

The Business Side of Wellness Coaching: Part 1: Is Wellness Coaching for You?

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Columns

In Brief Author Information

The Business Side of Wellness Coaching. Part 1: Is Wellness Coaching for You?

Ellen G. Goldman, M.Ed., has worked in the health and fitness industry for more than 25 years in New York City and New Jersey. Her career has included exercise prescription and training, fitness consulting, group workshops, and motivational speaking. In 1992, she started her personal training business, adding coaching to her services in 2005. She is the founder and owner of EnerG Coaching, providing one-on-one wellness coaching, group coaching, personal training, and lectures and seminars on all aspects of health and well-being. She holds a B.S. and Master's in Physical Education and is certified by ACSM, AFAA, and Wellcoaches Corporation.

Paul M. Couzelis, Ph.D., FAWHP, is a founding partner and president of MediFit Corporate Services, Inc., which is a diversified management and consulting company with nationwide interests in worksite health promotion, physical fitness, health screening, and worksite physical therapy. Dr. Couzelis was the 1996 International President of the Association for Worksite Health Promotion (AWHP) and served as chairperson of its Professional Standards Task Force. He also served as the 2001 president of the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity (NCPA). Currently, he is an associate editor for ACSM's Health & Fitness Journal® and is part of the writing team that revised the *ACSM Health/Fitness Facility Standards and Guidelines*. He received his B.S. and M.S. from Springfield College and his Ph.D. in exercise physiology from Kent State University.

Do you remember back when only the "rich and famous" had personal trainers? The average consumer didn't know what a personal trainer was and, even if they did, they certainly didn't think it had any relevance to his/her life. Well, if you have been in the industry for 15 or more years, you can smile at the memory and marvel at the growth of the profession. Many people have or want a trainer of their own, and your services are in high demand.

Early in 2000, the word *coach* began to emerge among industry professionals, although the roots of coaching psychology began in the late 1980s. *Lifestyle* often precedes the word coaching and, more recently, the word *wellness*. Slowly, a new profession is growing, one that will likely follow a similar path as personal training.

If you are a personal trainer, you undoubtedly went into the profession with a strong desire to help individuals improve their well-being by incorporating healthy behaviors into their lifestyle. Clients hire coaches with the expectation that they can give professional advice relating to not only exercise but nutrition, weight loss, stress management, and other health-related issues that can be impacted by lifestyle change. Coaches not only educate them but also motivate and mentor them. As a trainer, you become the trusted friend, role model, and often, psychologist as well. The education and skill sets needed to be a successful wellness coach are probably already part of your toolbox. Coach training would seem to be a natural fit, opening the door to an additional income stream, the possibility to work on the road (because most coaching is done on the telephone), or even the option of a "softer" career in the same field. Years and years on the gym floor can take its toll!



Figure

Before you leap into the next Wellness Coach Training program you find, take the time to explore whether coaching is truly for you; look at the realities of setting up a coaching business. For the past few months, I have been working with a task force of approximately 30 certified personal trainers who have become trained and certified wellness coaches through Wellcoaches Corporation. Our experiences and insights may help you answer this question.

First, you must understand that coaching and personal training are not the same thing. They are two distinct skill sets, which most definitely compliment each other, but both require a different type of education. Margaret Moore, founder and CEO of Wellcoaches Corporation explains, "Wellness coaches are taught the tools, skills, and processes of coaching psychology, which is the relational vehicle for positive psychology (an 8-year-old field that studies happiness and well-being). In addition to positive psychology, coaching psychology integrates at least 15 theories and academic domains, including the Transtheoretical Model of Change, Motivational Interviewing, Appreciative Inquiry, Emotional Intelligence, and Self-Efficacy." Coaching is a lot more than just being a great motivator and good listener. Becoming a masterful coach requires study and practice and often takes years to perfect. You must ask yourself whether you are willing to put in the time and if you have the patience to work at becoming competent and confident in this new skill set.

As a trainer, you are used to playing the "expert" role. After years of telling clients what to do, we must now sit patiently through the process of clients arriving at their own answers. Although there may be times when coaching clients do indeed need the knowledge base we can supply concerning diet, exercise, or health science, this is no longer the primary focus of conversations. Rather than jump right into our teacher mode, we need to use reflective listening skills, ask open-ended questions, and give our clients the opportunity to work through the different stages of readiness before they begin to take positive action toward change. This is quite different than taking a client through a well-thought-out exercise prescription from your very first get together and is one of the most challenging parts of becoming a great coach.

One of the most exciting outcomes of coach training is the effect it has on your own personal life. Coaching will force you to explore your own wellness and answer the difficult question, "Is my life working?" If you have some challenges with life balance, often find client schedules come before your own, or are struggling to find time for family, friends, or your workouts, you will need to work on yourself first. Clients will know instinctively if you are not walking your talk, and your authenticity may be in doubt. Perhaps working with a mentor coach would be an excellent first step before attempting to expand your current business.

Spend some time thinking about how you will incorporate coaching into your current business. If you currently work for a club, are they interested in adding coaching services to the club offerings? Will there be support and assistance in getting a coaching program off the ground, and how will you be compensated? If you are in business for yourself, how will you market and grow your business while continuing to keep your current one viable? Remember that your initial marketing efforts will be time costly. Will you have the energy to maintain your current business while adding the necessary hours of training to improve your knowledge base, practice coaching to improve your skill base, and promote your new service through marketing?

A final area to explore before making the decision to become a wellness coach is how your current personal training business is going. Think back to when you first began training. Did you enjoy starting your new business and find it exciting? Is your current business working the way you want it to? Explore your true reasons for wanting to become a

coach. If you are struggling to get enough training business and think this will be an easy way to add an additional income source, you may want to reevaluate your decision. Speak with experienced coaches to get an understanding of the challenges involved in obtaining clients.

If after asking yourself the above questions, you decide that coaching is indeed your next professional move, you are about to enter an exciting field with great promise for the future. The task force members agree unanimously that their personal lives have immensely benefited from their coach training. We have all learned more about ourselves and our relationships not only with our clients but also with our loved ones. Most members agree that even if they are not actively coaching private clients, they have changed their approach toward their current training clients for the better. For those personal trainers who work privately, many have found that the camaraderie and supportiveness of the coaching community have greatly enhanced their professional lives as well.

In summary, if you have patience and a thirst for learning a new approach to helping clients and are ready to be on the cutting edge of a new profession, then coaching is for you. We look forward to welcoming you to our community.

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