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Wellness Coaching for Lasting Lifestyle Change

SECOND EDITION

Michael Arloski, PhD, PCC, CWP

Wellness Coaching for Lasting Lifestyle Change

2nd Edition



REAL BALANCE

GLOBAL WELLNESS SERVICES INC.

First In Health & Wellness Coach Training

Michael Arloski, Ph.D., PCC, CWP



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Wellness Coaching for Lasting Lifestyle Change
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As I wrote I felt like I was often casting nets back into my past to connect and draw to me learnings that I had experienced earlier and needed to remember now. I acknowledge all those learning gifts that I was given by clients, students, teachers, professors, colleagues, authors, and people I have met around the world.

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—Michael Arloski, Ph.D., PCC
November, 2006

Prologue

On the steep hillside where I grew up in eastern Ohio, overlooking the Ohio River, I used to sit on a sandstone boulder and reflect. I would contemplate my young life, and enjoy the shade of the two hundred year old oak tree beside me. Being reflective has been a blessing and a curse all my life, but all in all it has served me well.

In the mid 1970s I began to reflect, as did many of us in the field of behavioral health, on the irony of a nation where the majority of health problems were preventable, and where abundance had spawned our greatest health challenges. We were gathering evidence and awareness that what not only was killing us, but limiting the length and quality of our lives was, in fact, our own choices. All around us we saw health risks being ignored and the consequences being suffered. Obesity, smoking, stress and other factors related to the way we, as a culture, were living were being discovered to be the deadly carriers of our collective “dis-ease”.

The fledgling wellness field had begun to grow and capture a lot of excitement and imagination. In 1979 I attended my first National Wellness Conference at the University of Stevens Point, Wisconsin. There I was surrounded by other reflective souls who were not only wondering about these questions of irony and puzzlement, they were implementing ideas of what to do about it! In that wellness milieu I discovered a subculture of like-minded people who were not only studying wellness and lifestyle improvement as an academic subject, they were living it! Living well was, and is, fun!

A flood of health information began to pour forth about our lifestyles and ways to live healthier. You could hardly pick up a magazine or newspaper that didn't have an article about cholesterol or exercise in it. The jogging craze had become the running craze, more young people were backpacking and bicycling than ever before. The public became more and more savvy in the ways of wellness, yet, to our amazement, the health of our nation did not seem to improve that much.

The question for reflection that I have found the most fascinating and the most challenging, is this: *What keeps people from doing what they know they need to do for themselves?* Despite great health information there is still great struggle, for many people, in consis-

tently making the real behavioral changes that create and maintain a healthier lifestyle.

As a behavioral scientist I thought I was a pretty easy teach. Just show me the data that indicates a health risk and I'll believe you and change my behavior to come in line with what is best for my health. Right? Well...that was easy in some areas of my life, and a lot more challenging in others. Exercising and eating right seemed no problem. Taking time to relax, be in nature and spend time with my family...no problem. Get my needs met in the most important intimate relationship in my life...that was a much greater challenge! There is no denying that living well means attending to every area of our lives, especially the ones that are not easy. From my own experience, and the experience of my colleagues, friends, students and clients, I saw that improving one's lifestyle was as much psychology as it was physiology.

My deep interest in biofeedback and behavioral health, as well as Eastern philosophy and spiritual practices, had shown me the potential of our own choices. Through the subtle processes of EEG, EMG and thermal biofeedback, meditative practices, etc., my colleagues and I, in many disciplines, saw how people could exercise influence on parts of the nervous system commonly held to be beyond our conscious control. Through effortless effort people could learn to slow their heart rate, lower their blood pressure, relax their muscles, and even dilate the blood vessels in their extremities. Surely we were discovering, or in some cases re-discovering, new and age-old secrets of how to truly gain conscious control of our lives.

Perhaps some of my interest in approaches that we use in the field of coaching today began in the behavioral medicine and stress-related disorders work that I did for two decades after graduate school. Like coaching, there was an emphasis on awareness, tracking, practicing various relaxation techniques, and reporting in to be held accountable for progress. The results were very measurable, and for the most part, extremely successful!

Clients who had experienced little, if any, success with conventional medicine were finally able to reduce or prevent their headaches, calm their digestive systems, conquer insomnia, minimize anxiety, and more. Central to the approach was educating clients about their challenges (many had no idea how a migraine headache came about

or functioned, even after years of treatment) and empowering them to take charge of their own health. Seeing them tap into their own potential for self-regulation was extremely rewarding.

Working with individuals who were motivated to practice relaxation by the positive pay-off of pain reduction, increased sleep, and noticeable improvement in their lives was one thing. Helping people to adopt new behaviors and make it a regular part of their lifestyles was a bigger challenge. When I stepped beyond the treatment-oriented world of behavioral medicine and into the bigger world of wellness, the answers became much more elusive.

Inspired and educated by that 1979 wellness conference, our campus medical director and I brought the wellness concept to Miami University's campus in Oxford, Ohio. We focused on the residence hall system and introduced a health risk assessment and a wellness-environment residence hall program. I began teaching undergrad and graduate classes in wellness and soon began presenting regularly at The National Wellness Conference.

As anyone who works with campus wellness knows, combating the immortality mentality of undergraduates is challenging to say the least! Yet, by inspiring personal growth as well as personal responsibility, and fostering a residential environment with healthy, wellness-oriented norms, we experienced some success.

At the same time my love for the natural world helped me see the connections between lifestyle and environment. I began writing and presenting about the environmental dimension of wellness, helping people see how their own behavioral choices affected not only their own health, but the health of the planet. Contact with the natural world also has a positive effect on our mind, body and spirit. Nancy Rehe and I, at the urging of the president of the Global Tomorrow Coalition, founded a non-profit organization to further these environmental wellness goals.

My attraction to psychology, even as a freshman in college, had always been to the humanistic aspects of the field. The work of Abraham Maslow, Fritz Perls, Carl Rogers, Virginia Satir and others was my earliest draw to wellness as they wrote about self-actualization. In the mid-1990s I discovered that a whole new profession that embraced many of the principles of holism, self-actualization and human poten-

tial was developing. The field of personal and professional coaching was getting off the ground and I jumped on board.

Here was an approach to working with people that was about possibilities, not pathology. Here was an approach that held the client to be whole and complete, as they were, right before you. Here was an approach that fostered insight and integration, and then asked the client, “OK, so how can you apply that to your life?”

As I received training in coaching I enjoyed the differences between it and counseling. I saw the value of both, and will always be a powerful advocate of counseling and therapy when it is the method of choice, because I know it works. I deepened my work in coaching and became the Director of Wellness Coaching for The Institute For Life Coach Training.

The blending of wellness and coaching was a natural extension of who I am, and who I had become. For all of our efforts at influencing groups to become healthier through influencing their norms, through wellness education, through incentives and promotions, we saw some success, but many in the wellness and healthcare fields felt disappointment.

Today, with the outrageous (but unfortunately accurate) statistics telling us of epidemic levels of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and more, combined with the once-again increasing costs of healthcare, solutions are desperately sought. Perhaps the time has come to work on wellness one person at a time.

Wellness professionals are not typically educated in all the interpersonal skills that it takes to work one-on-one. Counselors and others who begin training in the field of coaching may be familiar with holistic health, but are usually not aware of the principles and methods of lifestyle change developed by the wellness profession/industry.

Fritz Perls loved to play on the words of Sigmund Freud about dreams. Freud said that dreams were the “royal road to the unconscious.” Perls liked to say that dreams were the “royal road to integration.” Perhaps our dream here is one of integration. Perhaps our dream is to develop a new profession that integrates the best of wellness and coaching. Perhaps our dream is to develop qualified professionals who can be the allies that people have long needed to make lasting lifestyle behavioral change.

Introduction

Imagine you are a person who is ready to change your life. Imagine that you want to feel fulfilled in some areas that now seem wanting, or even empty. While certain dimensions of your life are satisfying, even rich, others are a source of frustration at best, and increasing illness and loss at worst.

Imagine that you have expended, over the years, great energy to change and to grow. You have succeeded in some areas but other areas feel like boggy swamps where your progress is like walking knee-to-thigh-deep in failure, sadness, regret and perhaps even self-loathing.

Others have tried to help. At times you reached out to them and got information and treatment that kept you going. They may have given you all manner of advice and criticism while imploring and cheering you on. All the motivation seemed based on their own agendas for your life. Despite their efforts, and yours to work with them, you once again feel like you are essentially alone and still bogged down in that swamp.

Now imagine that you begin talking with someone who approaches the process of helping you in an entirely different way. They listen to you—truly listen—not just waiting for their turn to talk. You feel they hear and understand you. Rather than stand above you they stand beside you and with you as an ally. Their agenda is your agenda.

This person does not live with you or work with you, they work for you. You employ them to help you find your way through that swamp that impedes your progress. They require you to look into yourself, to acknowledge your strengths and build upon them in order to confront your fears. They ask questions not so much to gain information, as to require you to seek answers from within yourself, to benefit yourself.

They come equipped with tools that help you take stock of your life and with effective methods for change. They acknowledge that you are ready to make those changes and they ask your permission to delve deeper and push you further. You are treated with respect and compassion, while you are confronted and challenged to do your best. When you make a commitment for action, they help you hold yourself accountable so that you will accomplish your goals in the time frame you allocate.

This person goes beyond gathering information and stresses mo-

tivation, helping you find within yourself the motivation needed to initiate, sustain and maintain change. They are there to celebrate your success with you. They are your coach.

Lifestyle Change

Over half of what affects your health is your choice of lifestyle. The way you live your life largely determines the level of health with which you get to experience your life. Perhaps this awareness comes slowly, over years of self-awareness and learning about health and wellness and perhaps it comes quickly, in that teachable moment when you receive a diagnosis or in some way encountered a health challenge.

Most of us have had the experience of being diagnosed and treated or have been to a health-educator who implored us to change our lifestyle behavior. This often magnifies our problems and our own sense of failure. These solitary efforts at change are not easy. To quote Pat Williams, the founder of the Institute for Life Coach Training, “If you could have done it by yourself, you probably would have done it by now.” There is the growing awareness that people need an ally to work with, and that wellness is a very individual and personal issue.

Worldwide there is tremendous interest in living happier, healthier lifestyles. Wellness products and services are among the fastest growing economic areas. People are fascinated with spas and magazines that promote living a more simple and healthy lifestyle. The popularity of classes in yoga, Pilates, Tai-Chi, and related methods are at an all-time high. Restaurant menus offer more healthy, lower-carbohydrate, lower-fat, and vegetarian options. Paul Zane Pilzer’s book *The Wellness Revolution*, calls wellness “the next trillion-dollar industry.”

Vigorous in healthier lifestyles is present in spades, but what is really driving our wellness revolution is the phenomenally increasing cost of healthcare. Around the world companies embrace wellness to help with increasing productivity, lowering absenteeism, employee turnover, etc. In the United States where healthcare reform is only beginning, the employer and the employee are both alarmed at how much of their corporate or individual budget goes into the cost of healthcare services and insurance.

Seen as an actual threat to the health of the economy, not just people, reducing healthcare costs has spawned many experiments. Know-

ing that amazing amounts of money are lost when patients do not comply with treatment plans disease management firms have proven their worth by providing coaching and coach-like services that improve patient compliance or adherence. We know from the research of the field of Lifestyle Medicine that lifestyle behavior directly affects the course of many illnesses for the better or for the worse. For many years the health promotion field has contended that over half of what affects the health of a population is lifestyle choices. Now is the time for implementing effective ways of changing lifestyle behavior and making it last.

Yet, more and better health information is not enough. Spending a day or a week at a spa, while enjoyable and perhaps even helpful, does not usually effect a lasting change in lifestyle habits. The process of changing human behavior is complex. Slowly, we are looking to those who have studied human behavior, lifestyle and wellness, for the answers. Many effective methods have been discovered and now they need to be implemented so more people can enjoy better lives.

Coaching

The field of personal and professional coaching is well established and continues to grow worldwide. The International Coaching Federation, which sets standards of certification, provides professional development and education in the field, holds annual conferences in the United States, Europe and Australia/Asia. Coaches now work with business executives, managers, small business owners and entrepreneurs, career professionals, artists, parents, students, families, and more to help fulfill a wide variety of missions and objectives. The coach approach has been found valuable not only to one's business and career, but to develop leadership, deepen character, and help people become the architects of healthy, rewarding lives.

Drawing upon the roots of counseling and psychotherapy, management and human development, the coaching profession saw rapid growth in the early 1990s. (For an excellent review see "The History and Evolution of Life Coaching," chapter two, in *Therapist As Life Coach* by Williams and Davis). What evolved was a realization that much of the work being done in coaching was life coaching. Often one's effectiveness and success at work stemmed not from knowing

how to do the job better, but from working with the person's belief systems (especially beliefs about themselves), their interpersonal relationships, and their way of living—their lifestyle.

People found that having an ally who could engage them in possibility thinking, hold them accountable to complete their plans and challenge them to be their very best resulted in real growth, real movement, and often, career/business success as well.

As a coaching and wellness professional, I saw the natural fit and the alliance that needed to be created between the fields. It was like knowing two very different people in a small town who cared deeply—passionately—about the same area of interest, but who would walk obliviously past each other day after day. It seemed obvious to everyone else that they would have a great deal to give to each other. I saw the connections and similarity and have worked to introduce wellness to coaching.

Coaching, at its very foundation, is wellness oriented. Coaching holds the client to be a whole individual, responsible for his or her own choices. According to the Coaches Training Institute, “coaching is a powerful alliance designed to forward and enhance the lifelong process of human learning, effectiveness, and fulfillment.” Work is done looking at the client's entire life.

As I wrote about wellness coaching and began presenting about the subject, I discovered a few pioneers out there who, like me, had a long-time interest and/or background in health and wellness, and were purposely applying the skills of coaching to helping people with health and lifestyle goals. The fledgling specialty of wellness coaching had taken flight.

Taking Wellness One-On-One

I regularly found myself talking with health educators, nurses, and various wellness professionals who were becoming discouraged at the ineffectiveness of their efforts to help people live more wellness-oriented lifestyles. The nurses would say “I tell them exactly what they need to do, and they (the clients/patients) don't do it!” The health educators would add “We do great programs in health promotion and have wonderful facilities available, yet so many of the people who really need to use the facilities and make changes in their lives never do!”

These wellness professionals also talk about how, increasingly, they were being asked to work individually with employees who were at high health risk. They found that the same prescribe and treat and educate and implore methods they used with large groups showed little or, at best, sporadic success. Their years of professional schooling and training had never included the training in interpersonal skills that are needed when working one-on-one.

Discovering coaching skills, for these professionals, was a true deliverance. Even health professionals whose contact with clients was limited to fifteen minutes at a time found tremendous value in applying the skills of coaching to their work.

Today wellness coaching is finding application in hospitals, clinical practices, company wellness programs, EAPs, insurance companies, spas and with the individual consumer. In the larger picture there is a shift occurring towards individualizing wellness. Using sophisticated wellness assessments and possessing improved one-on-one skills helps us create realistic wellness plans for individuals. We are better able to serve the health and well being of people who want (and often need) to benefit from lifestyle improvement.

In 2006, Anne Helmke, then with the National Wellness Institute wrote the quote below noting the paradigm shift within the wellness field to embrace coaching. Indeed since I started presenting on the topic of wellness coaching in the late 1990's at The National Wellness Conference we have witnessed a real surge of programs implementing wellness coaching. The same conference now offers an extensive track of wellness programs each year. The shift has already happened!

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

Mapping The Course

The intention of this book is to create a resource that helps people create lasting lifestyle change through the process of wellness coaching. While there will be some lifestyle improvement information contained in this work, the emphasis is not how to be well, but rather on how to work as a professional ally with people who want to be well.

As in any journey, we want to begin by becoming well-oriented and well-grounded in where we are, who we are, and what we want to do. We will begin with a foundation in some of the best theoretical concepts about how people change their behavior. This is based on the humanistic contributions of Abraham Maslow and adapted to use in wellness coaching.

We will then ground ourselves in an understanding of the wellness principles essential to working with lifestyle improvement. Drawing upon some of the classic contributions of pioneers and leaders in the wellness field will prepare you to venture further into the integration of wellness and coaching.

The trend is moving toward the individualization of wellness and the current models for wellness work are shifting. In applying the coach approach to the wellness field, you will discover a process for taking wellness one-on-one and the benefits of acquiring such skills.

Then it is time to lift your pack, put on your walking shoes, roll up your sleeves and begin your exploration of just what wellness coaching is, what skills are involved, how to learn them, and how to use them. We will thoroughly cover these skills and provide you with tools and resources for further learning and your application of what you have learned.

From this new vista, further down the trail, we'll look out at how the field of wellness coaching is being applied by fellow travelers who are out there contributing to the field and helping people around the world to be well.

This journey doesn't have an "X" on the map where the trail ends, instead, we'll take a good look at what lies ahead and do our best to speculate on what might be around the next bend, or at least, what we'd love to see there.

Happy trails!