

Case Study Guidelines for Certification Application with the Institute of Career Certification International

A Case Study is not to exceed 1,000 words in length and must disguise the people, situation, location and time so that the privacy of people and organizations is fully protected.

Each Case Study is set up under the following headings:

1. Title of the Case Study
2. Statement of the situation
3. Background of the situation
4. Issues to be resolved
5. Procedures employed
6. Outcomes
7. Summary
8. Principles of practice demonstrated
9. Competencies demonstrated

Sample Case Study # 1

1. Title of the Case Study: Coaching an Executive in Trouble

2. Statement of the situation: Elaine Kennedy selected me after interviewing four executive coaching consultants who had been recommended to her. She selected the firm with which I was associated despite some concern about confidentiality due to the close personal relationship her manager had with the head of my firm. This created a potential concern for me in our work, particularly in my reporting.

A vice president in her company for 10 years, Elaine was very highly regarded for her technical expertise and ability to put together successful deals. However, she had developed such strong physical reactions (tics, facial grimaces, stuttering) to her manager's communications that he thought she "needed help". The company did not want to let her go, but she needed to modify these behaviors and to manage upward more effectively.

If she was unable to change, her dismissal was likely. I worked to clarify with the client company the parameters of executive coaching, as well as the kinds of reports that would be given, so that expectations for our work would be realistic and would protect Elaine's confidentiality.

3. Background of the situation: Elaine was 39-years old, very well educated for her chosen profession. Married, with one small child, she managed to balance her personal and professional schedule quite well, despite a reputation for being a hard worker who put in long hours.

She was a very private person, angry at being in the position of seeking external consultation. She felt her manager was the problem, though she acknowledged that management's perception of her as "the one with the problem" did indeed create a problem for her.

She liked the company and did not want to explore other possibilities outside of it. This created a certain motivation for our work. Another positive factor was her strong job performance. This facilitated management's support for her development plan.

4. Issues to be resolved:

- a) Elaine needed to become more aware of her feelings and learn how to defuse them before they became too strong for her to manage. I also helped her to understand the link between her emotions and the physical symptoms she manifested, which were outside of her conscious awareness.
- b) We had to develop very specific goals and measures of how she and management would know she had changed.
- c) She needed to be able to communicate them, as well as to demonstrate new behavior to senior management.

5. **Procedures employed:** I administered the MBTI (she was an ENTJ) and provided feedback to Elaine on her style and on the impact of her behaviour on others. This was especially useful because she was not strongly psychologically focused and the MBTI provided a frame of reference for our discussions.

We role played actual and hypothetical exchanges with her manager and the president and explored possible alternative ways to handle them. We strategized how to build internal alliances and support for getting back on the management committee. (She had been told that the reason for her not attending the meetings was that the agendas were not particularly relevant to her work, which she knew was not true.) We planned how she could be invited to join the board of a key industry association and explored how she could manage the perception of others that she had "changed".

I conducted each meeting in a very businesslike way, with prearranged topics to be covered and a summary of "key learning," items to be pursued prior to the next meeting. While these are standard in working with all my clients, Elaine did not want to be seeing "a shrink" as she said, so I related to her in a very matter-of-fact, businesslike way.

6. **Outcomes:** Elaine did get back on management committee and was invited to join the association board, which we had targeted. In addition, she received a sizable salary increase three months after we concluded our work.

More importantly, she was able to relax, detach herself emotionally in tough situations so the behavioral quirks, which had seemed "crazy" to observers, disappeared.

Her manager reported to the head of my firm a short time after our last meeting that Elaine was a "changed person," and wondered what had taken place to cause such a degree of change. He admitted later he had been somewhat skeptical, though hopeful, that she would be able to make the required improvements.

7. **Summary:** A highly valued professional was able to utilize executive coaching intervention in order to modify her personal style and communication patterns so that she remained with the company and in a stronger position.

8. **Principles of practice demonstrated:** Concern for protection of confidential client information, improving alignment between organizational requirements and employee ability to satisfy them, use of psychometric instrument, practical coaching to improve awareness and strengthen performance at work.

9. **Competencies demonstrated:** Core Competency 1.1 and 1.2 and Selected Competency 2.1

Sample Case Study # 2

1. Title of the Case Study: Management of individual consultant violating the ethical standards of the firm and the profession.

2. Statement of the Situation: Two separate complaints from candidates in our career transition program were brought to my attention regarding alleged misleading representations made by one of our firm's most experienced senior consultants, Mark Jewell, to two candidates during the decision-making phase of selecting a career management firm. Both candidates were "shoppers" who selected our firm based on specific representations and promises made by Mark to the candidates, which in the experience of both candidates were unfulfilled.

3. Background of the Individual and the Situation: Mark was 53 years old with a strong background in both consulting and line management. He had been in the career transition business for eight years and was responsible for delivery of all individual service programs in our regional office, reporting directly to me, the Regional Manager. Six consultants worked directly under his supervision.

Our office, which operates as an independent profit centre within the larger firm, had recently introduced a "special bonus" provision, which allocated 5% of the career transition fee to the individual consultant who was successful in having a "shopper" select our firm for service. Shoppers are normally seen by one consultant based on who is available to meet with the prospective candidate.

Both candidates alleged that Mark had offered to be their consultant during the exploratory stage, but that once into the program, the bulk of the delivery of service was delegated to more "junior" members of Mark's consulting staff with Mark rarely making himself available. In addition, he had promised during the exploratory phase that he would personally make 50 contacts to CEO's he knew on behalf of the candidates to facilitate the job search. This promise was in flagrant violation of our firm's policy that the responsibility for carrying out a job search belongs to the individual, not the consultant. The consultant coaches the candidates on how to make effective contacts on their own.

4. Issue to be resolved:

- a) How to deal with Mark?
- b) How to respond to the candidates' dissatisfaction?
- c) What kind of communication with the corporate client should take place?
- d) How to reinforce our company's policies and help ensure that the code of ethics of the profession is reinforced and adhered to?
- e) Review our firm's "special bonus" policy on successful intake of shoppers.

5. Procedures employed:

- a) Following extensive dialogue I had with the two candidates and Mark, as well as consultations with our firm's Director of Professional Standards and the Executive Vice President of Operations, the decision was made to terminate the services of Mark. He knowingly violated the Code of Ethics relating to misrepresentations to candidates and corporate clients of both ACP International (of which he is a member) and ACF International (of which our firm is a member) and our firm's policy of not making contacts on behalf of candidates. In our judgment, the senior consultant responsible for the delivery of individual service in our regional office needed to be an exemplary role model for the consultants reporting to him.
- b) The two candidates who launched the complaint, both of whom were still engaged in our program, were offered their choice of: (i) Selecting another consultant within our firm to work with and continue in our program, or (ii) Selecting another career transition firm to work with funded by the full professional fee originally paid by the sponsoring corporate client, which I

- was prepared to refund to the corporate client to be re-allocated to another firm.
- c) With the clearance of the candidates, the total situation was explained to the sponsoring corporate client to ensure that they understood what had occurred and to gain their concurrence with the two options I was planning to present to the candidates.
 - d) I developed a communication to reinforce with consultants the code of ethics and firm's policy relevant to representations made to candidates. This communication was to be made available to each candidate (including "shoppers") at the initial meeting with the consultant or in the case of shoppers, at the initial exploratory meeting.
 - e) The "special bonus" policy paid out to a consultant on the successful intake of a "shopper" was eliminated and in its place an overall profit sharing plan was developed for the office which allowed all employees in our regional office to participate in the profits of our regional business.
 - f) Finally, a policy was adopted to have at least two of our consultants meet with each candidate (shopper) at the exploratory phase.

6. Outcomes:

- a) Mark was offered the services of another outplacement firm to assist him in his relocation.
- b) Both candidates elected to remain in our firm's outplacement program.
- c) The corporate client was impressed with the "professionalism" I demonstrated in handling this very difficult situation, as well as the offer to refund the entire fee of both candidates in the event that they decided to select another outplacement firm.
- d) The procedure developed to communicate to candidates the firm's policy raised the standards of delivery of service in our office and provided valuable information on candidate perception of our service.

7. Summary: A senior consultant misrepresented the service being offered to two "shopping" candidates. I dealt with the consultant's transgression from the Code of Ethics of the profession and the policy of our firm as well as manage the sensitive communication required with the candidates and corporate client. In addition, I developed means to prevent recurrence of a similar conflict of interest issue.

8. Principles of practice demonstrated: Ensure that promises made to potential clients will be consistent with our professional code of ethical practices and within the standards and policies of a career management firm. Provide full disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest to the stakeholders. Take action to correct an internal policy and communications program to prevent future potential issues of misrepresentation.

9. Competencies demonstrated: Core Competencies 1.2, 1.3 and Selected Competencies 2.12 and Other (confronting ethical issues)