



Standard 3.5 – Case Study

Aware of any biases

Background

As an ICF Professional, I maintain fairness by being aware of my biases and addressing them so that I do not discriminate toward others based on race, color, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, spiritual practice, ability, and other groups, classes and categories of human differences. No human is perfect and without a bias but being aware of them can help you to be careful when work may confront those biases head on. Sometimes this may require the ending of a relationship and sometimes this may require hypervigilance of that bias and how it may affect your client.

Case Study

Cheng had been coaching for at least 30 years now. She had started a coaching career in the early days of coaching and was impressed with how far coaching had come, especially recently. Cheng wanted to reach the newer population of coaches that were still young in their coaching careers. She worked with a marketing firm to do some target marketing and had an uptick in mentoring requests.

Parker was Cheng's newest client. They had an intake Zoom call and by Parker's name, she saw that it said Parker (they/them) and made a mental note of Parker's pronouns. The use of they/them pronouns was still very new to Cheng. One day during a zoom call with Parker, Cheng brought up a document of her notes and screenshared it with Parker. Cheng was eagerly talking through the notes to show Parker their progress. But Cheng started to notice that Parker was giving her an odd look. Parker didn't say anything in the moment, so Cheng moved on.

The next day, Cheng found an email from Parker saying that they were offended because they noticed that within Cheng's notes that she was screensharing, Cheng was using he/him pronouns for Parker instead of they/them. It had been a long week and Cheng just rolled her eyes at the email and decided to respond to it later. *Kids these days*, she thought to herself, *they are so easily offended*.

Implications for Coaching

- Cheng found that she had a potential bias that she was not even aware of when she started mentoring Parker. Sometimes that requires revisiting whether you can remain present and unbiased while still acting as an ICF Professional. (ICF Code of Ethics, Standards 3.3, 3.5, 4.2 and 4.3)
- Cheng will also need to be sensitive to Parker and their needs. This could cause a conflict of interest or cross boundary lines that Parker is not comfortable with any longer. It may

require Cheng to do some inner work and to meet with Parker to have a face-to-face discussion. (ICF Code of Ethics, Standards 3.3 and 3.5)

Possible Outcomes or Next Steps

- **This accidental slip may cause a shift in their mentoring relationship.** Cheng should remain aware of any indications from Parker on whether this has affected their ability to be mentored by Cheng. And Cheng should remain aware of any indications from herself on whether this has affected her ability to mentor Parker.
- **Cheng is now aware.** Now that Cheng is aware of this potential bias, she could do some research or meet with other coaches on being more aware of pronouns. The knowledge she can gain will only help her if this ever arises again. It may also help her to save her current relationship with Parker.

Discussion Points

- How should Cheng respond to Parker?
- What biases may be present for Cheng in this situation?
- If you were Cheng's coach supervisor, how would you support her?

Reference

ICF Code of Ethics (2025)