

# The Ethics Toolkit

For Coaches and  
Mentors



**COMENSA**

COACHES AND MENTORS OF SOUTH AFRICA

# The Ethics Toolkit for Coaches and Mentors

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*Ethics is nothing else than reverence for life* – Albert Schweitzer

## **Introduction**

COMENSA accepts the definition of Ethics as a moral philosophy that involves systematizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. Ethics is a set of moral principles that govern a person or group's behaviour.

As a rule, we all feel that we understand the difference between right and wrong and, as Coaches and Mentors, we certainly enter our chosen profession with a desire to help rather than harm. However, the mere fact that we come into contact with people who may have conflicting values and operating philosophies, means that we must pay particular attention to ethical practices and standards.

Being a coach or mentor means that we place ourselves in a position of trust with our clients and it is beholden upon us to ensure that we not only act in a morally responsible and professional manner, but that we equip ourselves with the tools to resolve the moral and ethical conflicts that arise as a consequence of the close interaction of our work.

The goal of this Ethics Toolkit is to help coaches and mentors to become proactive in their ethical behaviour and to provide a useful resource that enables them to make the right decisions from a position that is morally comfortable to all stakeholders.

The Toolkit is divided into four sections dealing with the primary areas of consideration:

### **Stakeholder Considerations**

This section covers the considerations that must be made regarding the awareness of your personal ethical profile, the broad ethical personalities of your clients and the ethical profile of organizations you may be contracted to.

### **Pragmatic Considerations**

This section covers the practical aspects of codes, contracts, frameworks and procedures.

### **Resource Considerations**

Laws and legislation, governing bodies, professional associations, supervisors, personal mentors and established chains of authority are all available to ensure compliance and provide help and guidance when conflicts arise

### **Considerations for Professional Excellence**

It is not enough to simply comply with rules and regulations. If we are to hold to Schweitzer's belief that ethics is a reverence for life, then ethics becomes a manner of living, a way of constantly reviewing and improving our professional interactions in order to provide quality service to our clients.

## Section 1 – Stakeholder Considerations

The only real solution to avoiding ethical conflicts is to avoid people! As that isn't a realistic option, the next best thing is to be aware of the nature of all of the stakeholders involved in a coaching/mentoring process, evaluate the potential problems and establish the contractual framework and boundaries that will, at the very least, minimise unavoidable harm, and preferably ensure that the interests and integrity of all parties are upheld to the highest possible standards.

### The Ethical Profile

Ethical behaviour is matter of making the right choices, and those choices become easier when there is a solid awareness of personal beliefs and values.

COMENSA's stated purpose is to ignite and sustain positive change in the people of South Africa through coaching and mentoring. The values that COMENSA asks its members to uphold in order to achieve its purpose are: Integrity, Ethics, Accountability, Inclusivity and Professionalism. However, there are doubtless other values which are of particular importance to you and your business. The simple exercise that follows is designed to provide you with an awareness of your ethical profile. With this tool you will feel more confident to make the choices that best reflect your core beliefs and values.

### Core Values

List, in order of importance, 3 – 5 values that you feel are most important to you as part of your moral compass.

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Examples:  
Achievement  
Charity  
Contribution  
Community  
Enterprise  
Family  
Forgiveness  
Independence  
Spirituality

### Values of Execution

List, in order of priority 3 – 5 values that reflect the importance of the manner in which you behave towards your client

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Examples:  
Caring  
Guiding  
Helpfulness  
Honesty  
Minding my own  
business  
Respect

### Relational Values

List, in order of priority 3 – 5 values that are important in a coaching/mentoring relationship

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Examples:  
Accepting  
Friendly  
Non judgemental  
Open Minded  
Polite  
Unobtrusive

### Virtues

Virtues are those characteristics that express moral excellence and good character. Which virtues do you place the most importance on within the coaching/mentoring environment?

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Examples:  
Assertiveness  
Commitment  
Cooperation  
Gratitude  
Integrity  
Loyalty  
Reliability  
Trustworthy

Once you have completed the above exercise, write your responses down where you will be able to refer to them regularly as an aid to maintaining your ethical bearings. As our beliefs and values develop and mature over time it would be useful to repeat this exercise at regular intervals.

### The Coachee/Mentee Profile

The minimum that can be expected of ethical behaviour is to do no harm. However, the coaching/mentoring process is more complex than at first appears, and it is easy for the unaware to unintentionally overlook issues which may ultimately harm or impede the progress of the person you are contracted to help.

There are four areas where there could potentially be legal or ethical problems and thought should be given to each of these areas prior to commencement of coaching and/or mentoring.

These are:      Boundaries  
                    Confidentiality  
                    Competence  
                    Dependency

Below is a quick checklist that can be used to ensure that these issues have been considered

Boundaries	Am I clear about my boundaries and are they in line with my values and beliefs?	
	Have I established my client's boundaries?	
Confidentiality	Am I prepared/able to maintain complete confidentiality?	
	Are there issues which may potentially require a breach of your confidentiality? Have these possibilities been discussed? (i.e. in the case of law-breaking, abuse, or organizational requirements)	
Competence	Am I fully aware of the requirements of the coaching assignment?	
	Am I fully aware of the needs of my client regarding expected outcomes?	
	Do I have the requisite skills, knowledge and experience to be able to assist the client?	
	Am I prepared to refer the client to someone who is more capable to help them, if the need arises?	
	Do I need to refer to a Supervisor to ensure that I am able to provide the necessary competence?	
Dependency	Am I encouraging the client to extend the process unnecessarily?	
	Do I discourage the client from forming a reliance on my input?	
	Is there a clear determination of expected outcomes and a consequent end to the process?	

### The Sponsor/Organisation Profile

The addition of a third party into the process may bring added complications to the four areas of potential concern discussed above and extra care should be taken to ensure that these issues are addressed.

**Boundaries:** Clear definitions should be made regarding the primary client, the hierarchy of stakeholders and the rules of engagement. Standards and procedures for the handling of information both internal and external to the organisation should be laid down. Agreements reached regarding the marketing of coaching/mentoring services within the organisation.

**Confidentiality:** Clear guidelines should be established to detail what information may, or may not, be divulged. Negotiated agreements are vital if the required levels of trust are to be maintained. Where possible, issues of confidentiality should be put in writing and agreed to by all parties.

**Competence:** The role of the coach/mentor to be clearly laid out detailing required outcomes (personal development, leadership development, performance issues etc.). The Coach/Mentor should objectively assess the requirements and ensure that their competency is adequate to the task/s. Procedures should be established for where referrals to other experts may be required.

**Dependency:** Clear Guidelines regarding length of coaching/mentoring process to be made as well as exit strategy.

### **Other affected persons**

The Coach/Mentor should remain aware, at all times, of the affect that coaching/mentoring decisions can have regarding other people and should ensure that the attention of the client is brought to bear on such matters

## **Section 2 – Pragmatic Considerations**

There are a number of practical actions that can be taken to avoid the likelihood of an ethical breach. A number of these are listed below. However, it is good practice to review one's professional situation from time to time and add or amend as may be required by prevailing circumstances.

### **Code of Conduct/Code of Practice**

A Code of Conduct, or code of practice, is a document which is drawn up to reflect the way that you do business. It is a set of voluntary 'rules' and it encapsulates your philosophy and practice on matters relating to contracts, conditions of service, conflicts of interests etc. Its purpose is to establish a clear and common understanding of expectations and deliverable services between the coach/mentor and the coachee/mentee. A Code of Conduct may be a simple personal declaration or it can be a more in depth document which takes into consideration the requirements of multiple parties and stakeholders.

Although all members are bound by the COMENSA code of ethics, it is often wise to formulate an additional and personal code of ethics that relates to one's own practice or business. Whether a business consists of a one person entity or a large organisation, a code of conduct is essential for ethical health and wellness. The following are suggested items for inclusion:

### **Statement of Services**

Services offered, together with details of services which are NOT offered (For example a coach does not offer therapy), which clarifies for the client the exact nature of the services to be contracted for.

#### **Contracts**

Detailing what contracts will include such as deliverables, activities, costs and timescales

#### **Professional Conduct**

A statement that business will be conducted with integrity, in adherence with accepted professional norms and in the best interests of the client

#### **Duty of Care**

Recognising the requirements of laws, legislation and the requirements of professional bodies

#### **Fees and Payments**

A statement of policy with respect to fee structure, discounts, barter, invoicing, payment terms, debt recovery, interest etc.

## **Ethics and Confidentiality**

These matters can be included here or in your Code of Ethics – *see below*

### **Code of Ethics**

A code of ethics is an invaluable tool for establishing trust between coach and coachee (mentor and mentee) and is an essential component of Good Practice. It generally includes provisions regarding confidentiality, competence, referral options, boundary issues etc. As a member of COMENSA there is a code of ethics to which you have agreed to be bound. This ethical code should be read and, if necessary, added to for your own purposes in order to reflect your current practice.

### **Contracts**

A contract is a written or verbal agreement between two or more parties that is intended to be enforceable by law. To be legal a contract must begin with a definite offer and a subsequent acceptance of that offer. It must also contain a 'consideration' being a benefit which must be bargained for between the parties. In common law it is a prerequisite that both parties offer consideration before a contract can be thought of as binding. In other words, a payment of some nature is exchanged for the performance, or promise of performance, by the other party. Contracts can therefore become unenforceable when the intended consideration is found to be less than expected or performance is not as promised.

A contract is an ethical tool which requires a basic knowledge of law and the coach/mentor should seek advice from competent parties, if necessary, in order to ensure compliance. Although many coaches/mentors have a 'one size fits all' contract for their clients, it is advisable to make provision for additional items to be added after negotiations are completed.

Coaching and mentoring contracts generally include clauses relating to confidentiality issues and may also include statements relating to appropriate boundaries within the contracted relationship. It may even be appropriate to include a framework for a referral procedure to be followed when the practice competence of the coach/mentor is not able to meet the requirements of the client.

Obviously, when a third party is involved in the contractual agreement for coaching or mentoring, extra care and consideration should be taken.

### **Established Models and Frameworks of Practice**

The coaching and mentoring professions are maturing and there are well established models and frameworks of practice that have been proven to be effective. Requirements of most professional bodies regarding Standards of Competence involve the coach/mentor being knowledgeable of, and able to apply, the theories and practices behind established models and frameworks.

The coach/mentor's greatest tool in the ethical toolkit is to be able to meet the competencies promised during the contractual stage and they should therefore ensure that they have a sound body of knowledge as well as access to the resources necessary to meet requirements.

### **Competent Assessment**

Allied to competencies of coaching and mentoring are the skills required to perform assessments. Should the coach/mentor choose to use assessments as part of the process, they should be adequately trained in, and conversant with, any methods that are used.

## Framework for Ethical Decisions and Dilemmas

Despite building ethical intelligence and using all of the tools at your disposal, there may well be times when you are faced with an ethical decision which has to be made, or an ethical dilemma which has to be faced. Such decisions will be made easier with the use of an ethical decision framework. A simple six step solution is listed below. Alternative models can be found in the ACTION model for coaching. (Passmore 2009) or the 'Framework for Ethical Thinking' from the Markkula Centre for Applied Ethics.

## Ethical Decision Framework



### Step 1 **Apply objective analysis**

Once you have recognised that an ethical issue exists, gather all of the relevant information together and evaluate all of the possible options that are open to you. You may need to bypass your personal biases during this step in order to get to a comprehensive list of options.

### Step 2 **Consider the consequences**

There will be both positive and negative consequences associated with each of your options. Think carefully about both the facts and the assumptions that are involved.

- Are your sources of information credible?
- Who are the stakeholders and who would carry the possible burdens and risks?
- Who or what could be hurt?
- Who or what could benefit, and in what way?
- How significant would the benefits and/or damages be?
- What are the implications over time?
- Do any of the options mean discarding ethical principles?

### Step 3 **Decide on the most appropriate course of action**

Consider the following as you analyse and decide.

- How would the action measure up to your moral principles and values?
- What would the impact of your actions be on the greater good of your social and ecological environment?
- If you rank your values, how can they be used as a measure to promote or subordinate your options?
- Would your actions involve treating others as you would expect to be treated?
- Would you be comfortable if your actions were a matter of public knowledge?

### Step 4 **Implement your decision and act with commitment**

Once you have decided on the course of action that would maximise the benefits and minimise the damage, develop and follow your plan, taking full responsibility for your decision. Ensure that you are able to justify your choice and that you are comfortable with your reasoning.

### Step 5 **Monitor, evaluate and modify**

Monitor the effect of your decision, remain open for new information and evidence that may come forward and, if necessary, be prepared to revise your choice or take alternative action in the light of new knowledge.

### Step 6 **Learn from the experience**

Review the circumstances which led to the dilemma as well as the consequences of the resolving actions and, where possible, remove the conditions which may incur a repeat of the problem. Ensure that all the

facts of the matter and the resultant decisions are recorded for future reference and review personal and company standards to accommodate preventative measures.

### **Complaint Procedure**

Finally, ensure that you are aware of, or have put in place, an ethics complaint procedure to be followed. This procedure should be well known and knowledge of the process made available to all stakeholders.

## **Section 3 – Resource Considerations**

There are a number of resources that can be utilised by Coaches and Mentors. Rather than wait for something to go wrong, you can add considerable weight to your ethics toolkit by ensuring that you have strong connections with as many of the following resources as possible. Discussing ethical issues with likeminded peers and professionals will also equip you to deal with ethical decisions and problems more easily.

### **Laws and Legislation**

There are a number of laws and legislation governing our everyday interactions. Whilst no one is expected to remember them all, it is advisable to know where, and how, to access them easily. It is also useful to have available the services of someone who is an expert on the law. If necessary, talk to one or two lawyers and get a feel for who can help you – before you require their urgent attention.

### **Professional Associations**

Professional Associations are there to provide help, guidance and support as well as a network of people committed to professional and ethical behaviour. Such bodies generally have a dedicated committee for ethical matters and are approachable for advice in person, telephonically and through email. COMENSA is a body who is able to provide such services for its members.

### **Supervisors**

Supervisor Coaches are experienced people who are able to provide expert help and guidance to coaches in many areas, not only ethics. COMENSA will be able to provide you with the appropriate contact details

### **Respected Peers and Mentors**

Building relationships with respected peers and mentors is a good way to remain ‘tapped in’ to the ethical way. Communication does not necessarily have to be face to face. Social Media Groups and discussions will enable you to pose questions and learn from other’s experiences. However, care should be taken to ensure that the groups you belong to are in alignment with your own ethical convictions.

## Section 4 – Considerations for Professional Excellence

This section is made up of optional tools for creating a practice that is centred on ethical excellence.

### **Follow the Principles of Ethical Intelligence.**

In Bruce Weinstein's book, Ethical Intelligence, he states that excellence is created when these principles are observed as a matter of habit.

Do No Harm

Make Things Better

Respect Others

Be Fair

Be Loving

Whilst most of us have been brought up to understand these simple principles, they can become exceedingly difficult to live by in our increasingly complex world. It is worthwhile making a point of consciously reminding ourselves of them on a regular basis.

### **Understanding ethical systems**

Understanding the systems or frameworks from which ethical choices are made enables the coach/mentor to gain insights into their client's ethical perspective and thus avoid or mitigate possible conflicts within the practice.

Below is a short summary of three ethical systems, but the coach/mentor is encouraged to research and develop their knowledge further in order to gain a more rounded understanding.

#### **The Teleological, or Consequentialist View.**

This system focuses primarily on the consequences which any action might have. Thus the most ethical decision is the one that brings about the best consequences. The ethical obligation is to ensure that whatever action is taken results in the bringing about the greatest benefit to everyone. Actions in themselves are neutral – whether they are right or wrong depends on whether they lead to the best consequences.

#### **The Deontological or Dutiful View.**

In this view, the focus is upon adherence to independent moral rules or duties. From this perspective certain actions are intrinsically good and others intrinsically bad. Ethical behaviour therefore consists of carrying out the good actions and avoiding the bad.

#### **The Pluralist View.**

This view holds that there is no one right course of action and that making an ethical decision requires us to be aware of all perspectives and to weigh up the consequences of our decisions in order to do the least harm to the greatest number.

### **Continued Professional Development and the Dissemination of Knowledge**

Ethics and competency are the twin pillars that support excellence in good practice. Increased competency builds ethical capacity. Not only is it important that the coach/mentor increases their own personal development, it is equally important that the coach/mentor is able to disseminate

knowledge to their peers in order to uplift the profession as a whole, as well as to their clients so that they are enabled and empowered to develop as independent and motivated individuals.

### **Building emotional and ethical capacities**

In addition to the acquisition of knowledge to improve theoretical and practical skills, coaches and mentors should seek to increase their capacity with regard to emotional and ethical intelligence. Building emotional capacity involves the elements of rapport, sustained presences, depth of engagement and inspiration. Building ethical capacity involves improving the ability to: create ethical sensitivity, formulate appropriate courses of action, hold ethical conversations, implement ethical decisions and live with the ambiguity of ethical decisions.

### **Employing the use of Care Ethics in Coaching Practice**

Care Ethics promotes the use of emotional skills into the ethical deliberation process. Although originally posited as a feminist approach it is now being viewed as integral practice to those companies who wish to develop a 'triple bottom line' approach to business.

### **Industry Involvement and Contribution**

Ethical behaviour is a professional lifestyle choice that brings great benefits to its proponents. By actively becoming involved and contributing to the operations of the industry as a whole, a coach/mentor is able to encourage and motivate their peers to adopt the same philosophies and assist the profession to flourish.

### **Ethical Reflective Practice**

Reflective practice is a keystone of the learning process. Every day you are faced with ethical choices, both large and small. When you are tired, stressed or in a situation that is new and uncomfortable, we may make choices which, in hindsight, were not the best. By making it a regular practice to review your ethical practices, you will gain insights and improve your decision making capacity over time. The use of a professional journal will allow you to go back and review past situations, the decisions made, and the consequences of your actions, making it easier and more comfortable to choose the correct action when dealing with current problematic circumstances. Reviewing ethical case studies is another opportunity to employ reflective practice. By putting yourself in 'someone else's shoes', even for a short while, enables you to further develop your capacity to deal with situations that might occur in the future.

### **Use of Supervision as a way of building excellence**

Ethical issues can become complex and inexperienced coaches and mentors can become overwhelmed with the decision making process. Supervisor coaches/mentors assist in the negotiation of the ethical maze through their advanced training and experience. Working with Supervision either on a one to one basis or as part of a coaching circle can provide an important tool in the building of an ethical practice.

## **Resources for Further Ethical Development**

### **COMENSA Code of ethics**

[http://www.comensa.org.za/ABOUT\\_US/What\\_is\\_our\\_Code\\_of\\_Ethics\\_.aspx](http://www.comensa.org.za/ABOUT_US/What_is_our_Code_of_Ethics_.aspx)

### **COMENSA Standards of Competence**

[http://www.comensa.org.za/ABOUT\\_US/What\\_are\\_Standards\\_of\\_Competence\\_.aspx](http://www.comensa.org.za/ABOUT_US/What_are_Standards_of_Competence_.aspx)

## Books and Publications

### **Cengage Advantage Books: Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong**

- **Author:** Louis J Pojman & James Fieser
- **Publisher:** Cengage Learning; 7 edition (January 25, 2011)
- **ISBN-13:** 978-1111298173

### **Ethical Intelligence: Five Principles for Untangling Your Toughest Problems at Work and Beyond**

- **Author:** Bruce Weinstein
- **Publisher:** New World Library
- **Language:** English
- **ISBN-13:** 978-1608680559

### **Law and Ethics in Coaching: How to Solve and Avoid Difficult Problems in Your Practice**

- **Author:** Jack Marks
- **Publisher:** Wiley; 1 edition (November 4, 2005)
- **Language:** English
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0471716143

### **Supervision in Coaching: Supervision, Ethics and Continuous Professional Development**

- **Author:** Jonathan Passmore;
- **Publisher:** Kogan Page (August 28, 2011)
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0749455330

### **Applying Care Ethics to Business (Issues in Business Ethics)**

- **Author:** Maurice Hamington (Editor) , Maureen Sander-Staudt (Editor)
- **Series:** Issues in Business Ethics (Book 34)
- **Publisher:** Springer; 2011 edition (July 29, 2011)
- **ISBN-13:** 978-9048193066

### **Ethics for Dummies**

- **Author:** Christopher Panza & Adam Potthast
- **Publisher:** For Dummies; 1 edition (June 1, 2010)
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0470591710

### **Internet resources**

12 Principles of Ethics, Walter Johnson

[http://www.ehow.com/info\\_7746524\\_12-principles-ethics.html](http://www.ehow.com/info_7746524_12-principles-ethics.html)

Ethics in Coaching; Lance Mortimer, Jonathan Passmore

[http://www.mysgw.co.uk/Images/368/Passmore%20&%20Mortimer%20\(2011\)%20Ethics%20in%20Coaching.pdf](http://www.mysgw.co.uk/Images/368/Passmore%20&%20Mortimer%20(2011)%20Ethics%20in%20Coaching.pdf)

Ethical Decision Making and Moral Behaviour, Charles T Schmidt Jr, Labor research Centre, University of Rhode Island

<http://www.uri.edu/research/lrc/scholl/webnotes/Ethics.htm>