

Challenging the ICF International Coach Federation Accreditation Process

Mark Waldman revised 6-5-23

Some of my students ask me why I will not be affiliated with the International Coach Federation, and this brief essay outlines my reason for doing so. In the educational, medical, psychological, and other professional communities, the goal of accreditation is to ensure that institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of quality in what they are teaching to their students. It is a very rigorous process for both the teachers and schools and is overseen by some of the most respected organizations in the world.

Accreditation in the United States is overseen by the Department of Education and involves federal and state government agencies to assure that institutes provide the highest standards of training for students seeking credentials, degrees, and certificates. In order to be approved, members of an accreditation group must not have any affiliation with the organization seeking to give accreditation to others. ICF uses its own students and staff when evaluating another person's qualifications to be accredited by them, and this is a clear conflict of interest. In other words, no neutral outside agency has recognized that the ICF is a valid accredited agency. In the United States, the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity was formed to evaluate organizations providing accreditation to others, and members of any accrediting agency must not be affiliated with the organization offering accreditation. For example, the American Psychological Association has been approved to grant accreditation to schools, courses and professionals providing counseling and therapeutic services. The ICF has no recognition, nor could they receive such recognition since every certifying member is directly affiliated with ICF.

Since coaching is an unregulated field, accreditation is not possible. However, many accredited colleges throughout the world offer certificates and degrees – *but not accreditation* – in coaching but those courses must be grounded in evidence-based research that is published in peer-reviewed coaching journals. ICF does not meet these criteria.

The ICF has created what they consider to be a core set of ethical standards and practices, and they have set their own standards for what competencies a coach, teacher, or course should have. Compared to coaching courses offered by colleges, their requirements are vague and are not comprehensive.

ICF charges its 35,000 subscribing coaches an annual membership fee of \$245, and the coaches have to receive their training *only* from another accredited ICF coach who has paid a minimum of \$2000 to offer an ICF course. They do not disclose how their 10-million-dollar income is distributed, and they also publish an “ICF Global Coaching Study” that can be purchased for \$295. It is based on surveys sent out to their membership and several other coaching organizations. It is not peer-reviewed to ascertain the accuracy of the information nor does it reference other studies that show different data.

Another concern: ICF has no ability to evaluate the content of courses they certify since accreditation is based solely on a written questionnaire and a multiple-choice exam. For example, nearly all of their approved courses that claim to be grounded in scientific and neuroscientific principles are filled with an abundance of pseudoscientific beliefs.

My Recommendation: There are several national board certification programs for coaches that carry far more respect than ICF and have standards similar to other medical and psychological certification boards in the United States. For example: In 2019, The National Board for Health and Wellness Coaching (NBHWC), a nonprofit affiliate of the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME), announced the American Medical Association's (AMA) approval of new Category III Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®) Codes for health and well-being coaching effective January 1, 2020. NBHWC and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) successfully applied for the creation of these new tracking codes, utilizing the NBHWC standards. Another similar organization is the National Board for Health & Wellness Coaching.

Regarding my NeuroCoach training program, virtually every organization worldwide who has wanted to hire one my students has been satisfied with the university credentials of our faculty, listed on our certificate, and they did not need to have an ICF credential.

