

PEER RESOURCES

A Guide to Coach Credentials

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Introduction

In 1996 Peer Resources created a list on their website (www.peer.ca/coaching.html) of the few coach training organizations that provided formal training for coaches. Eight years later there are now over 150 such organizations listed. With no regulations or common standards, each training school was free to initiate its own credentialing system. And initiate they did.

There are now more than 65 distinct credentials in North America and the United Kingdom as well as other countries, and the systems used to grant these credentials vary. Some are competency-based, some require attaining hours of course work, others require supervision by someone who has already attained the credential, some rely on self-assessment, some can be obtained without ever coaching a client; and some are just based on self-proclamation.

The purpose of this article is to reduce the confusion about coach credentialing and provide guidance to prospective coaches, current coaches, and the general public about the nature of, sources for, and issues associated with credentials.¹

This paper reports on the most recent authoritative poll regarding opinions about certification, summarizes the issues associated with certification, identifies the variety of credentialing systems available in coaching, provides a way to distinguish the various credentials from each other, and offers suggestions regarding credentialing that will contribute to a healthy future for coaching.

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Peer Resources Website Poll on Certification

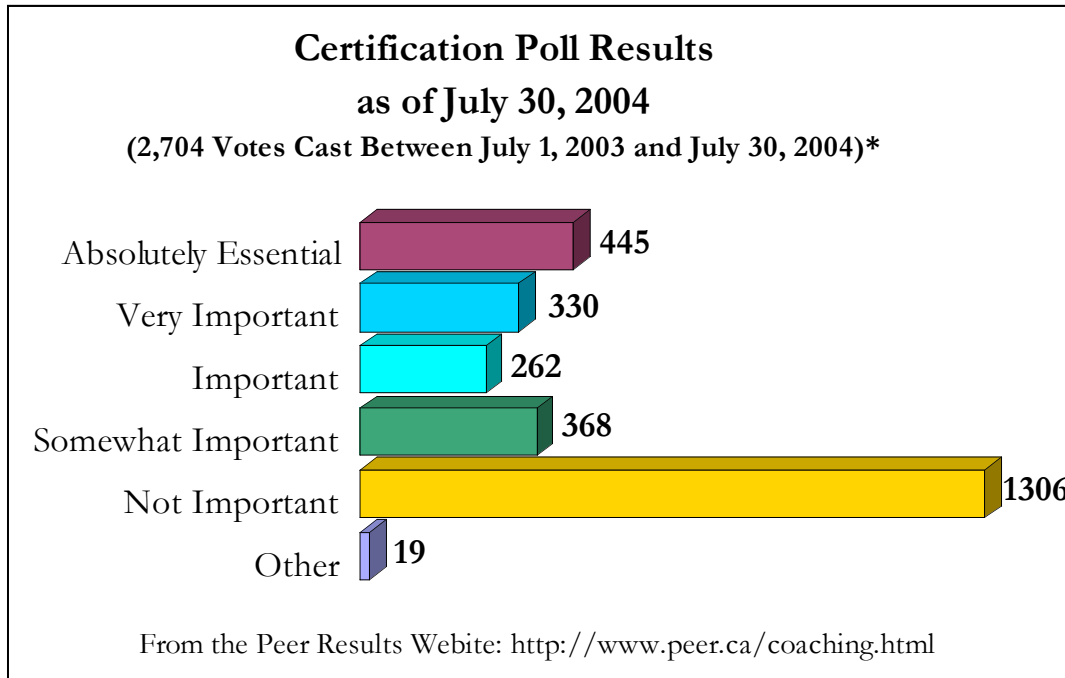
The variety and proliferation of credentialing systems has led to confusion, controversy and skepticism about the coaching field. One of the most frequently expressed concerns by those individuals who request information about the variety of coach training schools listed on our website is: “How important is certification?”

In order to answer this question, Peer Resources created a Poll on Certification where visitors to their website could “vote” as to the degree of importance and leave a comment regarding their viewpoint about certification.

To make the poll easy and quick to complete, six categories were available for selection. Certification could be described by visitors as “Absolutely Essential,” “Very Important,” “Important,” “Somewhat Important,” “Not Important,” or “Other.”

The graph accompanying this article shows the results of this poll as of the publication of this paper.

¹ Some confusion exists regarding various terms associated with credentials in coaching. Thanks to Wendy Johnson, CEO and President of the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, for preventing earlier drafts of this paper from adding to the confusion. Ms. Johnson pointed out that “credential” (not “certification”) is the more accurate “umbrella” term and that this more general category includes terms such as “certification,” “accreditation,” “licensure,” and “registration” as well as the terms typically associated with universities such as “diploma” and “degree.” The primary focus of this paper will be on certification and accreditation since they are the most popular form of credentialing in coaching. Where appropriate, the other terms will be included.



Results of this poll require cautious interpretation since this type of Internet polling does not rely on traditional scientific sampling methods. In addition, while some information about the respondents can be inferred from their comments (see below), there is too little information to draw any conclusions about the demographic distribution of the respondents. Researchers and others interested in more in-depth analysis will be disappointed that too little data is available to make it possible to show any relationship between certification perspectives and respondent coaching experience, area of expertise, country of practice, and such.

Current Viewpoints on Certification

Nevertheless some insights can be gained from an analysis of the data collected so far.

The results in the graph, for example, at first appear to be strongly skewed towards “not important,” however the other categories of importance combine to 52% of the total vote. In essence this means that visitors were almost equally divided about the importance of certification.

In addition to casting a vote, visitors could also “explain” or provide more information about their vote. While not everyone chose to leave a comment following their actual vote, more than 500 visitors (18 percent) did leave some type of comment. And for the most part, their comments reflected strongly held, passionately-presented viewpoints.

Their comments do reflect a number of common themes. These themes are likely a fair representation of the variety of viewpoints regarding certification. Here are the nine common themes identified so far.

1. Certification is a political tool.
2. Certification is a marketing tool.
3. Certification is arbitrary.
4. Certification is a revenue generator.
5. Certification is a weak substitute for integrity.
6. Certification exploits the inexperienced.
7. Certification acts as a mark of distinction.
8. Certification protects the public.
9. Certification acts as a beacon.

1. Certification is a political tool.

Various organizations are in a struggle to control coach certification. Although the organizations suggest that their emphasis on certification is primarily to benefit the coaching industry, the general public (and potential clients) and coaches themselves, critics respond by saying that the primary beneficiary of certification is the organization (through fees collected for either membership, certification processing, or certification procedures.)

2. Certification is a marketing tool.

Coaching schools use certification to keep participants lined-up for their courses. Coaching schools may also be using certification as a way of intimidating prospective coaches into believing that unless a coach is certified they will not be able to gain enough clients to survive in the field. Courses may provide value and be experienced as worthwhile by the participants, yet when the credentials of the experienced and well-known coaches are examined, few have paid any attention to certification. Instead most attend to what a person can achieve or do. To some, then, certification is perceived as a marketing tool, not a validation of accomplishment.

3. Certification is arbitrary.

Certification based on hours of experience may be a way to underscore the importance of experience, but hour-based approaches are at best arbitrary and at worst misleading the public. Is a coach with 250 hours of experience really less able than a coach with 500 hours of experience? It might be logical to say, "yes," but there is too little evidence that such hour designations are equivalent to capability. In reality the use of hours to determine certification is probably based on the outdated university system of awarding a degree after completion of a certain number of units or courses.

4. Certification is a revenue generator.

Of all the negative views expressed about certification this one is the most prevalent. Considerable cynicism appears to exist regarding the "real" reason versus the "stated" reason for certification. One organization came under continuous criticism for its self-management of certification, requiring fees for application and payment of fees to others who already hold such certification in order for the applicant to become eligible for certification. Many website visitors described certification as a "cash-grab." Highly critical visitors described particular certification systems as pyramid scams or "Ponzi" schemes. One website visitor said that certification was like a virus: "it spreads fast, wipes out all the alternatives, and eventually eats its host."

Despite the extensive comments made by website visitors about this facet of certification, there may be little basis for claiming that certification is a revenue generator. While it may generate revenue (or income) in that there is typically a fee associated with it, certification is not likely to be a "profit" generator. Instead, it is more likely to be a costly and time-consuming procedure that is offered as a service rather than a "profit-centre." To be

conducted with even minimal credibility, requires coaching schools and associations to engage in considerable review, paperwork, and communication.

5. Certification is a weak substitute for integrity.

Many experienced coaches believe that certification is unnecessary. Partly this is based on the idea that their actions are more important than their certificates. Actions typically include their attention to training themselves to offer the best possible quality of service, ethics, integrity, and skill to assist clients. In addition many coaches believe that the results their clients have gained or the outcomes their clients have achieved ought to be the main qualification.

6. Certification exploits the inexperienced.

Younger visitors (as determined by their website comments or by their telephone enquiries) who had less life experience and minimal formal training or degrees, were more likely to seek certification and describe it as essential. They typically equated certification with the ability to attract clients and establish a legitimate practice. Older visitors, typically those with degrees, extensive life and business experience, or previous formal training in another helping profession area, were less likely to be interested in certification or would typically state that certification was of little importance to them.

7. Certification acts as a mark of distinction.

The most popular view for certification was that it distinguishes “charlatans” and the unskilled (and unscrupulous) from qualified, trained, and skilled coaches. Coaches who hold this view hope is also that such certification will attract more prospective clients and act as a short-hand way for coaches to demonstrate their capability. While it seems logical that a coach engaged in serious, systematic study and supervised practice will be more likely to attract clients than someone who has no formal training in coaching, too little data is available to assess the validity of this viewpoint.

8. Certification protects the public.

This is a common viewpoint that supports certification systems used in many other disciplines. The problem with coaching, as many others will point out, is that it is without accepted standards, legislated regulations, or even common goals. Unregulated certification actually serves to bamboozle the public. Add to this the documented case of a coach certifying herself with the same certification designation as used by one of the largest coaching organizations, the public has no way of truly being protected or educated. Critics of certification believe it does not eliminate irresponsible or inappropriate practices passing as coaching. At the present time, although likely to be confidential, there does not appear to be a case of a certified individual having his or her certification removed or revoked. In addition, as of this writing, only one North American organization or association in the

coaching field has a mechanism in place to provide scrutiny or discipline for certified members that engage in inappropriate, illegal, or immoral activities.

9. Certification acts as a beacon.

Many supporters of certification acknowledge its weaknesses, but believe that it is a way to improve the quality of coaching, document a coach's training, and provide an opportunity for coaching schools to validate the progress of their participants. Advocates believe that certification is more of a starting point than an end in itself. Proponents of certification believe there is a positive movement among various coach training schools to tailor their offerings to conform to the certification requirements of a particular coaching association. They see this movement towards commonality as a way to establish more widely accepted standards and provide greater opportunities for industry self-regulation.

Although the nine themes were drawn from comments left on the website by visitors, no representation is made about the relationship between the themes and the frequency with which they were expressed. For example, three of the above themes could be considered positive or supportive of certification; whereas the other six could be considered critical of certification. The larger number of negative themes only means that there were more distinct themes, not more expressions of negativity. Proponents of certification were more likely to coalesce around a fewer number of themes. Similar to the data collected in the quantitative poll, the qualitative comments were relatively equally divided between advocates for coaching certification and those who believed certification had little importance.²

Credentialing Systems Available in the Coaching Field

The proliferation of various systems of credentialing shows no sign of slowing down. Traditional universities are adding to the mix by providing diplomas, certificates, and degrees in coaching, thus making the maze of designations more difficult to navigate and understand.

In order to clarify and distinguish between the variety of credentialing systems available to coaches and potential coaches, a review of all known forms of certification, registration, diplomas, and degree granting in coaching was conducted in July of 2004, based on data available on the Internet. The Credentialing Chart that appears on the last three pages of this article was prepared from the collected data. The categories used to group the data are based on the frequently asked questions about credentialing submitted to the coaching experts at Peer Resources over the last two years. For greater clarification, a series of "Explanatory Notes" are provided in the section preceding the chart. These notes provide descriptions of the categories as well as necessary cautions and limits with regard to the accuracy and potential uses of the data in the chart.³

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² Results may have been different had the poll asked about "The Importance of Credentialing" instead of "The Importance of Certification." The poll results may have had far fewer negative comments.

³ The Credentialing Chart appears in Appendix I at the end of this article. If the Chart is missing from the Appendix of this article, it can be downloaded from the Peer Resources website in a viewable form at this link: www.peer.ca/certchartxls04.pdf. Members of the Peer Resources Network can download a viewable and printable version of the chart at <http://www.peer.ca/Projects/certchartxls04p.pdf>.

Explanatory Notes

The categories used in the Credentialing Chart are, in part, based on the most frequently asked questions submitted by email or telephone to our coaching experts. A balance in the number of categories was necessary: too many categories would make the Chart cumbersome and difficult to read; too few categories would make the Chart less educational and informative.

The following explanations of each of the categories are provided in place of the typical “legend” that would accompany this type of chart.

Initials. The letters used in this column are the primary reason this chart was created. The use of this short-cut for describing the type of credential has led to extensive confusion or puzzlement as to what the letters actually mean. Many coaches place these initials after their names on business cards, websites, or other forms of interaction with clients and the public. Unlike the more well-known initials such as MD or PhD, the proliferation of the initials in the coaching world has decreased the likelihood of public recognition. The majority of initials used in this chart reflect the typical way this title is described and displayed. In a few cases the source did not use initials and a set was created for this chart. Some initials from different organizations may consist of identical letters, but represent different words in the full title. A few sets of initials are identical in letters and title, but are offered by different organizations.

Full Title. The most frequently used form of credentialing in coaching is certification. Consequently, most titles include the term “certification.” Some schools use the term “certificate,” “diploma,” or “registered.” While these terms are not synonymous, they do share some common elements. Typically they all reflect that a person has participated in some type of systematic, pre-determined course of study and practice and has been awarded the designation as a result of the successful completion of specific requirements. However, those requirements can range from attendance only to passing examinations to writing extensive documents to demonstrating specific skills or abilities to graduating from an accredited school.

Typically certification (as distinct from a diploma, degree, or registration) usually means additional post-certification requirements such as continuing education or other activities that contribute to quality assurance. While certification does not guarantee competence, it is strongly oriented in that direction and usually includes some type of eligibility requirements (often prior to admission to

either the training program or the professional field) as well as an evaluation of each person’s skill and knowledge.

Registration is somewhat similar to certification, but typically “verifies” that a person has certain qualifications (has taken a specific course of study, has engaged in certain work experience, has attained specific certifications, or obtained certain academic credentials). Registration, however, is less oriented toward assessing performance or establishing post-registration requirements.⁴

Issuing Source. This column represents the school, association, or organization responsible for creating or conferring the particular title. There are six sources of credentialing:

- (1) coaching schools that tailor (or align) their curriculum so that participants will be eligible for certification by the ICF;
- (2) coaching schools that offer their own in-house certification (or combine their in-house certification with (1) above);
- (3) coaching associations that provide certification such as the International Coach Federation and the International Association of Coaches;
- (4) coaching associations that sponsor particular training programs such as the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches;
- (5) universities that offer masters or doctoral degrees, or certificates and diplomas that

⁴ Although not covered in this document because at the present time there are no examples in coaching, “licensure” differs from registration and certification in that it typically is associated with mandatory, legislated, or legal requirements. Various state legislatures and other government entities have been or are currently considering whether coaching (as practiced in personal coaching) ought to be licensed. The State of Colorado recently exempted coaches from coming under licensing requirements of that state.

emphasize coaching; and
(6) individuals who “self-proclaim” their own certification.

In some cases more than one school may use the same title. In addition, some schools have created more than one type of certification.

Accredited. Accreditation, which is not the same as certification, has been used extensively around the world for determining the quality and legitimacy of post-secondary educational organizations. Independent bodies have been formed in various countries to review colleges and universities and assign or deny accredited status. In North America, college and university accrediting is carried out by "regional," (as compared to national) independent groups. Professional associations in North America also review specific offerings at colleges and universities and determine whether such a specialized program qualifies for their "accreditation." Traditional examples in North America include law schools, medical schools, and advanced degree programs in psychology, counselling, and social work. In Europe, it is more likely that the terms “accreditation” and “certification” are used interchangeably. In North America the term “accredited” is more properly applied only to organizations and not individuals.

In coaching there are three associations currently involved in accrediting coaching schools: the International Coach Federation (ICF), the European Coaching Institute (ECI), and the Open Learning Institute (OLI) - the latter two both located in the United Kingdom. Unlike the traditional university accrediting sources in the United States, these bodies do not possess the "arms-length," independent relationship between themselves and the schools they are accrediting. They do, however, in the case of the ICF, for example, provide explicit criteria and standards upon which their accrediting decisions are made and they make public the fees they charge to provide such accreditation. While the ICF accredits coaching schools, the ICF is itself not "accredited" to do so.

For some of the coaching schools listed as not accredited, that determination may not provide an accurate description of their work. Many of the schools listed as not having accredited status have geared their curriculum to match the requirements

for certification with the International Coach Federation. Schools typically call this "alignment" and it means that the courses, contact hours, and experiences required to obtain their credential will enable individuals to apply for (and likely be approved for) one of the three certifications (ACC, PCC, MCC) provided by the ICF. The ICF has provided a "portfolio" method whereby applicants from schools the ICF does not currently accredit can independently apply for certification.

No coaching associations listed are accredited. However, this status might be slightly misleading. Because of the unregulated nature of coaching at the present time, there is no “overarching” body or institution that is involved in accrediting a coaching association. (This point will be discussed more fully in the recommendations section of this report.)

Training Hours. The number of hours associated with coach training was determined from information available on the organization's website. In some cases the organization distinguished between "direct" contact hours (typically contact with a course leader either in-person or through telecourse) and "indirect" hours (typically study time required, time to complete assignments, or engage in research or practice projects). For this chart the direct and indirect hours have been combined into one total. In many cases the organizations provided no information about the total minimum hours required for training, but where individual courses were listed it was often possible to provide an estimate based on course descriptions. Some organizations provided no information about minimum course hours required.

Coaching Hours. The number representing "coaching" hours was determined from information available on the organization's website. Typically this number represents the minimum number of hours of coaching with paid or unpaid clients (as compared to "coaching" fellow students in the class through simulations or role plays) in order to gain the noted credential. In some cases organizations did not indicate a minimum number of hours and instead noted the minimum number of clients (rather than hours) and the number of "sessions" with each client. For purposes of easier comparison on this chart, we have used "1" hour as an average length of a

coaching session. Eight hours, for example, could mean one client for eight hours or eight clients for one-hour.

Surprisingly, a large number of organizations provided no details about this practical aspect of their training program, thus leaving visitors completely uninformed about this important element for comparing certification requirements. In some cases "coaching hours" with real clients may have been included in a course, but the course description provided few clues as to this possibility.

Paper/Essay. Many coaching schools provide instruction via telecourse and few require written assignments. This category identifies schools that require written work that is typically a case study, journal, or position paper. The emphasis here is on written work that must be reviewed by or turned into school faculty. This does not refer to personal notes or case records maintained by school participants.

Examination. Oral or/and written examinations are common and typically occur near or at the end of course work and coaching hours. In some cases these exams are conducted on an interim basis. Programs leading to traditional degrees such as an MA or PhD more typically require a dissertation or thesis. It was not possible to determine whether such work also served as a basis for an oral examination as is common in most universities.

Other. A variety of requirements to obtain credentials are included in this category. While a few examples require an interview, audio-tapes of coaching sessions, letters of reference from clients, or coaching with peers, the most common additional requirement was being coached by a mentor or certified coach. In rare cases this coaching was indicated as being included in the fee for the program. The majority of schools that required this element did not indicate the number

of hours, the fees involved, or who was responsible for paying these fees. Where multiple "other" requirements are indicated, refer to that school or organization website for more details.

Processing Fee. A few schools or organizations charge a processing fee to administer or register a certificate or degree. In some cases this is clearly stated as an extra fee; in other cases it is included as part of a program fee or tuition.

Estimated Tuition. For most coaching schools the completion of their training program is required to obtain the designated registration, certification, diploma, or degree. Therefore, where the designation can only be obtained by completing their requirements, an estimate is provided of their tuition fee for completing their full program. These fees are all in US dollars and they are subject to change. A small number of schools did not provide data about fees.

Membership Required. A very small number of credentials require that the holder be a member in good standing (fees paid) of a particular organization or association. Where this was indicated, an estimate of the current fee was included.

NA and Unknown. These notations are the two most common found in this chart. "NA" refers to either "not applicable" or "not available." Usually these terms were used when it was clear that the category did not apply to this credential or the source provided no information about this category and it could not be determined from the context, mission, or practices of the school. "Unknown" was used in a slightly different sense. This typically meant that this information should have been provided as a key element for obtaining the credential, but was not provided through the information available to the public. In most cases this information is likely available by contacting the school.

Cautions and Limitations

This is not a complete list of all coach training organizations. Those training schools that provide a curriculum that is primarily directed toward completion of the certification requirements of the International Coach Federation, and do not provide their own certification are excluded. The rationale for this omission is that the certifications provided by the ICF are included on this list along with descriptions of each. On the other hand, organizations that provide their own "in-house" certification and also tailor their curriculum to match the requirements of the ICF are

included. Coach training organizations that do not provide certification and do not orient their curriculum to the certification system of the ICF are excluded.

There are many reputable and worthwhile coach training organizations that neither provide credentials nor orient their curriculum to the ICF; however, their program offerings were not relevant to the purpose of this current list. For further details about all coaching organizations, go to the only complete list available on the Internet at <http://www.peer.ca/coaching.html>.

Some coaches who have earned the designations specified in the accompanying Chart (*see Appendix 1*) may mistakenly change the title slightly from the official version. Consequently, if a coach is using a title (or set of initials) that is not on this list, it can come about for two reasons: the coach has altered the title by mistake or the coach has made up the title and has assigned it to him or her self.

This list has not been prepared for nor designed to be a source of comparison between schools or associations. Nor has it been designed to assess the quality of programs or offerings of those listed. The exclusive purpose of this list is to identify the myriad of credentialing systems available. No inferences or judgments about the quality of the schools or associations listed are intended. To come to such conclusions based on the data presented here would be inappropriate.

Inaccuracies or mistakes on this list are the responsibility of the author. All information was gathered from details provided on the websites of the various organizations. Many schools are continually updating their course offerings, procedures, and fees. Readers are advised to check the website of any school to ensure the accuracy of the data here before using this chart for any financial decision or learning commitment. Please report any discrepancies to the author (rcarr@peer.ca).

Don't Shoot the Messenger or There Must Be a Pony in Here Somewhere

In Neil Simon's play, *The Odd Couple*, neatnik Felix Unger appears at the doorway of roommate, Oscar Madison's litter-strewn bedroom and exclaims, "What disarray!" A similar observation can serve as a summary statement regarding the current status of credentialing in the coaching field.

Rather than acting as a way to elevate the status of coaching, assist consumers, guide prospective coaches, and legitimize coach training, the increasing variety and type of credentialing may be having the opposite impact.

Even as this article is being prepared, another American university has announced in a press release its plan to deliver a coaching curriculum aimed at certification. With more than 60 distinct certifications available in the coaching field already and the increasing number of organizations entering the coach training business, there seems to be no end to the variety of ways that certification is being used.

While such variety could be considered as increasing consumer choice, contributing to diversity of philosophy, and adding a healthy competition to the coaching field, the evidence appears to reveal the opposite. The comments provided by the respondents to the Peer Resources' website poll revealed considerable cynicism, confusion, and mis-understanding. Several articles that have appeared in newspapers, magazines, and professional journals have presented critical perspectives or sarcastic comments about coaching and (indirectly about)

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credentialing. (See <http://www.peer.ca/coaching.html> for brief summaries of all public literature about coaching.)

New Directions for Credentialing

The facts presented in this article are meant to reveal the current state-of-credentialing; they reflect what our research on this topic has revealed. But they also provide an opportunity. An opportunity to suggest directions that will put credentialing in general and certification specifically back on track toward its ultimate goal: a way to recognize and validate coach quality, a way to help consumers make better choices, a way for coaching schools to offer truly worthy instruction, and a way for coaching associations to earn the credibility they deserve.

Build on successful existing models and definitions.

Certification, accreditation, licensure, and registration are often discussed as if they have virtually identical meaning. However, each has a definition that makes it clearly distinguishable. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine each definition, consistent attendance to these distinctions (as practiced by dozens of well-known professional associations) will help coaches and coaching consumers understand and recognize their appropriate use. (For an expert analysis of these distinctions, see Knapp, J. (undated). *Designing Certification and Accreditation Programs*. Princeton, NJ: Knapp & Associates International. Available online at: <http://www.knappinternational.com>.)

All coaching associations have shown considerable initiative in finding ways to strengthen public confidence in coaching, but the majority have done so while ignoring the models and policies regarding certification, accreditation, licensure, and registration of more established professional associations. Medicine, nursing, psychology, counselling, law, social work, and engineering are just a few of the more established professions that can provide guidance on certification and accreditation for the coaching industry. Only the publications of the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches appear to recognize and acknowledge the need to “look outside” the coaching industry and find ways to integrate previous lessons with current goals.

While the practice of coaching is distinct from these other helping interventions, the business of coaching must be able to benefit from the lessons learned by these other professions. All coaching associations and coach training organizations must become familiar with the existing professional literature and professional practices regarding models and definitions associated with certification, accreditation, registration, and licensure. In addition, all coaching associations must increase their cooperation with and openness to learning from more established professional associations around the world.

Separate certification from accreditation.

The practice of a coaching association both certifying coaches and accrediting coaching schools must end. The International Coach Federation, for example, is violating an accepted professional standard with regards to the same organization both certifying individuals and accrediting the schools from which those

individuals have gained their training. The 2003 report, *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*, prepared by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (www.noca.org) states that “the certification agency must not also be responsible for accreditation of educational or training programs or courses of study leading to the certification.” In what is considered the most authoritative reference work on the subject of certification, *The Business of Certification: A Comprehensive Guide to Developing a Successful Program* (Knapp & Knapp, 2002), the authors are adamant that the “functions of accreditation and certification are distinct processes that should be carried out by agencies independent of one another. This independence is designed to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.”

Probably the best way to make this separation is to establish a separate organization that focuses exclusively on accrediting coach training schools. Accrediting coaching schools must be conducted at an arms-length, independent distance in order to ensure credibility of these decisions. The recent decision of the International Coach Federation to only include ICF accredited schools (or those schools that have paid the ICF to consider them for accreditation) on their list of approved coach training organizations did little to reduce cynicism about the ICF’s purpose, and, in fact, increased their conflict of interest.

A more appropriate method to restore credibility to the accrediting process might start with the various coaching associations meeting together to discuss how they can contribute to or create a separate association that can have greater credibility than any one of them currently enjoy. This “Standards and Accreditation Council” could include representatives from the variety of coaching associations in existence today. While the funding of such a higher order association would have to be determined, it would be a valuable start if current associations would express their approval in principle and spirit.

Once such a separate and independent “Council” is created, it could in turn apply to agencies that have been specifically established to “accredit” accrediting agencies, such as the National Commission for Certifying Agencies, the accrediting arm of the National Organization of Competency Assurance (www.noca.org/ncca/accreditation.htm).

Establish a common core curriculum.

Coaching can be considered an emerging profession. What is considered the core of coaching is still open to debate and is beyond the scope of this paper. While this debate is on-going, a variety of specialties or niches have been created: life coaching, personal coaching, business coaching, executive coaching, leadership coaching, ADD coaching, holistic coaching, developmental coaching, peer coaching, conflict coaching, career coaching, and more. Credentials now exist for a wide-range of specialties or niche areas. But there is a common component to all coaching. It is that common core that makes coaching distinct from other activities such as counselling, management consulting, and psychotherapy.

Establishing such a core curriculum will be no small matter. Many coach experts believe there are only two types of coaching: business coaching and personal

coaching. And while they acknowledge some basic commonalities, they believe that the requirements of the two are so distinct that the two require very different credentials.

At the same time, many coaching experts do not accept the “two divisions” idea; their belief is that there are many different areas in coaching that require more specialized credentials.

Rather than contributing to the robustness of coaching and assisting coaches to better serve their clients, these specializations (and their accompanying credentials) may actually be confusing the public and prospective coaches. In a previous review we conducted regarding coach referral systems, one of the biggest challenges reported by potential clients who interacted with one of the major online systems, was deciding on which of the specialties, qualities, and experiences of a coach were needed “to help me with my situation.” Too little evidence is available to show that there is any relationship between the situation or circumstances faced by a potential client and the specialty certification of the coach. What little evidence that does exist almost shows the opposite: effectiveness as a coach is less related to coach experience and more related to interpersonal coaching skills.

Specializations are important, but not at the expense of the basic elements of coaching. Credentials in coaching ought to guarantee that an individual has achieved a certain level of performance and skill on those elements common to the highest standards in coaching. Once those elements have been achieved, then further study and practice could build on the basics.

One way that this approach could be developed would be to build on the cooperative arrangement begun by a number of coaching schools to find ways to work together to promote standards and quality and share resources while maintaining their independence and unique contributions. The Association for Coach Training Organizations (ACTO) is such a model (<http://www.acto1.com>). Although their initial founding was based on the fact that all member schools were accredited by the International Coach Federation, their experience in holding cooperative discussions and their potential to mentor other less-developed schools and assist them to work towards a basic standard would add certification credibility.

ACTO’s challenge would be to decrease their current exclusivity and increase their inclusiveness while at the same time acting as advocates for the highest training standards in the coaching industry. An approach they might consider is establishing a standard nomenclature for certification. For example, a designation that would reflect both the achievement of the basic elements of coaching and, if attained, the additional specialization area could be specified as: “Certified Coach with a Specialization in XYZ.” Such a designation would reinforce what is common to all coaching (what makes it unique and distinct from other type of helping interventions) and what additional skills and perspectives a coach has attained. In addition such a designation does not overemphasize the common elements at the expense of what makes certain coaching specializations require more advanced training or different types of experiences.

A somewhat related issue concerns the role of “prior experience” or “prior learning” in evaluating an individual’s portfolio for certification. Providing credit, certification, or even degrees as a result of prior learning or experience has become an issue of greater significance in North America and has been considered in Europe for some time. In Canada, for example, there is a yearly conference on this topic bringing together administrators and faculty members from colleges and universities, as well as public service agencies and professional associations around the world to examine the various methods and systems to manage this area.

Evaluating prior experience is a complicated and time-consuming process, but recent advances in how to do this and the models that have been devised have reduced the problems associated with integrating prior learning with current attainment. While some coaching schools are finding ways to acknowledge and recognize an individual student’s prior experience, the largest coaching association appears to ignore this factor in its certification reviews. Dismissing this factor contributes to less likelihood of cooperation between coaching associations and schools around the world and in some cases has actually led to the creation of schools that build on participant prior learning.

Establish coaching performance and practice review standards.

At the present time several coaching associations are competing to gain additional members. Fees from memberships are basically the fuel that propels the association to provide services and act on behalf of member interests. Consequently, coaching associations open their membership to anyone who is willing to pay the membership fee. Only one organization, however, the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC), actually requires potential members to hold certain credentials or have certain characteristics. In addition, WABC examines thoroughly and verifies all documents that are submitted for membership consideration. Most other coaching associations allow anyone to become a member.

While this inclusiveness helps these associations gain the revenue they need to operate, and all the associations typically require that members agree to a code of ethics or code of conduct, only one of these associations appears to provide any system to review or, if necessary, discipline the ethical practices of its members. The WABC, for example, provides a “Safe Harbor Consultation and Adjudication Process” to manage concerns not only about members, but also about the organization, as well as members concerned about other members.

The WABC review process is a proactive way for an association to demonstrate its commitment to and practice of reviewing member coach performance. Each coaching association ought to have a similar procedure actively in place to provide both the perception of caring about member performance as well as the reality of such performance. If this were a common element of all coaching associations, it would lend greater credibility to certification.

Restore integrity to mentoring coaches in training.

Coaching associations should also end the paid “mentor-coach” role. While it may remain a requirement for a newer or prospective coach to be coached by a “mentor-coach,” this should be a service that truly fits the definition of mentor: a voluntary service without pay. To require coaches applying for certification (or completing the requirements for a training program) to hire (pay for) a “mentor-coach” or a coach who holds a specific certification (that is only granted by that association) in order for that coach to qualify for certification is not only inappropriate, but also violates the spirit of mentoring as well as the responsibility of coaching leaders to act as “servant leaders.” Equally important, the requirement for coaches to pay for coaching by member coaches can easily be perceived as a conflict of interest at best and way to provide “needed” clients for coaches with limited practices at worst.

On the positive side it is both a long-standing tradition and a worthwhile career-affirming practice to bring together experienced and skilled practitioners with novices or those just starting out. By acting as role models who can put their skills and abilities into observable action, the mentor-coach is both an educator and a source of inspiration to the coach in training. In addition, it makes sense for a beginning coach to hire an experienced coach to help them develop many aspects of character, practice, business, and skill. But to make this paid relationship part of a training requirement to achieve a certain level of credentialing is not appropriate for a mentoring relationship.

Work to standardize information available to the public.

One of the tasks required to prepare this document involved accessing and studying the information available on the websites of more than 200 organizations. While the Credentialing Chart depicts, in part, the results of that scrutiny, it also reveals the inconsistencies, omissions of relevant details, and lack of attention to key items of interest to consumers. Some sites are information rich, but finding a concise or succinct description of courses, fees, credentials and such could be a daunting task even for an expert surfer. Some sites appear to have been hastily or inexpensively put together and include significant design and navigation problems.

As was mentioned earlier, using the data appearing in the Credentialing Chart to compare the credentials or program elements offered by one organization with another would be inappropriate. But using the data in the Chart to determine how any school compares with another in regards to the thoroughness of their online details would be appropriate. It is our hope that this document will act as a catalyst for the improvement of information available to the public over the Internet.

We also hope that the suggestions provided here, the issues identified, and the data provided will act as a source of illumination for the coaching world. Certification, licensing, registration, and accreditation in coaching all require more thoughtful attention and a change in practice to help build consumer confidence, public trust, coach credibility, and accountability for both coaching schools and associations. However, no model currently in existence or suggested in this paper

A Guide to Coach Credentials

can guarantee quality. We can, though, significantly improve our current status; we can go beyond our current reality; we can achieve our goal of extraordinary service to the public, to business, and to society.

We hope that what you have read here will be a catalyst for reflection, meaning, and action planning. Feel free to send your reactions, comments, and suggestions to Rey Carr at Peer Resources (rcarr@peer.ca).⁵

Peer Resources is a non-profit corporation specializing in peer assistance, mentorship and coaching.

Their mission is to provide objective, non-commercial, state-of-the-art education and resources to practitioners and the general public. The primary funding for the work of Peer Resources comes from memberships in the Peer Resources Network. Members receive a variety of services including a non-commercial, monthly email newsletter, an advertising-free professional, peer reviewed journal, up-to-date research summaries, access to timely and relevant documents, notices of contract opportunities, and immediate and personal responses to enquiries within less than 24 hours.

For a full-list of the benefits and services associated with membership in the Peer Resources Network as well as online form to become a member, visit <http://www.peer.ca/PRN.html>.

⁵ Thanks to Scott Ward for taking the time to improve the formatting of this document.

Appendix I
Credentialing Systems in Coaching (Chart)

CREDENTIALING SYSTEMS AVAILABLE IN COACHING
July 30, 2004
(See Explanatory Notes for Details on Each Category)

Initials	Full Title	Issuing Source	Accredited	Minimum Requirements					Fees (in \$US)			
				Training Hours	Coaching Hours	Paper/Essay	Examination	Other	Processing Fee	Estimated Tuition	Membership Required	Membership Fee
ACC	Associate Certified Coach	International Coach Federation (ICF)	No	60	250	NA	Oral	12 others	\$100 or \$250	NA	No	\$155-\$305
ACC	Associate Certified Coach	International Coach Academy	No	150	66	Yes	Yes	Coached	NA	\$2,035	No	NA
ACCC	Associate Certified Career Coach	Career Coach Institute	No	Self-Paced	12	NA	Written	NA	NA	\$995	No	NA
ACDC	Adler Certified Professional Coach	Adler School of Professional Coaching	Yes	92	40	Learning Log	Oral, Written & Interview	Coached	\$482	\$3,986	No	NA
ACG	ADD Coach Academy Graduate	ADD Coach Academy	No	72	NA	Yes	Oral & Written	NA	NA	\$1,609	No	NA
C3C	The Canadian Center for Coaching Education Coaching Certification	Canadian Center for Coaching Education	No	144	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$3,418	No	NA
CAC	Certified Action Coach	American Seminar Leaders Association	No	23	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$197	Yes	\$197
CAC	Certified ADDCA Coach	ADD Coach Academy	No	62	750	NA	NA	Tapes and References	NA	\$3,695	No	NA
CBC	Certified Business Coach	International Consortia of Business Coaches	No	NA	NA	Essay	interview & Role-Play	85% on Reviews	\$250	\$1,067	No	NA
CCC	Certified Career Coach	Career Coach Institute	No	Self-paced	50	NA	Online exam	Mentored by Coach				
CCCC	Certificate of Career Coaching Competence	Worklife (Australia)	Yes	24	NA	NA	NA	Unknown	NA	\$2,500	No	NA
CCCG	Certified Corporate Coach U Graduate	Corporate Coach U	Yes	130	Unknown	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$3,595	No	NA
CCG	Coach U Certified Graduate	CoachU	Yes	200	750	NA	Oral & Written	4 others	NA	\$4,795	No	NA
CCMC	Coach U Certified Master Coach	CoachU	Yes	225	2500	NA	Oral & Written	4 others	NA	\$4,795	No	NA
CDC	Certified Developmental Coach	Interdevelopmentals.org	No	80	20	Case Study	Written	Tapes	NA	\$3,150	No	NA
CDC	Certified Dream Coach	Dream Coach University	No	56	Unknown	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$2,950	No	NA
Cert.LPC	University Certificate in Life and Personal Coaching	Calamus Extension College	No	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	NA	Unknown	NA	\$1,113	No	NA
CFLC	Certified Fearless Living Coach	Fearless Living Institute	No	21	50	Report & Interview	No	Four PreCourses	NA	\$6,000	No	NA
CGEC	Certified Global Executive Coach	Academia Global Executive Coach Training Institute	No	160			Yes	Mentored by Coach	Unknown	Unknown	No	NA
CIC	Certified Intrinsic Coach	Totally Coached (Formerly Educoach)	No	76	300	NA	NA	Portfolio	\$360	\$2,800	No	NA
CIC	Certified Integral Coach	New Ventures West	Yes	144	Unknown	NA	NA	Unknown	NA	\$7,600	No	NA
CLC	Certified Life Coach	Coach for Life	Yes	60	500	Yes	Yes	Tapes	NA	\$6,345	No	NA
CLC	Certified Life Coach	Institute for Life Coach Training	Yes	60	NA	NA	NA	Coached	NA	\$2,795	No	NA
CMC	Certified Master Coach	1 to 1 Coaching School	No	32	NA	NA	NA	Unknown	NA	\$7,950	No	NA
CMC	Certified Mentor Coach	MentorCoach	Yes	125	250	NA	Yes	Mentored by certified coach	\$295	\$1,995	No	NA
CMC	Certified Mentor Coach	Coachville School of Mentor Coaching	No	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	No	NA
CMEC	Certified Management Effectiveness Coach	The Academy of Coaching	No	72	100	Case Study	Open Book	Interview	NA	\$7,200	No	NA
CMSC	Certified Master Spirit Coach	Coaching from Spirit	No	48	Unknown	Yes	Unknown	Mentored by Coach	NA	\$3,420	No	NA
CPC	Certified Professional Coach	College of Executive Coaching	Yes	128	50	Option	Interview Option	MA or PhD	NA	\$3,900	No	NA
CPC	Certified Professional Coach	Academy for Coach Training	Yes	181	Unknown	NA	Written, Telecourses, Assignments	Peer coaching and Mentor Coaching	NA	\$5,519	No	NA

CREDENTIALING SYSTEMS AVAILABLE IN COACHING
July 30, 2004
(See Explanatory Notes for Details on Each Category)

Initials	Full Title	Issuing Source	Accredited	Minimum Requirements					Fees (in \$US)			
				Training Hours	Coaching Hours	Paper/ Essay	Examination	Other	Processing Fee	Estimated Tuition	Membership Required	Membership Fee
CPC	Certified Professional Coach	International Coaching Institute	No	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	NA	\$20,000	No	NA
CPC	Certified Peer Coach (Level I, II, III)	Peer Resources	No	Competency Based	Competency Based	Yes	No	Videotape	No	NA	Yes	\$53-\$107
CPCC	Certified Professional Co-Active Coach	The Coaches Training Institute	Yes	115	100	NA	Oral & Written	Coaching with Mentor Coach	\$350	\$3,600	No	NA
CPCC	Certified Professional Career Coach	Professional Association of Resume Writers and Career Coaches	No	NA	NA	NA	Multiple Choice & Essay	NA	\$225	NA	Yes	\$150
CPDEC	Certificate of Professional Development in Executive Coaching	The Coaching School (UK) with the University of Strathclyde	No	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	NA	Unknown	NA	NA
CPRC	Certified Professional Retirement Coach	Retirement Coach Institute	No	30	12	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$1,995	No	NA
CRC	Certified Relationship Coach	Relationship Coaching Institute	No	Unknown	Unknown	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$495	Yes	\$360
CSC	Certified Success Unlimited Network Coach	Success Unlimited Network	Yes	125	54	Yes	Yes	Mentor Coach	NA	\$10,000	No	NA
CTACC	Coach Training Alliance Certified Coach	Coach Training Alliance	No	55	Unknown	NA	Written	Coach two paying clients	NA	\$1,999	No	NA
DipNMC	Diploma as a Practitioner Coach	Noble Manhattan	Yes	250	NA	Yes	Written	Mentored by certified coach	NA	\$4,651	No	NA
DipNMC	Senior Coach Diploma	Noble Manhattan	Yes	304	750	Yes	Written	Mentored by certified coach	NA	\$4,651	No	NA
ECGC	Executive Coach Graduate Certificate	Royal Roads University	Yes	72	Unknown	NA	Oral	NA	NA	\$7,500	No	NA
GCC	Graduate Credit Certificate in Leadership Coaching	George Washington University	Yes	36	Unknown	NA	NA	NA	Unknown	Unknown	No	NA
ICC	International Coaching Certification	International Coaching Community	No	60	4	Case Study	Written	Monitored Coaching	No	\$1,556	No	NA
IAC CC	International Association of Coaches Certified Coach	International Association of Coaches (IAC)	No	NA	NA	NA	Multiple Choice Online	Interview & Audio Tape	\$200 (non-members)	NA	Yes	Free
I/OECC	Industrial/Organizational Executive Coaching Certificate	Professional School of Psychology	No	40	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$2,200	No	NA
LCC	Leadership Coaching Certificate	Georgetown University	Yes	125	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$7,200	No	NA
LCH	Life Coaching Handbook Diploma	Achievement Specialists	Yes	350	NA	NA	NA	Coaching with Mentor Coach	NA	\$9,162	No	NA
LSC	Life Skills Coach	Holland College	No	106	Unknown	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$750	No	NA
MA	Master of Arts in Coaching and Mentoring Practice	Oxford Brookes University	Yes	2-5 years	Unknown	No	Dissertation	No	NA	\$11,462	No	NA
MA	Master of Arts in Consulting and Coaching in Organizations	Leadership Institute of Seattle (with Bastyr University)	Yes	192	Unknown		Thesis or Case Studies	NA	NA	\$14,976	No	NA
MA	Master of Arts in Coaching and Mentoring	Wolverhampton University and the UK College of Life Coaching	Yes	540	Unknown	Yes	Dissertation	NA	NA	\$11,911	No	NA

CREDENTIALING SYSTEMS AVAILABLE IN COACHING
July 30, 2004
(See Explanatory Notes for Details on Each Category)

Initials	Full Title	Issuing Source	Accredited	Minimum Requirements					Fees (in \$US)				
				Training Hours	Coaching Hours	Paper/Essay	Examination	Other	Processing Fee	Estimated Tuition	Membership Required	Membership Fee	
MBC	Master Business Coach	Self-assigned by various practitioners											
MCC	Master Certified Coach	International Coach Federation (ICF)	No	200	2500	NA	Written & Oral	8 others	\$300 or \$450	NA	No	\$155-\$305	
MCC	Master Certified Coach	Self-assigned by various practitioners											
MDCD	Master Certified Developmental Coach	Interdevelopmentals.org	No	120	30	Case Study	Written	Tapes	NA	\$4,250	No	NA	
MCLC	Master Certified Life Coach	Coach for Life	Yes	1 Year	Unknown	Yes	Oral	Tapes	Unknown	\$9,995	No	NA	
MNMC	Master Noble Manhattan Coach	Noble Manhattan	Yes	304	2500	Yes	Written	Mentored by Coach	NA	\$4,651	No	NA	
MRC	Master Relationship Coach	Relationship Coaching Institute	No	Unknown	Unknown	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$495	Yes	\$360	
MSc/PgDip/PgCert	Master of Science in, Postgraduate Diploma in, Postgraduate Certificate in Mentoring and Coaching	Sheffield Hallam University	Yes	192	Unknown	Yes	Dissertation	Unknown	\$2,125	\$6,780	No	NA	
MSc/ProfD	Master Practitioner Executive Coach	The Academy of Executive Coaching and Middlesex University	Yes	141	8	Journal	No	NO	No	\$14,777	No	No	
NCC	Newfield Coaching Certificate	Newfield Network	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	NA	Unknown	Unknown	NA	\$7,950	Yes	NA	
PCC	Professional Coaching Certificate	Adler School of Professional Coaching	Yes	128	40	Yes	Written & Oral	2 others	\$481	\$5,680	No	NA	
PCC	Professional Certified Coach	International Coach Academy	No	196	84	Yes	Yes	Coached and peer report	NA	\$3,080	No	NA	
PCC	Professional Certified Coach	International Coach Federation (ICF)	No	125	750	NA	Written & Oral	7 others	\$300 or \$450	NA	No	\$155-\$305	
PCCC	Professional Certified Career Coach	Career Coach Institute	No	Self-paced	250	NA	Written	Mentor Coach plus courses	\$750 for Mentor Coach	\$1,995	No	NA	
PGCert	Post Graduate Certificate in Coaching & Mentoring	Wolverhampton University and the UK College of Life Coaching	Yes	104	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$7,467	No	NA	
PGCert Exec Coach	Post Graduate Certificate in Executive Business Coaching	Derby University School of Business Management	Yes	72 in person or 150 distance	72	Yes	NA	Portfolio	\$1,382	\$9,126	No	NA	
PGDip	Post Graduate Diploma in Coaching and Mentoring	Wolverhampton University and the UK College of Life Coaching	Yes	90	10	Yes	NA	NA	NA	Unknown	No	NA	
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Professional Coaching & Human Development	Institute for Life Coach Training and the International University for Professional Studies	Yes	270	Unknown	Yes	No	Dissertation	\$100	\$8,700	No	NA	
PMC	Professional Mentor Coach	Coach U	Yes	Grad of Coach U	750	Yes	No	Mentor coach; ten clients; 3yr commit	No	NA	Yes, ICF	\$155-\$305	
PMC	Professional Mentor Coach	Corporate Coach U	Yes	Grad of Corporate Coach U	750	Yes	No	Mentor coach; ten clients; 3yr commit	No	NA	Yes, ICF	\$155-\$305	
PMC	Professional Mentor Coach	Self-assigned by various practitioners											
RCC	Registered Corporate Coach	Worldwide Association of Business Coaches	No	60	30	NA	Written	NA	NA	\$1,795	Yes	\$270-\$470	
SFCD	Solution Focused Coaching Diploma	Erickson College	No	Unknown	200	NA	No	Audio/Video Case Study	NA	\$7,444	No	NA	
SISC	Strozzi Institute Somatic Coach	The Strozzi Institute	No	212	6	NA	NA	NA	\$750	\$17,100	No	NA	