

International Coaching Week 2016

Ethics is the underscore for the Coaching Relationship

During the International Coaching Week 2016 that took place from the 16th to the 21st of May I was fortunate enough to participate in a “conversation around ethics” with guest speaker Kees de Vries. This event was organised by ICF Paris International, part of the Paris IDF chapter under the presidency of Sabine Jordan-Dassonville. In this article I share my personal experience and what I took away from that conversation with Kees and the other participants.

Kees had titled the event “Ethics is the Underscore for the Coaching Relationship” but started with something quite provocative “Ethics are not rules”.

How could that be? The ICF have an Ethics Code, and a code is surely just another name for a set of rules? After all, here was a man who sat on the IRB (Independent Review Board) at ICF and who dealt with official complaints.



Kees de Vries with Hellen Hettinga of ICF Paris International.

But he said it again “Ethics are not rules and they’re not a goal”. He went on to enlarge, saying that the ICF Code of Ethics is a good basis, a common ground where the conversation begins, but then adding that rules are about right and wrong, and from an ethical point of view, each situation is different and should be looked at in its uniqueness. The code can’t be the solution as the question of ethics only arises after a problem has become apparent. Ethics comes through dialogue and are relationship led. Awareness of ethics is necessarily “in the moment” as this is the only place where life happens.

Ethics can’t be found in a rule book as ethics are life, and are present in all relationships.

The key words that emerged at this point were: Life, Trust, In the Moment, Relationship, Love in the Air, Our interconnectedness.

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This discussion was nicely summarised by Kees using a quotation from the Sufi poet Rumi:

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I'll meet you there.”

The field he was talking about was ethics, and it was bigger than I thought.

Then Kees asked us to pair up and share around the question “What was the first ethical decision you made today?”, bringing us face to face with the fact that ethics is part of our everyday life.

Of course, the first question we had to answer was “What is an ethical decision?”. Is it something I did for somebody else, because I'd committed to it? Or on the contrary, something I did for myself, in order to be fully present and aligned?

What emerged for the group is that it is connected to respect for others, but also respect for one's self. Or to resume it better, respect for the relationship that we have and how we behave between us. It's how we live together.

Another sentence that hit home was “The ethics don't change but the context and the behaviours do”. So in fact, ethics run deeper than the other two, or as Kees said in his introduction, “ethics underscore” them. It is the ongoing dialogue that keeps ethics fresh and alive.

As a coach I have to make sure that I'm showing up in a way that best serves my client. What allows me to do that? If I'm scared of doing the wrong thing, or of not following the rules, then can I really be present with my client?

As a coach I'm responsible for the relationship that I share with my client. I don't have to find the answer to his questions; Kees quoted David Whyte's expression “Let the question stay”. Not knowing is more ethical than coming up with an inappropriate answer.

Kees reminded us that in coaching the client is in a vulnerable space. My awareness of ethics will allow me to be fully present to my client and to hold the space for him or her. Learning the rule book or the ethics code won't help me to do that, although they may be useful as a starting point. I shall learn to develop a sense for ethics, a feeling that comes from my gut and that I learn to trust and respect. Respect for myself and also for what my client is going through, learning how to be with him and his feelings in the moment, even if those feelings are uncomfortable for the client, but also for me, the coach.

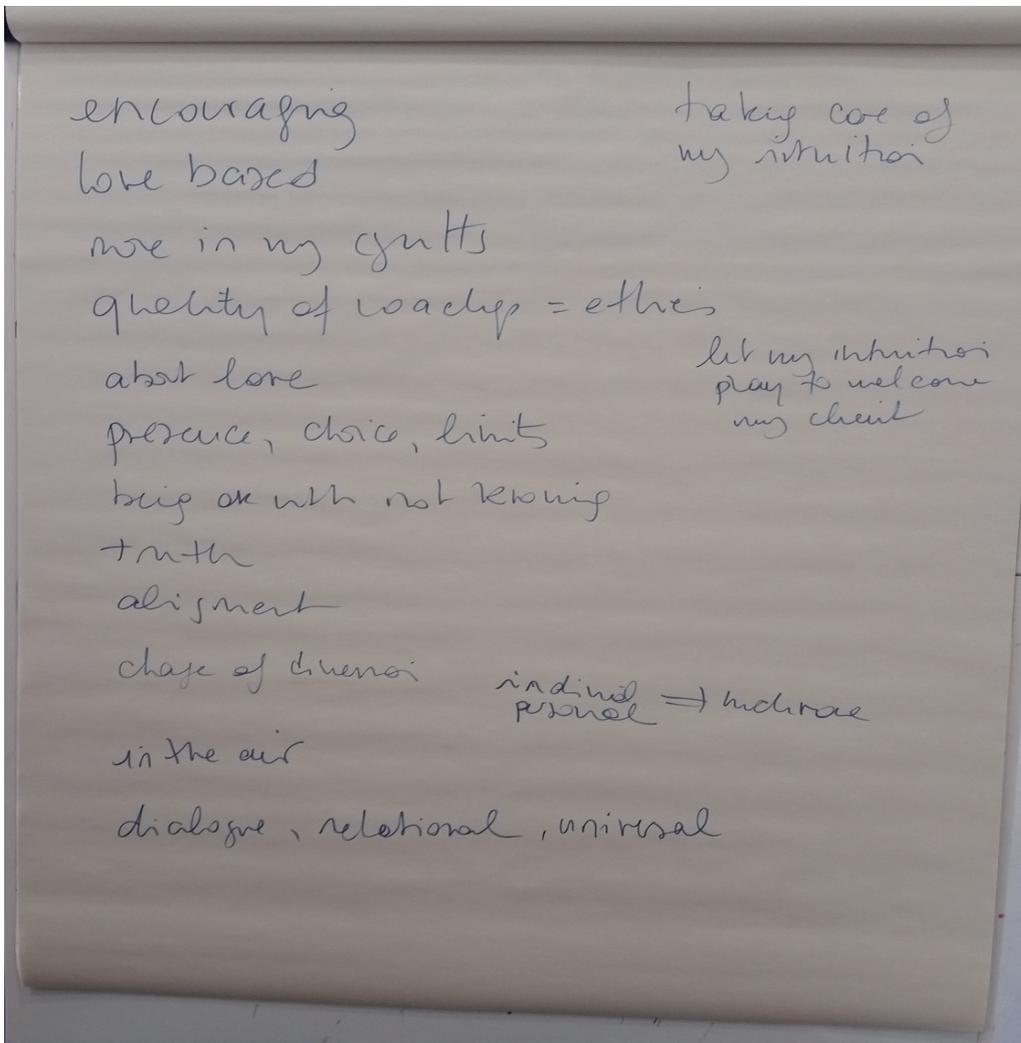
In groups we discussed another question “How do you go about making an ethical decision in a difficult coaching situation?”

The key words noted by the whole group were; Responsibility for the relationship, Moral behaviour, Safe, Personal alignment, Vulnerable place, Always risks, Open, Presence, Committed, Not Knowing, Rules and code as a starting place, Respect for yourself and others, Respect for the relationship, Living together, Holding the space, Values, Intentions, Expectations and the Prison of assumptions.

What came up for the group I was in was the idea of moving from fear to love. If we come from fear then we disconnect from our client; we go into a space of worry, of right and wrong, of problems, of “me”. When we come from love then we come from a place of expansion and acceptance and we can move back to a place of alignment and connection. This allows the ethical decision to emerge naturally.

To bring the session to a close Kees asked us what were we taking away from our exchange?

Our answers are shown in the following photo.



I'm left with the idea of dialogue; a dance with our client to find the ethical path for the given situation at that moment in time. Let's invite our clients to come and dance with us in that field that Rumi was talking about.

Jo Leymarie. ICF Paris International. May 2016

For extra resources on Ethics you can refer to the following authors mentioned by Kees during our conversation:

David Clutterbuck – The Liberated Coach ; Michael Carroll and Elisabeth Shaw – Ethical Maturity in the Helping Professions ; Patsy Rodenburg – Second Circle on YouTube ; David Whyte – Coaching and Poetry on You Tube ; Robin Shohet – Love and Ethics in Supervision on You Tube.

Kees also mentioned the ICF Global Ethics Community of Practice group. Anyone interested in participating in this should contact ICF at the following email address: ethics@coachfederation.org

ICF Paris International. is an English-language initiative by ICF Chapter Paris Ile de France. The quarterly English-language breakfast meetings aim at creating an opportunity for the international coaching community to get together in Paris. Internationally renowned and diverse guest speakers are invited to share about trends, best practices, methodologies, tools with the coaching community in France. The events are open to all nationalities, to both ICF members and non-members.

We welcome your contributions to make our events successful. Please contact Hellen Hettinga (hellen.hettinga@coachfederation.fr) in charge of ICF Paris International within our chapter and Paul-Hervé Vintrou, Mentor of this project (phv@mediacg.tv) to share your suggestions, contacts and proposals.