

**Guest Column: Professional Coaching**



March 17, 2008

**Fitness Expert to Professional Coach...  
*a journey of growth and lasting change***

"Most fitness experts have been taught to focus on getting clients to comply with their expert advice, rather than fostering the personal growth needed to underpin their confidence in being successful," writes Margaret Moore, BS, MBA, the founder & CEO of Wellcoaches Corporation.

**We are fortunate to live in the era of emerging consumer-directed health**, kicked off by leading thinker and professor Regina Herzlinger at Harvard Business School, whose three books on consumer-driven healthcare since 1999 challenge us to innovate and enable the consumer to become the boss of health and well-being.

Consumer-driven health and wellness is a call to action--the next major theme of personal responsibility to follow smoking cessation twenty years ago and before that, seat belts. Becoming the boss of one's health and well-being is a complex matter--bigger than quitting smoking or wearing a seatbelt. Especially in these times, the demands of everyday life have never been greater. We face a bewildering array of health, fitness, and wellness facilities, guidelines, products, and services, making it difficult to create a personal formula. Change is challenged by roadblocks, including innate resistance and ambivalence. Many of us have histories of repeated failure. Most of us do not believe that we can master our health and well-being.

**Mastering health, fitness, and well-being is a journey of personal growth.** Yet as fitness experts, we have been taught to focus on getting clients to comply with our expert advice, rather than foster the personal growth needed to underpin their confidence in being successful. ***In health clubs we aim to recruit and retain more members - not helping members change for good.***

Carl Rogers, a leader in humanistic psychology, taught us that human beings are innately designed to grow and develop. But there are certain preconditions. Self-determination theory teaches that people are most successful at growth and change when they really, really want the outcomes of change (intrinsic motivation), and they are free to choose it (autonomy). Relational cultural theory teaches that people grow

best through relationships – growth-promoting relationships that energize and inspire while preserving autonomy and choice.

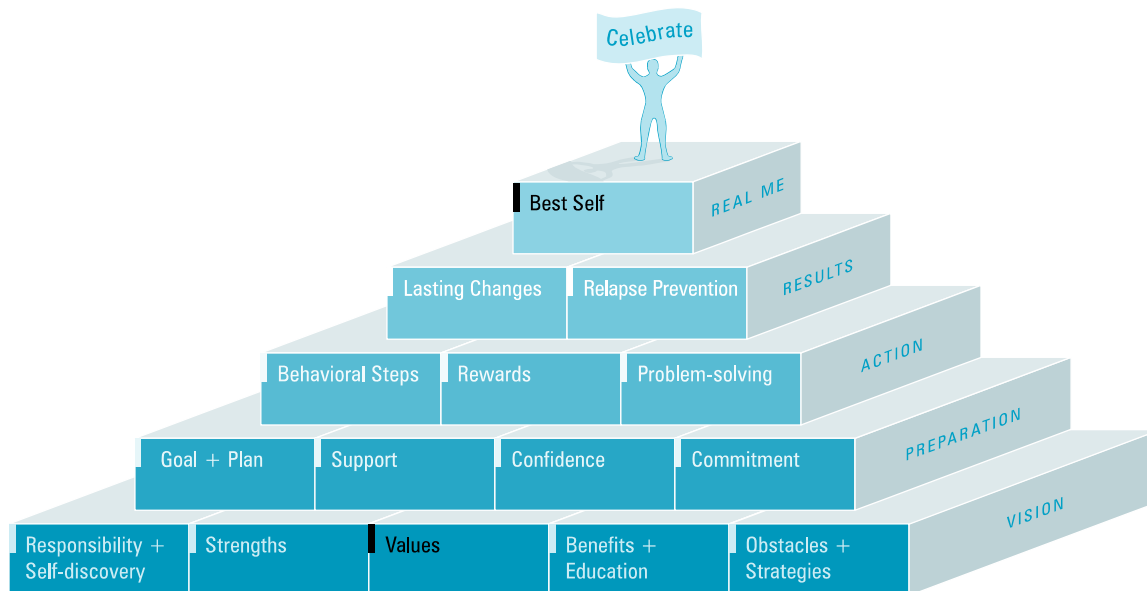
Today, fitness professionals and health clubs devote too little time to building a relational dynamic with members and clients that delivers self-efficacy and growth. Thanks mainly to James Prochaska, PhD, and the Transtheoretical Model, we've started to think hard about the ingredients needed to deliver lasting behavior change. Miller, PhD, and Rollnick, MD, designed the invaluable Motivational Interviewing (MI) paradigm to resolve ambivalence, which is improving the relational dynamic used by health and fitness professionals. MI trainer, Robert Rhodes, PhD encourages us to *get out of sales and get into fishing*. People are better persuaded by their own words than ours, innately resisting being changed by others.

**The coaching relationship is the growth-promoting relationship critical for the future success of consumer wellness and health clubs.** The emerging industry of professional coaching, which began nearly twenty years ago, has until recently focused on life, corporate, and executive coaching. Dozens of life and corporate or executive coach training schools and academic programs have trained more than 20,000 coaches worldwide. In the past five years, health and wellness coach training programs have emerged. Since the Wellcoaches [coach training school](#) launched five years ago, in collaboration with the [American College of Sports Medicine](#), our team has focused on defining evidence-based coaching psychology and coaching competencies, designing the coaching relationship for health, fitness, and wellness, and building curricula of coach training and certification of credentialed professionals.

<b>What is Coaching Psychology?</b>	
<p><b>The science of relationships designed to optimize health and well-being, founded upon evidence-based theories and fields.</b></p> <p><b>Coaching relationships enable...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>personal responsibility</b></li><li>• <b>self-awareness</b></li><li>• <b>self-efficacy</b></li><li>• <b>peak performance</b></li><li>• <b>lasting change</b></li><li>• <b>personal growth</b></li></ul>	<p><b>Evidence-based theories and domains that contribute to the foundation for coaching psychology include:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>Humanistic psychology</b></li><li>2. <b>Positive psychology</b></li><li>3. <b>Hope psychology</b></li><li>4. <b>Self-determination theory</b></li><li>5. <b>Self-efficacy</b></li><li>6. <b>Transtheoretical model</b></li><li>7. <b>Appreciative inquiry</b></li><li>8. <b>Motivational interviewing</b></li><li>9. <b>Solution-focused therapy/reality therapy</b></li><li>10. <b>Relational cultural theory</b></li><li>11. <b>Emotional intelligence</b></li><li>12. <b>Nonviolent communication</b></li><li>13. <b>Flow &amp; relational flow</b></li></ol>
<p>Visit the <a href="#">Harvard Medical School Coaching &amp; Positive Psychology Initiative</a></p>	

**While coaching clients define and decide where they want to go and what they want to work on, their coaches direct the process to get there.** Several years ago, my colleague Gabe Highstein, RN, PhD (whose doctoral degree and research focuses on application of the Transtheoretical Model) and I developed Mount Lasting Change to depict coaching processes that lead to lasting change and growth.

## MOUNT LASTING CHANGE



At the base of the 15 building blocks are the thinking processes that lead to a vision of our best selves and best lives. The next level is the intensive planning stage, and the third is the doing part, experimenting and brainstorming along the way. What's interesting is that 13 of the 15 building blocks are *thinking* not *doing* processes. Coaching conversations are workouts for our clients' brains.

Most of us are stuck in chronic contemplation, often for decades, in at least one area of our health and well-being. We tend to jump directly to the third level when we start a new diet or commit to a New Year's resolution to join a club and go regularly. If the thinking work below doesn't get done, we're standing on a shaky foundation. When a roadblock comes along, we fall back and soon we're back at the bottom again. We regain lost weight or quit the club.

At the bottom center of Mount Lasting Change you'll find our heartfelt values, or higher purpose. This higher purpose is why we get out of bed in the morning with zest. The reason we want to get to the top of the mountain is because something we care about in our lives is not going to be at its best, or not going to work, if we don't have optimal health and wellness. It's critical to get people to connect emotionally with what they want in the deepest way we can elicit. Helping them determine why they care about getting to the top of the mountain is the most important work we can do in the beginning. Then it's critical to keep that inspiration flame burning all the way up the mountain.

The top block is “my best self”... energetic, confident, resilient, and in charge. Reducing healthcare costs, lowering health risks, and changing behaviors to improve health or manage disease isn't truly all that people are yearning for. They long to be their best selves, whatever that means to them. As coaches, even when we're focused on health risks and numbers, we need to view our coaching work as helping people be their best selves. That's what they want most and what they will celebrate. That's the best possible outcome to ensure lasting change, and get beyond the struggle.

***Imagine a health club dedicated to members becoming their best selves as the path to retention through...***

- Support to build a vision and detailed plan for their best selves once a year
- Identifying strengths and talents they can use to reach their visions and handle challenges
- Finding meaning and learning on the path to their visions
- Connecting regularly to a unique higher purpose for being fit and healthy
- Celebrating success and learning from setbacks
- Recharging batteries with an energizing coach
- Enjoying a coach's warmth, empathy, courage, humor, and zest

Enough on complex psychological concepts – what are some simple tips for fitness professionals and clubs to use now?

**The vibrant ten-year old field of positive psychology has brought coaches some important lessons in helping people thrive.** Here are three you can apply immediately. First, we've learned from Barbara Frederickson, PhD, that positive emotions broaden thinking - *we're more creative and open-minded* - and build resources – *our memory works better, our medical symptoms wane, we're more resilient, and we connect better with others.* The optimal ratio of positive to negative emotions is 3-5 positive emotions (which are fleeting like butterflies) to each negative emotion (which sticks like velcro.) It's good to feel good.

What does that mean for our client or member interactions? Don't start with problems, risks, deficits, numbers—the bad stuff. Explore plenty of positive things first to generate positive emotion and energy. What was the best thing that happened today/last week/since we last met? What areas of your life are going well? What strengths have you used in areas where you are successful? What lessons have you learned?

Second, coaches are hunters and gatherers of our clients' strengths. We see feistiness not resistance, prudence not reluctance, unmet desires not frustrations. We dig out our clients' strengths and capacities from the noise and clutter in their lives.

Third, happiness – a positive state of mind and appreciation of one’s life - has a similar impact on preventing disease and improving longevity as not smoking. It’s important to encourage and support clients in pursuing pleasant, engaging lives infused with meaning, purpose, and accomplishment. Two shortcuts to happiness in the moment are to be grateful, or to do good deeds for others.

### **Want More? Professional Coaching Domains in Health, Fitness & Wellness**

**...combining coaching competencies with expert credentials**

**Wellness coach** – The wellness coach has the broadest mandate, helping people master wellness or well-being and addressing both physical and mental health. The timely advent of positive psychology, the science of happiness and well-being, is delivering behavioral guidelines for optimal mental well-being, readily applicable by coaches.

**Health coach** – The health coach is a transformed case manager--the skilled nurse who helps people master their lifestyles as well as managing complex medical issues and conditions.

**Fitness coach** – The fitness coach is an experienced fitness professional focused on enabling a fit lifestyle. In November 2007, the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Medical Association launched an “Exercise as Medicine” initiative, with a goal of getting physicians exercising, as well as promoting and prescribing exercise. A medical fitness coach is well-placed to work with people to establish regular exercise that they enjoy and sustain.

**But most importantly, in the coach’s toolbox are our relational skills that create the non-judgmental and inspiring space for people to do their best thinking and be their best selves.** We describe what these skills look and feel like to clients in our recent white paper called *The obesity epidemic: a confidence crisis calling for professional coaches*:

*Authentic empathy and complete acceptance come out of our pores. We cannot summon an ounce of judgment. We have a bird dog’s ability to sniff out client strengths, values, and desires. We prefer to listen to clients rather than talk ourselves. We love and enjoy client stories. We are full of zest and a sense of adventure. We see the funny side. We hold up the mirror with love and courage when necessary. We have the patience to allow clients to sit in our muck, even in tears, without rescuing them. We look at roadblocks as opportunities to grow. We stand for clients to achieve more than they believe they can. We take risks to challenge clients to reach higher at the right moment. We know that our clients’ lives are at stake if they don’t take care of themselves. And we know how to celebrate their successes.*

Perhaps the most wonderful aspect of becoming a masterful coach is that we grow along with our clients. Coaching conversations are workouts for our clients’ brains and call us to be our best – calm, confident, warm and affirmative, full of zest and play, and courageous. To be the partner in someone’s small or large transformation is rewarding beyond compare. That’s why you answered the call to be a fitness expert or to support fitness through health clubs and that’s why coaching is our future.

## **Club Coaching Stories**

*Laura Klein, Wellness Director, Thoreau Club*

Our three-month fitness coaching program has positively impacted new member acquisition and contributed to the club's profitability. While the majority of our coaching clients are new to the club environment and come with weight loss as their primary goal, what they realize along the way is a much deeper connection with what's behind their goals and the confidence to both try and sustain the behaviors necessary to change their lives. The results we measure (improvement in body composition, increased aerobic fitness level, weight loss and lowered resting heart rate) only tell half the story; the real benefits are less tangible and more lasting. Comments such as "the program was a life changing experience", "I'll be 50 until I'm 80 now!", "My coach raised the bar for me...there's nothing I can't do" are the true measure of the program's impact. Over 80% of the non-members who complete the program join the club and we recently began offering a maintenance program to provide the support, motivation and accountability for our client's continued success. With results like these the program is clearly a win win!

**Margaret Moore, BS, MBA**, is the founder & CEO of Wellcoaches Corporation, setting the gold standard in the training and certifying of health, fitness, and mental health professionals as health, fitness, or wellness coaches, emerging professions designed to be consumer-driven and help people become the masters of health and well-being. Margaret and Carol Kauffman, PhD have founded the Harvard Medical School Coaching & Positive Psychology Initiative and annual coaching psychology conference. Margaret is a co-author of a Harvard Medical School CME program teaching physicians a basic coaching roadmap. She is the lead author of the Lippincott Williams & Wilkins coaching psychology manual, and co-creator of EAC® (Employee Assistance Coaching); all providers are certified wellness coaches enabling the transformation of the EAP model to mental and physical wellness together.

### **Coaching Stories Contributor**

Laura Klein, Wellness Director, Thoreau Club