

Coaching For Wellness

Michael Arloski, PhD

A whole new profession has emerged to serve the wellness community in valuable ways: coaching. Personal and professional coaching, similar in some ways to athletic coaching, is a unique discipline offering counseling, mentoring, and advising to the people it serves.

"Coaching," as defined by the Coaches Training Institute, is a powerful alliance designed to forward and enhance the lifelong process of human learning, effectiveness, and fulfillment. Coaches are trained to assist people in optimizing their performance and deepening their satisfaction in life. Coaches move people from potential to achievement.

Coaches are hired by people who desire to be peak performers. In business and in various professions, success is often based upon having the support of another person who recognizes your unique employment potential. Coaching is a professional alliance that empowers both personal and professional success.

Facilitating Wellness and Behavior Change

Wellness focuses on supporting people in lifestyle behavior change, and coaching excels at helping people to change behavior. Coaching is action-oriented. It is a "what are you going to do about it?" approach that provides tremendous support, yet is not shy about asking powerful questions or effectively confronting.

Coaching, at its very foundation, is wellness oriented. Coaching holds the client to be a whole individual, responsible for his or her own choices. Coaching is about achieving fulfillment and balance in one's life. It offers an alliance that can take a person (or group) toward goal attainment, including lifestyle and health goals.

As a profession, coaching is young and growing. Some people believe it to be the same as the mentoring or consulting they have already been doing. Yet, coaching has developed with specific skills and theoretical approaches that

make trained professional coaches better at helping their clients actualize more of their potential.

Accountability is a key concept in coaching that can be directly applied to lifestyle behavioral change. When the client agrees to be held accountable for actions they commit to take for themselves, more often than not, in my experience, they do it! Knowing that during next week's appointment their coach will be asking about the agreement motivates action. The holistic approach of achieving balance by looking at all aspects of one's life helps identify where action needs to be taken. Having a nonjudgmental, supportive, confidential ally, whose only agenda is the client's agenda, helps make it happen.

Coaches are potential allies for all wellness professionals. Find professionally trained coaches who have wellness/health care backgrounds and you will have new partners in your wellness efforts.

RESOURCES

The International Coaches Federation, www.coachfederation.com

The Coaches Training Institute, www.thecoaches.com

Coach University, www.coachu.com

Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life, H. Kimsey-House, P. Sandahl, and L. Whitworth. Remote Management, 20885 Redwood Rd., #315, Castro Valley, CA 94546.

The Portable Coach: 28 Surefire Strategies for Business and Personal Success, Thomas J. Leonard. Scribner, New York, NY, 1998.



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Coaching for Stress Management:

A Case Scenario

A health promotion professional (HPP) finds an employee showing signs of stress. Previous stress management training has identified the employee as being at a higher level of health risk. Elevated blood pressure and heart rate, and complaints of insomnia and irritability are evident. The HPP works with the employee as usual, but finds more than the usual resistance to change. The employee finds it hard to cope with a number of life management issues both at home and at work. This is an excellent coaching candidate.

Through an intake meeting (in person or by phone) and weekly teleconference coaching calls, the coach will work with the person to get a complete picture of their life and how all the components affect the whole person. Listening intently and asking powerful, bottom-line questions, the coach will help the person get to the core issues surrounding their vision, dreams, and goals, and the barriers keeping them from working toward actualization of these important parts of their lives. Self-esteem issues, interpersonal conflicts, career indecision, or other important themes will soon emerge—ready to be explored and tackled in an accountable action fashion. The coach will make specific recommendations of actions to be considered and resources to be utilized (i.e., nutritionists, biofeedback, acupuncture, psychotherapy, massage, etc.).

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Lasting Lifestyle Change Through Wellness Coaching

By **Michael Arloski, PhD**

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Lasting lifestyle change is the elusive goal of every wellness program, whether individual, group or organization-wide. Prescriptions alone don't work. Diets alone don't work. New Year's resolutions alone don't work. Information alone doesn't work. The key word is alone.

Enter an ally, a professional ally...a coach. Having someone who will stand with you and stand by you as you take on the challenge of a significant lifestyle change can make all the difference. Coaching is "a powerful alliance designed to forward and enhance the lifelong process of human learning, effectiveness, and fulfillment" according to the Coaches

Training Institute. Focus the skills of coaching on wellness goals and the dynamic results can be impressive.

Wellness programs can benefit from the concept of coaching and wellness coaching in at least two ways. Professionally trained coaches can be hired or used as resources to coach program participants through the process of healthy lifestyle change. Programs can also benefit by having their staffs receive training to become more “coach-like” in the way that they work with participants (clients).

In the article “Coaching for Wellness” (Arloski, 1999), the field of professional coaching is described and its connections with wellness explored. A case study illustrates how wellness coaching can be of value to both wellness professionals and clients.

Professional coaches can be of tremendous help to clients seeking lasting behavioral change in their lifestyles. The change process always involves overcoming the power of long-standing health habits (Arloski, 2002). The ongoing support and accountability of a coaching relationship can help the client through the transition from old habits to new healthy lifestyle habits. Alone, the client frequently becomes discouraged upon the re-emergence of the old habit, and thinking they have insufficient strength of character, too often quits. We see this every March as the three-month New Year’s Resolution fitness center memberships are not renewed.

Coaches also can be of real value with helping the client engage in and commit to a wellness plan that will have a greater probability of success. The wellness coach may do this, in part, through the use of a wellness evaluation tool. TestWell and The Wellness Inventory are two excellent

examples of online wellness tools that can help clients get a good picture of their current level of wellness. These instruments also help begin the process of selecting goals and areas of wellness where the change process should be focused. Interpretation sessions and frequent reference to the results of the tool can help catalyze the wellness coaching sessions.

Many wellness professionals are already functioning in roles that are very “coach-like” in nature. Helping participants in wellness programs to learn more about themselves and engage in a change-for-the-better process often involves working closely with groups and individuals. This is where coaching skills can be of real value.

Specific Skills

Accountability, creating agreements of commitment to action, asking powerful questions, multi-level listening, sustaining motivation for change, goal setting, using acknowledgements, developing balance and fulfillment are only some of the skills to be learned from coaching. Let's focus on just one of the many coaching skills that will be especially important in working with wellness clients—sustaining motivation.

Sustaining Motivation

Nothing works better than internal motivation. A good athletic coach knows this and through their relationship with the player, discovers what motivates that particular individual. Rather than just being a cheerleader on the sidelines, the wellness professional needs to be “in the game” with the client and develop a trusting relationship that is a true alliance. From that sense of trust, issues of self-

esteem that are critical to lifestyle change can be explored (Arloski 1994).

Coaches have many strategies and techniques at their disposal which wellness professionals can use, too. “Structures” are one of these. Structures are physical objects that remind a client of a wellness goal. The structure can be quite direct and obvious, like a photograph of a mountainous vacation destination that the client wants to be in good enough condition to thoroughly enjoy. Or, the structure can be symbolic and have a unique meaning that only the client (and wellness professional or coach) knows about. A little statuette of a playful-looking gnome on one’s desk might be a continual reminder to lighten up and be more fun-loving even at work.

As we adapt to our environments constantly, structures fade into the background of our awareness. To prevent this from occurring, move structures to new locations, or change them. Freshen up the photos around your desk that motivate you.

The Alliance

When wellness professionals become more “coach-like,” they no longer just enroll, inform and educate their clients, they take the journey with them, by their sides. They accompany the client as their professional ally.

Coaching skills are focused on the here and now, on both understanding and taking action, on both support and accountability. Forging such skills into the repertoire of the wellness professional makes them into a more effective change agent and an ally that clients will value on their own path to wellness.

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THE POWER OF HABIT

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New Year! New goals, new resolutions, new hopes, new dreams...same old behavior??? Many of us jump into the New Year with lots of enthusiasm or at least a hope that we will make this next year better than the last, or at least as good. New exercise plans, new diets, new work projects, new, new, new!

Great intentions, unfortunately too often succumb to habit. Plain, old, habit. We know we want to remember to schedule time to work out today, but what do you know...? It's five o'clock and all we did was work all day without even thinking of when we would go for that walk, swim, bike ride, etc. Habit dies hard.

When habit reasserts itself do you get discouraged? Do you give yourself a hard time about how weak your character must be if you can't even follow through on a few simple promises to yourself to make your life better? Lots of times, the very act of berating ourselves for "failing" just makes even more certain that we will not change our behavior and adopt the new habit we are attempting to acquire. Why even go there? The heck with it, I give up!

Lots of health clubs say that they get three-quarters of their new membership enrolling in January. They also say that three months later the use of the facility is back down to normal with the vast majority of the new members rarely showing up, if at all.

Don't underestimate the power of habit! Once we have adopted a new behavior there are actually neural pathways set up in our nervous system related to this behavior. Our habits are part psychophysiological! Our bodies, as well as our minds, are "in the habit" of reacting a certain way, so no wonder changing a habit is not as simple as making a resolution.

Coaches work with people to help them make the changes they really want to make in their lives. We help people change their habits all the time. The habits may be physical, like the ones we've used as examples here, or they may relate to actual behavior on the job or in one's own business.

New, good habits really work for people. Stephen Covey made millions and millions helping people realize how positive habits, particularly "Seven" of them can bring us success. (Stephen Covey - The Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People).

Here are some QUICK TIPS FOR CHANGING HABITS

1. Practice patience. Research tells us that it takes as much as 180 days to truly drop an old habit and adopt a new one. So stay with it.
2. No beating yourself up! Patience right? Don't put yourself down because you find yourself engaged in the old habit. **REPEATING THE OLD HABIT JUST SHOWS THAT YOU ARE TRULY DEALING WITH A HABIT!**
3. Celebrate catching yourself! Take the repetitions in stride. Realize that despite the old habit showing up again, you are committed to changing the habit. Instead of beating yourself up, ("There I go again!") celebrate the fact that you managed to "catch" yourself and become aware of it. As you catch yourself earlier in the practice of the old habit, you'll have even more to celebrate!

4. Use "structures" to help remind you of the new habits you want to adopt. Structures are little physical reminders that help you remember your goals. They may be little signs you print up for yourself reminding yourself to: "Wait to answer the call after 2 rings, not sooner!"; "Breathe!"; "Call a friend today!"; "30 min. of writing every day". Structures can also be objects or photos that remind you of greater goals. I once coached a Japanese manager to have a photo of an orchestra conductor by his desk. Whenever he looked at the photo he reminded himself to BE the orchestra conductor when working with his supervisees, and to not keep trying to be the "one-man band". Another hint about structures...move them around, change the look of them so they don't start blending in with the background again (out of habit!).

5. Involve other in your goals. Let co-workers, friends and family know what you are working on changing. Enlist their support and possibly their awareness and feedback to help you stay engaged in the habit changing process.

6. Something you'll usually see in these columns is this next tip. GET A COACH! Working with a coach gives you someone to: help you get clear about what behaviors you really want to change; give you support in the process; hold you accountable to do what you say you will do to change the habits. I'm always amazed at what people get done when they tell me that they will do it, and know that I'll be asking next week to help them make sure that they did!

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Five R PROCESS® FOR GREMLIN FIGHTING

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1. RECOGNIZE when what you are saying to yourself
IS Gremlin-Talk.

- a. Know ahead of time what are some of your Gremlin's favorite lines are.
 - b. DISTINGUISH between Gremlin Talk and good problem-solving reflection.
 - c. Identify if this is a particularly gremlin-vulnerable time for you. Use the H.A.L.T. Self-Quiz.
2. REFUTE the Gremlin Talk.
 - a. "This is NOT true. What's true for me is..."
 - b. Don't get into a debate with your Gremlin
3. REMOVE the Gremlin from your experience.
 - a. Use your own favorite "gremlin-removing fantasy" (gag 'em, bind 'em, throw 'em in the dungeon and lock them up again!)
 - b. Don't let the gremlin "travel with you". "Throw" them out of the car, out of your workplace, or wherever you are.
4. REGAIN your self-confidence. Remember how you have been successful in the past and affirm your abilities and talents.
5. RETURN to the present. Focus on the here & now.

Five R PROCESS® FOR GREMLIN FIGHTING WORKSHEET

1. RECOGNIZE when what you are saying to yourself IS Gremlin-Talk.

*Write down an example of WHAT your Gremlin sometimes is saying to you in your work situation.

*Write down WHAT makes it Gremlin-Talk.

2. REFUTE the Gremlin Talk.

*Write down HOW this is not true for you.

3. REMOVE the Gremlin from your experience.

*Write down at least one way you can rid yourself of your Gremlin.

4. REGAIN your self-confidence

*Write down at least one way you can regain your self-confidence.

5. RETURN to the present.

*Write down three ways you can return to the present.

Five R PROCESS© FOR GREMLIN FIGHTING WORKSHEET Page two.

1. What are the easiest things to refute that your Gremlin, or Inner-Critic says to you?

2. What are the most challenging things to refute that your Gremlin, or Inner-Critic says to you?

3. Where does your Inner-Critic/Gremlin get in the way of your work the most?

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The H.A.L.T. Self-Quiz

Whenever you have identified your Gremlin, or Inner-Critic as being active, or you seem to be starting the process of reviewing your entire life in retrospect....

Ask Yourself....Am I:

Hungry?

Angry?

Lonely?

Tired?

If so...HALT! Stop the self-review process until you are no longer hungry, angry, lonely, or tired.

I highly recommend this book:

Taming Your Gremlin (Revised Edition): A Surprisingly Simple Method for Getting Out of Your Own Way

by Rick Carson (Author)