MCC BARS Resource Guide

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MCC BARS (Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale) Resource Guide

Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful to the **ICF BARS Review Executive Committee** for their thoughtful, steadfast work over two years to review and revise the MCC Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS), incorporating input from ICF Portfolio assessors to ensure these tools are clear, meaningful, and effective. These criteria articulate the essential behaviors and skills for effective coaching at the MCC level, offering assessors, mentor coaches and educators reliable tools to evaluate and support coaches in their development.

Special thanks as well to the **MCC BARS Resource Guide Working Group** for bringing the criteria and rating scale to life through this resource, designed to support assessors, educators, and mentor coaches in evaluating coaching skills with consistency and fairness.

We also appreciate the contributions of **ICF Portfolio assessors** whose feedback helped shape and refine these important tools.

This achievement reflects the collaborative spirit and global diversity of volunteer leaders, who demonstrate ICF's commitment to excellence in coaching.

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Introduction

The Master Certified Coach (MCC) Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS) Resource Guide was created to support evaluators, including assessors, educators, and mentor coaches, in understanding that the MCC Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS) is designed to support the evaluation of coaching skills at the MCC credential level. This guide provides detailed explanations for each behavioral statement that reflect MCC-level coaching, along with a description of the five available rating options.

At the MCC level, evaluators are rating candidates according to the MCC coaching standards.

The MCC credential distinguishes coaches who demonstrate a depth of knowledge and an ability to apply the ICF Core Competencies in full partnership their clients. The MCC is designed for seasoned coaches who have built their careers around excellence and impact.

Within this guide, you will find a section for each of the eight ICF Core Competencies with its definition and behavioral statements. The behavioral statements for competencies three through eight are further accompanied by what meets the standard for the specified statement, as well as additional descriptions and explanations.

ICF created this guide to support evaluators in upholding the ICF credential as the gold standard for the coaching profession.

Please proceed by reviewing the “Overview of Guide” section to better understand the nuances of evaluating at the MCC credential level and the key elements that should be observed throughout a coaching session.

NOTE: Please note that this guide is only for coaches who hold an MCC Credential. This guide is not to be shared with those applying for an MCC Credential. It will be provided in the ICF MCC BARS Training.

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Overview of Guide

An ICF MCC Credential represents the pinnacle of coaching excellence, awarded by the International Coaching Federation to those who embody not only advanced skill but a deeply developed *way of being*. MCC coaches bring a wealth of experience and a refined mastery of the ICF Core Competencies. More than technique, their coaching is rooted in presence, deep respect, and a genuine curiosity that invites exploration beyond surface-level issues.

MCC coaches listen holistically, attuned not only to words but to tone, emotion, energy, and silence, creating a space of resonance where clients feel seen, heard, and valued. They build trust through authentic, non-judgmental relationships, fostering an environment in which clients are empowered to be vulnerable and whole. Their intuitive, non-directive approach encourages deep self-discovery and evokes awareness through powerful, customized questions. With strong ethical grounding, they uphold the highest standards of integrity, confidentiality, and professionalism.

MCC coaches honor the client as the expert in their own life, partnering in a respectful, co-creative process that embraces complexity and growth. Flexible and attuned to the moment, they adapt with grace, responding to what is emerging with depth and clarity. Ultimately, an MCC coach is not just a highly skilled coach, but a transformational presence — one who facilitates lasting, meaningful change through both mastery and mindful being.

The aim of the MCC BARS Resource Guide is to differentiate observable behaviors for each behavioral statement, while recognizing that the qualities listed in the above paragraphs represent behaviors expected from an MCC coach throughout a coaching session.

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Assessment Process

Key MCC Evaluation Definitions

Throughout this guide, you will find several phrases that are connected to all behavioral statements and observed throughout the entirety of the coaching session. The following are definitions of these key words or phrases that are used multiple times throughout the guide.

Beyond Surface Level:

Beyond surface level means the coach consistently invites the client to look beneath their usual assumptions, patterns, and presenting issues, toward deeper meaning and impact. At the MCC level, this is not forced but emerges naturally, in alignment with the coaching agreement, creating moments of profound clarity that shift how the client sees themselves and their world. This is where transformational breakthroughs happen.

Customizing:

Customizing means attuning to the uniqueness of the client in the moment — shaping questions, reflections, and silences so they serve the client, in the current session. At the MCC level, customizing is so seamless and free from formulaic patterns that it may sound simple, yet it reflects highly attuned listening and trust in the client's capacity to lead.

Dialogue/Conversation:

Throughout this guide, the terms 'dialogue' and 'conversation' are used interchangeably to describe the interactive behaviors between coach and client.

Partnership:

Partnership is about shared ownership of the session. At the MCC level, the coach intentionally contributes with purposeful, concise input. Coach's contributions can be subtle yet influential in shaping the exploration.

Partnership includes co-creating the agenda: aligning on both the desired focus and the measure of success for that particular session. This focus is flexible — able to evolve or even shift entirely — but the coach invites the client to respond when new topics or nuances emerge and checks the usefulness of the direction in an effortless, natural way towards the client's desired outcome.

True partnership means the client feels empowered to direct, pause, or even interrupt the conversation. Beyond reflection, partnership requires a confident presence — challenging assumptions, uncovering blind spots, relating to the client's worldview, understanding who the client is, and broadening awareness. At the MCC level, this balance is seamless: the

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client leads the content, the coach holds the process, and together they co-create transformational breakthroughs connected to clear outcomes.

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General Assessment Principles and Guidelines:

This section provides general assessment principles and guidelines that apply to the evaluation of all behavioral statements and should be followed every time you evaluate a recording or coaching session. Within this section are four subsections that are listed and explained below.

A. Coach's responsiveness to the client. Listen to each exchange of a conversation as a partnership dialogue — a collaborative and generative conversation between equals. Note how effectively the coach demonstrates the behaviors indicated.

   Several MCC behavioral statements are designed to highlight specific aspects of responsiveness. For example:

   - Encouraging the client to identify the focus of the session (3.1).
   - Respectfully expressing interest and consistently demonstrating curiosity (5.3).
   - Stimulating the client's awareness of their own perspectives and allowing them to broaden those positions (7.1).

   When evaluating, use this principle to consider the extent to which the coach's response or statement is consistent with the key elements of a behavioral statement and whether the coach's contribution supports a generative dialogue.

B. Pacing and Silence. Norms about silence, micro-interruptions, speed of speaking, and delayed or immediate responses vary widely around the globe. Evaluators are encouraged to be aware that there may be differences in the norms of the languages in a translated recording. For example, what might seem like a series of micro-interruptions to one culture might be received as an affirmation of listening and attention to another.

C. When reviewing the statements, you will notice the use of "and" or "or". Please note that "and" means it **must be** included, while "or" is **optional**.

D. Refer to support materials such as the **Bias Awareness and Feedback Guide** to help with completing your evaluations.

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The Evaluator Mindset

When reviewing and using this guide during the evaluation process, it is important to maintain an evaluator's mindset. The evaluator's role is to evaluate the performance of the coach. Other coaching roles, such as mentor coach or coach educator, are important in supporting the growth of the coach. However, the evaluator mindset is critical for independent, objective assessment.

An assessment is the systematic process of measuring the knowledge or skills demonstrated by an individual. It involves the collection and interpretation of data to make informed decisions about an individual's performance.

Evaluators collect evidence from a recorded coaching session to evaluate specific behaviors developed from the ICF Core Competencies. The MCC BARS is a tool to evaluate a candidate's performance in a specific coaching session at the MCC level of coaching.

Coach educators teach individuals the principles of coaching, based on the ICF Core Competencies and Code of Ethics, and how to apply these principles in practice through the development of coaching skills. The goal of an educator is to equip a candidate with the right set of coaching skills and knowledge. The depth of their knowledge and skills will be evidenced through assessment.

Mentor coaches evaluate coaching skills and share knowledge, expertise, and experience with mentees to support them in achieving and demonstrating the level of coaching competence and capability demanded by the desired credential level.

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Skills Progression

Associate Certified Coach (ACC) Credential

For coaches looking to evidence their foundational coaching skills, knowledge, and competence.

ACC coaches demonstrate fundamental knowledge of the ICF Core Competencies, the ICF Code of Ethics, and the definition of coaching. The ACC is designed to include coaches early in their coaching career and professionals who understand the value of integrating a coaching approach into their practice.

The ACC demonstrates that the credential holder has the knowledge, skills, and understanding of core coaching principles that serve as the foundation for coaching practice.

Professional Certified Coach (PCC) Credential

For the experienced coach looking to evidence their proficiency in coaching skills, knowledge, and competence.

Coaches who have earned the PCC credential have achieved proficiency in their knowledge of and ability to apply the ICF Core Competencies and the ICF Code of Ethics as coaching professionals.

The PCC distinguishes coaches with the verified skills required for effective coaching practice and substantial experience partnering with clients.

MCC Credential (YOU ARE EVALUATING HERE)

For seasoned and expert coaches looking to demonstrate their advanced coaching skills, knowledge, and competence.

Coaches who have earned the MCC credential have demonstrated mastery of the ICF Core Competencies and the ICF Code of Ethics.

The MCC distinguishes coaches who demonstrate a depth of knowledge and an ability to apply the core competencies of coaching in full partnership and service to their clients.

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Defining the Standard

Standard: *Something set up and established as a rule for the measure of quantity, depth, extent, value, or quality.*

For evaluation purposes, ***the behavioral statements define the standard of performance required for the specified credential level***. The rating scale options allow the evaluator to rate the coach's performance relative to the standard.

Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales

BARS define behaviors that can be observed and evaluated.

Behavioral anchors, or behavioral statements, describe a specific behavior or skill that represents the standard of performance for evaluation purposes.

The MCC level behavioral statements define the standard of coaching performance expected at the MCC level. The behavioral statement as written IS the standard for MCC level coaching. Each statement addresses how the coach engages behaviorally with the client (e.g., "partners", "acknowledges", "recognizes", "inquires" as well as the content or purpose of the coach's response (e.g., clarifies the topic, explores and expands perspective)

MCC coaches demonstrate the ICF competencies with a level of artistry that goes beyond the PCC standard. They express their skills in ways that are authentic, unique, and responsive to the client, the context, and the present moment within the coaching conversation. When considering the distinctions between levels of the rating skill, evaluators may want to consider three aspects of the coach's performance:

1. The extent to which the coach demonstrated the key elements of the specific behavioral statement.
2. The extent to which the coach demonstrated a degree of artistry in their responses and comments–e.g., creative, fluid, skillful, impactful.
3. The extent to which the coach brings themselves and their uniqueness as a professional ICF coach into the dialogue.

The rating scale allows evaluators to assign a specific performance-level rating based on the extent to which the candidate's demonstration of a particular skill aligns with the defined anchor.

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Rating Scale Options

Exceeds the standard (exemplary demonstration): *The coach demonstrates the behavior with a higher degree of consistency, fluidity, and responsiveness than stated in the stated behavioral statement.*

Meets the standard (proficient demonstration): *The coach demonstrates the behavior clearly and with some consistency as described by the statement.*

Below the standard (partial demonstration): *The coach demonstrates part of the behavior as described by the statement.*

Does not meet standard (not demonstrated): *The coach did not demonstrate the behavior as described by the statement.*

N/A – Not Applicable: *To be used in rare cases in which the behavior as described by the statement was not relevant to the conversation or there were no opportunities for the coach to demonstrate the behavior.*

MCC Rating Scale Option Examples

**__Note:__ Key words for each rating are in __bold type__.*

Exceeds the standard (exemplary demonstration)

I. The coach exhibits this behavior **completely**, **effortlessly**, and **consistently in response** to what the client presents.
II. The coach's responses are spontaneous and fluid and reflect what the client has offered in a unique way consistent with the tone of the coach-client partnership throughout the conversation.
III. The coach's style and interaction with the client are natural throughout the conversation.

Note: The demonstration of this level is not a one-time response but shows the coach's alliance with and attention to the client as well as confidence and ease in the coach's own communication. Because this level of response is unique and contextual, any example is unlikely to universally represent "exemplary."

Meets the standard (proficient demonstration)

I. The coach exhibits this behavior **with ease**.
II. The coach's tone, word choice, and pacing are natural, allowing space and silence consistent with the flow of the conversation.
III. Coach responses and behaviors are customized to the situation, topic, relationship with the client, and the client's context.
IV. Coach's responses have few or no hesitancies, repetitions, or lengthy, awkward sentences.

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Below the standard (partial demonstration)

I. The coach demonstrates part of the standard but not the full standard
II. The coach exhibits the behaviors formulaically or in a way that is inconsistent with the client's purpose or pace of conversation.
III. It appears the coach was aware of the required behavior but did not perform it in a way that invites further conversation in line with the client's needs and purpose.

Does not meet the standard (not demonstrated)

I. The coach does not exhibit this behavior in response to the opportunities presented.
II. There is no evidence that the coach has demonstrated the behavior described in the behavioral statement.

N/A – Not applicable

I. There were no opportunities for the coach to exhibit this behavior.

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Competency 1: Demonstrates Ethical Practice

Definition: Understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards of coaching.

Behaviors Consistent With ICF Coaching Standards

- Demonstrate a strong understanding and alignment with the ICF Code of Ethics.
- Consistently stay in the role of the coach, demonstrating knowledge of how to structure a coaching conversation and stay focused on future and present issues.
- Use key coaching skills such as trust, presence, active listening, and evoking awareness to facilitate the client's own insights.

Behaviors Inconsistent With ICF Coaching Standards

- The coach is in clear violation of the ICF Code of Ethics.
- The coach's focus is primarily on telling the client what to do or how to do it (consulting mode). Or if the conversation is based primarily on the past, particularly the emotional past (therapeutic mode).
- The coach primarily gives advice or tells the client what to do throughout the session.

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Competency 2: Embodies a Coaching Mindset

Definition: Engages in ongoing personal and professional learning and development as a coach. Works with coaching supervisors or mentor coaches as needed. Develops and maintains a mindset that is open, curious, flexible, and client-centered.

Candidates' understanding of this competency is evaluated in the ICF Credentialing Exam.

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Competency 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.

Key Skills

The key coaching skills across all levels for Competency 3: Establishes and Maintains Agreements are:

- The coach co-creates an agreement for the session.
- The coach partners with the client to define the components of the agreement.
- The coach continues in the direction of the client's desired outcome, unless the client indicates otherwise.

Behaviors Consistent with ICF Coaching Standards (Behavioral Statements)

M3.1 Coach partners with the client to identify the focus of the session.

M3.2 Coach explores and clarifies several aspects of the topic.

M3.3 Coach confirms the mutual understanding of the client's desired session outcome.

M3.4 Coach notices possible shifts emerging in the conversation and clarifies the desired direction of the session with the client.

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M3.1 Coach partners with the client to identify the focus of the session.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to invite the client to identify the focus of the coaching session.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach partners with the client by asking questions or offering reflections with a shared responsibility to define the focus of the session.

Definitions and Explanations

Focus refers to the **main topic, goal, issue, or area of exploration** that the client wants to address and is developed collaboratively by coach and client during the coaching session.

The coach may use a variety of means to engage in exploration with the client, including but not limited to:

- Inviting the client to share their desired topic or direction for the coaching session.
- Co-creating the focus of the session in partnership with the client.
- Partnering with the client to narrow a broad topic into a clear, concise focus or area of exploration.

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M3.2 Coach explores and clarifies several aspects of the topic.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to invite the client to explore the topic of the coaching session and its meaning to the client, with openness and curiosity.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach's responses to the client's initially stated focus invite exploration that clarifies internal or external aspects of the topic that are important to the goal.

Definitions and Explanations

Exploring involves continually inviting the client to reflect on, deepen the understanding of, or further clarify the session focus.

Aspects are the various internal or external elements of the client's connection to the topic. Aspects can include, but are not limited to, the topic's significance, importance, meaning, or emotional connection.

The coach's role is to inquire about the meaning of the words and concepts the client is using, priorities for the session, address ambiguities, broad concepts, or abstract themes, and support the client in articulating a clear topic.

The coach may use a variety of means to engage in exploration with the client, including but not limited to:

- Partnering with the client to explore the significance, meaning, and multiple perspectives of the topic, including internal factors (e.g., emotions, feelings, beliefs, values, client's frame of reference) or external factors (e.g., goals, success indicators).
- Demonstrating curiosity by asking customized, relevant, open-ended questions that invite deeper reflection.
- Honoring the complexity of the client's goals and desires, encouraging thoughtful exploration rather than reducing them to simplistic choices.

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M3.3 Coach confirms the mutual understanding of the client's desired session outcome.

This behavioral statement evaluates the ability of the coach to demonstrate partnership, attentiveness, and care for the client's desired outcome throughout the coaching session.

Meets the Standard

To meet this standard, the coach partners by confirming a clearly defined and desired outcome, ensuring it remains meaningful, aligned, and supportive of the client throughout the session.

Definitions and Explanations

Clearly refers to an outcome of a session that is explicitly stated and agreed upon by both coach and client. It also includes confirmation, as explained below.

Confirming refers to a stated agreement that indicates both coach and client have a mutual understanding of the session outcome.

Session outcome is the specific, measurable result the client wants to achieve from this particular coaching session.

Confirmation may take several forms, including but not limited to:

- Partnering by stating their understanding of what the client wants as a session outcome and asking the client to confirm, ensuring both are clear about the purpose of the coaching session.
- Showing alignment with what the client wants to achieve by partnering with the client throughout the session, ensuring the conversation supports the client's desired outcome.
- Checking in periodically with the client to ensure the direction of the coaching continues to support the client's goals.
- Exploring several aspects of the client's desired session outcome around the session focus in a flexible manner.

Distinction between 3.3 and 3.4

The main difference between 3.3 and 3.4 is that 3.3 emphasizes maintaining awareness of the client's **intended outcome** throughout the session, including any changes to it, while 3.4 highlights the **shifts that emerge** as a result of the **conversation itself** and the **coach's attentiveness to those shifts.**

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Both require **checking in and confirmation** from the client.

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M3.4 Coach notices possible shifts emerging in the conversation and clarifies the desired direction of the session with the client.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to notice and be responsive to shifts in the direction of the coaching conversation and to invite the client to refine or revise the focus if they desire. It is designed to assess the coach's attentiveness, openness, and flexibility, and their full partnership with the client in refining their desired outcome during the conversation.

Meets the Standard

To meet this standard the coach is attentive, open and flexible, demonstrating full partnership with the client in refining their desired outcome should shifts occur.

Definitions and Explanations

Possible shifts may be evident when the client appears unsettled about the topic, has somatic, cognitive, or emotional reactions in the course of the conversation, or seems to contradict their previous thinking or expressions of feelings.

Being responsive means that the coach says something to acknowledge or recognize a possible new direction.

The coach may demonstrate this behavioral statement in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Sharing an observation, summarizing or reflecting new insights, or shifts in the conversation, and inviting the client to consider whether these represent a change in focus, direction, or a revision of the desired outcome.
- Partnering with the client to examine the meaning or impact of a new topic and deciding together whether to adjust the session direction or agreement.
- Clarifying whether the shift changes or enhances the original outcome or measure of success. If either of these changes, the coach co-creates a new, clear, and realistic outcome or measure of success in full partnership with the client.

Distinction between 3.3 and 3.4:

The main difference between 3.3 and 3.4 is that 3.3 focuses on maintaining awareness of the client's **intended outcome** throughout the session, including any changes to it, while 3.4 highlights the **shifts that emerge** as a result of the **conversation itself** and the **coach's attentiveness to those shifts.**

Both require **checking in and confirmation** from the client.

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Similarities between 5.2 and 3.4:

Behavioral statement 5.2 focuses on the coach's ability to demonstrate an ongoing partnership that is attuned to the client's needs throughout the session.

Behavioral statement 3.4 evaluates the coach's capacity to notice and respond to shifts in the direction of the conversation, and to invite the client to refine or revise the session focus if they choose. It assesses the coach's attentiveness, openness, flexibility, and commitment to full partnership as the client's desired outcomes evolve.

Both statements emphasize the coach's presence and responsiveness to what is emerging in the moment, reflecting a deep attunement to the client and the unfolding process.

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Competency 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.

Key Skills

The key coaching skills across all levels for Competency 4: Cultivates Trust and Safety are:

- The coach partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that encourages the client to share freely.
- The coach demonstrates trust in and respect for the client's unique ways of processing and creating.
- The coach is open and transparent to foster mutual trust.
- The coach acknowledges the client's unique contributions in the coaching process.

Behaviors Consistent with ICF Coaching Standards (Behavioral Statements)

M4.1 Coach acknowledges the client's learning or growth at any moment in the session.

M4.2 Coach recognizes the client's emotions, strengths, or other unique characteristics.

M4.3 Coach seeks to understand the client by inviting the client to share more about themselves, their perspectives, or their identity.

M4.4 Coach demonstrates empathy for what the client has expressed.

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M4.1 Coach acknowledges the client's learning or growth at any moment in the session.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's attentiveness and full partnership with the client by acknowledging the client's progress, learning, and growth at the time they emerge during the session.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach acknowledges the client's emerging learning and growth throughout the session.

Definitions and Explanations

At any moment refers to the coach's ability to respond to the client in the moment, demonstrating presence throughout the session.

Effective **acknowledgment** is specific and supports the client's development, rather than general expressions such as "wow" or "great".

The coach may demonstrate acknowledging or partnering through various behaviors, including but not limited to:

- Affirming the client's new awareness, learning, or forward movement, in an unattached or neutral manner.
- Recognizing the client's growth, change, or progress toward their desired outcome.

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M4.2 Coach recognizes the client's emotions, strengths, or other unique characteristics.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to demonstrate respect and trust in the client by providing space for the client to share about themselves, their feelings, beliefs, and perspectives without judgment.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach recognizes the client's emotions, strengths, and unique characteristics in a neutral manner by providing space for deeper self-understanding, trust, and exploration.

Definitions and Explanation

Examples of emotions, strengths, and unique characteristics may include, but are not limited to:

Emotions

- Explicit emotional expressions.
- Implicit emotional expressions.
- Observable energy shifts.

Strengths

- Talents.
- Abilities.
- Personal traits.
- Experience.
- Values.

Unique Characteristics

- Courage.
- Tenacity.
- Enthusiasm.
- Patience.

The coach may use a variety of means to provide space for the client to share about themselves, including, but not limited to:

- Expressing support of the client and their abilities with specific reference to the client's unique qualities.

- Reflecting the client's language, emotions, or energy back to them, without attachment.
- Providing space for the client to hear their own thoughts and feelings from a new perspective, allowing them to gain clarity without the coach's opinion.

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- Asking questions that prompt self-inquiry, rather than leading to a specific answer, and allowing the client to explore their own unique characteristics and perspectives in a way that builds their confidence.

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M4.3 Coach seeks to understand the client by inviting the client to share more about themselves, their perspectives, or their identity.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to demonstrate or express interest, curiosity, respect, and care for the client holistically, which may include multiple dimensions of their identity.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach invites the client to share more about their identity, values, emotions, or experiences, demonstrating curiosity that holistically supports openness and deepens the client's understanding of themselves.

Definitions and Explanations

Holistically means treating the client as a whole person — considering multiple dimensions of their identity, such as their emotions, thoughts, behaviors, values, relationships, and environment.

Client's self, perspectives, and identity may include, but are not limited to, the client's:

- Way of thinking, interpreting, or meaning making.
- Self-description.
- Self-identified group affiliations.
- Life story.
- Values.
- Beliefs.
- Emotions.
- Feelings.
- Desires.
- Expectations.

The coach may invite the client to share about themselves using various methods, including but not limited to:

- Responding to and inviting the client to share the deeper meaning of a shift of emotion or energy.

- Asking customized questions or offering reflections that respond to the client's stories, metaphors, worldview, or self-perception.
- Demonstrating respect for the client by treating them as a whole person. Inviting the client to share the desires and expectations behind their feelings, beliefs, values, or perspectives related to their identity.

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M4.4 Coach demonstrates empathy for what the client has expressed.

This statement evaluates the coach's ability to see the world from the client's point of view or understand the client's emotional reaction without inserting the coach's own.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach demonstrates empathy and understanding for what the client has expressed by reflecting the client's emotions and experiences in ways that align with the client's unique worldview and communication style.

Definitions and Explanations

Expressions of **empathy** reflect the coach's understanding of the client's feelings, circumstances, or experiences, while honoring the uniqueness of the client's perspective.

The coach may demonstrate empathy in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Demonstrating trust in and respect for the client's unique ways of processing and creating.
- Responding in ways that align with the client's perspective and learning style.
- Acknowledging the client's emotions or feelings.

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Competency 5: Maintains Presence

Definition: Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded, and confident.

Key Skills

The key coaching skills across all levels for Competency 5: Maintains Presence are:

- The coach remains engaged and responsive to the client throughout the session.
- The coach remains curious and observant of the client.
- The coach intentionally provides space for reflection.
- The coach remains present through both conversation and silence.
- The coach partners with the client throughout the session.

Behaviors Consistent with ICF Coaching Standards (Behavioral Statements)

M5.1 Coach responds holistically to the client in a manner that keeps the conversation flowing.

M5.2 Coach partners with the client in ways that support the client's needs.

M5.3 Coach consistently demonstrates curiosity.

M5.4 Coach creates space for silence, pause, or reflection.

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M5.1 Coach responds holistically to the client in a manner that keeps the conversation flowing.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to be attentive to the client in a way that supports, facilitates, or encourages a spontaneous flow in the coaching conversation through connection with the client.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach is attentive and holistically engages the client, using reflections and inquiries to keep the conversation flowing.

Definitions and Explanations

Holistically means treating the client as a whole person — considering multiple dimensions of their identity, such as their emotions, thoughts, behaviors, values, relationships, inner desires, expectations, perspectives, emotional states, current experiences, or environment .

The coach may use a variety of means to respond holistically to the client and keep the conversation flowing, including but not limited to:

- Offering customized questions or observations as needed to support the flow of the conversation.
- Responding to the client with curiosity that sustains the flow of conversation.
- Aligning with the client's rhythm and cadence to cultivate a sense of connection and conversational ease.

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M5.2 Coach partners with the client in ways that support the client's needs.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to be fully attentive to the client and their needs in the moment and throughout the session in a way that honors and supports the client's autonomy and equality in the coaching relationship.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach demonstrates partnership and responsiveness to the client's needs in the moment, while supporting their autonomy.

Definitions and Explanations

Client's needs refer to what supports the client's process, learning, and self-expression, in the moment, in service of their broader goals. These needs may include specific goals, challenges, or areas of focus that the client brings to the session or that emerge through the conversation. Recognizing and responding to these needs requires the coach to respect the client's autonomy, choices, and evolving awareness.

The coach may demonstrate this partnership in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Inviting the client to share what they need or want in the moment.
- Partnering with and supporting the client in choosing how to proceed in ways that respect their autonomy, intentions, or needs.
- Inviting the client to express and respond to their insights, ideas, or perspectives throughout the coaching process.
- Collaborating with the client to adjust the coaching approach or rhythm as needed.
- Checking in to ensure the conversation remains aligned with the client's evolving needs.

Distinction between 3.4 and 5.2

Behavioral statement 5.2 focuses on the coach's ability to demonstrate an ongoing partnership that is attuned to the client's needs throughout the session.

Behavioral statement 3.4 evaluates the coach's capacity to notice and respond to shifts in the direction of the conversation, and to invite the client to refine or revise the session focus if they choose. It assesses the coach's attentiveness, openness, flexibility, and commitment to full partnership as the client's desired outcomes evolve.

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Both statements emphasize the coach's presence and responsiveness to what is emerging in the moment, but 3.4 focuses on the desired outcome and 5.2 focuses on the client's needs throughout the entirety of the session.

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M5.3 Coach consistently demonstrates curiosity.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to express interest in the client's thinking, feeling, perceptions, and ways of being throughout the conversation.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach shows ongoing curiosity, inviting the client to explore emerging aspects of their experience.

Definitions and Explanations

Curiosity is demonstrating interest in the client and their world. It's a continuous state or way of being throughout the conversation that helps the client look at their own thoughts, feelings, and perspectives from a new angle.

Ways of being refers to the ways a client thinks, feels, acts, and relates, both to themselves and the world.

The coach may demonstrate curiosity in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Asking relevant, customized questions that reflect interest in the client's experiences, perspectives, insights, and the client's interpretations of those.
- Exploring the client's identity, values, learning style, unique worldview, and ways of expressing themselves.
- Noticing when deeper reflection may be helpful and offering thoughtful questions or reflections to support insight and integration.
- Demonstrating curiosity, free from any need to control the session or prove oneself.

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M5.4 Coach creates space for silence, pause, or reflection.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to create space for silence and reflection in support of the client and their learning and growth.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach creates space by using silence and pauses, allowing the client's reflections, insights, and experiences to emerge.

Definitions and Explanations

Creates space is evidenced when the coach provides opportunity for the client to process, reflect, and continue the session at their own pace.

To achieve this standard, the coach may demonstrate the use of silence, spaciousness, and presence in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Pausing after the client shares and before responding.
- Maintaining silence during moments of client processing — such as thought, emotion, or energetic shift — demonstrating alignment.

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Competency 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.

Key Skills

The key coaching skills across all levels for Competency 6: Listens Actively are:

- The coach hears what the client is and is not communicating in relation to their agenda.
- The coach integrates the client's unique use of words into their questions and observations.
- The coach notices and inquires about the client's non-verbal cues and body language.
- The coach offers what they see, hear, feel, or sense and accepts the client's response.

Behaviors Consistent with ICF Coaching Standards (Behavioral Statements)

M6.1 Coach recognizes the nuances of language, emotions, energy, or behaviors in relation to the client and the client's agenda.

M6.2 Coach's response demonstrates understanding of the client's thinking, feeling, or insight in the moment.

M6.3 Coach explores what the client communicates in relation to multiple dimensions of the client.

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M6.1 Coach recognizes the nuances of language, emotions, energy, or behaviors in relation to the client and the client's agenda.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to use opportunities to support the client and their agenda by responding to the client's language, emotion, energy, or behavior.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach recognizes nuances, such as shifts in the client's tone, emotions, energy, body language, or behaviors, and connects them to the client's stated agenda.

Definitions and Explanations

Nuances are the subtle shifts in a client's communication — such as tone, pacing, emotional intensity, body language, or pauses — that reveal a deeper, more complete view of their experience.

The client and the client's agenda refer to the moments when the client shares their perspectives, self-perception, and aspects of themselves that may be relevant to the coaching goals or intentions for the session.

To achieve this standard, the coach may demonstrate the ability to recognize the client's nuances of language, emotions, energy, or behaviors by, but not limited to:

- Reflecting the subtle shifts in the client's emotional and energetic expressions, while remaining aligned with the client and their agenda.
- Using language that resonates with the client's way of expressing themselves, their metaphors, and rhythm — while staying aligned with the client's agenda.
- Offering observations in response to the client's self-expression, such as metaphors, imagery, energetic or somatic expressions, or intuition.

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M6.2 Coach's response demonstrates understanding of the client's thinking, feeling, or insight in the moment.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to demonstrate an understanding of the client, including the client's thinking, feeling, or insights at the time they are shared during the session.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach's responses in the moment show understanding of the client's experience through an immediate reflection or question that builds directly on the client's thinking, feeling, or insights.

Definitions and Explanations

Understanding refers to the coach's ability to comprehend the meaning or significance of the client's reality, their beliefs, thoughts, feelings, behaviors, hopes, or desires.

The coach may demonstrate understanding in the moment by responding in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Summarizing what they heard from the client to help the client gain clarity and ensure they fully understand what has been expressed.
- Sharing reflections that integrate multiple elements from the client's words, tone, energy, or behavior.
- Offering customized questions that deepen the understanding of what the client has shared.

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M6.3 Coach explores what the client communicates in relation to multiple dimensions of the client.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to listen to, understand, and reflect on *what the client shares in relation to the client holistically. This may include the client's identity, ideas, beliefs, emotions, perceptions, contexts, or values.*

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach actively listens and explores the full context of the client's communication, linking what the client expresses to their identity, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, perceptions, or core values.

Definitions and Explanations

Multiple dimensions of the client refer to the interconnected layers of their being and experiences that influence how they communicate and engage with their world (the "who" and the "what"). This may include, but is not limited to, context, identity, environment, experience, creativity, spirituality, cultural background, values, uniqueness, talents, or insights.

The coach may use a variety of means to respond to multiple dimensions of the client by, but not limited to:

- Reflecting and inviting exploration of both what is said and what is evoked and accepting the client's response.
- Responding with customized questions or observations when multiple aspects of the client emerge in connection with the client's agenda.
- Inviting the client to explore how their values, strengths, emotions, thinking, or beliefs relate to or impact what they've shared.

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Competency 7: Evokes Awareness

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

Key Skills

The key coaching skills across all levels for Competency 7: Evokes Awareness are:

- The coach uses questions, observations, silence, and other techniques to support the client in gaining insight into themselves and their topic.
- The coach shares personal responses — such as comments or intuition — without attachment or direction, in ways that may support the client's insights or learning.
- The coach explores the client's emotions, needs, underlying beliefs, and ways of thinking, creating, and learning.
- The coach invites the client to identify influences on their current and future thinking, behavior, or emotions.
- Coach adapts their approach to the client's needs and style.
- The coach intentionally allows space for the client to fully respond.

Behaviors Consistent with ICF Coaching Standards (Behavioral Statements)

M7.1 Coach partners with the client to explore and expand the client's perspective.

M7.2 Coach shares insights, sensations, or observations that support the client in creating new or expanded awareness.

M7.3 Coach stimulates new client insights with succinct, open-ended questions, one at a time.

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M7.1 Coach partners with the client to explore and expand the client's perspective.

This behavioral statement evaluates the ability of the coach to partner with the client to explore the client's perspective in a manner that invites an expanded viewpoint for the client.

Meets the Standard

To meet the standard, the coach explores by asking questions or offering reflections that invite the client to expand their viewpoint.

Definitions and Explanations

Expand refers to the invitation by the coach — through observations and inquiry — to broaden, deepen, or shift the client's self-awareness, worldview, context, or circumstance.

This behavioral statement can be demonstrated in multiple ways, including but not limited to:

- Inviting the client to explore their own stories, metaphors, or imagery.
- Exploring the client's insights to expand their awareness, applications, or create opportunities for new perspectives.
- Asking customized questions that invite the client to view a situation, context, or circumstance from a different perspective to generate new possibilities, insights, or awareness.

The distinction between 7.1 and 7.2:

Behavioral statement 7.1 involves the coach **asking questions** that help the client explore beyond their current patterns of thinking, feeling, or behaving, thereby opening up new or expanded possibilities.

Behavioral statement 7.2 is about the coach evoking new awareness in the client by **sharing** observations, intuitions, comments, thoughts, or feelings with the client and by inviting the client to respond.

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M7.2 Coach shares insights, sensations, or observations that support the client in creating new or expanded awareness.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to share observations, insights, ideas, or questions that have the potential to broaden or stimulate new awareness for the client.

Meets the Standard

To meet this standard, the coach offers contributions, such as insights, observations, perspectives, or sensations — without attachment — that have the potential to support or enhance the client's awareness.

Definitions and Explanations

Sensations refer to the physical feelings or bodily experiences that a person becomes aware of in response to thoughts, emotions, or external stimuli.

Without attachment means the coach offers without needing the client to accept, agree, or act on it.

The coach may foster new or expanded awareness in various ways — without attachment, including, but not limited to:

- Using a metaphor or analogy introduced by the client.
- Offering an observation that may expand or challenge the client's thinking.
- Sharing an intuition, sensation, or metaphor, and inviting the client to reflect or provide feedback.

The distinction between 7.1 and 7.2:

Behavioral statement 7.1 involves the coach **asking questions** that help the client explore beyond their current patterns of thinking, feeling, or behaving, thereby opening up new or expanded possibilities.

Behavioral statement 7.2 is about the coach evoking new awareness in the client by **sharing** observations, intuitions, comments, thoughts, or feelings with the client and by inviting the client to respond.

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M7.3 Coach stimulates new client insights with succinct, open-ended questions, one at a time.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to use concise, evocative questions to support the client in exploration, reflection, insight, or discovery.

Meets the Standard

The coach asks succinct, open-ended questions, one at a time, allowing space for reflection and response before introducing a new question, to foster the client's self-awareness and learning.

Definitions and Explanations

Evocative questions are powerful, open-ended questions designed to encourage deep reflection, insight, and emotional connection. These questions go beyond gathering information as they evoke new awareness, perspectives, and possibilities.

Succinct questions are questions that are clear, concise, and to the point, using the fewest words necessary to convey meaning without losing clarity.

The coach may stimulate new insights in multiple ways, including, but not limited to:

- Maintaining silence during moments of client processing — such as thoughts, emotions, or energetic shifts — demonstrating alignment.
- They could respond to a shift in energy or tone with a simple, well-timed question that opens new reflection.
- They may integrate the client's own language into their question, helping the client hear themselves in a new way.

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Competency 8: Facilitates Client Growth

Definition: Partners with the client to transform learning and insight into action. Promotes client autonomy in the coaching process.

Key Skills

The key coaching skills across all levels for Competency 8: Facilitates Client Growth are:

- The coach partners with the client to explore their session progress and learning.
- The coach supports the client in considering how to integrate new awareness into their worldview and behaviors.
- The coach partners with the client to design actions that reflect new learning.
- The coach supports the client in identifying what they need to follow through with their designed actions.
- The coach partners with the client to close the session.

Behaviors Consistent with ICF Coaching Standards (Behavioral Statements)

M8.1 Coach invites the client to reflect on what they have learned about themselves from the coaching conversation.

M8.2 Coach partners with the client to translate insights or learning into actions.

M8.3 Coach partners with the client to complete the session.

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M8.1 Coach invites the client to reflect on what they have learned about themselves from the coaching conversation.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to support the client in reflecting on what the client is learning or has learned about themselves, their relationship with themselves, or their way of being in the world. This may include the client's feelings about their self-discovery, or its meaning to the client.

Meets the Standard

To meet this standard, the coach invites the client to reflect on insights about themselves. The coach's questions or invitations center on the client's self-discoveries and ways of being.

Definitions and Explanations

Ways of being refers to the ways a client thinks, feels, acts, and relates, both to themselves and the world.

This behavioral statement can be demonstrated **throughout the session or at the end.**

The coach may use a variety of means to support client reflection on self-discovery, including but not limited to:

- Exploring with the client the meaning, significance, or importance of new self-awareness, or their way of being.
- Inquiring about the progress the client has experienced from the session.
- Inquiring about how the client's new insights may expand their understanding of themselves, their identity, strengths, or values.
- Sharing observations about the client's learning or self-awareness and inviting the client to respond.

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M8.2 Coach partners with the client to translate insights or learning into actions.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to partner with the client to transform learning and insight into action to support the client's continued progress and growth.

Meets the Standard

To meet this standard, the coach partners with the client to design actions that emerge from the client's insights or learning during the session. The coach also partners with the client to identify and implement appropriate support systems, resources, or accountability measures that will help facilitate the client's progress and development.

Definitions and Explanations

Actions are not limited to external tasks; they can also include internal practices such as journaling, focused reflection, or meditation. Ultimately, actions are the intentional choices and awareness that transform learning into forward movement and growth.

The coach may demonstrate partnership by helping translate learning into action in various ways, including but not limited to:

- Inviting the client to share how their new insights may broaden their understanding of themselves, their identity, or their values.
- Inviting the client to identify ways to apply learning to (a) action or behaviors that support the achievement of their goal or (b) ongoing learning and growth.
- Inviting the client to reflect on how they can apply new learning to different situations, circumstances, or contexts in the future.
- Partnering with the client to establish resources, support, or systems for accountability, as needed.

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M8.3 Coach partners with the client to complete the session.

This behavioral statement evaluates the coach's ability to support the client in closing the session to ensure the coaching conversation has served the client's needs, growth, and forward movement.

Meets the Standard

To meet this standard, the coach partners with the client to confirm that the session has met the client's measure of success and that the client leaves with a solid foundation for growth and forward movement.

Definitions and Explanations

Client's needs refers to what supports the client's process, learning, and self-expression in the moment and while also serving their broader goals. These needs may include specific goals, challenges, or areas of focus that the client brings to the session or that emerge through the conversation. Recognizing and responding to these needs requires the coach to respect the client's autonomy, choices, and evolving awareness.

Growth refers to every aspect of the client's development that results from increased self-awareness, new insights, and forward movement. It is the internal and external progress a client experiences as they move closer to their goals, values, and potential.

Forward movement refers to the client's progress toward action or change, based on the insights, decisions, or clarity gained during the conversation. The coach partners with the client to ensure the client has clarity on their next steps or a clear sense of progress and completion.

The coach may demonstrate partnering to complete the session in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Inviting the client to reflect on the coaching conversation to determine if anything else about the session topic needs to be addressed before closing.
- Demonstrating respect for the client by confirming that the client feels a sense of completion or readiness for the session to end.
- Noticing and mentioning a possible moment for session closure and exploring client readiness to complete.
- Partnering with the client to determine how they would like to close the session.

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