

CASE LETTER



Health Coaching: Holistically Empowering Change

健康辅导：全面赋能变化

Formación sanitaria: un cambio en la capacitación holística

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INTRODUCTION

It's no secret that the rate and magnitude of stress in daily life, both at work and at home, are drastically affecting the health and well-being of people in our communities and around the world. People are desperate to find ways to improve their lives and feel happier, healthier, and more vibrant. Likewise, industry is clamoring to find resources to improve the health and well-being of their staff and their teams.^{1,2} With the aging population and rapidly growing demands of modern life, this need is expanding exponentially. Billions of dollars are spent annually on complementary and integrative care resources. Many people seek to combine allopathic medical care with proactive self-initiated choices and behaviors to prevent or manage illness and to increase their overall health and well-being.

As more and more people search for effective ways to improve their lives, expert support in addition to expert information is increasingly sought after and essential for those interested in making successful and sustainable changes.

This health coaching case letter from my practice experience highlights the essential principles I commit to in my health coaching practice. At the heart of this case is the Four Pillars of Health Coaching model in action.³ When these four aspects are present in the coaching relationship, the client can unlock the powerful pathway to behavior changes that become life-changing transformations.

CLIENT CASE: MR SMITH

Mr Smith, a motivated and focused corporate engineer, married with two children, sought coaching on a number of issues. A coaching service was provided to employees at his corporation free of charge.² Mr Smith identified five to six areas of change he wished to address.⁴ Recently, he had been trying to make some changes on his own but had hit a roadblock and was making little progress. His goals included weight loss, decreased sugar consumption, increased activity level, increased openness and patience with his family's needs, and equanimity. In keeping with the coaching principle of maintaining a client-centered approach, Mr Smith was asked where he chose to begin, and he selected "equanimity." Facilitated by the coach's attentive listening and thoughtful inquiry, Mr Smith designed his own approach to this goal.⁵ He ultimately decided to use mindfulness as his path to equanimity and to inspire all

areas of his life change. Through the coaching process, he developed his own personalized approach to mindfulness, deciding, as a starting point, to directly apply eating mindfully as a way of choosing what, when, and how much to eat and to help him recognize satiety.

Over the ensuing months, Mr Smith touched base with the coach every 2 months with the exception of a higher-stress period during which he came after 1 month to boost his plan, his motivation, and his commitment. Between sessions, he implemented his plan independently. At his request, the focus of each coaching session remained on next steps to deepen his mindfulness practice and his focus on equanimity from his spiritual viewpoint. During the sessions, however, he did voluntarily report on issues of weight loss, decreased sugar intake, gradual increased patience and tolerance behaviors, and increased physical activity.

After 4 to 5 months of coaching, Mr Smith arrived at the next coaching session with an up-to-date graphic tracking his progress that he had maintained throughout the coaching period. In addition to losing 40 lbs, he had significantly reduced his sugar intake and sugar cravings. His physical activity was increasing gradually and appropriately for his energy level and lifestyle. He was effectively finding ways to stay present to himself and his family, even after arriving at home tired at the end of the long workday. As a result, he reported being happier with himself. Self-trust, and particularly trust in the power of mindfulness, led him to develop and deepen a space of equanimity within himself and across his life.

The client reported that the most important elements supporting his ability to make and sustain change were (1) having a health coach, (2) trust in both the coach and in the confidential space created by the coach, (3) the creation of a plan/strategy that originated with him with expert support and reflective insight from the coach, (4) a self-designed tracking tool to mark his progress and recognize his success, and (5) a non-judgmental discovery process whereby he could identify his own path to effective, sustainable change.

DISCUSSION

Health coaching provides essential elements to support clients in creating and implementing their own self-designed change. Through this case, fundamental health coaching principles are reinforced and we learn the following.

1. The power of coaching lies within the principle that the client's innate wisdom holds the answer to his or her own change.
2. Trust is essential. As the coach, being a person who can be trusted allows clients to more deeply trust themselves—an ultimate goal of coaching. Major change happens when internal trust is deepened. Sustained change happens when trust in oneself is cultivated. In health coaching, an essential element to effective change is safe space. Safe space, the holding environment, is a non-judgmental, open place of discovery. In collaboration with the client, the coach co-creates this environment of curiosity, receptivity, and therefore greater trust and self-discovery leading to creative solutions for sustainable behavior change. The external environment of trust, both in the coach and the holding environment, ultimately provides a way for internal trust to develop. Support is an important dynamic needed for most people to move forward with the changes they desire and are ready to make.
3. Adherence to the coaching principles, including a client-centered approach; the client as the expert in his or her own life; a collaboratively creative, dynamic, safe, and sacred space for such creativity; and open, nonjudgmental inquiry are potentially powerful and transformative.^{6,7}
4. Behavior change strategies are effective and sustainable when they are client driven. While a specific health outcome may be desired by a physician or employer, allowing the individual to choose his or her own path forward—even working on seemingly unrelated emotional or spiritual issues—can result in a holistic shift that results in measurable improvements in the physical realm as well. In this case, equanimity was the road to healthier eating and significant weight loss.

In summary, this case highlights health coaching as a powerful conduit for deep and lasting behavioral change. The future of health coaching to dramatically alter the health and well-being of our communities holds enormous promise.

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