

A WELCOA | Expert Interview



Jay W. Vandegrift

President & Chief Executive Officer  
Wellness Coaches USA

# Coaching Catches On

A WELCOA Expert Interview with Wellness Coaches USA President & CEO, Jay Vandegrift

Recently, WELCOA President Dr. David Hunnicutt sat down with Jay Vandegrift, CEO of Wellness Coaches USA (WCUSA), to discuss the art and science of wellness coaching in a worksite setting. In this thoughtful discussion, Vandegrift shares important learning experiences and reveals many important findings that will greatly assist worksite wellness practitioners in their quest to build and sustain results-oriented worksite wellness initiatives.

**Q Dr. Hunnicutt:** Thanks for joining me, Jay—let’s dive right in. From the perspective of Wellness Coaches USA, what exactly is coaching and how do you define it?

**A Jay Vandegrift:** Good question. Let me first start with our perspective regarding the value of coaching and then kind of work back into it. As you know, in the wellness marketplace, we have an abundance of health promotion resources available to help employees improve their lifestyle behaviors and reduce their risk of chronic disease—educational websites, handouts, biometric testing, promotional programs, seminars, etc. And most all employers, again as you know, have at least a portion of these resources available to their employees. Unfortunately, from our perspective now, the information in self-help and testing doesn’t get the job done. If it did, we probably wouldn’t even be having this interview.

It’s obvious to us, and this again reflects our perspective as an onsite wellness coaching company that wanting to change and even knowing how just isn’t enough. People, at least most of us, just don’t change lifestyle behaviors on our own. It’s hard. We know it’s hard; we know it’s hard from our own personal experience. We need help, individual and personal and powerful support for our efforts to actually take action to change their lives. That’s where wellness coaching comes in. It’s the missing link from our perspective; it fills the gap between wanting to and actually achieving. It transforms interest and knowledge to action and success.

So from our perspective, wellness coaching is the key to workplace wellness success. And again, from our perspective, workplace wellness initiatives that do not include wellness coaching will find it very difficult to achieve substantive and sustained improvement in employee population health.

What then, from our wellness perspective, is coaching? Our definition is not unique—you, in fact, included it in many of your publications, especially your *Absolute Advantage* publications on coaching—it’s a series of conversations or discussions, interactions between coach and client intended to elicit the client’s best thinking and decision making to create and accomplish real and sustained improvement in risky lifestyle behaviors like weight loss, smoking, sedentary lifestyle, etc.

And, if I may, our coaches have created their own creed that they use as a guide in their coaching efforts and also to provide them with a constant reinforcement of what we all consider to be the critical aspects and components of effective coaching and their commitment to the people they serve. It also provides, I think, a wonderful definition of the essence of coaching, at least from our perspective, and I’d like to read it quickly if I could.

**Q Hunnicutt:** That would be very useful.

**A Vandegrift:** It’s drafted from the perspective of a conversation between our coach and the clients they serve.

“I’m here to partner with you to be your ally as you work to improve your health and find the life you seek. My



agenda is your agenda. I will listen intently to you, truly listen and understand, not just wait for my turn to talk. I'll help you set goals and develop an effective plan for their accomplishment. I'll help you identify solutions that work best for you. I'll provide health information, advice, and education as well as connect you with the resources you need to be successful. Most importantly, I'll encourage you to look inside yourself and challenge the mindset that works against you and help you discover the will and motivation within yourself to propel you forward. I'll help you to believe that you are in command of your own life and the choices you make and that you and only you have the power to succeed. I will call upon you to do the work it takes to achieve your goals. I will challenge you and help you hold yourself accountable so that you keep moving forward, and I will always believe in you."

I think that sums up the various components of the coaching process that are so critical and make it such a powerful tool in our efforts to change lifestyle behaviors, improve lives, and reduce the incidents of chronic disease.

**Q Hunnicutt:** Very nice. It's compelling and it's inspiring. From your perspective, how does the coaching process work as you conceptualize it and as you deliver it?

**A Vandegrift:** We're an onsite wellness coaching provider. We deploy our wellness coaches directly to the workplace to provide employees with face-to-face

wellness coaching. The coaching process, techniques, and methodology we utilize represent, essentially, a synthesis of the currently most generally accepted coaching models, adapted by us to accommodate (and I don't mean to minimize this) the reality of workplace delivery. Specifically, the behavior change theories and models we have drawn from include the health belief model, the trans-theoretical model and social learning/social cognitive theory. In addition, we've drawn upon the published works of nationally recognized coach training companies like Totally Coached and Well Coaches, upon the work of authors such as Christina Marshall, Michael Arloski, Donald Ardell, and Abraham Maslow, and upon the excellent materials published in the various WELCOA offerings, such as the "Coaching Connection."

We don't believe it's any secret that coaching and the coaching process works, and our outcomes support this notion. We know that the coaching process we've developed and the protocol we teach our coaches through our rather extensive coach training process is very effective. Our real distinction, however, as a wellness coaching company, is the process we have developed to drive exceptionally high levels of employee engagement in coaching. If, as we believe (and is now generally recognized more and more all the time), coaching to support employees' efforts to improve their lifestyle behaviors is an essential, critical component of wellness success then high levels of employee engagement in wellness coaching must also be achieved if we are to have a meaningful impact.

...from our perspective, workplace wellness initiatives that do not include wellness coaching will find it very difficult today to achieve substantive and sustained improvement in employee population health...



Without high levels of engagement in wellness coaching, meaningful employee population wellness success is at best very hard to achieve. But how do we do it? How do we drive exceptionally high levels of engagement? What's our process? First, our very presence in the workplace gives us a strong advantage and head start in stimulating engagement. That's because the workplace is the only place where employees are truly available, allowing us to reach out to them proactively and efficiently and regularly.

Next, unlike some of the more technologic coaching resources that are commonly used, our process is usable by employees during their time in the workplace, whereas the other alternatives are generally only available during off hours, ours are available during work making our process readily available and painless for employees to engage. Perhaps most significantly, our regular presence in the workplace gives us the opportunity to develop personal and trusting relationships with employees, making it possible for employees in turn to work on issues of importance in their own lives with people they know and trust. As a result, we believe we transform wellness from the remote and impersonal to the human, familiar, and very personal—making it very natural and comfortable for employees to engage with us.



## ABOUT WELCOA

Based in Omaha, NE, the Wellness Council of America (WELCOA) was founded in 1987 as a national non-profit membership organization dedicated to promoting healthier life styles for all Americans, especially through health promotion initiatives at the worksite.

**Working Well**—Specifically, WELCOA focuses on building Well Workplaces—organizations that are dedicated to the health of their employees. The Well Workplace process provides business leaders and members with a structure or blue print to help their organizations build results-oriented wellness programs. Ultimately these programs help employees make better lifestyle choices, and positively impact the organization's bottom line. To date, over 700 companies have received the prestigious Well Workplace award.

**Leading-Edge Wellness Information**—In addition to helping organizations build structurally sound wellness programs, WELCOA serves as a national clearinghouse and information center on worksite wellness. WELCOA responds to thousands of requests for information and materials by publishing a number of source books, a monthly health and wellness newsletter, an extensive line of brochures, as well as conducting numerous training seminars.

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In addition to this boost to engagement provided by our very presence in the workplace, we have developed a process to physically utilize our presence to further enhance employee engagement through systematic, regular and ongoing interactions between our wellness coaches and the employees we serve, which means that our coaches do not merely hope employees will engage as a result of our presence and availability, though we found that many will do so, rather our coaches reach out to employees personally, regularly, and systematically interacting with them during their regular scheduled rounds throughout the workplace to educate, test, and promote, continuously making the attempt to develop their interest in wellness and their readiness to improve and providing a convenient, accessible forum for them to initiate engagement in wellness coaching—coaching when they are ready to do so.

**Q Hunnicutt:** I agree with you that the engagement process really is the key in this. You have had experience now over the last eight years building and deploying this model for worksites across the country. From your perspective and your learning curve, what are the characteristics that make a good coach?

**A Vandegrift:** Good question. First, I guess it's a given that coaches must have subject matter education, training and expertise. We only hire (and most of the other vendors that we are familiar with only hire) coaches that have health care backgrounds of one variety or another and experience in actual practice of their expertise. I think that's a given and clearly as a result they must be conversant in the most common wellness lifestyle issues like nutrition and exercise, stress, smoking, etc. Second, and I think most importantly, they must be people-people. They must genuinely like people and be engaging and polite, and this is critical—and always respectful. They must be great listeners. They must be patient and understanding and flexible yet organized and persistent. They must care about the people they serve, be empathetic and truly concerned about their client's well-being. As much as the subject matter expertise, I think the key to successful coaching is the personality and nature of the coaches that we hire. They have to really love what they're doing and be committed to it and care about the people they serve.







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**Q Hunnicutt:** When you're looking at the process of engaging workplaces and employees in coaching and using these talented individuals to promote behavior change and to work alongside these employees, in your experience, has the coaching model and the coaching perspective that you use been effective and if so, can you give me examples?

**A Vandegrift:** Sure, I can give that a try here. From our perspective, let's just take a second and consider what effective wellness coaching is so we can be together on our definition. Certainly, we believe the coaching technique and methodology must be professional and based upon the science, but that's not necessarily indicative of effectiveness. From our perspective, it's all about the improvement in health risk factors. That is, for coaching to be considered effective, again from our perspective, it must achieve the workplace wellness goal—and that's sustained improvement in employee health risk factors both for individual employees and perhaps more importantly from a workplace wellness perspective. And we know that coaching can be effective in both respects because we know through the measurement and data collected by our coaches and from comparative HRAs, our model does work and has consistently helped tens of thousands of employees lose weight, stop smoking, exercise more, reduce stress, reduce their blood pressure and cholesterol levels, etc. We don't know for sure how effective other wellness coaching vendors actually are but we know that our model has produced these kinds of outcomes for over 200 employers of all sizes in most all business classifications and in 30 states throughout the country. So we see examples every day; it's actually very gratifying to us. We get e-mails daily from employees that our coaches have served, thanking us and thanking our coaches for helping them really change their life.

**Q Hunnicutt:** When you look at this process, there is obviously a very clear art and a very clear science. In your experience how many coaching sessions does it normally take before you begin to see changes in participants?

**A Vandegrift:** That's a tough one. I think first it varies, at least with respect to our experience, from employee to employee. We've worked with some employees who are so ready and motivated to change and improve that we begin to see real improvement after only two or three coaching sessions. We've also had 10, 12, 14 interactions with employees over extended time periods before we've seen any positive change. That's because, again from our experience, every employee that we serve is unique with their own concept of what's important to them in their own lives, their own self-concept and their own method and pace of learning and changing and growing. One of the great coaching challenges, we believe, is to be able to customize and adapt coaching technique and process to accommodate these differences. And we believe that the very personal relationships that we're able to develop with employees as a result of our onsite presence really position us very well to do this and really get to know people and understand the differences and what makes them tick and how we have to modify and shape the coaching model to steadily move them toward improvement and those health risk factors that they've indicated to us are important to them in their lives. So, I guess the short answer is that it just varies enormously in our model.



**Q Hunnicutt:** So I take it anywhere between 2-3 sessions to 12-14 sessions over time is generally going to be the normative range.

**A Vandegrift:** Yes. In fact, we average 4-6 one-on-one coaching interactions per employee per year.

**Q Hunnicutt:** These days there's a lot of talk about coaching and certainly a lot of excitement about coaching on the front end. In your experience, how many people who begin the coaching process will actually complete the process?

**A Vandegrift:** At the risk of being a little controversial, I'd like to first indicate again, from our perspective, we find it very difficult to define process completion, and let me tell you what I mean. Our onsite coaching model was based on our permanent presence in the workplace. We are retained by the employers that we serve and it's our expectation that we'll be there forever, and as a result, our work with employees is ongoing. Like wellness itself, wellness is not completed in a sense, but is a lifetime pursuit. Likewise, we work over time, over extended periods of time with employees to support their efforts to improve specific health risks, to help them sustain that improvement over the long term and to improve additional health risks as they determine over time. So, our model is such that we don't stop; we don't complete; we in essence become the employee's wellness partner and engage with them as often and as much as they determine and the logistics of our client engagements permit.

I'm here to partner with you to be your ally as you work to improve your health and find the life you seek. My agenda is your agenda.





# Jay Vandegrift Speaks Out...

## ▶ On Change of Lifestyle

"It's obvious to us that wanting to change and even knowing how just isn't enough. People, at least most of us, just don't change lifestyle behaviors on our own. It's hard. We know it's hard; we know it's hard from our own personal experience. We need help, individual and personal and powerful support for our efforts to actually take action to change our lives."

## ▶ On Wellness Coaching

"Wellness coaching is the key to workplace wellness success. And again, from our perspective, workplace wellness initiatives that do not include wellness coaching will find it very difficult today to achieve substantive and sustained improvement in employee population health."

## ▶ On Coach-To-Client Interactions

"Coaching is a series of conversations, discussions, and interactions between coach and client intended to elicit the client's best thinking and decision-making to create and accomplish real and sustained improvement in risky lifestyle behaviors like weight loss, smoking, sedentary lifestyle, etc."

## ▶ On Improving Workplace Wellness

"For coaching to be considered effective, again from our perspective, it must achieve the workplace wellness goal which is sustained improvement in employee health risk factors, both for individual employees, and perhaps more importantly from a workplace wellness perspective, from an employee population standpoint."

## ▶ On Wellness Participation

"(Our results) show that at least within the comparative HRA time period an average of 46% of all employees eligible for our coaching services achieve improvement in at least one health risk factor. And since an average of 70% of all eligible employees engage in wellness coaching with us every year, we estimate that 65% of employees who begin wellness coaching complete the process in the sense that they achieve reductions in health risk factors."





Having said that, however, there is one way that we do estimate the number of employees, who, in a sense, complete our process; the way that we do so is based upon the achievement (again, this is so important to us) of measurable improvement in health risk factors by those employees we engage in wellness coaching. So we attempt to analyze for all of those employees that engage in wellness coaching how many in essence achieve measurable improvements in health risk factors. The measurement is based upon an evaluation of comparative HRA results, but does not include improvements that are not apparent from such results nor improvements measured and recorded in our coaching software but not reflected in HRA results. And again, the results are only point in time, generally accomplished over the first 12-18 months of our client engagements.

The analyses that we do we think are pretty impressive over the broad cross-section of the employees we serve. Our results show that at least within the comparative HRA time period an average of 46% of all employees eligible for our coaching services achieve improvement in at least one health risk factor. And since an average of 70% of all eligible employees engage in wellness coaching with us every year, we estimate that 65% of employees who begin wellness coaching complete the process in the sense that they achieve reductions in health risk factors.



#### ABOUT Jay Vandegrift

**Jay Vandegrift** is a founder of Wellness Coaches USA (WCUSA), and has been its President since the Company's inception in 2002. Mr. Vandegrift is also a founder of WellBridge Partners, the majority shareholder of (WCUSA); and the President and sole Member of EHV Associates, the general partner of WellBridge Partners.

Prior to his role in WellBridge, EHV, and WCUSA Mr. Vandegrift was active for 15 years in the healthcare industry. In 1995, he founded and served as President of ArgosyHealth, a national provider of workplace based industrial rehabilitative therapy services, and the pioneer of the onsite rehabilitative therapy model which provides rehabilitative therapy directly in the workplace in connection with workplace injury. Prior to founding ArgosyHealth, Mr. Vandegrift was a founder and President of TherapyCare, a leading provider of rehabilitative therapy services for the residents of facilities which care for the elderly, and Complete Care Services, a regional provider of management support services for long-term care facilities, and Continuing Care Retirement Communities.

Mr. Vandegrift is a graduate of Bucknell University, and earned his Masters of Business Administration from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

## **Q Hunnicutt:** What makes your coaching process unique?

**A Vandegrift:** I think at the basic level our uniqueness is derived from the onsite wellness model that we've developed to deliver wellness coaching directly to employees in the workplace and to engage large numbers of employees in coaching. More specifically, I think our uniqueness relates both to our process itself and the outcomes and results that we achieve. I'll give you a few of the highlights and hopefully they're not too extensive here.

First, we're a workplace wellness provider. We deploy our coaches directly to the workplace. That's the only place they go to work; they work in the workplace every day on a scheduled basis with employees making their rounds. Their primary responsibility is to interact with and coach employees—each of our coaches engage in 30-40 coaching interactions per day, maybe 8,000 interactions per year. They are busy all the time within the workplace.

Secondly, I think we're unique because we don't stratify the populations we serve, rather we provide our services to all employees in all risk groupings. In fact, unlike most of the more traditional programming, we provide equal focus on the low-risk group, because as the University of Michigan and Dee Edington has reported, perhaps the best wellness spend of all is on the low-risk employees in order to interrupt their natural migration to high-risk categories. We don't target, and we don't need to target employees for intervention. We get to know all of the employees and their needs because we're in the workplace and because we build relationships with them. And believe it or not, the amazing thing about this process is as a result of the relationships that we build and our availability and the trust that we build, employees themselves initiate the wellness coaching process.

They approach our coaches to enlist their assistance in helping them achieve the lifestyle improvements that are important to them in their own lives when they're ready to do so; not because we've targeted them and solicited them, but because they want to do it and they do it in very large numbers (which I'll get to in a second). We are always visible and convenient in the workplace, and of course, I said it before, on the clock. An employee doesn't need to interrupt his dinner to take a call from his telephonic wellness coach. We're there for him in the workplace when he's ready to meet with us.

Part of our process as a supplement to the wellness coaching we do includes the delivery of a wide range of educational, testing and promotional resources to



employees by our coaches. Now we're getting into outcomes here. We stimulate 98%+ employee participation in these resources every year with an average of 6-8 participations per employee every year. Perhaps the most significant statistic that we're so proud of and that we think is very distinctive is our engagement statistic. The process that we've developed to drive engagement produces a consistent average of 70% employee engagement in wellness coaching every year with an average of 4-8 wellness coaching interactions per employee. And by engagement, we mean that the employee is meeting with a coach on a regular basis making discernible progress toward their goal and really demonstrating a commitment to achieve that goal. We get 60-80%, an average of 70% of eligible employees, in every population we serve to engage with us. We don't use incentives at all. We achieve our levels of employee engagement in wellness coaching—and all of the other supplemental resources we provide—without financial incentives.

A controversial observation, we know that the widespread use of wellness incentives does often stimulate participation in the use of wellness resources and often an interest in improving health risk factors, but (and pardon the phrase) interest from our perspective is not action to improve and participation in programs is not behavior change improvement. That is, I guess we feel interest and participation is not the wellness objective we seek, rather the objective is large scale, employee population behavior change, which we're able to achieve without financial incentives of any kind. I think that we've learned and clearly demonstrated that because we don't provide financial incentives at all, and yet we generate exceptionally high levels of engagement, intrinsic incentives are the true motivators—like personal gratification and pleasure and satisfaction. It truly has the power to drive and sustain change. People should change for the right reasons. And it's our observation that workplace wellness initiatives that focus on the intrinsic motivators are the ones that will be able to unlock the power of people and help them make the changes that are important and valuable to them in their own lives.

The next category here with respect to outcomes is health risk factors. Our onsite process, and again it's the bottom line, achieves improvement in all of the common risk factors across the board. We average improvement in nearly 50

health risk factors, and this is in the first 18 months to 2 years of our engagement, for every 100 employees. So for every 100 employees, we will measure improvements in 50 health risk factors. These stats translate to an average 20% reduction in the prevalence rate of each of the major health risk categories over the early years of our program.

In addition, we have been able to modify our onsite process to include a coach focus on injury prevention and the management of workplace injuries. And in those instances where we provide these workplace injury coaching services as supplemental to our basic wellness focus, we generally achieve significant reductions in the incidence and cost of workplace injuries. For example, in a long-term study of three of our clients, each in a different business classification and in multiple locations, we showed an average decline of 30% in the cost of workplace injury.

I guess finally, and everybody talks about it, is ROI. This year we engaged Thompson Rueters, Ron Goetzl is our lead consultant. In this relationship, we've licensed their health and productivity management ROI tool to use to analyze samples of our customer population. As you know, that's a predictive rather than a retrospective model based on actual improvements in risk factors. One of the samples of studies that we did with Thompson, for example, was a multi-employer study of a broad cross-section of our customers and in that study we achieved absolute savings of approximately \$900 per year over a 5-year period for not just the employees that participated, but that \$900 was a \$900 average for every single employee that was eligible in the employee population we served which was 100% of the employees.



**Q Hunnicutt:** So it was spread out over the entire employee base?

**A Vandegrift:** Right. So, I think there's a quick list of some of the highlights that we think distinguish us in the marketplace.

**Q Hunnicutt:** I take it from our conversation that you are assuming that participation and participant satisfaction are part and parcel of the process and you get on to things that are more pressing from a business and health perspective?

**A Vandegrift:** Yes, absolutely. You hit the nail on the head. The bottom line, the ultimate measure of wellness coaching success, the reason that we exist is ultimately to improve the health of the population.

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“People, at least most of us, just don't change lifestyle behaviors on their own. It's hard. We know it's hard; we know it's hard from our own personal experience.”

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**Q Hunnicutt:** What advice would you give to worksite practitioners in selecting a good coaching company?

**A Vandegrift:** I'm not sure how qualified I feel to give advice regarding coaching generally or regarding other coaching delivery methodology, but from an onsite coaching perspective, my primary advice would be to carefully consider the onsite coaching expertise, experience and commitment of the vendors under consideration. There are few questions that I'd ask a potential onsite vendor to try to better understand the depth of their experience and commitment. I have nine questions that should be asked of every coaching vendor.

1. How long have you been providing onsite, face-to-face coaching? Is onsite face-to-face wellness coaching your core business?
2. How many of your clients use your onsite coaching services? How many of these also use your telephonic or Internet coaching services?
3. How many onsite wellness coaches do you employ that are full-time, onsite wellness coaches?
4. What percentage of your clients' employees engage in your wellness coaching process?
5. How many wellness coaching employee interactions does your onsite coach engage in per day, per month, per year?
6. How do you measure improvement in health risk factors and what are your improvement statistics?
7. How much experience do your mid- and senior-level folks have in managing onsite coaching?
8. What are the qualifications of your coaches? What is their average length of service providing onsite coaching? How are they hired, managed, and, most importantly trained? (I think that's a key.)
9. And finally, what type of coaching software have you developed to track your coaching interactions and help you measure and evaluate all the key statistics like participation, engagement and health improvement outcomes, etc. and what type of reporting do you provide?

In essence, I think the common theme of all of these questions is to provide an opportunity to gauge the level of expertise to commitment to onsite coaching.





**Q Hunnicutt:** Jay, from your perspective, how much does coaching cost?

**A Vandegrift:** I guess from our perspective and our observations of the wellness world, there's a great deal of variability in pricing that's based on delivery methodology and perhaps the range in cost of other included or embedded services. However, based on our experience, it seems to us that the market for telephonic coaching services ranges from \$4-8 per employee per month. Regarding our onsite face-to-face services, employers can get started with us for \$8-10 per employee per month. And we have a few customers that have very highly developed and comprehensive onsite coaching programs that run up to \$20-25 per employee per month. If I can, I'd just like to take a minute, because as is obvious, you can see that onsite coaching requires at (least on a PE/PM basis) a somewhat greater commitment than other alternatives. So I'd like to make an observation that I think is important for employers to consider when evaluating the cost of coaching, and I don't mean to be defensive about this; I just would like to be helpful.

And that observation is this: the PE/PM pricing model is not a meaningful measure of real program cost. Let me explain what I mean. Other than outstanding coaching effectiveness and process, the key to wellness coaching success from a population perspective is levels of engagement in coaching or participation in coaching. The key is to get a lot of people doing it or there would be little impact on employee populations. That's the bottom line as we talked about previously. From our perspective, the cost measure that best reflects engagement levels is price per participating or engaged employee per month, not per eligible. This means, for example, that a program that costs \$5 PE/PM and produces 5% employee participation costs \$100 per month for every participating employee. And a program like ours that costs \$10 PE/PM and generates 80% engagement costs \$12.50. It's night and day when you consider the value that's being produced, so that on a PE/PM basis, though it may look like the price is lower, in reality in terms of what's being produced, which is participation in wellness coaching, PE/PM may be very much higher than it appears to be in terms of value.

So our point is that we think employers need to consider per participating employee per month as an alternative measure of program cost. Just a thought, and we are constantly evaluating cost because we think PE/PM puts us at a disadvantage in terms of what we're actually able to produce and what the bottom line of wellness is really all about.

**Q Hunnicutt:** In your mind, how is wellness coaching going to evolve and how's it going to change in the future?

**A Vandegrift:** We firmly and passionately believe that wellness coaching is an absolute essential component of workplace wellness strategies. So, first, we see as we travel throughout the country and talk to employers and other professionals in the wellness world, that the use of wellness coaching services is expanding and we expect that it will continue to expand rapidly and substantially. However, it's also obvious to me that wellness coaching has to be effective from an employee population health perspective and also be able to stimulate very high levels of employee engagement. As a result, we see a growing interest in wellness coaching programs that have the capability to generate very high levels of engagement. The only such methodology that we believe has the capability to deliver this result, at least from what we've observed, is onsite. So we anticipate the onsite coaching alternative to grow at an even faster pace.

## Questions To Ask Your Potential Wellness Coach

1. How long have you been providing onsite, face-to-face coaching? Is onsite face-to-face wellness coaching your core business?
2. How many of your clients use your onsite coaching services? How many of these also use your telephonic or Internet coaching services?
3. How many onsite wellness coaches do you employ that are full-time, onsite wellness coaches?
4. What percentage of your clients' employees engage in your wellness coaching process?
5. How many wellness coaching employee interactions does your onsite coach engage in per day, per month, per year?
6. How do you measure improvement in health risk factors and what are your improvement statistics?
7. How much experience do your mid- and senior-level folks have in managing onsite coaching?
8. What are the qualifications of your coaches? What is their average length of service providing onsite coaching? How are they hired, managed, and, most importantly trained? (I think that's a key.)
9. And finally, what type of coaching software have you developed to track your coaching interactions and help you measure and evaluate all the key statistics like participation, engagement and health improvement outcomes, etc. and what type of reporting do you provide?



**Q Hunnicutt:** Finally, what should our audience know about WCUSA?

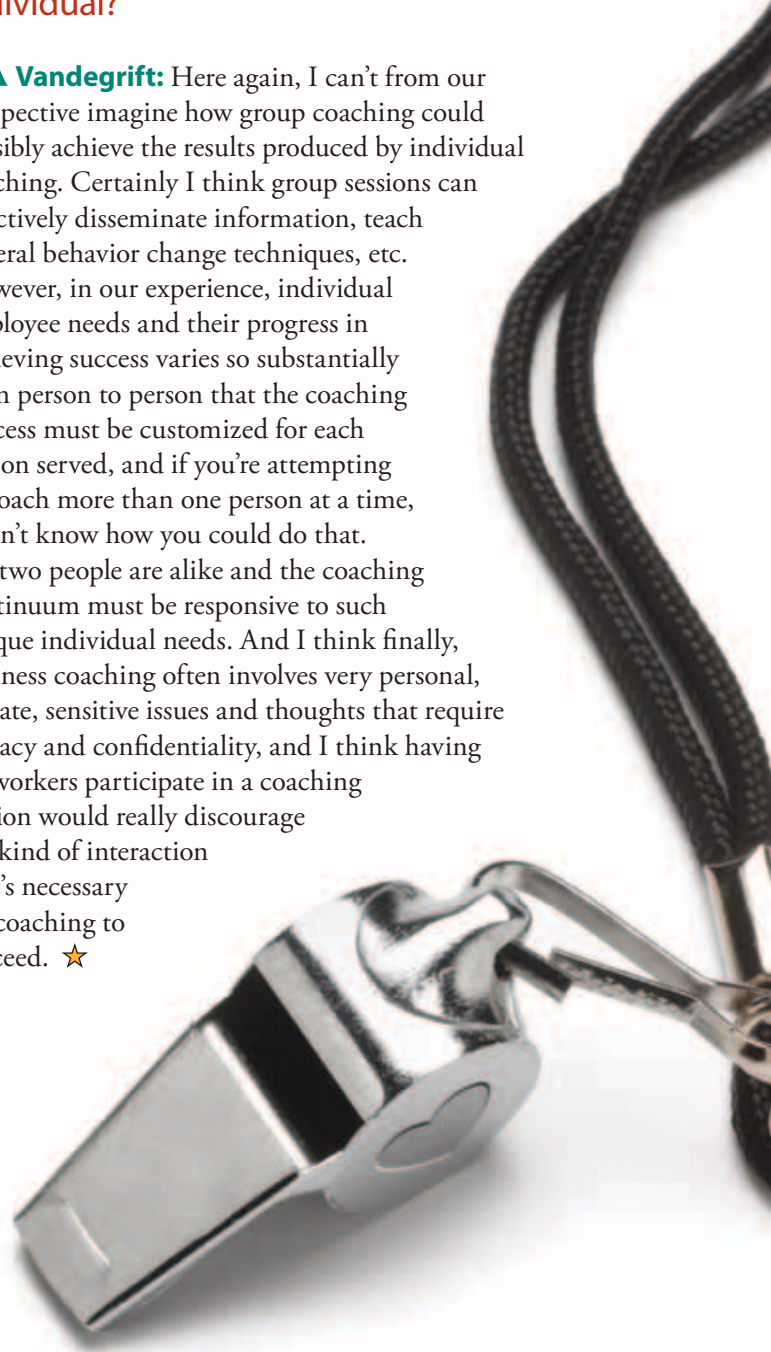
**A Vandegrift:** I'll make this one brief. From our perspective, we are a next-generation workplace wellness provider. That's because we have developed and offer employers throughout the country a wellness model which delivers the very high levels of active employee engagement necessary to drive large-scale improvement in employee population lifestyle behavior change. Our model, we believe, does this with unique distinction and, in fact, delivers higher engagement levels than ever before possible, really offering for one of the first times a practical, affordable, universally applicable model which truly offers the opportunity to capitalize upon the promise of prevention to help resolve our national health care crisis. As a result, we feel very strongly that players must/should consider and evaluate the onsite face-to-face wellness coaching opportunity as a way to boost the effectiveness and success of their workplace wellness efforts, most especially from an employee population perspective. And we're here to help.

**Q Hunnicutt:** A couple of final questions. Telephonic or face-to-face?

**A Vandegrift:** Telephonic or face-to-face, to be honest, we are not aware of any peer reviewed studies that have measured the comparative effectiveness of telephonic and face to face. From a scientific perspective we believe both methodologies produce relatively comparable results. However, intuitively we believe face-to-face to be superior. Consider, for example, how a coach can possibly get into people's hearts and minds over the phone. But even more significantly, how is it possible to harness the power that derives (and this is the essence of coaching) from live human interaction, including telephonic, if we can't respond and react real time to all of the nuances of both verbal, and perhaps more important, non-verbal communication. In fact, as we've been doing a lot of research recently, we've learned that it's believed that non-verbal communication cues are just as significant in terms of communication effectiveness as verbal. And that's just lost completely with technologic coaching. So, we intuitively believe that onsite, face-to-face is better. We do also have our coaches provide telephonic coaching in the event that employees are, for whatever reason, not able to access them in the workplace, and our coaches have consistently reported anecdotally that they achieved much higher levels of success with face-to-face coaching.

**Q Hunnicutt:** And what about group or individual?

**A Vandegrift:** Here again, I can't from our perspective imagine how group coaching could possibly achieve the results produced by individual coaching. Certainly I think group sessions can effectively disseminate information, teach general behavior change techniques, etc. However, in our experience, individual employee needs and their progress in achieving success varies so substantially from person to person that the coaching process must be customized for each person served, and if you're attempting to coach more than one person at a time, I don't know how you could do that. No two people are alike and the coaching continuum must be responsive to such unique individual needs. And I think finally, wellness coaching often involves very personal, private, sensitive issues and thoughts that require privacy and confidentiality, and I think having co-workers participate in a coaching session would really discourage the kind of interaction that's necessary for coaching to succeed. ★



ABOUT **David Hunnicutt** PHD

**Dr. David Hunnicutt** is the President of the Wellness Council of America. As a leader in the field of health promotion, his vision has led to the creation of numerous publications designed to link health promotion objectives to business outcomes.



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