Editorial

Ethics Unveiled: Pioneering a Global Conversation in Coaching Ethics

Wendy-Ann Smith

WELCOME, readers, to the first edition of the Journal of Coaching Ethics (JoCE). To begin this journey let us look to where the unveiling of ethics globally all began. Early in the year 2021, with some insistence on my part David Clutterbuck and I decided to bring together a group of leading academics, representatives from coaching bodies and leading coaches from across the globe\(^1\). We aimed to ignite a conversation about elevating ethical thinking, fostering ethical conversations, and promoting ethical decision-making in coaching. So, from that virtual meeting late Wednesday night - early Thursday morning for some and early Wednesday morning for others April 2021, the seeds of a global conversation were planted, blossoming into a series of groundbreaking conferences and, ultimately, the birth of JoCE in 2023.

Keywords: ethics, coaching, JoCE, CEF, conference

Igniting Ethical Thinking Worldwide

My wish was to disrupt the coaching landscape with a renewed focus on ethics and influence how coaches approached ethics. I hoped that they would come to a fuller understanding that ethics permeates every aspect of our thoughts and actions. Ethics serves as the cornerstone upon which trust and integrity are built – two crucial elements for effective coaching, working relationships, and the functioning of organisations and institutions. I hope that coaches also discover the joy inherent in engaging in ethical discussions, recognising them as a positive aspect that can bring enrichment even in situations that may initially seem challenging to navigate.

Ethics demand our active participation, reflection, seeking input, and fostering understanding within ourselves and with others. In striving for this ethical shift, I anticipate a coaching field that not only upholds greater integrity internally but also gains external trust. I hope that the masses will develop a deeper appreciation for the value of quality professional coaching.

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1. Wendy-Ann Smith, David Clutterbuck, Angela Hill, Jonathan Passmore, Michael Cavanagh, Carol Kauffman, Pam McLean, Carrie Arnold, David Lane, Paul Stokes, Dumi Magadlela, Kristin Kelly, Peter Hawkins, Ioanna Iordanou, Ivan Young, Rachel Hawley, Robert Biswas-Diener, Lise Lewis, Terrence Maltbia, Jeff Hull & Victoria Leath
Inaugural Gathering of Leading Minds

Following that first meeting, the concept of a virtual conference emerged. As we worked to turn this idea into reality, the Coaching Ethics Forum (CEF) with a strongly defined newly minted mission as follows CEF was founded.

February 2022, saw the inaugural global two day virtual conference ‘Exploring Ethics in Coaching: Demystifying and Energising Ethics in Practice’ (CEF2022) hosted on CEFs’ virtual home www.coachingethicsforum.com. This groundbreaking conference marked the first of its kind, and to the surprise for many what unfolded was a high-quality two-day international conference with a registration count unexpected for a first-time conference.

CEF mission:

“CEF is an independent forum dedicated to the ethical dimensions in the field of coaching, coach supervision and education. To do this we seek to engage in discussions with the coaching community (coaches, coaching bodies, coach supervisors, coach educators, coaching researchers, human resource professionals, coaching and consulting organisations, and all who are interested in ethics). Our hope is to positively influence coaches thinking and practice across professional contexts, and the broader community it regularly engages.”

Pioneering a Virtual Ethical Space

CEF2022 speakers were thought-provoking, and the audience was highly engaged, evidenced by the activity in the chat and attendance between session discussion groups. While virtual there were many accounts of having felt safe and a general inviting warmth and acceptance of difference of thinking. Sessions covered themes such as GDPR, and ethics in the digital environment, coach education, culture, systems, feedback, supervision and taking a macro-societal lens on ethics in coaching. One session taunted the audience with the title: Why are ethics boring? CEF2022 was by all accounts a great success. Many appreciative comments were received including the following:

“The breadth of the topic and the depth of discussions with experts and speakers from different regions and perspectives was a unique learning experience.”

“It was a very open and conversation style event which I very much enjoyed.”
“Ethics is a critical thinking process, not just a set of rules and processes. Which also means it’s very helpful to have people to talk to about ethics and ethical thinking.”

In addition to the audience’s appreciative feedback, it is understood at least three postgraduate coaching programs have reworked their curriculum to include a stronger emphasis on ethics.

**Ethics - Global Impact**

A sister project – an edited book on ethics in coaching: The Ethical Coaches Handbook: A Guide to Developing Ethical Maturity in Practice (Smith, Passmore, Turner, Lai & Clutterbuck, 2023) was published. This book with contributions from authors all over the globe, covers all manner of pertinent topics such as coaching and its relationships, note-taking, culture, equity, the psychological contract, and positive ethics to name a few – it is expected this book will stand the test of time and with a 2nd edition at least a decade away.

CEF decided to use funds from CEF2022 to buy a quantity of the handbook and distribute it to coaches across the globe. Work has been undertaken to connect with coaches across all regions of the world to help find coaches to receive the book gift. At the time of writing, this endeavour continues. A second edited book: Ethical Case Studies for Coach Development and Practice: A Coach’s Companion (Smith, Hirsch Pontes, Magadlela & Clutterbuck, 2023), provides a wonderful extension of the work of ethics in coaching. This book for the first time provides a clear research-based argument for the use of case studies for the development of ethicality, with the second chapter providing a conceptualized method of understanding the stories in case studies. Following these two chapters are forty case studies to challenge a coach’s thinking and decision-making of professional behaviour.

**CEF2023: Extending the Boundaries of Ethical Thinking**

December 2023 saw the second conference held by the Coaching Ethics Forum (CEF2023) – aptly titled Ethics the Heart of Coaching; Expanding the Boundaries of Ethical Thinking and Practice. Over two immersive days, this conference, once again substantial in its scope, proved to be well worth the time and effort. Attendee numbers surpassed those of CEF2022, with double the number of registrations and participation.

CEF2023 was far-reaching - truly being ‘Global’ – it felt like the masses were arriving, reaching attendees from the far east in Japan to the West Coast of the Americas, and south as far as Australia.
to North as far as Finland. The level of engagement reached unprecedented heights during these two days, with one attendee stating “I get to speak as well as [be] an attendee”. Ironically, the unexpected arrival of a Live Streamer and the use of the Otter-AI Zoom bot, both uninvited and without permission, marked a pivotal moment. Ethics in the digital space within coaching had undeniably arrived, bringing with them real-time real-life ethical scenarios to share and dissect from an ethical perspective.

CEF2023: Unveiling the Ethics in Coaching

CEF2023 themes were diverse, covering a range of thoughtful topics. Engaging role plays highlighting cultural differences in addressing leadership management. International Coaching Federation provided an engaging discussion highlighting their ethical decision-making process and support for their coaching community, BetterUp provided a session on how to best combat misinformation.

A panel of human resource coaches spoke to the challenges faced by internal coaches and contracting coaches. Other panel discussions delved into the ethical implications of using art-based mediums in coaching, using decision-making frameworks, race, gender, power, ethical considerations when engaging with stakeholders, AI, intercultural challenges, best practice with the individual in mind, duty of care and the application of ethical theory to coaching conversations and more. The following reflection by one attendee at CEF2024 illustrates the thinking that arises from the work of the conference.

“Confirmation that - ethics is «at the heart» of a «good professional practice and in conscience for the professions of Coach and Coach Supervisor, - «practicing» ethics is a daily discipline that requires a strong investment, integrity, humility and the ability [to] not to be «absorbed» by customer systems and overly polarizing positions”.

The prominence and importance of ethics is underscored by the support received from major coaching bodies, as well as many medium and small coaching associations, at each CEF conference. Their consistent backing emphasises the collective commitment to ethics in coaching, with more organisations joining with each successive conference.

CEF and the future

Looking ahead the Coaching Ethics Forum continues to grow with increasing activities throughout the year, culminating with an extended conference in 2024. CEF2024 will extend to three days - crossing
all time zones, with deeper inclusive learning. It is planned to have several speakers from non-English cultures speak in their native tongue and translate into various languages as well as English. CEF is committed to continuing to champion ethics in coaching and to support the younger generation of coaches to elevate their practice and their increasing involvement in CEF.

In the words of one CEF attendee:

“Ethics is important in coaching and coming together collectively to think and learn is part of helping us to continue to prioritise ethics in coaching”

The arrival of JoCE

With increased attention and interest in ethics in coaching the arrival of the Journal of Coaching Ethics (JoCE) marks a pivotal moment in the field of coaching, addressing a significant gap in the literature on ethics. The JoCE serves as a vital platform for collating and disseminating research from coaching and other helping, learning and developmental domains that inform coaching practices and the field of coaching more broadly.

With its founding in late 2023, the JoCE is sponsored by the Coaching Ethics Forum (CEF). The JoCE is a natural connective tissue to the work of the conference to bring increased awareness and engagement in the broad topic of ethics that underpins our way of being as coaches and humans in an increasingly interconnected and complex world. The inclusion of conference papers from CEF2022 and CEF2023 in this inaugural edition underscores the journal’s commitment to academic rigour and the evolution of coaching ethics.

As we embark on this journey, we invite you to engage with JoCE, whether through manuscript submissions, subsequent publications, or as avid readers. Our journal welcomes diverse contributions, from in-depth research papers to insightful perspectives, innovative practices and case studies grounded in theory. Together, let us advance the discourse on ethics in coaching and shape the future of our profession. We hope you join and enjoy this new journey with us.

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