



Learning Outcomes

Coaching

Core & Specialized Credentials

International Certification Alliance

Version 1.0 — August 2026



LICENSING INFORMATION

The work in this document was facilitated by the International Certification Alliance (ICA) and done through the contributions of various experts and practitioners. These learning objectives are intended to help the growing Tomorrow-Ready™ community worldwide.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LICENSING INFORMATION	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT	4
CORE CREDENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES	5
Coaching Core	5
SPECIALIZED CREDENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES	8
Coaching and Mentoring Conversations	8
Coaching Presence and Stance	10
Team Coaching	12
Team Development	14
Systems Coaching	16
Coaching Ethics and Boundaries	18
Listening and Inquiry	20
SPECIAL THANKS	22

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document outlines the learning outcomes that accredited member organizations must address to offer ICA's Coaching certification. To achieve the certification, a learner must complete the core credential plus at least two specialized credentials.

Each learning outcome (LO) follows a particular pattern, described below.

O.O Learning Outcome Name

Additional Context, describing why this Learning Outcome is important or what it is intended to impart.

The learning outcome's purpose further describes what is expected to be imparted to the learner (e.g., a key point, framework, model, approach, technique, or skill).

CORE CREDENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Coaching Core

Coaching is an 8-hour Core Credential for professionals who want to develop the foundational capability to use coaching intentionally to support a client's thinking, learning, choice, and action. Learners build practical skills in establishing the focus of a coaching conversation, listening and responding with presence, and using questions and reflections to expand awareness and support client-owned insight and action.

1.1 Coaching Foundations and Boundaries

1.1 Purpose and Boundaries of Coaching

Coaching can be confused with mentoring, advising, teaching, facilitation, or therapy. When its purpose and boundaries are unclear, practitioners may default to coaching when another approach is more appropriate, take over the problem, create dependency, or blur the roles they occupy in supporting a client.

Develop learners' understanding of coaching as a development practice that supports a client's thinking, awareness, choice, and action while preserving client ownership. Build learners' ability to distinguish coaching from mentoring, advising, teaching, and facilitation based on client need, ownership, expertise, and practitioner role, and to recognize when coaching or another approach is more appropriate. Reinforce the importance of clear role and relationship boundaries, particularly when practitioners need to shift between coaching and other approaches in workplace settings.

2. Coaching Presence and Conversation Skills

2.1 Coaching Presence and Active Listening

Effective coaching requires attention, curiosity, self-management, and listening beyond surface content. Coaches need to stay with the client's agenda and experience rather than move quickly into interpretation, advice, or problem-solving.

Develop learners' ability to create the conditions for a client to think more deeply through coaching presence and active listening. Build learners' capacity to stay with the client's agenda, listen for meaning as well as content, use the client's language, allow productive silence, notice shifts in emotion, tone, pace, or energy, and manage their own impulse to solve or direct the conversation.

2.2 Questions That Evoke Awareness

Coaching questions can expand awareness and choice when they arise from what the client is exploring rather than from the coach's preferred direction. Questions that are leading, stacked, overly complex, or driven by the coach's curiosity can narrow thinking or shift ownership.

Develop learners' ability to use questions in service of the client's thinking rather than simply gathering information. Build learners' capacity to ask concise, open, non-leading questions that follow the client's language and emerging awareness; explore meaning, assumptions, values, emotions, perspectives, and possibilities; and recognize when a question is directing rather than evoking thinking.

2.3 Reflection and Reframing

Coaches can help clients hear their own thinking differently by reflecting what they notice and offering alternative ways of viewing a situation. These interventions can expand awareness, but they can also become interpretation or advice when the coach adds too much meaning or pushes a preferred perspective.

Develop learners' ability to use reflection and reframing to surface patterns, assumptions, values, tensions, and new possibilities while preserving client ownership. Build learners' capacity to ground reflections in what the client has expressed, offer reframes tentatively rather than as truth, and notice whether the intervention expands the client's thinking or pulls the conversation toward the coach's interpretation.

3. Complete Coaching Conversation

3.1 Complete Coaching Conversation

A useful coaching conversation needs enough structure to establish what the client wants from the conversation, explore what matters, create new awareness, identify client-owned action or learning, and close meaningfully without becoming scripted or coach-directed. Clear agreement about the focus and desired outcome helps keep the conversation centered on what matters to the client.

Develop learners' ability to integrate coaching presence, active listening, questions that evoke awareness, reflection and reframing, and client ownership into a coherent coaching conversation. Build learners' capacity to establish what the client wants from the conversation, stay responsive to what emerges rather than rigidly following a model, support insight and choice, and leave decisions, action, and accountability with the client. Reinforce that structure should support the conversation rather than become a script the coach must complete.

4. Coaching Context, Ethics, and Impact

4.1 Recognizing the Coaching Context

A coaching topic does not exist in isolation. A client's experience and choices can be shaped by team norms, relationships, organizational conditions, goals, incentives, leadership signals, or other factors outside the client's direct control. Recognizing the wider context helps coaches avoid treating every issue as an individual problem.

Develop learners' ability to recognize when a coaching topic is influenced by factors beyond the client without requiring full team or systems diagnosis. Build learners' capacity to distinguish what appropriately belongs within an individual coaching conversation from issues that may require team, organizational, managerial, or other intervention, without placing responsibility on the client for conditions they do not control.

4.2 Ethics, Power, and Coaching Effectiveness

Coaching relationships are shaped by confidentiality, authority, power, dependency, competing agendas, and organizational expectations. These conditions affect what can appropriately be addressed through coaching, whose interests the coach is serving, and how success should be understood. Client satisfaction alone is not sufficient evidence that coaching is ethical or effective.

Develop learners' judgment about the ethical and relational conditions that support responsible coaching. Build learners' capacity to consider confidentiality and its limits, power and dependency, conflicting stakeholder interests, professional boundaries, and situations that require clarification, referral, or a change of stance. Build learners' familiarity with a recognized professional ethical code as a reference point for responsible practice rather than a set of rules to memorize. Connect coaching effectiveness to meaningful shifts in the client's awareness, choice, learning, or action rather than to whether the coach was liked or the conversation felt comfortable.

SPECIALIZED CREDENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Coaching and Mentoring Conversations

Coaching and Mentoring Conversations is a 2–4 hour Specialized Credential for professionals who want to use coaching and mentoring stances intentionally within developmental conversations. Learners deepen their ability to recognize what the client and situation need, distinguish coaching from mentoring based on the use of expertise and ownership, notice when they drift unintentionally between stances, and shift deliberately when doing so serves the client's development. Through practice and reflection, learners strengthen their ability to use and shift between coaching and mentoring stances while preserving the client's agency, choice, and ownership.

1.1 Coaching and Mentoring Stances

Coaching and mentoring share many conversational skills but use expertise differently. Coaching primarily supports the client's own thinking and discovery, while mentoring may draw more directly on the practitioner's experience, knowledge, perspective, or guidance to support the client's development.

Develop learners' ability to recognize when a conversation calls for a coaching stance, a mentoring stance, or an intentional shift between them. Build learners' capacity to consider what the client needs, where relevant expertise sits, and how it should be used, and whether drawing on the practitioner's knowledge, experience, or perspective would expand or narrow the client's thinking and choice. Reinforce that neither stance is inherently better; effectiveness depends on choosing deliberately while preserving client ownership.

2.1 Stance Drift

Practitioners can shift between coaching and mentoring stances without consciously choosing to do so. Unexamined stance shifts can change ownership, create dependency, or reduce the value of the conversation.

Develop learners' ability to notice when and why they are drifting from an intended coaching or mentoring stance. Build learners' capacity to distinguish a deliberate shift made in service of the client from a reactive shift triggered by urgency, discomfort, habit, the impulse to rescue, or the desire to demonstrate expertise or be useful. Build awareness of how stance changes affect client ownership, thinking, trust, and the direction of the conversation.

3.1 Using Coaching and Mentoring Stances Intentionally

Developmental conversations do not always stay within one stance. Effective practitioners shift intentionally between coaching and mentoring when doing so better serves the client's development.

Develop learners' ability to use and shift between coaching and mentoring stances intentionally within a developmental conversation. Build learners' capacity to support the client's thinking when coaching, seek permission before drawing on relevant knowledge, experience, or perspective when mentoring, and return interpretation and choice to the client after sharing. Build skill in making stance changes transparent so the client understands what is being offered and remains free to accept, adapt, or decline it.

4.1 Reflection on Stance Choice

A conversation can feel helpful while still becoming overly directive, withholding useful perspective, or shifting ownership away from the client. Reflection helps practitioners evaluate the effect of their stance choices.

Develop learners' ability to reflect critically on their use of coaching and mentoring stances after a conversation. Build learners' capacity to examine where their stance choices served the client's development, where they shifted intentionally or unintentionally, how their own reactions influenced those choices, and what they would sustain or change in future conversations. Reinforce that effectiveness should be evaluated through the effect on the client's thinking, agency, and ownership rather than through practitioner comfort or conversational smoothness.

Coaching Presence and Stance

Coaching Presence and Stance is a 2–4 hour Specialized Credential for professionals who want to strengthen their ability to maintain an effective coaching stance when their own reactions make that difficult. Learners deepen their understanding of coaching presence through observable behavior, recognize the internal reactions and triggers that can pull them away from an effective coaching stance, and practice self-management that supports intentional choices in live or simulated coaching interactions. Through practice and reflection, learners strengthen their ability to evaluate how their presence, reactions, and choices affect the quality of the client's thinking, ownership, and development.

1.1 Behavioral Coaching Presence

Coaching presence is visible in how a coach pays attention and responds in the moment. Without it, even good coaching techniques can become mechanical or driven by the coach's agenda.

Develop learners' understanding of coaching presence through observable behavior rather than as an internal feeling or personality style. Build learners' ability to recognize presence through attention, curiosity, responsiveness, self-management, comfort with uncertainty and silence, and the ability to stay with the client and what is emerging rather than moving prematurely toward solutions, particularly when the coach experiences an impulse to intervene or direct.

2.1 Triggers and Coaching Stance

A coach's internal reactions can pull them away from an effective coaching stance and influence how they respond in the moment. Recognizing what triggered the shift makes intentional choice more possible.

Develop learners' ability to recognize when an internal reaction has begun to pull them away from an effective coaching stance. Build learners' capacity to identify triggers such as urgency, discomfort, silence, emotion, judgment, the impulse to rescue or demonstrate expertise, the desire to be useful, or attachment to a particular outcome, and recognize how those triggers influence their behavior. Connect the resulting stance drift to its effect on curiosity, client ownership, and the direction of the conversation.

3.1 Self–Management in Coaching

Coaching interactions can involve silence, emotion, discomfort, uncertainty, urgency, or a strong desire to help. Self-management allows the coach to notice their own reactions to what is happening without automatically acting on them.

Develop learners' ability to notice internal reactions and choose how to respond rather than reacting automatically. Build learners' capacity to recognize what is happening internally, pause when needed, reconnect with curiosity and the client's agenda, and make an intentional behavioral choice that preserves space for the client's thinking. Reinforce that effective self-management can draw on different practices rather than requiring a particular mindfulness, somatic, or regulation technique.

4.1 Evaluating Coaching Stance

A coaching interaction can feel comfortable to the coach without meaningfully supporting the client's thinking or development. Reflection helps connect the coaching stance to its effect on the client and identify what to strengthen next.

Develop learners' ability to evaluate how their presence, stance, and self-management affected the quality of the client's thinking. Build learners' capacity to recognize evidence such as greater awareness, new perspective, expanded choice, deeper exploration, or stronger ownership; distinguish those shifts from the coach simply feeling confident or comfortable; and identify what they would sustain or change in future coaching.

Team Coaching

Team Coaching is a 2–4 hour Specialized Credential for professionals who want to coach an intact team as a collective client rather than coach individual team members separately. Learners develop the ability to recognize what appropriately belongs within team coaching, establish a shared coaching agreement, maintain a stance that serves the team as a whole, and facilitate interventions that help the team notice and work with its own patterns, relationships, and ways of working. Through practice and reflection, learners strengthen their ability to support collective ownership and capability and evaluate whether coaching is contributing to meaningful behavioral and relational change within the team.

1.1 Team Coaching as a Practice

Team coaching works with an intact team as the client rather than coaching individual members separately. The focus is on how the team thinks, interacts, learns, and works toward shared outcomes.

Develop learners' understanding of team coaching as a distinct practice focused on the team as a collective client. Build learners' ability to distinguish team coaching from individual coaching, facilitation, team building, and systems coaching; keep attention on patterns and outcomes that belong to the intact team; and recognize when a team need may be better addressed through another approach.

2.1 Contracting and Stance with a Team

Team coaching requires agreement about the team's purpose for coaching, roles, participation, confidentiality, sponsor expectations, and how the coach will work with the team as a whole.

Develop learners' ability to establish a clear coaching agreement with an intact team and maintain a stance that serves the team as a whole. Build learners' capacity to clarify the purpose of coaching, roles and expectations, confidentiality boundaries, sponsor expectations, and how progress will be understood. Reinforce balanced attention across team members and awareness of power and participation dynamics, while avoiding alignment with the leader, a subgroup, or an individual agenda.

3.1 Team Coaching Interventions

Team coaching interventions help an intact team notice and work with its own patterns rather than relying on the coach to diagnose its problems or provide the solutions.

Develop learners' ability to facilitate interventions that help a team observe how it communicates, makes decisions, handles disagreement, shares responsibility, and works toward shared outcomes. Build learners' capacity to respond to what is emerging in the team, create space for multiple perspectives, notice relevant power and participation dynamics, and strengthen the team's ability to recognize and work with its own patterns without turning the coach into the expert or fixer.

4.1 Team Coaching Outcomes

Team coaching should be evaluated through changes in how the team works together, not simply through completed coaching activity or individual member satisfaction.

Develop learners' ability to evaluate whether coaching is contributing to greater collective capability within the team. Build learners' capacity to recognize observable shifts in communication, decision-making, disagreement, accountability, shared ownership, learning, or progress toward team outcomes, and distinguish those changes from activities such as attendance or completed sessions.

Team Development

Team Development is a 2–4 hour Specialized Credential for professionals who want to support teams in becoming more capable and effective over time. Learners examine how a team's history, membership, roles, norms, relationships, trust, leadership, and changing conditions shape its development, including how those supporting or leading a team can influence its dynamics. Learners analyze team patterns without jumping too quickly to labels; design development responses that fit the team's current needs and build its own capability; and use behavioral, relational, and performance evidence to assess development over time.

1.1 Team Development Over Time

Teams develop patterns, norms, relationships, and ways of working over time. Their development is rarely linear, and changes in purpose, membership, leadership, or context can create new needs.

Develop learners' understanding of team development as an evolving process rather than a fixed sequence of stages. Build learners' capacity to consider how a team's history, purpose, membership, roles, norms, relationships, trust, workload, leadership, and changing conditions shape its development. Use stage or lifecycle models as optional lenses for sense-making rather than universal predictions of how every team should progress.

2.1 Team Dynamics, Trust, and Psychological Safety

Team dynamics become visible through patterns of participation, decision-making, disagreement, accountability, trust, and safety. Individual moments can be misleading when interpreted without enough context, and those leading or supporting a team may themselves influence the patterns they observe.

Develop learners' ability to observe patterns that influence how effectively a team works together without over-interpreting limited evidence. Build learners' capacity to examine participation, voice, trust, disagreement, decision-making, accountability, inclusion, and psychological safety; distinguish repeated patterns from isolated incidents; consider how context and power affect what team members are willing and able to contribute; and recognize how those leading or supporting the team may reinforce or disrupt these patterns.

3.1 Team Development Priorities and Responses

Teams do not improve through generic development activities. Different patterns and conditions call for different kinds of support, and addressing the visible symptom may leave the underlying development need unchanged.

Develop learners' ability to identify and prioritize team development needs and choose responses appropriate to the team's context. Build learners' capacity to distinguish underlying development needs from visible symptoms; consider responses such as role clarity, working agreements, trust-building, decision practices, conflict norms, accountability, relationship repair, and learning routines; and take appropriate action within their role and capability to strengthen team capability and shared ownership.

4.1 Team Health and Development Progress

Team health is better understood through patterns of behavior and relationships over time than through isolated events, activity levels, or team-member satisfaction alone.

Develop learners' ability to evaluate team health and development using multiple forms of evidence. Build learners' capacity to examine behavioral, relational, and performance indicators such as participation, trust, conflict quality, decision effectiveness, accountability, adaptability, shared ownership, team capability, and progress toward outcomes; identify patterns of improvement, stagnation, or regression when sufficient evidence is available; and avoid drawing conclusions from a single data point or measure.

Systems Coaching

Systems Coaching is a 2–4 hour Specialized Credential for professionals who want to extend their coaching practice beyond an individual or intact team to a wider relationship system. Learners develop the ability to recognize recurring patterns across teams, functions, roles, boundaries, and stakeholder groups; examine different perspectives, power dynamics, dependencies, and tensions without locating the problem in one part of the system; and establish shared purpose and working expectations across multiple stakeholders. Through practice and reflection, learners strengthen their ability to facilitate basic boundary-spanning coaching interventions that support greater shared awareness and choice and to evaluate impact and responsible practice across a multi-party coaching engagement.

1.1 Systems Coaching

Some challenges are created and sustained through relationships, roles, boundaries, and interactions across multiple parts of an organization. Systems coaching treats the wider relationship system as the client rather than locating the issue within one person or intact team.

Develop learners' understanding of systems coaching as a distinct practice focused on the wider relationship system as the client. Build learners' ability to distinguish systems coaching from individual and team coaching; recognize when a challenge spans teams, functions, roles, or stakeholder groups and is appropriately addressed at the wider system level; and shift attention from identifying who is causing the problem to understanding how the broader system is producing or sustaining the pattern.

2.1 Patterns, Roles, and Dynamics Across the System

Wider relationship systems contain recurring patterns, roles, boundaries, power dynamics, alignments, and tensions that no single stakeholder can fully see from their own position.

Develop learners' ability to notice patterns across multiple stakeholders without reducing the situation to one person's perspective or explanation. Build learners' capacity to examine recurring interactions, formal and informal roles, boundaries, power, alliances, dependencies, and tensions; compare different stakeholder perspectives; and distinguish what is observable from assumptions about why the system behaves as it does.

3.1 Coaching Across System Boundaries

Systems coaching often requires working across team, functional, role, or stakeholder boundaries. Interventions need to serve the wider system rather than reinforce one group's agenda or oversimplify a complex pattern.

Develop learners' ability to create and rehearse basic boundary-spanning coaching interventions that help multiple parts of a system see and work with shared patterns. Build learners' capacity to establish shared purpose and working expectations with relevant stakeholders, bring different perspectives into dialogue, clarify boundaries and interdependencies, and help the system generate greater awareness and choice without positioning the coach as the expert who diagnoses or fixes the system.

4.1 System Impact and Multi-Party Ethics

Systems coaching involves multiple parties with different interests, levels of power, and expectations about confidentiality or outcomes. Its effectiveness should be judged by meaningful change in the wider relationship system, not by whether individual stakeholders felt satisfied.

Develop learners' ability to evaluate both the impact and ethical quality of systems coaching across multiple stakeholders. Build learners' capacity to recognize evidence of relational shift, improved alignment, healthier interaction across boundaries, or increased capacity for the system to work with its own tensions; consider confidentiality, power, competing interests, and sponsor expectations; and avoid claiming impact that the evidence does not support.

Coaching Ethics and Boundaries

Coaching Ethics and Boundaries is a 2–4 hour Specialized Credential for professionals who want to navigate the ethical complexity of coaching in organizational settings. Learners deepen their ability to reason through responsibilities to the client, sponsors, organizations, and the profession; recognize when authority, power, performance–management responsibilities, competing agendas, or other role boundaries affect whether coaching is appropriate; and establish clear agreements that support informed participation and clarify purpose, roles, confidentiality, and information sharing. Learners also develop judgment about when coaching should continue, change, or stop, including when the limits of the practitioner's role or competence require an alternative response.

1.1 Ethical Coaching Practice

Organizational coaching creates ethical responsibilities to more than one party and can involve competing interests, power differences, and confidentiality expectations.

Develop learners' understanding of ethical coaching responsibilities using a recognized professional coaching code of ethics as a reference point. Build learners' capacity to identify duties to the client, sponsor, organization, and profession; recognize where those duties may conflict; and use ethical principles to guide judgment rather than treating a code as a checklist of rules.

2.1 Coaching Boundary Risks

Coaching can become inappropriate when the practitioner also holds responsibility for performance, decisions, evaluation, or organizational outcomes. Unclear role boundaries and power differences can undermine trust, informed participation, and client ownership.

Develop learners' ability to recognize when organizational roles, authority, or competing responsibilities create a boundary risk for coaching. Build learners' capacity to recognize situations where a manager, internal coach, HR practitioner, or other professional may need to move between coaching and performance management, direction, escalation, or another role; make those shifts explicit rather than disguising management decisions as coaching; and consider how power and authority affect the client's ability to participate freely and make informed choices about the coaching relationship.

3.1 Coaching Agreements

Clear coaching agreements reduce ambiguity about the purpose of coaching, roles, confidentiality, information sharing, and what happens when concerns fall outside the coaching relationship.

Develop learners' ability to establish and communicate a coaching agreement that supports trust and informed participation. Build learners' capacity to clarify purpose, roles, confidentiality and its limits, sponsor or organizational expectations, how success will be understood, what information may be shared, and how concerns requiring a different response will be handled. Reinforce that the coaching agreement is an ongoing conversation when conditions or expectations change, not simply an administrative step at the beginning.

4.1 Stepping Out of the Coaching Role

Some situations can no longer be responsibly addressed through coaching. Continuing to coach when another response is needed can create harm, delay appropriate action, or exceed the practitioner's role or competence.

Develop learners' judgment about when continuing in a coaching stance is no longer appropriate. Build learners' capacity to recognize concerns that may require a different professional role, organizational response, specialist support, escalation, or referral; consider urgency, risk, competence, confidentiality, and duty of care; and communicate the transition clearly without diagnosing, abandoning, or promising support the practitioner cannot provide.

Listening and Inquiry

Listening and Inquiry is a 2–4 hours Specialized Credential that builds on the foundations introduced in the Communication Core Credential. This course is for practitioners who want to develop the quality of their attention and their use of questions as tools for deepening understanding, generating insight, and moving thinking forward. Effective listening and purposeful inquiry are among the highest-leverage communication skills in professional life, yet they are rarely taught with the depth and intentionality they deserve.

1.1 What Deep Listening Actually Requires

Hearing someone's words isn't the same as listening to what they mean, and everyone listens through personal filters and biases that quietly shape what they notice and miss.

Build the ability to distinguish deep listening from simply hearing words. Cover how personal filters and biases quietly shape what a listener notices and misses, so learners can recognize their own patterns and listen more deliberately. Skilled listeners pay attention not only to what is being said but also to emotions, values, intentions, and what remains unsaid. Developing this capability strengthens empathy and improves the quality of professional dialogue.

2.1 The Architecture of Purposeful Questions

Questions are among the most powerful tools available, yet most people use a narrow repertoire by default asking closed, leading, or rhetorical questions without recognizing the effect this has on the conversation

Build the ability to recognize and distinguish between different question types such as open vs. closed, leading, or stacked/compound questions. Understand how different question types shape and steer a conversation. Build awareness of the learner's default questioning patterns and the contexts in which those patterns serve or limit effective inquiry.

3.1 Balancing Listening and Inquiry

Listening and inquiry do not operate the same way across all professional contexts. The approach that serves a one-to-one coaching conversation differs from what is needed in a group problem-solving session, a stakeholder alignment meeting, or a difficult feedback exchange.

Build the ability to read a conversation for which mode it actually calls for at a given moment, rather than defaulting to a single habitual style. Cover how to balance listening and inquiry by appropriately shifting between asking questions, listening deeply, and contributing perspectives based on the needs of the conversation.

4.1 Reflective Listening and Inquiry Practice

Listening and inquiry are skills that develop over time through deliberate practice and honest reflection.

Build the habit of evaluating your own listening and inquiry practice, rather than repeating it unexamined. Assess depth of attention, quality of presence, and the actual impact of inquiry on the people and conversations involved. Explore the risk of not evaluating your listening and inquiry practices.

SPECIAL THANKS

ICA would like to give special thanks to the contributors:

Kerri Sutey · Paulo Dias · Christina Hartikainen · Tricia
Broderick · Shane Hastie · John Barratt · Mahmoud Ghaz ·
Jaime Yanez · Laura Powers