

Ethically Speaking...Can You Copy and Paste and Stay in Integrity?

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It is time to get your coaching Web site up and running or update your current Web site? Some people begin this process by reviewing other sites as a way to get ideas for what they might like to design on their own. You will most likely come across words, phrases and some fantastic language that describe who you are and what you do in this fabulous profession. Actually, you may like it so much you might just want to borrow it; no harm done, right? Everybody does it! Just copy paste and send it to your Web designer or copy and paste it into your Web site yourself.

Please reconsider. What you may not realize is United States copyright laws (as well as those in other areas) cover Web site content as well as all other written materials if registered. According to most legal jurisdictions, it is an infringement to take another's copyrighted creative writing; you could be legally vulnerable if you use another's words and represent them as your own.

In addition to potential legal ramifications, in the US and elsewhere in our global community, it is a breach of the ICF Code of Ethics.

ICF Code of Ethics reads as follows:

Part Two: The ICF Standards of Ethical Conduct
Section 1: Professional Conduct At Large

As a coach:

3) I will recognize and honor the efforts and contributions of others and not misrepresent them as my own. I understand that violating this standard may leave me subject to legal remedy by a third party.

This standard can cover the copying of any person or organization's materials. If you misrepresent the copy as your own, without noting proper attribution to the original owner, then you may be in breach of the ICF Code of Ethics.

For example, you have hired a Web designer to design and write content for your Web site. He or she uses copy that actually came from another coaches' Web site. This could be a breach of the ICF Code of Ethics because as the owner of your site, you are the ultimate presenter/owner of that information and are therefore responsible.

How is information separated from ideas? Although the United States copyright law does not protect the idea itself, it does protect the expression of that idea. There are five basic rights protected by US copyright and registration, and they are sometimes called the five "pillars" of copyright protection. The owner of copyright has the exclusive right to authorize others to do the following:

- To reproduce the work in copies or phone records;
- To prepare derivative works based upon the work;
- To distribute copies or phone records of the work to the public by sale or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease, or lending;
- To publicly perform the work, in the case of literary, musical, dramatic, and choreographic works, pantomimes, and motion pictures and other audiovisual works; and
- To publicly display the work, in the case of literary, musical, dramatic, and choreographic works, pantomimes, and pictorial, graphic, or sculptural works, in-

cluding the individual images of a motion picture or other audiovisual work. A violation of any of the exclusive rights of the registered copyright holder is said to be a copyright infringement. This applies to registered, copyrighted written materials, Web sites, articles, programs, presentations, etc.

As coaches, in a self-regulated field, we must uphold ourselves to a high degree of integrity and ethical behavior. As easy as it is to copy and paste, we urge you to step back and think of the person who provided this information; respect his or her work as you would like them to respect yours. In addition, regardless of where you coach in the world, please abide by all copyright laws.

Coaches are notifying the ICF Ethics and Standards Committee of copyright violations by other coaches, and some are using specialized software designed to scan the Web in order prevent content theft and protect their copyrighted information.

Ask yourself this question; is the legal and ethical gamble worth it? We don't think so, personally or professionally.

As you surf the Web for definition and explanation for who you are and what you do as a coach, it may feel good to find language that resonates with you. However, using your own words to describe the essence of you as a coach is much more powerful and authentic and will easily attract your desired audience.

So next time you are tempted to copy and paste, ethically speaking, please think again.

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