relationship 3. Establishes and Maintains Agreements. From the ICF:

A. Foundation

1. Demonstrates Ethical Practice

Definition: 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
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

B. Co-Creating the Relationship

3. Establishes and Maintains Agreements

Definition: 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

2) Empathetic

- A. A coach listens actively to clients, seeking to understand clients within the context of their lives and to create a safe space for clients to share freely.

Empathetic listening is the core skill of coaching. It's what a coach does each minute of every session. It's a proactive activity, requiring the coach to actively imagine what is it like to be the client in the client's life, in what the client is currently describing, as well as right now in this session. Such a stance in listening takes trusting your imagination,

intuition, and natural curiosity to help you arrive at the next powerful question or direction to take the coaching session.

B. A coach generates questions from the client's perspective, asking questions designed to elicit insights.

When you listen from such a perspective, it makes sense to ask questions from the view point of your client. The first way a coach demonstrates this skill is by avoiding questions designed to get information but rather asking questions designed to elicit insight. Information based questions might look at what has worked in the past or gather information that someone would need in order to make a recommendation, for example a weekly schedule of current activities. Insight based questions focuses on what the client might not have yet considered. For example:

“What is it like saying it all out loud?”

“What do you hope to learn about yourself in the next week?”

“What do you want to say to yourself two months from now?”

C. A coach recognizes subtle shifts of energy as well as patterns and themes in a client's life.

The other way this skill shows is the degree in which a coach recognizes small shifts in a client's perspective, energy, or emotion. When you listen from an empathetic perspective for extended lengths of time, you start to recognize changes and shifts in your client that even your client does not notice or quickly dismisses. By bringing awareness to the present moment and the shift that just happened, you help your client become more mindful and raise awareness of certain patterns that are extremely useful to address. Listening so closely makes clients feel seen and heard and creates a tremendously strong bond between a coach and client. Such a strong relationship creates a safe space for clients to dig deep and explore areas that are hard to navigate successfully solo. Empathetic listening and the recognition of such small shifts adds depth which provides tremendous value through coaching.

ICF's Core Competency

This quality includes the ICF's core competency B. Co-Creating the Relationship 4. Cultivates Trust and Safety and 6. Listens Actively. From the ICF:

B. Co-Creating the Relationship

4. Cultivates Trust and Safety

Definition: 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

C. Communicating Effectively

6. Listens Actively

Definition: 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

3) Empowering

- A. One of the best uses of a coaching exercise is to offer an insightful starting point a scaffold for a coach's curiosity to ask powerful questions that move a client forward.

This quality looks at how well you are able to balance expert knowledge and using coaching exercises with making sure you fully empower and allow your client to determine the topic and direction of the coaching. One of the best uses of a coaching exercise is to offer an insightful starting point a scaffold for a coach's curiosity to ask powerful questions that move a client forward. A coach looks for opportunities to ask questions from a perspective of being your client's student. To meet this coaching standard, after you share expert information, it's best to shift immediately into empowerment mode to ask your client what they want to do with the information. If your client chooses to ignore or go against it, it's your job to follow them. If they choose to adopt and use it, that's great too, and it's your job to shift back into complete curiosity mode. One of the trickiest parts of coaching is to find the synergy between providing expert knowledge and leaning into empowerment coaching.

- B. A coach tailors coaching exercises and tools to fit the client.

The second way this concept shows up is in the way you adapt to fit your client's language and paradigm. Over explaining coaching tools or reading questions from a list makes coaching sessions feel flat and misses the opportunity to connect meaningfully with your client. Clients want to feel seen and heard. An expert coach melds the structure of a coaching exercise with what the client just said in a way that seems seamless. The whole conversation feels so natural that someone listening in might think that two people are having an amazing conversation without realizing all the coaching tools, exercises, and skills happening in the background.

This quality includes the ICF's core competency A. Foundation 2. Embodies a Coaching Mindset. From the ICF:

A. Foundation

2. Embodies a Coaching Mindset

Definition: 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

4) Curious

A. A coach asks powerful questions designed to elicit a deeper awareness that explores a client's current assumptions, ideas, and emotions as well as looks toward the future.

b. {not b, but a continuation from above.} Curiosity comes from the Latin word cura, which means to care, ask about. Combined with listening empathetically, from the client's perspective, curiosity is a way of deeply caring for someone else. Such listening and asking questions is a gift that allows a client to explore more of themselves and what is truly most important in their lives. Curiosity shows up more clearly in the structure and topics of the questions a coach asks. The most effective structure is

termed a powerful question. Powerful questions are short (10 words or fewer) and start with open-ended question words such as what, why, and how. The other aspect of powerful questions is the quality and range of a coach's curiosity to include a balance of learning, being, and doing questions, covering both a client's agency and possible pathways.

B. A coach continues to ask meaningful questions that help clients go beyond current understanding, transforming judgement into curiosity, and helping clients clarify and define new insights and ideas.

This skill shows up most clearly is in the coach being able to elicit deeper ideas and emotions by simply staying curious. When a coach stays in curiosity, keeps asking questions, and finds a deeper agenda for the client, clients are on a journey of completely new territory of thought and emotion. The probability to stumble upon new and meaningful insights skyrockets. One such opportunity is at the beginning of each coaching session when setting the session agenda. When exploring the importance of a surface agenda, there is often an opportunity to look at another, more fundamental agenda that addressing would have an impact on the current challenge as well as many other areas in a client's life. A skilled coach is able to listen to such a degree that they are able to hear opportunities to ask questions that change a client's perspective or perhaps uncover and challenge limiting beliefs. The job of the coach is to listen from the perspective of the client to such a degree that the client feels self-judgement transformed to curiosity and progress.

This quality includes the ICF's core competency B. Co-Creating the Relationship 5. Maintains Presence and C. Communicating Effectively 7. Evokes Awareness. From the ICF:

B. Co-Creating the Relationship

5. Maintains Presence

Definition: 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

C. Communicating Effectively

7. Evokes Awareness

Definition: 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

5) Courageous

A. An effective professional coach is able to create a safe space that invites sharing and boldness.

B. {not b, but a continuation} Coaching can be a fierce profession that requires the coach to be comfortable with vulnerability, being bold, and taking risks by asking tough questions. Coaching courage shows up in the coach's willingness to take risks, ask tough questions, and address the elephant in the room if one is romping around.

B. A coach is willing to be direct and state his or her observations, insights, and suggestions without being attached to whether the client agrees with the idea or not.

Suggesting solutions is a tricky area for a coach because many of coaching qualities point to the coach not being the expert, providing solutions, or telling a client what to do and how to do it. However, in practice, the coach will have suggestions and ideas for the client. Courage as a coaching quality addresses how well the coach is able to share those suggestions or insights with the client from a life coaching perspective. In a coaching session, this involves saying what you think (giving a suggestion/idea), and following it up with a powerful question. For example: I think you're deluding yourself here. What are your thoughts? I think you really need to take this step. What do you think? Not being attached to the rightness or wrongness of your intuition or suggestion allows you to fully empower your client. And if your intuition or idea is off the mark, clients usually follow up with articulating what would make your suggestion fit perfectly. Even when wrong, you have provided your client with an effective starting point to evoke an insight.

C. Communicating Effectively

7. Evokes Awareness

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

2. Challenges the client as a way to evoke awareness or insight

11. Shares observations, insights and feelings, without attachment, that have the potential to create new learning for the client

6) Confident

A. A professional coach leans into the three trusts in coaching - trust your client, trust yourself, and trust the process - and embraces pausing and silence as useful elements of a coaching session.

Expert coaches trust the coaching process. Beginning coaches often try to force insights, rush to ask the next question or paraphrase and explain where their question is coming from or talk about the way the coaching exercise is supposed to work or just keep explaining something that is best wrapped up in a question for the client.

Experienced coaches are completely comfortable with pausing, allowing ten to twenty seconds of silence before asking the next question or pausing after the client is done speaking to create the next question. Such comfort with silence comes from the coach trusting that the client is also processing ideas and emotion in the silence.

B. An expert coach trusts the client's resilience and brilliance.

The coach assumes that a client is resourceful and capable of achieving what they want to achieve. The coach's role is not to offer suggestions or try to over-help but rather to let the client do the heavy lifting in the session. A coach avoids trying to problem solve but rather focuses on simple, curious questions to prompt the client to do the necessary inner work to arrive at insights, solutions, and action steps. It shows in the degree a coach continues to explore for insights about learning, being, a client's agency, perspective, and characteristics without trying to come up with an immediate action plan. An experienced coach is confident that the client's exploration will unfold in such a way that the new insights will naturally lead to an exciting and effective action plan for the client to take between sessions.

This quality includes the ICF's core competency B. Co-Creating the Relationship 5. Maintains Presence 6. Space for silence.

B. Co-Creating the Relationship

5. Maintains Presence

Definition: 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

7) Inspiring

A. A professional coach inspires clients to take bold action steps and design effective systems.

An effective coach guides clients to create exciting action steps, small enough to be manageable yet large enough to be meaningful. This quality shows up most clearly in the strength of the well-designed actions a coach and client co-design. A well-designed action includes these elements: being stated in the positive, effective size to time ratio, starting and ultimate success is completely controlled by the client, and the measurement of success is tangible.

B. A coach effectively ties action with learning and being, addressing both a client's agency and possible pathways.

When a coach also asks questions about how the action step relates back to a client's agency (learning and being), they add another dimension to the coaching. When clients are taking action steps not only to get the tasks completed, but also to learn more about themselves or the effectiveness of a certain perspective, or how well they can use the

tasks to develop another skill set, action steps become that much more meaningful. When the action step seems to combine equal measures of action and learning, the coach is doing well and likely creating action and learning steps that inspire even bolder action in the future.

C. A coach co-designs accountability with clients and addresses the strategic and session agendas effectively.

The final piece to designing action steps that inspire ties back to addressing accountability and the best ways for the coach to follow up next coaching session. Designing and alliance around accountability ties back into the first coaching quality: Professional, and completes the coaching core quality loop.

This quality includes the ICF's core competency D. Cultivating Learning and Growth 8. Facilitates Client Growth.

D. Cultivating Learning and Growth

8. Facilitates Client Growth

Definition: 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