

Coaching and Mentoring 2nd ed.

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Getting your life in order

Another aspect of people's lives where life-coaching can be helpful is in creating some order and discipline. Many of us would benefit from 'de-cluttering' our homes or even our minds, using our time more effectively and generally becoming better organized. Managing our finances can also be included in this context, such as living within our budget, increasing our savings, reducing our outgoings, etc. Life-coaching can be useful for those suffering from procrastination or lack of focus.

Health and physical wellbeing

Many people seem to be obsessed about their weight and/or their body shape. Recently the trend for healthier eating has become more common, with more people striving to live a generally healthier lifestyle, including giving up smoking. Life-coaching can be helpful in providing the motivation to begin and encouragement to stick to a specific exercise regime, diet or quitting smoking.

An increasingly hectic and stressful life can be another reason why someone would seek a life-coach. Stress can have an adverse effect on a person's health and lead to many illnesses. A report released in May 2006 by the UK Health and Safety Executive shows that just over a fifth of UK workers are concerned about work-related stress. Half a million people a year report that stress levels are making them ill. Life-coaching can be effective in helping to establish a better work-life balance. The case study below shows how the UK National Health Service is recognizing the potential benefits of coaching for some groups of patients.

NHS 'health coaches'

One example of what could be classed as a form of life-coaching is that of 'health coach' within the UK National Health Service.

In 2005, there were 17.5 million people in the UK suffering with long-term conditions with the expectation that by 2030 this will more than double. In particular, Type 2 diabetes related to obesity is expected to grow by 54 per cent and hypertension by 28 per cent.

In February 2004, Pfizer Ltd and Haringey Primary Care Trust launched an innovative programme designed to provide individualized support and coach-mentoring for 600 patients within the London Borough of Haringey suffering from diabetes, heart failure and coronary heart disease.

The aim of this project was to investigate the benefits to patients of a telephone-based and technology-supported coach-mentoring and self-care programme using a patient-centred disease management model in England adapted from a successful disease management approach from the United States.

The programme was born out of growing recognition of the potential benefits for patients and the NHS of improving chronic disease management. As Jill Lewis (Care Manager, Development Lead, UK Pfizer Health Solutions) comments: ‘Self-care is about empowering individuals to take actions to maintain their health. Support for self-care involves increasing the capacity, confidence and efficacy of the individual for self-care by providing a range of options.’

A team of dedicated care managers or ‘health coaches’ provide regular coaching interventions for patients based on their individual needs. The care managers, all qualified nurses, use decision support software in a systematic telephone-based coaching and coordinated care service. Each health coach is a qualified nurse, with a dedicated case load of 150–200 patients, who has been trained to provide coach-mentoring and support.

Through this regular communication and support, patients have become more successful in managing their condition and have improved their clinical outcomes and quality of life, while reducing the demands on local health services. The results of the evaluation of the programme were released in the spring of 2006.

Patient satisfaction levels included:

- 90 per cent patient satisfaction with the health coach;
- 70 per cent improved their confidence regarding health decisions;
- 61 per cent thought it enabled more useful discussion with doctor.

The impacts on the individual patient included:

- improved health outcomes;
- people felt more confident to manage their condition;
- improved quality of life with greater independence;
- improved life expectancy.

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Potential benefits to the NHS included:

- 40 per cent decrease in the number of primary care consultations;
- 17 per cent decrease in outpatient visits;
- 50 per cent reduction in Accident & Emergency Department visits;
- hospital admissions and length of hospital stays halved.

Perhaps this comment from a patient on the health coach programme sums up what life-coaching and community mentoring is all about: 'The programme has helped me, I am a different person since being on the programme, especially my diet and food intake. The care manager is very good and helps me to be healthy and happy.'

As you can see from the above examples, life-coaching can cover any or all aspects of a person's life. Sometimes clients seek life-coaching for a specific issue, such as health, relationships, finances, or career transition. On the other hand, it may be something more ambitious like creating a new life for themselves, while sometimes it's to hold on to and appreciate more what they've already got, or to regain something that seems lost. Others are drawn to coaching by a general dissatisfaction with their life or a sense that something could be better. Perhaps a more appropriate title in some of these contexts would be to call it 'lifestyle' coaching.

Approaches

Some key tools and approaches used in life-coaching are familiar in other areas of coaching, such as the 'Wheel of life' and variants of GROW, described in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. However, while the business coach borrows freely from the plethora of tools, models and psychometrics arising from the world of business, life-coaches tend to fill their toolkit from much wider areas such as pop-psychology, astrology, self-help and even hypnotherapy. It is worth noting that some of the approaches used can reflect quite specific and unconventional worldviews or approaches, such as the combination of martial arts with hypnosis, or crystal healing, and would be more likely to hold appeal for like-minded clients.

