

WELCOA's News & Views

How To Influence Lasting Lifestyle Change:

The Benefits of Wellness Coaching



Part One
Of An **Interview** With
Dr. Michael Arloski
On The **Art & Science**
Of **Coaching**



ABOUT MICHAEL ARLOSKI, PhD, PCC, CWP



Dr. Michael Arloski is CEO of Real Balance Global Wellness Services (www.realbalance.com) and dean of the Wellness Coach Training Institute. He is a licensed psychologist and professional certified coach with over 30 years of professional contribution to the field of wellness. Thousands of wellness and health coaches worldwide have been trained by his company's program, which is recognized and approved by The International Coaching Federation, The American College of Sports Medicine, The American Holistic Nurses Association and The National Commission for Health Education Credentialing.

Dr. Arloski is the author of *Wellness Coaching For Lasting Lifestyle Change*, a foundational book of the wellness coaching field used by many universities and training schools. Michael is an Adjunct Professor in Integrative Health Studies at The California Institute for Integral Studies, and is a member of the National Wellness Institute Service. He is a founding member of the leadership team of the National Consortium for Credentialing Health & Wellness Coaches.

WELCOA's News Views

An Expert Interview with
Michael Arloski

ABOUT DAVID HUNNICUTT



Since his arrival at WELCOA in 1995, David Hunnicutt has interviewed hundreds of the most influential business and health leaders in America. Known for his ability to make complex issues easier to understand, David has a proven track record of asking the right questions and getting straight answers. As a result of his efforts, David's expert interviews have been widely-published and read by workplace wellness practitioners across the country.

David Hunnicutt can be reached at dhunnicutt@welcoa.org.



When it comes to workplace wellness programs, health coaching can make a huge impact on employee lifestyle change. Unfortunately, despite its popularity, far too many companies don't realize how to fully harness the power of coaching. WELCOA president Dr. David Hunnicutt recently sat down with professional wellness coach and CEO, Dr. Michael Arloski, to talk about the benefits wellness coaching can bring to existing workplace health initiatives.

In part one of a two-part interview, Dr. Arloski draws on his more than 30 years of experience in the field to share some fundamentals of wellness coaching. Dr. Arloski discusses what characteristics make for a good wellness coach and how the process works—sharing his foundational 7-step lifestyle improvement model. This WELCOA Expert Interview brings you best-in-class tips from a pioneer in the wellness coaching field, so you can learn more about implementing and achieving results through wellness coaching programs.



Dr. David Hunnicutt: What characteristics make a good coach?

Michael Arloski: For some, coaching just comes naturally. People-oriented types of folks are usually attracted to coaching, and for them, coaching is a natural fit. Good coaches are also naturally empathic, warm, genuine and very real. They are able to connect with other people.

Also, I think good coaches have achieved what I call a 'mindset shift.' They are able to let go of their attachment to being the expert, and instead they allow their client to take the lead. These coaches provide structure and assistance, but it is ultimately the client who gets to where they need to be. Coaches with this mindset shift don't force their clients to follow every directive and detail they have mapped out.

“Coaches provide structure and assistance, but it is ultimately the client who gets to where they need to be.”



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DH: What does the coaching process look like?

MA: A real process has a beginning, a middle and an end.

The Beginning: As wellness coaches, we place a lot of focus on the beginning. We help a client with their own exploration and self-assessment. Rather than just assessing and diagnosing them, we help the client explore, get in touch and take stock of their wellness. After we help them understand where they are, we can help them clearly understand where they want to be. Life coaching and wellness coaching are really all about establishing your vision of health and wellness. We want to help clients establish how they would really like to live their lives. We help clients identify what exactly has to change to achieve that vision, which is what we call coaching to the gap—the gap between where you are now and where you want to be in the future.

“We help a client with their own exploration and self-assessment. Rather than just assessing and diagnosing them, we help the client explore, get in touch and take stock of their wellness.”

The Middle: After we help clients identify the gap, we help them formulate a plan. And as coaches we may come up with a wonderful wellness plan: “Here is how to exercise. Here is how to eat.” And of course, that is wellness, but it is not wellness *coaching*. The *coaching* approach involves working with the client to help them develop their own plan. We help them develop a wellness plan that has specific details and processes that will enable *them* to move forward. We essentially help each client create their own map to follow—one that is co-created with the client and the coach.



The Final Stages: Lastly, we support the client through the plan. We do not just give someone a good direction, pat them on the shoulder and say “Go ahead and climb that mountain all by yourself.” We climb the mountain with them. We stick with them through the behavioral change process, providing accountability and support. That is the ongoing relationship that is really the heart and soul of coaching.

“We do not just give someone a good direction, pat them on the shoulder and say “Go ahead and climb that mountain all by yourself.” We climb the mountain with them.”

DH: Can you share with our readers a little bit about the lifestyle improvement model outlined in your book?

MA: 1. Self-Assessment. The whole process starts with a self-assessment—a real awareness of your health, a really conscious idea of where you are at. Of course, not everyone is terribly self-reflective. For example, I had two clients who needed to lose a tremendous amount of weight; 100 pounds for one person and 60 pounds for the other. Neither one was very self-reflective. However, by doing the self-assessment, they got a really clear idea of where they were at, where they wanted to go and what they needed to accomplish. They were wonderful at tracking their behavior, activity level, calorie expenditure and so forth. They made tremendous progress.



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2. Foundational Work on Self. People don't often realize that it's things like social isolation or environment that are holding them back from quitting smoking or losing weight. Perhaps a person moved to a new city, hasn't made any friends, so just works all day and then goes home and watches television. When we take a look at their whole life, by doing what I call "Foundational Work on Self," it really helps.

I think too many times in coaching, we jump into goal setting. However, if we do that prematurely, we don't always set the most effective goals. They are not really the things the person would most benefit from working on. It's critical to take an inventory of your whole life. You need to assess how satisfied you are in all aspects. It sounds really simple, but it is amazing how it opens people up to the idea of, "Oh, wellness is a lot more than just diet and exercise. It is also about my connection to other people. It's about the support I get from my significant other. It's about the place where I live and the environment I am in."

3. Setting the Focus. Then you have to set a focus. You cannot just assess and explore forever. Coaches must request some action. To do that, we apply the Readiness for Change theory. That is really essential to identify if the person is ready to change and at what stage of change they are in. Going with behaviors where readiness is higher ensures more success.

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4. Working Through Habit and Environmental Support. With readiness for change factored in, we develop an actual concrete plan with specific goals and action steps. When we help a person through this phase I call it “Working Through Habits and Environmental Support.” There is so much about behavioral change that requires lasting support. When you think about it, coaches will only be in someone’s life for a brief moment—it’s really like a snap of the fingers, a blink of the eye. So, we want to set them up for success by ensuring they have that lasting support. We make sure they can answer questions like, “Who can help you with this? Who can support you in this?” You know, the saying, ‘friends keep friends healthy’ is really true.

5. Initial Behavioral Change. After we see that initial behavioral change, we often see that people do not always get the support they need. For example, if a married couple is both overweight and one of them begins working on it, the other person is not always so keen about that. They feel almost betrayed that their partner is moving ahead with lifestyle improvement. This is the moment in time where our clients really need support. Otherwise, they often give up their positive behavior change.

6. Deeper Work On Self. The next step in the lifestyle improvement model is what I like to call “Deeper Work on Self.” If we are doing this right, we help people change the way they live their life. That is pretty profound, when you think about it. We help people change their perceptions and develop their new identity. We help people to think, “I am not an overweight couch potato person. I am really a healthy and vibrant person who can move easily and has energy.” We also help these individuals through the lifestyle and environmental adjustments they must make.

There is certainly a lot they have adjust to—they may have to rearrange who they hang out with. For example, an overweight person may have great friends, but perhaps they are very sedentary. They may have to find some friends who go bicycling, walking or hiking—who do more active things. We have to help them take a deeper step here to make this lifestyle change really last.

“We help people change their perceptions and develop their new identity. We help people to think, “I am not an overweight couch potato person. I am really a healthy and vibrant person who can move easily and has energy.””

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7. Lasting Behavioral/Lifestyle Change. That is where we get into the final part, which I call “Lasting Behavioral Lifestyle Change.” This is where we really want to maintain change. For example, many of my clients are good at losing weight; they’re just not so good at keeping it off. When stressful events or triggers occur, it’s very easy to revert back to old habits—to get busy and neglect yourself. So, we must help the person figure out how to make change last when faced with adversity. Part of that is through keeping track of behavior long enough that it really becomes a habit. It takes a lot of repetition and a lot of support to “re-wire” your brain and to permanently kick those old habits.

This is where coaches can really help people succeed, I think, because a lot of people start a personal change process, but they often get discouraged and give up. We want to help people maintain change, and we need to help them make a concrete, conscious effort to gain more support. I often say that sometimes the most important work a coach can do is to help a client make a conscious effort to increase the support they need for living a healthy lifestyle.

“I often say that sometimes the most important work a coach can do is to help a client make a conscious effort to increase the support they need for living a healthy lifestyle.”



DH: When it comes to health coaching, how important is it that the coach be a good role model?

MA: It's important from a couple of perspectives. When I think of being a good role model, I think of working on what I call a "Personal Wellness Foundation."

When I am doing workshops and training people, I always say that we as coaches do not have to look like we came off the cover of *Fit* magazine. Most coaches are normal human beings. We are not perfect, and we also might be trying to lose some weight or trying to improve other areas of our lives. However, the fact that a coach is engaged in that healthy effort is the most important part of being a good role model. We have a well-life vision; we are committed to healthy lifestyles and we are continually working on it.

“If a coach has worked on improving their own health in some way, whatever it might be, then they understand more of what the client is up against, what their reactions are to change and what they are going through.”

The other part of being a good role model is having empathy for our clients. Even though I cannot really relate to someone who is 70 pounds overweight because I never had that experience in my life, I know I have felt the same kinds of feelings that person has felt. I have felt embarrassed. I have felt ashamed. I have felt frustrated. I have felt angry. That is where coaches connect. That is where we empathize. If a coach has worked on improving their own health in some way, whatever it might be, then they understand more of what the client is up against, what their reactions are to change and what they are going through.



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DH: How important is achieving results in coaching?

MA: I think results are very important. One of the nice things about health and wellness coaching is that we can often point to real biometric measures that have changed. In coaching, we can often look at these bio-markers and see a reduction in high-risk health behaviors.

For example, one of our clients was diabetic and in poor overall health. He was obese. His blood pressure was 170/90. He had recently come down with gout. He did not exercise. His doctor indicated that he was headed into renal failure. He was maxing out his insulin pump supply every day. We provided this individual with comprehensive coaching that included working with a dietician and focusing on lasting behavioral change around eating. By the end of the coaching program, his blood pressure was down. He lost weight. He was no longer making mistakes like drinking a giant container of orange juice from concentrate every morning. He was no longer draining his insulin pump. His labs were under review and improving. In this case of coaching, we had concrete outcomes we could point to showing the results.



DH: On average, how long does it take before you can actually start seeing visible progress and tangible change in the people you are coaching?

MA: Quite often we will see initial change, but the tricky part is making that change last. Most of the research around behavioral change points towards a three month type of process to establish and solidify new habits.

Many are exploring ways in which coaching can be delivered in a minimal amount of time and still have effective outcomes. But I think that is a real challenge, especially when you are trying to leverage coaching for a large population. As we tackle these challenges, we have to always measure what I call 'whole person outcomes.' But it is easy to only focus on one activity. For instance, I have seen attempts at computerized coaching that will focus on getting the person to walk more. The computer program appeared to get them to walk more during the time that they were tested, but to me that is not a very good study because it does not look at the big picture—at the person's whole health. So in this instance, how much real behavioral change happened? How much of that is going to last? Often we are not really evaluating the whole picture.

DH: There is a lot of concern among executives and wellness leaders about coaching and ROI. Is coaching cost effective for an organization?

MA: I can just say yes it is. That is easy to say. Putting the proof behind it is what we really need to do, and we are accomplishing this more and more every day. We are continuously encouraging successful companies to share their data with the world. I was recently at the National Wellness Conference talking about results and ROI in one of my sessions. A woman in the front row shared how her company was saving amazing amounts of money, and it was all attributed to their wellness coaching program. We asked if that has been published—'can we get our hands on it?' She said no, it was all internal. We asked her to get it out there. Share it! We really want to hear from companies that are doing well.



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Notable & Quotable

from Michael Arloski

On The Characteristics Of A Good Wellness Coach...

People-oriented types of folks are usually attracted to coaching, and for them, coaching is a natural fit. Good coaches are also naturally empathic, warm, genuine and very real. They are able to connect with other people.

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On Developing A Road-Map For Behavior Change...

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On How To Set The Focus For Success...

Coaches must request some action. To do that, we apply the Readiness for Change theory. That is really essential to identify if the person is ready to change and at what stage of change they are in. Going with behaviors where readiness is higher ensures more success.

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On Creating Lasting Lifestyle Change...

When stressful events or triggers occur, it's very easy to revert back to old habits—to get busy and neglect yourself. So, we must help the person figure out how to make change last when faced with adversity. Part of that is through keeping track of behavior long enough that it really becomes a habit. It takes a lot of repetition and a lot of support to "re-wire" your brain and to permanently kick those old habits.

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On Seeing Results From Wellness Coaching...

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There has also been tremendous growth in wellness coaching within the disease management and EAP fields. There is clearly evidence in the marketplace that coaching is working and the demand is growing.

“There is clearly evidence in the marketplace that coaching is working and the demand is growing.”

I think we must also catch up with academic studies so we can clearly point to outcomes and show cost effectiveness. The good news is that these are starting to come in; we are starting to see them. In fact, I am one of the leadership team members for the National Consortium for Credentialing Health and Wellness Coaches. If you go out to their website—NCCHWC.org—you can view a research section that is continuously updated by some of the best academic researchers in the country. These folks are doing a great job assembling important information, including the research that makes it to publication. Although it is a small field, it is growing and the results are really encouraging.

Lastly, we are starting to see more academic institutions teaching wellness coaching as part of their curriculum. As that happens, we will see more compelling research, and we will know more answers. **NKV**



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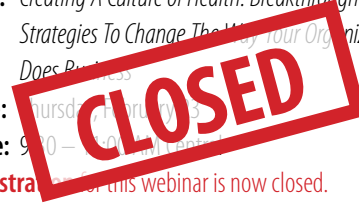
Title: *An Examination Of The Health Habits Of Americans: What's Doing What And What's Going To Take Us To The Day We Do Business In 2012*



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FEBRUARY

Title: *Creating A Culture Of Health: Breakthrough Strategies To Change The Way Your Organization Does Business*



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MARCH

Title: *Bonus Webinar: Introducing SWELL: Harnessing Social Media To Improve Your Health and Wellness Programs*



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APRIL

Title: *10 Simple Solutions To Stress: How To Help Your Employees Tame Tension And Stress In The Workplace*



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JUNE

Title: *Bonus Webinar: EconoHealth ROI: A Revolutionary Way To Calculate ROI and Establish Strategic Priorities For Your Organization's Wellness Initiative*



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JULY

Title: *The Anatomy Of A Business Plan: A Step-By-Step Guide To Developing A Great Business Operating Plan That Will Improve Employee Health and*



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OCTOBER

Title: *Fitness That Works: Simple Moves To Make Exercise Happen Between 9 And 5*

Date: Thursday, October 25
Time: 9:30 - 11:00 AM Central Time

NOVEMBER

Title: *Evaluating Health And Wellness Programs: A Practical Approach To Determining The Impact Of Your Programming Efforts*

Date: Thursday, November 29
Time: 9:30 - 11:00 AM Central Time

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AUGUST

Title: *Well Workplace University—How To Effectively Utilize Health Coaching To Improve Employee Health*

Dates: Wednesdays 8/8, 8/15, 8/22, 8/29

Time: 9:30 - 11:00 AM Central Time

OCTOBER

Title: *Well Workplace University—How To Demonstrate A Return-On-Investment*

Dates: Wednesdays 10/10, 10/17, 10/24, 10/31

Time: 9:30 - 11:00 AM Central Time

MARCH

Title: *Well Workplace University—Linking Wellness Initiatives To Employee Behavior Design: The Missing Link In Creating A Successful Wellness Program*

Dates: Wednesdays 3/7, 3/14, 3/21, 3/28

Time: 9:30 - 11:00 AM Central Time

Registration for this webinar is now closed.

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MAY

Title: *Well Workplace University—The Art And Science Of Changing Unhealthy Behaviors*

Dates: Wednesdays 5/9, 5/16, 5/23, 5/30

Time: 9:30 - 11:00 AM Central Time

Registration for this webinar is now closed.

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