



FREE DOWNLOAD

ICF PCC/MCC Exam Sample Questions

10 ICF PCC/MCC practice scenarios with the best and worst actions explained

78

scenarios in the
current exam

180 min

current exam
appointment

80

items in the new
format

460

scaled score to pass

1. For each of the 10 scenarios, choose the best and the worst action before looking ahead.
2. Then check the answer key, which explains the best and second best, and the worst and second worst, actions.
3. Note the competency or Code of Ethics standard behind each miss. That is where to study next.

These are original practice questions written by ExpertCoach.Co to match the ICF exam format, the ICF Core Competencies and the ICF Code of Ethics. None is taken from the real ICF exam.

Questions

Question 1

A client has spent four sessions preparing to ask their manager for a promotion. At the start of this session, they asked to rehearse what they will say at Friday's meeting with their manager. The client usually follows the plan they set for a session closely and likes to leave with clear next steps.

Twenty minutes into the rehearsal, the client stops and starts describing a job offer from another company that arrived yesterday and needs an answer within a week. They speak faster as they go, listing what excites them about the new role and what worries them about leaving. Then they say, "Sorry, I know we're supposed to be practicing for Friday."

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ (A) Bring the client back to the agreed rehearsal and offer to explore the job offer in the next session.
- ☐ (B) Continue exploring the job offer, since the client raised it and has the most energy for it.
- ☐ (C) Share that the conversation has moved to the job offer, and ask the client which topic they want to focus on for the rest of the session.
- ☐ (D) Ask the client how the job offer and the promotion request relate to each other.

Best _____ Worst _____

Question 2

A client who manages a large team has been talking about a hiring decision they made last year, when they chose an external candidate over a long-serving colleague who later resigned. The colleague had trained the client when they first joined the company, and the two had worked side by side for years. Until now, they have described the decision in a calm, factual way.

Halfway through describing the colleague's farewell, the client's voice breaks and their eyes fill with tears. They wipe their eyes, sit up straight and say, "I'm sorry, this is so unprofessional of me."

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ (A) Acknowledge the emotion and return to the hiring decision the client was describing.
- ☐ (B) Let the client know that their emotion is welcome in the session, and pause to give them space.
- ☐ (C) Ask the client what the apology is about.
- ☐ (D) Offer to end the session early so the client has time to recover.

Best _____ Worst _____

Question 3

A client working with a coach on a career change is usually reserved about their personal life and keeps sessions focused on job applications. In their sixth session, they mention that they have been seeing a therapist for depression for the past year. They say the coaching has helped them more than therapy has, and they are thinking of stopping therapy to save money. The career change has meant a pay cut, and their therapist has suggested they keep going until the end of the year.

As the session ends, the client asks, "Can we just do more coaching instead? You'd basically be my therapist then."

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ (A) Continue coaching and leave the decision about therapy to the client, since it is theirs to make.
- ☐ (B) Tell the client that they must stay in therapy, and end the coaching if they stop.
- ☐ (C) Recommend that the client stays in therapy, and continue coaching alongside it.
- ☐ (D) Explain the difference between coaching and therapy, and explore the decision about therapy with the client.

Best _____ Worst _____

Question 4

A client who runs a small business has spent three sessions planning to open a second location. They are usually careful with money and describe themselves as "the one who always reads the fine print." Last month, they mentioned that the bank had not yet approved the loan they would need.

At the start of this session, the client arrives with a finished plan. They have hired a manager, set an opening date six weeks away and agreed terms on a lease. As they walk through the numbers, the plan relies on the full loan, and they do not mention the bank. They finish, smile and say, "I think this is it. I'm ready to sign the lease on Monday."

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ (A) Ask the client what they have considered that could get in the way of the plan.
- ☐ (B) Name the unapproved loan as a risk so the client can respond to it.
- ☐ (C) Accept the plan as it stands, since the client is the expert on their own situation.
- ☐ (D) Ask the client to walk through the plan again step by step.

Best _____ Worst _____

Question 5

As the session nears its end, a client who came in wanting to decide whether to apply for an internal role says, "This was really useful. I see the decision differently now." They lean back and glance at the clock, but they do not say what they will do next.

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ A Accept the session as complete, since a new view of the decision is a valid outcome.
- ☐ B Ask the client whether they want to set an action now or take time to reflect first.
- ☐ C Ask the client what they are taking from the session.
- ☐ D Suggest two or three actions the client could commit to before the next session.

Best _____ Worst _____

Question 6

A coach who left a corporate career to start their own business six months ago is working with a client weighing the same move. Halfway through the session, the client describes their fear of losing a steady income, in almost the same words the coach once used with their own coach. The coach's own move has gone well, and they still think about it often.

The coach feels a strong pull to share how they handled it, and notices that they want the client to choose the same path. The client pauses and looks at the coach, as if waiting for a response.

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ A Ask questions that steer the client toward the option that worked for the coach.
- ☐ B Notice the reaction, set it aside and stay with what the client is saying.
- ☐ C Share the coach's own experience to build a connection with the client.
- ☐ D Say that what the client described resonates with the coach, without sharing details, and return to the client.

Best _____ Worst _____

Question 7

A client has spent several sessions deciding whether to accept a promotion that would move their family to another city. In earlier sessions, they spoke about the opportunity with energy, leaning forward and talking quickly about the new team. They once called it "the chance I've been waiting for."

At the start of this session, the client says they have accepted the offer. As they describe the move, they use words like "exciting" and "the right call," but they speak slowly, look down at their hands and pause for a long time before mentioning their children's new school. When they finish, they say, "So, that's settled," and fall quiet.

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ (A) Ask the client how they feel about the decision.
- ☐ (B) Summarize the decision and check that the summary is accurate.
- ☐ (C) Continue with the details of the move, since the client has not raised any concern.
- ☐ (D) Share that the client's words and tone seem different, and ask the client about it.

Best _____ Worst _____

Question 8

In the first session of a six-session program, a client says their goal is to be promoted from team lead to director by the final session. Earlier in the conversation, they mentioned that their company reviews promotions once a year and that the next review is ten months away. They describe the promotion as the reason they asked for coaching in the first place.

The client, who has already booked all six sessions, adds, "If I don't get there by the end of this, the coaching will have been a waste."

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ (A) Agree on the promotion as the goal, as the client stated it, and begin the work.
- ☐ (B) Explore with the client what would be a meaningful step toward the promotion within six sessions.
- ☐ (C) Ask the client how they will know the coaching has succeeded.
- ☐ (D) Tell the client that the goal cannot be reached in the time available.

Best _____ Worst _____

Question 9

Halfway through a twelve-session engagement, a client who knows the coach spent fifteen years as a marketing director asks for help with their product launch. Until now, the sessions have stayed on the client's goals as a new manager. "You know this better than anyone," they say. "Could you look at my launch plan and tell me what to change? I'm happy to pay extra."

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ (A) Discuss how consulting differs from coaching, and agree with the client on what they want and how it will work.
- ☐ (B) Give the client feedback on the plan informally, without changing the coaching agreement.
- ☐ (C) Accept the request, since the client has asked and the coach has the expertise.
- ☐ (D) Decline, because the coach's role in the engagement is to coach.

Best _____ Worst _____

Question 10

A coach has been working with a client for three months on their relationship with their business partner. The client is usually direct, quick to say when something is not working for them, and often starts sessions with a joke. Last session ended with the client quiet and checking their phone.

At the start of their next session, the client does not joke. They say that a question the coach asked last time, about what they might be avoiding with their partner, made them uncomfortable. "It stayed with me all week," they say. "I'm still not sure whether I'm annoyed with you or with myself." They look at the coach and wait.

What is the BEST action?

What is the WORST action?

- ☐ (A) Apologize for the question and move on to a different topic.
- ☐ (B) Explain the reasoning behind the question so the client understands why it was asked.
- ☐ (C) Thank the client for saying so, ask what the discomfort was about, and let them decide where to take it.
- ☐ (D) Ask the client whether the discomfort led to anything useful during the week.

Best _____ Worst _____

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Answers and explanations

For every scenario: why the best action is best and how it compares with the second best, then why the worst action is worst and how it compares with the second worst, each with its ICF reference.

Question 1

Best: C

Worst: A

BEST: C

- Option C aligns with ICF Core Competency 3, Establishes and Maintains Agreements: the session has moved from the agreed rehearsal to the job offer, and the coach names the shift and asks the client to choose the focus for the rest of the session.

PCC Marker 3.1: "Coach partners with the client to identify or reconfirm what the client wants to accomplish in this session."

- Naming the shift also answers the client's apology without judging it, and leaves the choice of direction with the client.

PCC Marker 5.3: "Coach partners with the client by supporting the client to choose what happens in this session."

- Option D asks a useful question that may connect the two topics, but it does not settle what the client wants to focus on for the rest of the session.

WORST: A

- Option A goes against ICF Core Competency 3, Establishes and Maintains Agreements: the conversation has moved to an offer the client must answer within a week, and the coach steers them back to the rehearsal without exploring which direction they want to take.

Behavior inconsistent with the PCC Minimum Skills Requirements (Competency 3): if the conversation shifts away from the chosen agenda during the session, the coach does not notice or explore with the client what direction they would like to take for the rest of the session.

- The client's apology shows they feel they have broken the plan, and holding them to it puts the coach's structure ahead of what matters to them today.
 - Option B does not check the direction with the client either: it moves to the job offer on the coach's reading of the client's energy. Unlike Option A, though, it stays with what the client is talking about now.
-

Question 2

Best: B

Worst: D

BEST: B

- Option B aligns with ICF Core Competency 4, Cultivates Trust and Safety: the client apologizes for crying and calls it unprofessional, and the coach makes clear that the emotion belongs in the session, then gives them room.

PCC Marker 4.3: "Coach acknowledges and supports the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs or suggestions."

- Pausing after that lets the client decide what to do with the feeling, instead of the coach moving them on.

PCC Marker 5.5: "Coach allows for silence, pause or reflection."

- Option C explores the apology, but asking about it before the client has had room for the feeling can read as analysis at a vulnerable moment.

WORST: D

- Option D goes against ICF Core Competency 4, Cultivates Trust and Safety: offering to end the session treats the client's tears as something they need to recover from, which confirms their fear that the emotion is unprofessional.

Behavior inconsistent with the PCC Minimum Skills Requirements (Competency 4): the coach communicates a lack of confidence in the client's capabilities.

- The emotion is part of the decision the client is working on, so ending the session also cuts off the work at the point where it matters most.
 - Option A moves past the emotion too: it returns to the hiring decision before the client has had any room for the feeling. Unlike Option D, though, it acknowledges what the client feels and keeps the session going.
-

Question 3

Best: D

Worst: B

BEST: D

- Option D follows the ICF Code of Ethics: the client is asking the coach to take the place of their therapist, and the coach explains what coaching is and is not before exploring the decision with them.
ICF Code of Ethics (2025) Standard 4.3: "Remain alert to indications that there might be a shift in the value received from the coaching relationship and discuss this with the client. If appropriate, explore changes in the coaching relationship and/or the potential for a different coach, professional, or resource." Also reflected in the 2020 Code, Section 1, Standard 8.
- Exploring the decision with the client keeps it theirs, while making sure they make it with an accurate picture of what coaching can offer.
ICF Core Competency 1.6: "Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions."
- Option C points the client toward professional support, but recommending what to do about their treatment goes beyond the coach's role.

WORST: B

- Option B goes against the ICF Code of Ethics: instead of discussing what the client needs, the coach tells them what to do about their treatment and makes the coaching depend on it.
ICF Code of Ethics (2025) Standard 4.3: "Remain alert to indications that there might be a shift in the value received from the coaching relationship and discuss this with the client. If appropriate, explore changes in the coaching relationship and/or the potential for a different coach, professional, or resource." Also reflected in the 2020 Code, Section 1, Standard 8.
 - Making the coaching conditional on a health decision takes that decision away from the client, and leaves them without support just after they shared something difficult.
ICF Core Competency 2.1: "Acknowledges that clients are responsible for their own choices."
 - Option A does not deal with the client's request either: it lets the client go on believing that coaching can replace therapy. Unlike Option B, though, it leaves the decision with the client and keeps supporting them.
-

Question 4

Best: A

Worst: C

BEST: A

- Option A aligns with ICF Core Competency 7, Evokes Awareness: the client is ready to sign, and the coach invites them to look for what could get in the way, so they can find the gap in the plan themselves.

PCC Marker 7.4: "Coach asks questions to help the client explore beyond current thinking, feeling or behaving toward the outcome the client desires."

- An open question draws on the careful habits the client describes in themselves and keeps ownership of the plan with them.
- Option B puts the loan on the table and invites a response, but it hands the client the coach's conclusion before they have had a chance to look for the risk themselves.

WORST: C

- Option C goes against ICF Core Competency 7, Evokes Awareness: the plan depends on a loan the client last described as unapproved, and the coach asks nothing days before the client signs the lease.

Behavior inconsistent with the PCC Minimum Skills Requirements (Competency 7): the coach does not ask open-ended questions that allow the client to explore or reconfirm their own thinking, feelings, values, needs, wants, beliefs, or behaviors.

- Treating the client as the expert on their situation does not mean holding back curiosity about the plan they bring.
ICF Core Competency 5.2: "Demonstrates curiosity during the coaching process."
 - Option D does not raise the risk either: walking through the plan again may or may not bring the loan up. Unlike Option C, though, it keeps the client examining the plan instead of closing it.
-

Question 5

Best: C

Worst: D

BEST: C

- Option C aligns with ICF Core Competency 8, Facilitates Client Growth: the client says they see the decision differently, and the coach invites them to put that new view into their own words before the session ends.

PCC Marker 8.3: "Coach invites the client to state or explore the client's learning in this session about their situation (the what)."

- Stating the learning first often leads the client to their own next step, without the coach supplying one.
- Option B checks how the client wants to move forward, but it offers two set paths before the client has said what they learned.

WORST: D

- Option D goes against ICF Core Competency 8, Facilitates Client Growth: the coach supplies the actions at the moment the client should be shaping their own.

Behavior inconsistent with the PCC Minimum Skills Requirements (Competency 8): the coach directs the client to carry out specific actions prescribed by the coach, rather than allowing the client to design their own actions.

- The client has not yet said what changed in their thinking, so the coach's actions may not even fit their new view of the decision.
- Option A does not help the client name their learning or a next step either. Unlike Option D, though, it does not take the design of actions away from the client.

Question 6

Best: B

Worst: A

BEST: B

- Option B aligns with ICF Core Competency 2, Embodies a Coaching Mindset: the coach notices their own pull toward the path they chose, sets it aside and keeps the session on the client's thinking.

ICF Core Competency 2.5: "Uses awareness of self and one's intuition to benefit clients."

- Staying with what the client is saying leaves the decision about their career with them.
- Option D is open about the coach's reaction without taking over, but it still asks the client to hold something of the coach's at a moment when the focus belongs on them.

WORST: A

- Option A goes against ICF Core Competency 7, Evokes Awareness: the coach uses questions to lead the client toward the path the coach chose, which hides the coach's agenda inside the client's exploration.

Behavior inconsistent with the PCC Minimum Skills Requirements (Competency 7): the coach asks questions that lead the client toward the coach's perspective, rather than the client's own way of thinking, feeling, or sensing.

- A leading question is harder for the client to notice and push back on than an open opinion, so the decision can stop being theirs without them knowing.
- Option C also brings the coach's experience into the session and shifts attention to the coach. Unlike Option A, though, it does so openly, so the client can see where the coach stands and respond.

Question 7

Best: D

Worst: C

BEST: D

- Option D aligns with ICF Core Competency 6, Listens Actively: the client calls the move "exciting" but speaks slowly and looks down, and the coach shares that difference and invites the client to explore it.

PCC Marker 6.4: "Coach explores the client's energy shifts, nonverbal cues or other behaviors."

- Offering the observation without a conclusion lets the client say what the slower pace means, if anything.

PCC Marker 7.5: "Coach shares, with no attachment, observations, intuitions, comments, thoughts or feelings, and invites the client's exploration through verbal or tonal invitation."

- Option A invites the client's feelings, but it asks for a label and leaves aside the specific change the coach has noticed.

WORST: C

- Option C goes against ICF Core Competency 6, Listens Actively: the client's pace, gaze and long pause all signal something their words do not, and the coach carries on with the details as if nothing had changed.

Behavior inconsistent with the PCC Minimum Skills Requirements (Competency 6): the coach does not use information presented by the client verbally or non-verbally to structure questions and observations.

- Taking the lack of a stated concern as the lack of a concern keeps the session on logistics the client may already have finished with.
 - Option B also stays with the content of the decision. Unlike Option C, though, it checks the coach's understanding with the client and gives them a chance to add what is missing.
-

Question 8

Best: B

Worst: D

BEST: B

- Option B aligns with ICF Core Competency 3, Establishes and Maintains Agreements: the next promotion review is ten months away, and the coach partners with the client to shape an outcome the six sessions can reach without dropping what they want.

ICF Core Competency 3.4: "Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to establish an overall coaching plan and goals."

- Keeping the promotion in view respects how much the goal matters to the client, while making the program's success something they can reach.
- Option C asks about measures of success, but the client has already said what success looks like; the problem is that the timeline does not fit it.

WORST: D

- Option D goes against ICF Core Competency 4, Cultivates Trust and Safety: in the first session, the coach delivers a verdict on the client's goal instead of exploring it with them.

Behavior inconsistent with the PCC Minimum Skills Requirements (Competency 4): the coach influences the client by imposing their own knowledge, point of view, or interpretation of the client's situation.

- The client has said the coaching will be a waste without the promotion, so a flat answer that it cannot happen risks their trust at the start of the engagement.
 - Option A avoids the problem too: it accepts an outcome the program cannot reach. Unlike Option D, though, it does not shut down the client's goal, and the gap can still be explored later.
-

Question 9

Best: A

Worst: B

BEST: A

- Option A follows the ICF Code of Ethics: the client is asking the coach to act as a consultant, and the coach makes the change of role clear and agrees with the client on how it would work before doing anything.

ICF Code of Ethics (2025) Standard 3.7: "Understand that ICF professionals often serve in multiple professional roles based on prior training and/or experience (i.e. mentor, therapist, HR specialist, assessor), and it is my responsibility to disclose to the client when I am acting in a capacity other than the role of an ICF professional."

- Agreeing on what is offered also keeps the coaching agreement accurate, including the extra payment the client mentions.

ICF Core Competency 3.2: "Reaches agreement about what is and is not appropriate in the relationship, what is and is not being offered, and the responsibilities of the client and relevant stakeholders."

- Option D keeps the coaching role clear, but nothing in the Code rules out a second role that is disclosed and agreed.

WORST: B

- Option B goes against the ICF Code of Ethics: the coach starts consulting without telling the client that the role has changed or updating the agreement.

ICF Code of Ethics (2025) Standard 3.7: "Understand that ICF professionals often serve in multiple professional roles based on prior training and/or experience (i.e. mentor, therapist, HR specialist, assessor), and it is my responsibility to disclose to the client when I am acting in a capacity other than the role of an ICF professional."

- Mixing advice into the coaching without saying so blurs the line between the two services for the rest of the engagement.

ICF Core Competency 1.6: "Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions."

- Option C also takes on the consulting role without discussing it. Unlike Option B, though, the client knows they are getting consulting, because they asked for it and the coach agreed.
-

Question 10

Best: C

Worst: A

BEST: C

- Option C aligns with ICF Core Competency 4, Cultivates Trust and Safety: the client has taken a risk by saying the question made them uncomfortable, and the coach receives it without defending it, explores it and lets the client choose where to go.

PCC Marker 4.4: "Coach partners with the client by inviting the client to respond in any way to the coach's contributions and accepts the client's response."

- Leaving the direction with the client keeps them in charge of how far to take the discomfort.
PCC Marker 5.3: "Coach partners with the client by supporting the client to choose what happens in this session."
- Option D also explores the discomfort, but asking first whether it was useful can sound as if the coach is defending the question.

WORST: A

- Option A goes against ICF Core Competency 3, Establishes and Maintains Agreements: the coach drops what the client has raised and picks a different topic for them.
Behavior inconsistent with the PCC Minimum Skills Requirements (Competency 3): the coach chooses the topic of the session.
 - Apologizing and moving on also signals that difficult material will be avoided, which works against the trust the client showed by raising it.
 - Option B does not let the client lead either: it turns the conversation to the coach's reasons. Unlike Option A, though, it stays with what the client raised instead of closing it down.
-

How ready are you?

Give yourself one point for each correct best and each correct worst, out of 20.

17 to 20

You judge these situations well. Take a full timed practice test next to check your pace.

12 to 16

A good base. Reread the explanations for the actions you missed, especially the worst ones.

11 or fewer

Study the ICF Core Competencies and the Code of Ethics before you book the exam.

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The current ICF PCC/MCC exam has 78 scenarios in a 180-minute appointment. For each one you choose the best and the worst action, and you need a scaled score of 460 to pass.

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