Hacking the Core Competencies

In our work together, I ask new coaches to focus on the Key Skills and stages of coaching human change. And we use the Play Card (***The 3 A’s and the Core Four***) to learn to set the stage for trust and to begin to find the balance and rhythm of between exploration and action. Later in the Mastery Alliance Teams, I widen our focus to, 1) the development of your personal presence as a coach and, 2) the further development of your balance and rhythm as you understand and make personal the ICF Core Competencies. When you are ready to apply for certification, your grasp of the following competencies will be assessed at the ACC level on the multiple choice “knowledge assessment.” At the PCC level, your actual performance will be evaluated via recordings and transcripts. My aim for you as a SeattleCoach is for you to coach comfortably at the PCC level by the time you complete Module II.

Coaching becomes nearly magical when, instead of driving to solution and accomplishment, we trust the people we’re coaching more--and when we stay open to learning from and being touched by them. We are always more effective when we see them as bearers of gifts for us. These Competencies will help you to foster the magic.

A few years ago I designed this document, “Hacking the Core Competencies.” In those days, the ICF’s Core Competencies were big philosophical targets that, in my opinion, needed a little decoding in order for new coaches to grasp what they looked like behaviorally, in practice. Then, in early 2014, the ICF’s standards went up, along with their need to give their assessors clearer direction. I happily edited my work to include their new markers.

Think of the Core Competencies in four big categories:

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| **Setting the Foundation** | **Co-Creating the Relationship** | **Communicating Effectively** | **Facilitating Learning and Results** |
| 1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards 2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement | 1. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client/Coachee 2. Coaching Presence | 1. Active Listening 2. Powerful Questioning 3. Direct Communication | 1. Creating Awareness 2. Designing Actions 3. Planning and Goal Setting 4. Managing Progress and Accountability |

I still keep my own personal learnings-log, noting what I believe each of these competencies looks like in my own life and work--as I hope you will. There is an editable copy of this document on the [Module II page](http://www.seattlecoach.com/module-ii-playbook.html). It’s designed for you to add your own insights and learnings. Get to know it well--the multiple choice ICF assessment is based on these eleven Core Competencies.

* Everything in blue below is © [ICF](http://www.coachfederation.org/files/FileDownloads/0614%20PCC%20Markers.pdf?utm_source=Real%20Magnet&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=42869956) and describes the behaviors that should be in place in coaching at the Professional Certified Coach (PCC) level.
* Everything in red below is my take on things.
* And there’s a grey comments box under each hack for your personal comments and learnings too.

***Ask yourself, how do you see the Key Skills mapping to these Eleven Core Competencies? I’ll include a couple of possibilities under each competency.***

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**A. Setting the Foundation**

#1: Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards—Understanding of

coaching ethics and standards and ability to apply them appropriately in all coaching situations.

1. Understands and exhibits in own behaviors the [ICF Code of Ethics.](http://coachfederation.org/about/ethics.aspx?ItemNumber=854&navItemNumber=4047)
2. Clearly communicates the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions.
3. Refers client/coachee to another support professional as needed, knowing when this is needed and the available resources.

**Patty’s Summary:** *Get clear about the* [*ICF Code of Ethics*](http://coachfederation.org/about/ethics.aspx?ItemNumber=854&navItemNumber=4047) *(there’s a copy in the “Additional Resources section of this Playbook). Act like a coach and be able to explain distinctions (like between consulting, psychotherapy, rescuing, nagging, etc.) when you need to. Refer when you need to. Consult with another coach when you need to. Keep confidences. Focus on inquiry and exploration, the present and future rather than on telling, advising, assigning or acting alone to choose the focus or answers.*

Your comments and learnings:

#2: Establishing the Coaching Agreement—Ability to understand what is required in the

specific coaching interaction and to come to agreement with the prospective and new client/coachee about the coaching process and relationship.

1. Understands and effectively discusses with the client/coachee the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship (e.g., logistics, fees, scheduling, inclusion of others if appropriate).
2. Reaches agreement about what is appropriate in the relationship and what is not, what is and is not being offered, and about the client/coachee's and coach's responsibilities.
3. Determines whether there is an effective match between his/her coaching method and the needs of the prospective client/coachee.

**Patty’s Summary:** *Beginning with the informational interview, explore fully your coachee’s hopes and focus of learning, vision and intended change. Explain how coaching works, how you like to work, your terms, and that you will be curious about the measures of success for each session. Check/revisit in along the way to see if the coaching is on track and if the person you’re coaching is getting what they want from the conversation. Cultivate a full partnership.*

Your comments and learnings:

**B. Co-creating the Relationship**

#3: Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client/Coachee—Ability to create a

safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust.

1. Shows genuine concern for the client/coachee's welfare and future.
2. Continuously demonstrates personal integrity, honesty and sincerity.
3. Establishes clear agreements and keeps promises.
4. Demonstrates respect for client/coachee's perceptions, learning style, personal being.
5. Provides ongoing support for and champions new behaviors and actions, including those involving risk taking and fear of failure.
6. Asks permission to coach client/coachee in sensitive, new areas.

**Patty’s Summary:** *This one is about the signal strength and about the creation and cultivation of the safety and trust required for deep learning to happen. The coach provides support for and champions the coachee’s full expression and experimentation with strengths, assets, new behaviors and risks. The coach works from not-knowing and shares his/her observations without attachment to being right about them. The focus is on the coachee’s view of the situation more than the coach’s. The coach asks permission. There is mutual equality and vulnerability and comfort with not-knowing. The coachee is a full and complete partner and the ultimate decider of what’s important. The coach is at ease and NOT more interested in his or her own views, tools, performance or demonstration of knowledge. What is the coachee taking away from the conversation?* With trust and intimacy, value almost always happens.

Your comments and learnings:

#4: Coaching Presence—Ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship

with the client/coachee, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident.

1. Is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment.
2. Accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing—"goes with the gut."
3. Is open to not knowing and takes risks.
4. Sees many ways to work with the client/coachee and chooses in the moment what is most effective.
5. Uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy.
6. Confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action.
7. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client/coachee's emotions.

**Patty’s Summary:** *The coach demonstrates deep partnering with his/her coachee and doesn’t coach for just a solution to the coachee’s concern. The coach responds both to what the coachee wants to accomplish and to who he/she is and wants to be. Using his or her unique style and voice, the coach is curious, empathetic and encourages the coachee’s use of space/time to reflect. The coach pays attention to his/her own somatic intelligence and energy: Beliefs, emotion, body, posture, gestures, breath, voice—and invites the coachee to do the same. The coach leaves time for what he/she says to land. The coach is present, agile, intuitive, equal and at ease, not driving an agenda, and willing to risk along with the coachee. The coach is open to what the coachee has to teach him/her and there is complete curiosity without the need to perform. The coach’s job is far more about creating trust, space and focus than it is about driving an agenda, but if we work from a solid sense of our own presence, we’re usually contagious.*

Your comments and learnings:

C. Communicating Effectively

#5: Active Listening—Ability to focus completely on what the client/coachee is saying and is

not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the client/coachee's desires, and to support client/coachee self-expression.

1. Attends to the client/coachee and the client/coachee's agenda and not to the coach's agenda for the client/coachee.
2. Hears the client/coachee's concerns, goals, values and beliefs about what is and is not possible.
3. Distinguishes between the words, the tone of voice, and the body language.
4. Summarizes, paraphrases, reiterates, and mirrors back what client/coachee has said to ensure clarity and understanding.
5. Encourages, accepts, explores and reinforces the client/coachee's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.
6. Integrates and builds on client/coachee's ideas and suggestions.
7. "Bottom-lines" or understands the essence of the client/coachee's communication and helps the client/coachee get there rather than engaging in long, descriptive stories.
8. Allows the client/coachee to "clear" the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move on to next steps.

**Patty’s Summary:** *The coach listens with emotion and presence to the coachee’s wholeness and agenda at all levels, to what is and is not possible in the coachee’s thinking--to both the logical and the emotional. The coach invites the coachee to explore what he or she feels deeply about, listening for underlying beliefs and incongruities. Level III listening is unfiltered by the coach’s need to demonstrate knowledge, tools and methods. The coach is curious along the way: What are limiting beliefs? Is the coachee getting what he/she really wants?*

*The coach’s questions and observations are customized and based on what he or she is hearing from the coachee. The coach listens beyond the words to the coachee’s shifts in energy and emotion. The coach doesn’t rush the coachee, nor fill up the silence with stacked questions, interpretations or meandering comments. The coach doesn’t finish the coachee’s statements/questions. The coach doesn’t listen in order to teach or impose a story. The coach lets the coachee lead and explores the truth from the coachee’s pov.* [This audio file](http://www.seattlecoach.com/dear-master-coach-blog/wait-for-it) *talks about the value of (and toleration of) silence.*

Your comments and learnings:

#6: Powerful Questioning—Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for

maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client/coachee.

1. Asks questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client/coachee's perspective.
2. Asks questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action (e.g., those that challenge the client/coachee's assumptions).
3. Asks open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility or new learning.
4. Asks questions that move the client/coachee toward what they desire, not questions that ask for the client/coachee to justify or look backward.

**Patty’s Summary:** *This one is at the heart of things. Ask simple questions that are informed by the conversation far more than by a list or formula. Questions that are big enough to matter. Questions that help your coachee to move below the surface, or into a larger space with his/her hopes and desires. (“What do you notice about your breath, voice...? What part of you is not ok with this?”) Your questions aren’t standardized, formulaic, leading, interrogating or all lined up, but rather they encourage self-reflection and discovery and flow from the partnership. When you get stuck, use your intuition and experiment with something a fourth-grader might ask. Ask questions to which you don’t know the answer early on. Remember, you’re a learner more than a knower. The goal isn’t data collection, the goal is to raise/deepen your coachee’s awareness--In the words of one coach, to “double-click.” If your question is big enough to matter, don’t clutter it with too many words, or stack other questions on top. Wait for it to land. Maybe ask it a second time. Let your coachee work a little harder. Let silence do some of the heavy lifting. And when you decide to ask “why?”, make it what I call a* [*“forward-facing why.”*](http://www.seattlecoach.com/dear-master-coach-blog/start-with-why)

Your comments and learnings:

#7: Direct Communication—Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions, and

to use language that has the greatest positive impact on the client/coachee.

1. Is clear, articulate and direct in sharing and providing feedback.
2. Reframes and articulates to help the client/coachee understand from another perspective what he/she wants or is uncertain about.
3. Clearly states coaching objectives, meeting agenda, and purpose of techniques or exercises.
4. Uses language appropriate and respectful to the client/coachee (e.g., non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon).
5. Uses metaphor and analogy to help to illustrate a point or paint a verbal picture.

**Patty’s Summary:** *Even though our goal as coaches is to amplify our coachee, coaches find a way to bring their unique style and voice to the work. The coach is direct, clear and responsive with both inquiry and observation. The coach says what he/she sees without attachment to being right, and leaves space for the coachee to explore, create and learn. The coach is clear about the purpose for any exercises and requests. The coach is open to sharing his or her own experience and observations in the moment, simply, easily, freely inviting the coachee to more deeply reflect and consider what is desirable and what is possible. The coach celebrates the coachee’s directness, deeper engagement, metaphors, learning and intuition in return. The partnership uses the coachee’s thinking, language, metaphors and learning style. Exploration recognizes the coachee’s underlying stories, limiting beliefs, critical voices.*

Your comments and learnings:

**D. Facilitating Learning and Results**

#8: Creating Awareness—Ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of

information and to make interpretations that help the client/coachee to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results.

1. Goes beyond what is said in assessing client/coachee's concerns, not getting hooked by the client/coachee's description.
2. Invokes inquiry for greater understanding, awareness, and clarity.
3. Identifies for the client/coachee his/her underlying concerns; typical and fixed ways of perceiving himself/herself and the world; differences between the facts and the interpretation; and disparities between thoughts, feelings, and action.
4. Helps client/coachee to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them.
5. Communicates broader perspectives to client/coachee and inspires commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new possibilities for action.
6. Helps client/coachee to see the different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, and background).
7. Expresses insights to client/coachee in ways that are useful and meaningful for the client/coachee.
8. Identifies major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching.
9. Asks the client/coachee to distinguish between trivial and significant issues, situational vs. recurring behaviors, when detecting a separation between what is being stated and what is being done.

**Patty’s Summary:** *The coach helps the coachee to find and hold the focus, to use silence, to take the time and space to keep coming back to himself/herself in deeper and deeper ways. The invitation to explore important issues is greater than the invitation to find a solution (unless it is clear the coachee has a time-sensitive agenda). Through the coach’s questions and observations, the coachee explores their thinking about their 'best self' and recaps any new thoughts or possibilities that emerge from the conversation. The coach grows in his/her own awareness along the way and stays curious about how the coachee will integrate new learning. The coach goes beyond what is said and invites the coachee to do the same in order to explore new thoughts, beliefs and possibilities for movement forward.*

Your comments and learnings:

#9. Designing Actions—Ability to create with the client/coachee opportunities for ongoing

learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will

most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results.

1. Brainstorms and assists the client/coachee to define actions that will enable the client/coachee to demonstrate, practice, and deepen new learning.
2. Helps the client/coachee to focus on and systematically explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals.
3. Engages the client/coachee to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions.
4. Promotes active experimentation and self-discovery, where the client/coachee applies what has been discussed and learned during sessions immediately afterward in his/her work or life setting.
5. Celebrates client/coachee successes and capabilities for future growth.
6. Challenges client/coachee's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action.
7. Advocates or brings forward points of view that are aligned with client/coachee goals and, without attachment, engages the client/coachee to consider them.
8. Helps the client/coachee "Do It Now" during the coaching session, providing immediate support.
9. Encourages stretches and challenges but also a comfortable pace of learning.

**Patty’s Summary:** *This one’s about the ability to create opportunities for learning as the coachee moves forward from the session. The coach asks things like, “Do you need a plan? Does this move you in the right direction?” As a coach, you want to hear more “I-coulds” from your coachee (vs. “you-coulds from you). Actions can’t just be physical actions without thinking, learning, being, creating. The coach keeps holding the focus. I think of #9 as tactical, and #10 as a bit more strategic.*

#10. Planning and Goal Setting—Ability to develop and maintain an effective coaching plan

with the client/coachee.

1. Consolidates collected information and establishes a coaching plan and development goals with the client/coachee that address concerns and major areas for learning and development.
2. Creates a plan with results that are attainable, measurable, specific, and have target dates.
3. Makes plan adjustments as warranted by the coaching process and by changes in the situation.
4. Helps the client/coachee identify and access different resources for learning (e.g., books, other professionals).
5. Identifies and targets early successes that are important to the client/coachee.

**Patty’s Summary:** *This one is about coach holding and following the coachee’s focus and outcomes over time as, with increasing trust, they evolve and deepen. Check with the coachee about how he or she likes to learn. Check with the coachee about the pace of your coaching. Leave responsibility with the coachee. What will you do? When will you do it? Who will know? Do you need a plan? Again, there is either full partnership or the coachee leads. Don’t let the ICF words in #1 above throw you. If you’re clear about the meta-agenda and the agenda “for today,” if you invite evaluation every few sessions and know when and how to help a coaching engagement to wrap up, you’ve got a plan.*

#11. Managing Progress and Accountability—Ability to hold attention on what is

important for the client/coachee, and to leave responsibility with the client/coachee to take

action.

1. Clearly requests of the client/coachee actions that will move the client/coachee toward his/her stated goals.
2. Demonstrates follow-through by asking the client/coachee about those actions that the client/coachee committed to during the previous session(s).
3. Acknowledges the client/coachee for what they have done, not done, learned or become aware of since the previous coaching session(s).
4. Effectively prepares, organizes, and reviews with client/coachee information obtained during sessions.
5. Keeps the client/coachee on track between sessions by holding attention on the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s).
6. Focuses on the coaching plan but is also open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions.
7. Is able to move back and forth between the big picture of where the client/coachee is heading, setting a context for what is being discussed and where the client/coachee wishes to go.
8. Promotes client/coachee's self-discipline and holds the client/coachee accountable for what they say they are going to do, for the results of an intended action, or for a specific plan with related time frames.
9. Develops the client/coachee's ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop himself/herself (to get feedback, to determine priorities and set the pace of learning, to reflect on and learn from experiences).
10. Positively confronts the client/coachee with the fact that he/she did not take agreed-upon actions.

**Patty’s Summary:** *This one is about that dance between holding attention on what matters most to our coachee, and the discipline of leaving responsibility for action with the coachee. The coach encourages the coachee to determine his/her own accountabilities (or, as I like to say, their aspirations and next steps) and checks in regularly, often at either the end or at the beginning of a coaching conversation. The best accountabilities/next steps call forth the coachee’s hopes, goals, strengths and broader learning. The coach’s voice is never the most significant, yet the coach skillfully interrupts to hold the focus and revisit the measures of progress. Again, any tools that the coach suggests must be fully discussed and explained for their value and congruence with the coachee. The coach holds, revisits and supports the coachee’s hopes and measures of success: “Are we hitting it? What are you taking away? What can you carry forward?” As always, the coach leaves responsibility for action with the coachee.*

Your comments and learnings:

**Reference**

[This chart](https://www.coachfederation.org/files/IndCred/ICFCompetenciesLevelsTable.pdf) will give you an overview of what ICF Assessors consider in reviewing the performance of coaches at each level of credentialing. It is our goal in the training and development of SeattleCoaches to prepare you to work solidly at the PCC level—even if you haven’t yet completed the required number of coaching hours.