

New Mindset, New Model: From Prescribe and Treat, or Educate and Implore, to Advocate and Inspire - The Coach Approach!

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There is a very instructive parable about a people who lived at the base of a great waterfall. One day a person floated over the waterfall and crashed among the rocks into the water below. The People of the Waterfall swam out and saved them. Before long another person came screaming over the waterfall, and again the people swam out to the rescue. This began to happen much too often and the people decided to station a rescue boat by the falls. The victims kept washing over the falls and the people eventually built first a rescue station, then a clinic, then a gigantic hospital at the bottom of the falls. As plans were being drawn up for a hospital expansion, someone looked up at the falls and wondered out loud..."Don't you think we should go upstream, and see why these people are falling in?"

Prevention. Despite knowing the tremendous benefit of it, we are only beginning to put healthcare money into it. Fortunately, just like a career or business coaching client who has been urged to look at the big picture, not just the work on the desk in front of them, the medical world is starting to value wellness and recognize that lifestyle improvement prevents over half of the potential healthcare problems out there.

Medicine knows how to treat the people who wash over the waterfall. Fortunately medical science has developed many life-saving and health-enhancing methods of treatment. To do so the practitioners of modern medicine have rigorously been schooled in the scientific method and have created a mindset of treatment based on diagnosis, prescription and treatment. The new question becomes, "How does this work upstream?" Medical research in the 1950's and 1960's began to show us how people were "falling" into these health dangers. We finally made the connections between smoking and lung cancer, between heart disease and smoking, high cholesterol diets, etc.

The field of wellness education and health promotion evolved to meet this "upstream" prevention work. Yet, even this field, which relies heavily on providing information through classes and health promotion programs, has struggled. Despite knowing the "why" about how people were succumbing to lifestyle-related illnesses, the challenge became, and still is, "How can we keep them from slipping off the bank into the water, when they already know it is dangerous?"

Many of these wellness professionals attempted to apply the "prescribe and treat" mindset to wellness. By assessing someone's health and then "telling them what to do", these treatment-oriented professionals thought that people would change. They have seen frustratingly little change happen this way. Other wellness professionals came from a health educator philosophy. Thinking that knowledge was the golden answer, they did their best to provide great health information and then begged their clients to change their lifestyles. The "educate and implore" mindset has been just about as effective as the "prescribe and treat" approach.

Many cultural and sub-cultural factors influence our health behavior. Much progress has been made in influencing the health norms that drive some of our choices. Witness the smoking bans in public places in effect in many cities and in the entire country of Ireland! More healthy food alternatives are available in stores and restaurants. More opportunities for exercise abound with new bicycle/running paths, health clubs, etc. However, in the United States, at least, the combined effect has been insufficient. While some people are ready to change and are improving their lifestyles, many others are contributing to the epidemics of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, etc. that we see.

Behavioral change is really an individual matter. There are so many personal factors that either facilitate or impede personal growth and change. Recognizing this, more and more wellness programs are working hard to individualize wellness. The first step is a shift in mindset.

One-on-one interpersonal communication skills are usually not a part of the training received by most healthcare professionals. Some limited training in “bedside manner” doesn’t suffice. As we know, some of the very best one-on-one skill training to come along in recent times, is coaching. The coach approach not only provides these crucial interpersonal skills, it presents a compelling methodology for effective behavioral change where the specter of pathology is absent. Instead of “prescribe and treat”, or even “educate and implore”, we operate from a mindset of “advocate and inspire”

The Wellness Ally

The wellness coach, from first contact, begins to create an alliance. Many wellness clients have a long history of attempt and failure at lifestyle change. The diet and exercise programs that were started and then soon evaporated. The old joke about smoking: “Yes, I’ve quit smoking...many times!” As my coaching colleague Pat Williams likes to say “If you could have done it on your own, you probably would have done it by now!”

The missing ingredient in all of the myriad self-help programs out there for lifestyle improvement is a professional ally. While “buddy” approaches are good, it is nothing like having a professional coach who has the skills and resources to help the client to assess their wellness, determine their readiness for change, create a wellness plan, implement the plan with coaching support and accountability, and then support the maintenance of the behavioral change achieved so it will last.

Instead of being “treated” for what is “wrong” with them, clients (not patients) are accepted for who they are and their “problems” are reframed as “challenges”. Which is not to say that these “challenges” are taken lightly. The wellness coach supports the treatment process that their client might be engaged in. In fact, the wellness coach can become not only an ally to their client, but to the healthcare professionals treating that client as well. One way the coach is an advocate for their client is by helping them to take ownership of their health, and if they have chosen a particular treatment regiment, to help them comply with it.

The Lifestyle Prescription

When a person sees a physician they often receive a pharmaceutical prescription. They are to take this to their favorite pharmacy, or chemist, get it filled, and then comply with the directions for taking it. Often today, with increased awareness of medical research showing that over half of what determines one's health is their lifestyle choices, the physician often gives what I call a "Lifestyle Prescription". The person is advised for example, to exercise more, eat higher fiber foods, drink less caffeine, etc. The physician tells the person to do this and sends them on their way. Where does the person get their lifestyle prescription filled? How do they comply behaviorally with all of these prescribed lifestyle changes? Where do they start, and how do they do it alone? Enter the wellness coach.

The National Pharmaceutical Council, an industry research organization, estimates that non-compliance with medication adds over \$100,000,000,000 annually to the U.S. health care system. The behaviors of getting a pharmaceutical prescription filled, and then remembering and taking the medicine prescribed properly are all behavioral acts. Add to this the incalculable cost of failing to comply with "lifestyle prescriptions" and we see that the issue of patient/client compliance is really critical behavioral health issue. A person working with a wellness coach has co-created a wellness plan that includes this type of compliance built right into it.

The wellness coach is not there to "fix" their client. Most lifestyle change clients have been told what to do many times. Most have read plenty of information about what they need to do. They know what they need to do. Why don't they do it? This is the perennial question for the wellness field. The wellness field has over-invested in information. The wellness coach is there to help the client discover within themselves, their own motivation and really grow self-efficacy.

As your client's wellness coach you are not there to be the "expert". The nature of the coaching relationship is all about promoting the independence, self-sufficiency and self-efficacy of the client. It is the antithesis of co-dependency. The "prescribe and treat" mindset brings us back into the medical expert role, the "educate and implore" mindset pulls us into a teacher role, which can also be taken as another "expert" stance. The wellness coach works "shoulder to shoulder" with their client, not one-up/one-down in their roles. You, the coach, either refer the client out to the "experts" for consultation, or, if you have an expert role to integrate into the relationship (e.g., fitness trainer, diabetes educator, etc.), you have to be extremely clear when you are "switching hats" with your client.

Wellness coaching is however, more than simply applying life coaching to the area of lifestyle choices. As director of wellness coaching for the Institute For Life Coach Training, I have seen that many well-trained life coaches are not really familiar with the concepts and methodologies that the wellness field has developed. While they may be even familiar with the broad fields of holistic health, remedial care, and even integrative or alternative care, this is not wellness.

INSERT TRAVIS'S WELLNESS CONTINUUM

The Illness-Wellness Continuum by Jack Travis, M.D., is extremely helpful in understanding what wellness is. Wellness is not merely the absence of disease. The treatment model typically takes one from wherever they are on the left side of the continuum and brings them to the middle, to the “point of no discernable illness” and is finished. Wellness overlaps back to the left beyond this mid-point and takes the person further to the right side of the continuum, into the realms of education, growth, and wellness coaching!

Wellness is not just about preventative medicine. Wellness is also about actualizing one's potential in mind, body and spirit.

“Wellness is the experience of living life with high levels of awareness, conscious choice, self-acceptance, interconnectedness, love, meaning and purpose. Wellness is the individual's life journey (and our society's larger task) of taking Abraham Maslow's concept of Self-Actualization and applying it to mind, body, spirit and our interconnectedness with other people and our environment.” - Michael Arloski, Ph.D.PCC

The field of coaching is a perfect partner for wellness because it is based on the same principles of potential and possibility. As coaches we are always striving to help our clients to achieve more and more of who and what they can be. As we help our clients to live more fulfilling lives we (and they) discover that all aspects of their lives are interconnected. The evidence linking immune system functioning to stress is mountainous. Look over your own shoulder. Didn't your last cold or flu occur when you were under a lot of stress? How many people have you seen build their careers or businesses at the expense of their health, and in the end, lose it all?

There is real value in living a life in balance. Obvious benefits are apparent when we look at how our body/mind functions. There is, however, a kind of reason-in-reserve for living in a more centered way. Living our lives in balance allows us to have extraordinary experiences in living!

Often in life we attain the highest goals when we have stretched ourselves the most...when we have, frankly, been quite “out of balance”. Real growth happens out on that edge where we have pushed ourselves beyond our comfort zone. The key is that we cannot sustain life out on the edge, however we can have the strength to visit there long enough to make our achievement. Recall the act of being the first to attain the summit of Mount Everest by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, or Roger Banister breaking the “barrier” of the four-minute mile in running. One cannot live on the summit of Everest, or maintain the pace of a sub-four minute mile. The whole-person mind/body/lifestyle conditioning to go to the edge, fulfill ourselves in what we truly have wanted to do, and then come back home, to center, is the epitome of living at a high level of wellness.

Readiness For Change

“Change is a process, not an event.” James Prochaska

A foundational concept, in pervasive use in the wellness field, is the readiness for change contribution of James Prochaska and his associates (*Changing For Good, James Prochaska, et.al.*). Used by thousands of addiction treatment programs and wellness programs world wide, Prochaska’s work has had a profound impact. Deceptively simple at first, Prochaska reminds us that people don’t change until they are ready to. While this seems absurdly obvious, when you examine most healthcare or treatment programs, you see that change is demanded by the healthcare provider immediately.

Change is not controlled by a toggle switch that flicks on or off. Just because we, the healthcare provider, or the coach, see the need for change, and even if the client intellectually sees it too, will it automatically happen? In fact, a real caution for coaches is to follow the coach training that urges a rush to action. How many coaches are trained to respond quickly to their client’s insightful statement with “So! What are you going to do about it?” When we rush to action in the arena of the lifestyle change process we are often sabotaging success.

When we plug the readiness for change theory into our coaching we can see that a client goes through the six stages that Prochaska outlines.

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| 1. Pre-contemplation. | The client is unaware and isn’t concerned. |
| 2. Contemplation. | Client becomes aware and begins to consider change. |
| 3. Preparation. | Client begins exploring change possibilities (looks for resources, accessibility, affordability, etc.) |
| 4. Action | Client takes action for change. |
| 5. Maintenance | Client works at maintaining the change |
| 6. Termination | The new behavior is now a part of their life |

Our wellness coaching client can be at a different stage of readiness on each different behavior we look at. Just because someone is ready to exercise doesn’t mean they are ready to quit smoking.

Another thing to be aware of is that Prochaska has found that this six-stage model is a spiral model. People cycle and recycle through it. Perhaps someone contemplates beginning a program of recreating more with their children, prepares for it by buying some sporting equipment. Then their child cancels out of the outing by opting to go to an event with their own friends. The parent is disheartened and gives up trying to connect with their child, slipping back into contemplation, or even pre-contemplation. Perhaps they see their coach, realize it doesn’t serve them to take the “rejection” so personally, and follows through with a wonderful time spent enjoying that planned for activity with their child.

The work of Prochaska and his associates is a deep resource. His trans-theoretical model of change even matches therapeutic interventions with the appropriate stage of readiness for change. Coaches would be well served to study this body of knowledge.

The wellness field has also developed many other tools for behavioral change that are available to the wellness coach to become proficient with and use. Health risk assessments (HRA's), online wellness inventories, and other devices for feedback and elicitation are there for the coach to learn about. (see resources section)

"I think we are on the verge of a major paradigm shift in promoting health and wellness driven by coaching. Coaching provides a positive connection--a supportive relationship--between the coach and the person who wants to make a change. That connection empowers the person being coached to recognize and draw on his or her own innate ability and resources to make lasting changes for better health and well-being."

--Anne Helmke, Member Services Team Leader
National Wellness Institute, Stevens Point, WI, USA

The world of wellness is waking up to coaching. Since my initial presentation on wellness coaching in the late 1990's at the National Wellness Conference (<http://www.nationalwellness.org>), I have seen a tremendous growth of interest shown in coaching by the field of wellness. Hospitals, corporate healthcare departments, and other institutions and organizations are realizing that individualizing their wellness programs is imperative.

At the same time the health consumer is seeing wellness and lifestyle improvement as a highly desirable area. Looking at what economist Paul Pilzer says in *The Wellness Revolution : How to Make a Fortune in the Next Trillion Dollar Industry* (2003), there is an increasing trend to take wellness products and services directly to the consumer. While public understanding of what wellness actually is varies greatly, and often is filled with misunderstandings, the curiosity and interest is there. For many people, there is a readiness for change that may start with some simple health products and develop into membership in a fitness club. If the coaching profession can educate the public well enough, their interest may expand to seeing the value of employing a personal wellness coach.

Like every area of coaching, many people have quickly rushed in, as best they can, with minimal training. It is common now in the healthcare field to find many professional and quasi-professionals calling themselves "health coaches" or "wellness coaches", when they have little or no training in the actual profession of coaching. Coach training programs and professional organizations need to present to the world competently trained wellness coaches who are the embodiment of the professional title "coach".

Resources:

Arloski, M. (2004) *The Wellness Coach: Lifestyle Prescriptions*© Filled Here.
Tomorrow's Life Coach, Institute For Life Coach Training. Volume 3 Issue 1 :January 2004 Also available at the author's website: www.realbalance.com.

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Prochaska, J., Norcross, J., & Diclemente, C. (1994) *Changing For Good*. New York, NY. Harper Collins/Quill. 1994 Harper Collins, 2002 Quill reprint.

Pilzer, P.Z. *The Wellness Revolution*. Hoboken, N.J. John Wiley & Sons.

Travis, J. and Ryan, R.S., (2004) *The Wellness Workbook: How to Achieve Enduring Health and Vitality*. Third Edition. Berkley/Toronto. Celestial Arts.

Web Resources:

<http://www.mywellnesstest.com/> - The Wellness Inventory, online wellness assessment.

<http://www.testwell.org> - TestWell, online wellness assessment.

<http://www.nationalwellness.org> - The National Wellness Institute and the National Wellness Conference.