

[learning & development] by Kenneth Nowack, Ph.D.

LIFESTYLE COACHING AS A STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT TOOL

It's common in many coaching engagements to hear employees share challenges and stressors associated with organizational outcomes, including burnout, fatigue, inability to concentrate and lower performance.

Although most organizations consider health care costs, they tend to ignore the fact that up to two-thirds of an organization's costs are indirect. These costs often carry long-term impact such as absenteeism, "presenteeism" (the employee is at work but not 100 percent effective because of poor health or extreme fatigue), workers' compensation and short-term disability.

Chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome and stress all lead to absenteeism and reduced productivity. Although health benefit costs increased an average of 10 percent in 2006, more employers are adopting health management programs to help control costs — in part by getting employees involved in disease- and lifestyle-management programs aimed at obesity, inactivity and smoking cessation.

Increasingly, today's most successful businesses understand that investing in their employees' health and well-being can have tremendous bottom-line results, including increased retention, improved performance and reduced costs because of health insurance, accidents and absenteeism.

For example, the 2005 Mercer National Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Plans revealed 62 percent of large employers rated health and productivity management as a significant or very significant cost management strategy for the next five years.

LIFESTYLE-MODIFICATION COACHING

Consultation regarding lifestyle behaviors has seemed to be part of the domain of physicians, psychologists and other health professionals — not that of executive coaches. But coaches who attempt to increase effectiveness and performance of clients should consider coaching for lifestyle modifications.

The increasing prevalence of work stress, job-family imbalance and chronic health problems has a direct adverse effect on individuals and organizations. In two recent Envisia Learning studies, employees in a large aerospace and public utility organization who exercised more regularly, practiced positive overall health habits and used ap-

propriate emotion-based coping reported significantly less absenteeism because of physical illness, less burnout and greater job satisfaction at the end of one year.

One of a coach's biggest challenges is to link an employee's health goals to an organization's profitability and productivity goals. Despite the challenge, health and productivity management (HPM) research suggests investments in the overall health of an employee do contribute to the organization's bottom line.

For example, individuals on disability comprise about 10 percent of all employees, but they account for more than 50 percent of all employee health costs in most organizations.

Lifestyle-modification coaching can be a strategic talent management tool to facilitate both individual behavior change and organizational outcomes. Coaches who contract with an organization to enhance a client's individual effectiveness can help focus the behavior-change effort to provide awareness, skills and motivation to become more productive and healthy at the same time.

Figure 1 illustrates a comprehensive lifestyle-coaching model based on the latest theories of successful behavior change. This model suggests successful lifestyle-modification coaching will lead clients systematically through three distinct stages, each with specific goals and techniques to facilitate successful behavior change.

STAGE 1: ENLIGHTEN

The "What's in it for me?" is a critical leverage point for coaches to be successful in lifestyle modification. Helping clients become more aware of areas of risk and resources can increase readiness for behavior change and goal definition.

A personal stress and health assessment can be an invaluable tool at this step to help coaches facilitate awareness and motivation. Such assessments help clarify lifestyle assets and risks that are associated with health, well-being and productivity.

Once coaches have some specific data about possible areas of health resources and risks, they can





assist the client to reflect on resistance to change, ambivalence or unrealistic goals that might interfere with lasting behavior change.

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a useful approach to help clients reflect on and target specific lifestyle goals that need work.

This approach emphasizes the client's values and interests, and it uses reflective listening and investigation to help the client make lasting behavior changes.

From an MI perspective, coaches working with clients listen carefully to understand their professional goals, work-family challenges, self-efficacy, health beliefs and specific attitudes linked to behaviors. Coaches should ask open-

STAGE 2: ENCOURAGE

Successful behavior change is in the planning process. The coach's role is to ensure the lifestyle-modification plan is realistic, specific and measurable. To help the client translate awareness and motivation into actual behavior change, the coach can begin to ask some critical questions to facilitate a plan for successful behavioral change.

This is the stage at which coaches begin to help the client acquire knowledge and skills to initiate and maintain important lifestyle practices and behaviors.

In general, most clients are more likely to try new behaviors for which they are confident there will be a successful outcome. If clients lack confidence in their ability to implement the lifestyle-modification plan, they likely will not maintain it. The coach should provide an encouraging and supportive role and help clients explore their feelings about the wellness journey through writing or by looking for reactions, reflections and insights in each session.

STAGE 3: ENABLE

This third phase is critical for the long-term success of lifestyle-modification programs and is often overlooked. During this stage, coaches should help clients manage lapses, recognize successes, enlist the power of social support systems, focus on progress through structured reminders and evaluate overall success.

The coach's role is to help clients re-evaluate the importance of their wellness goals and explore some relapse-prevention strategies. Encouraging ways for clients to reward sustained behavior is also something the coach can discuss during follow-up meetings, along with an analysis of the client's social support network.

The strategy of goal reappraisal should be emphasized during the entire coaching process. The coach

and client should mutually define ways to track, monitor and evaluate the progress of their specific lifestyle goals. **TM**

Kenneth M. Nowack, Ph.D., is the president, co-founder and chief research officer of Envisia Learning. He can be reached at editor@TalentMgt.com.

FIGURE 1: LIFESTYLE COACHING MODEL

1. Enlighten

- Stress/Health Appraisal (awareness of assets and risks)
- Readiness to Change (clarification of motivations and beliefs)
- Motivational Interviewing (emphasis on "What's in it for me?")

2. Encourage

- Goal Definition (identification of conflicting goals)
- Goal Setting/ Developmental Planning (measurable and specific)
- Skill Building (coaching focus on acquisition and practice of new behaviors)



3. Enable

- Reinforcement (individual and organizational incentives)
- Monitoring (continual reminders on developmental planning progress)
- Social Support
- Relapse Prevention Training
- Evaluation

ended questions to help clients see that the ability to concentrate, be productive and maintain high energy is related to nutrition, sleep and physical activity, as well as inadequately coping with work-family stress. Coaches help clients reflect on the advantages of maintaining optimal wellness and help them set some specific behavioral goals.