

ICF Saudi Arabia Chapter - ICW 2026

The Coaching Industry Under the Microscope

صناعة الكوتشينج تحت المجهر

1. Session Details

Field	Details
Session Title	The Coaching Industry Under the Microscope صناعة الكوتشينج تحت المجهر
Speaker	Coach Ahmed El Ibyari
Event	International Coaching Week 2026 - ICF Saudi Chapter
Date	Saturday, May 16, 2026
Time	7:00 PM - 8:00 PM KSA Time
Language	Arabic
Session Type	Chapter Event / Webinar
Main Themes	Coaching industry maturity, quality standards, AI coaching, coach development, specialization, ethics, professional communities

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/G2UkZA1clos>

2. Executive Summary

This session offered a candid and reflective examination of the coaching profession as an evolving industry. Rather than presenting coaching only through its success stories, the speaker invited coaches to look honestly at the profession's history, achievements, risks, and next stage of maturity.

The conversation traced the development of coaching from fragmented practices into a more organized field supported by accreditation bodies, academic research, coaching psychology, and global communities. It also explored how major disruptions such as COVID-19 and artificial intelligence have accelerated both the demand for coaching and the need for higher professional standards.

A central message was that the future of coaching will not depend only on credentials, marketing visibility, or the number of completed training hours. It will depend on the depth of the coach's self-work, ethical maturity, contextual awareness, ability to specialize, continuous supervision, and willingness to learn beyond coaching itself.

The session was also a strong call for the coaching community to move from individual effort toward collective professional development. Coaches, chapters, platforms, and schools all have roles to play in improving quality, strengthening trust, correcting misconceptions, and positioning coaching as a credible profession in the region.

3. Core Learning Thread

- Coaching has matured from scattered practices into a more organized profession, but it is still in the process of defining its identity, quality standards, and evidence base.
- Accreditation bodies played an important role in unifying language, competencies, standards, and professional identity, yet the field must be careful not to reduce quality to certificates alone.
- Academic study and coaching psychology added important rigor by asking what works, what does not work, and how coaching impact can be studied more reliably.
- COVID-19 created a major acceleration point by normalizing online coaching, online training, global learning access, and the need for support during transition and crisis.
- Artificial intelligence is likely to expand the coaching market, but it may also challenge coaches who rely only on generic conversations, surface-level skills, or weak differentiation.
- The human value of coaching will increasingly depend on relationship, challenge, accountability, ethical presence, and the coach's ability to work within real client context.
- The next stage requires more specialization, stronger supervision, deeper self-work, and more collaboration across the coaching ecosystem.

4. Best Highlights from the Session

- The speaker framed the session as a loving but honest reflection on the coaching industry, emphasizing that critique should begin with self-reflection before pointing to others.
- Coaching was described as a profession that has achieved significant progress in around two decades, while still having much more potential ahead.
- The early development of coaching required accreditation bodies to help unify language, competencies, ethics, and the meaning of coaching itself.
- The academic study of coaching was highlighted as a turning point because it moved the profession from personal claims and individual experience toward stronger evidence and research.
- COVID-19 was presented as a major industry accelerator: online delivery became normal, access expanded, and more people began seeking reflective support during uncertainty and transition.
- The speaker suggested that crises often increase the need for coaching because people pause, question their direction, revisit life decisions, and need structured thinking support.
- Artificial intelligence was discussed not as a simple threat, but as a major disruption that will likely grow the market while changing the type of coach who succeeds.
- AI coaching may increase access and follow-up support, but it can also create risks when it only validates the client's narrative instead of challenging responsibility and growth.
- The value of human coaching was linked to connection, accountability, appropriate challenge, and the ability to reflect the client's blind spots with care.
- Specialization was positioned as important, but the speaker warned that specialization requires understanding the client's context, not only using a niche title.
- The session strongly challenged coaches to move from chasing certification to building real qualification through practice, mentoring, supervision, self-work, and continuous learning.
- Social media visibility was discussed as a double-edged sword: useful for awareness and contribution, but risky when coaches learn only to produce content rather than to grow deeply.

5. Industry Timeline and Development Milestones

Milestone	Meaning for the Coaching Industry
Early fragmented practices	Before stronger professional organization, many different practices were described as coaching, which created a need for clearer definitions, standards, and competencies.
Rise of accreditation bodies	Bodies such as ICF helped create a shared professional language, ethical expectations, competencies, and global communities.
Academic study of coaching	The introduction of coaching psychology and university-based research helped examine what is effective, what is not, and how coaching can be studied more rigorously.
Research critique and evidence quality	The session highlighted the need for stronger research methods beyond simple self-reported satisfaction data.
COVID-19 acceleration	Online coaching, online training, international access, and the demand for personal and professional reflection grew rapidly.
AI disruption	AI coaching tools are already present and will likely expand access, reshape demand, and pressure coaches to clarify their human value.

6. Key Insights

1. Coaching needs honest internal dialogue. The session emphasized the importance of discussing not only opportunities and success stories, but also challenges, mistakes, quality concerns, and uncomfortable questions within the profession.
2. Growth does not automatically mean maturity. The industry may be larger and more visible, but visibility alone does not guarantee quality, ethics, or sustainable impact.
3. Evidence matters. Coaching cannot rely only on satisfaction surveys or personal success stories. The profession needs stronger research, clearer outcomes, and more disciplined ways of proving impact.
4. Disruption creates coaching demand. During major changes such as COVID-19, AI adoption, market shifts, and geopolitical uncertainty, individuals and organizations need reflective spaces to make decisions, regulate emotions, and redesign their next steps.
5. AI will not affect all coaches equally. Well-established coaches with strong credibility, depth, specialization, and relationship quality may benefit from AI-driven market expansion. Generic or less-developed coaches may face stronger competition from low-cost AI alternatives.
6. The coach's relationship with self shapes the client relationship. The session linked coaching effectiveness to the coach's ability to work on their own ego, assumptions, presence, humility, and emotional maturity.
7. Supervision and mentoring are not optional luxuries. They provide mirrors that help coaches notice blind spots, overconfidence, fatigue, ethical risk, and areas where further development is needed.
8. Specialization requires contextual literacy. A coach serving executives, healthcare professionals, entrepreneurs, educators, or families must understand the surrounding environment, laws, culture, systems, and pressures relevant to that audience.
9. Collective movement is more powerful than individual movement. Coaches working through platforms, communities, umbrellas, or collaborative groups may access stronger opportunities, shared learning, and more sustainable impact than working alone.

7. AI Coaching: Where the Opportunity and Risk Meet

Area	Opportunity	Risk / Watch-out
Market access	AI can make reflective support more accessible and may introduce more people to coaching-like conversations.	Clients may confuse AI support with professional coaching, especially when the distinction is not clearly communicated.
Follow-up and support	AI can be useful for structured follow-up, reminders, reflection prompts, and reinforcing action between sessions.	Confidentiality, data privacy, and ethical boundaries must be carefully managed.
Cost and availability	Low-cost AI tools may serve clients who cannot access human coaching immediately.	Low-cost availability may reduce perceived value if coaching is treated as unlimited generic advice.
Client narrative	AI often validates what the user says and may build on the user's story.	Without appropriate challenge, clients may leave with more justification rather than deeper responsibility.
Human differentiation	Strong human coaches can stand out through presence, accountability, context, intuition, care, and ethical challenge.	Coaches who offer generic conversations may be compared directly with AI tools.

8. Quality, Credentials, and Professional Maturity

One of the strongest parts of the session was the distinction between certification and real qualification. The speaker did not dismiss credentials; rather, he cautioned against treating them as the final proof of readiness or mastery.

The message was that certificates can support professional credibility, but they should sit on top of real capability, ethical practice, personal work, mentoring, supervision, and demonstrated effectiveness. When credentials become a shield that hides weak practice, they harm the coach, the client, and the profession.

The session also challenged the coaching community to revalue mentorship and supervision as developmental relationships, not administrative requirements. A mentor or supervisor can help the coach notice overconfidence, fatigue, assumptions, and professional blind spots that the coach may not see alone.

- Move from “I have completed training” to “I am continuously becoming a better coach.”
- Use credentials as a professional foundation, not as a substitute for depth.
- Maintain a relationship with mentors, supervisors, and peers who can challenge and support development.
- Measure progress by quality of presence, client relationship, ethical maturity, and impact, not only by titles or letters after the name.

9. Specialization and Contextual Awareness

The session presented specialization as an important future direction, while warning that specialization must be more than a marketing label. A specialized coach needs to understand the ecosystem around the client. For example, executive coaching requires awareness of business context, markets, organizational dynamics, leadership pressure, and sometimes local laws or labor practices. Health coaching, family coaching, education coaching, or career coaching also require knowledge of the context in which the client is making decisions.

Specialization Requirement	What It Means in Practice
Know the client's world	Understand the system, language, pressures, culture, and constraints around the client.
Stay within role boundaries	Contextual literacy does not mean becoming a consultant, lawyer, therapist, or subject-matter expert in place of the client.
Ask better questions	Relevant context helps the coach ask sharper and more responsible questions.
Learn around coaching	Coaches need to study outside coaching: business, psychology, culture, systems, ethics, law, technology, and the client's field.
Allow specialization to evolve	The chosen niche today does not need to define the coach forever; specialization can mature with practice, feedback, and interest.

10. Practical Takeaways for Coaches

- Have honest conversations about the profession. Discuss quality, ethics, evidence, and challenges without defensiveness.
- Continue learning beyond the initial coaching program. Treat training completion as the beginning of the journey, not the end.
- Invest in supervision and mentoring. Choose people whose values, maturity, and work you respect, and allow them to challenge your blind spots.
- Work on yourself consistently. Presence, humility, grounding, and relationship quality are not technical add-ons; they are central to coaching effectiveness.
- Differentiate your human value in an AI-enabled world. Clarify what only a human coach can provide: presence, context, challenge, care, ethical judgment, and accountability.
- Use AI responsibly. It may support preparation, follow-up, learning, and reflection, but do not ignore confidentiality and ethical implications.
- Develop a niche through evidence and experience. Try different client groups, notice where you are both effective and energized, then refine your focus.
- Study the context around your client. Do not only learn coaching skills; learn the world your clients are navigating.
- Balance visibility with substance. Use social media to contribute and educate, not only to stay visible or recycle information.
- Collaborate more. Join or create professional groups, platforms, communities, and peer spaces where coaches can learn, refer, reflect, and grow together.

11. Implications for Coaching Communities and Chapters

The session included an important discussion about the role of chapters and professional communities. The speaker recognized that chapters create belonging, awareness, and community, but also noted that coaches may expect more support around quality, standards, development, and practical opportunities. This creates a complex space because chapters must balance awareness, membership growth, governance, community building, and professional boundaries.

- Chapters can create more spaces for professional dialogue, not only awareness events.
- Communities can help coaches understand standards, pathways, and the difference between continuing education and foundational coach training.
- Chapters may need clearer tools for addressing quality concerns, misinformation, and misuse of credentials.
- There is value in bringing coaches together under professional umbrellas or platforms to increase collaboration and opportunity.
- The coaching ecosystem benefits when schools, chapters, supervisors, mentors, platforms, and independent coaches understand their complementary roles.

12. Memorable Statements

"We need to open real conversations about the opportunities, challenges, and mistakes inside the coaching profession."

"The coaching industry has achieved a lot, but it still feels as if we have only just started the journey."

"COVID-19 made online coaching and online coach training normal."

"Big disruptions make people stop and ask: Where am I going? What did I choose? What did I not choose?"

"AI coaching will not simply take the current market; it may expand the market and change who benefits from it."

"Part of the value of a coach is the challenge that helps the client see their responsibility in the story."

"We need to move from certification to qualification."

"A credential is the last decoration on the cake, not the cake itself."

"The coach's relationship with themselves affects the relationship they can build with the client."

"Coaches need to learn inside coaching and outside coaching."

"Moving as groups may be stronger than moving individually."