

Health-Based Coaching: The Many Dimensions

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The emerging field of health-based coaching has mostly focused on strategies associated with empowering individuals to make lasting health behavior changes. These changes are the cornerstone in defining a sense of well-being. As in most emerging fields of human service, health-based coaching practices are highly diverse with regard to both perspectives on and knowledge about health. A diverse set of strategies also are engaged by the health-based coach—these strategies reflecting the complexities of successfully-managing wellness.

A health-based coach is likely to implement recommendations for well-being from a wide range of disciplinary categories and fields of knowledge. An important role can be played by the coach in assisting their client to bridge the gap between and integrate several different disciplines: biology, environmental studies, psychology, neurobiology and spirituality. Together, these interwoven disciplines provide what might best be called a biopsychosocial perspective on health-based coaching.

In this essay, we identify some of the areas that might be engaged by the health-based coach. In some cases, these are areas of knowledge about health and in other cases they are areas of healthy practice. The health-based coach is both a source of knowledge and an advocate for specific practices—most importantly the coach is a source of provocative and generative questions that are posed to their client. These questions primary concern the client's exploration of what constitutes "health" for them and how they can best achieve this state. Following are some of the domains and disciplines which a health-based coach might enter and in which they might be most helpful to their client.

Biology of Health Care: Dis-ease

Health-based coaches often gain immediate credibility if they first address issues related to the biology of health care. This includes addressing challenges associated with the origination of illness, and the promotion of well-being on a physiological level. Naturally,

addressing biology alone will not support the management or amelioration of ill health. Ill health, illness or disease are synonymous in the description of physiological disorders. Dis-ease is the absence of ease. It is useful to remember that the word “disease” has “ease” as a derivative. The objective from a biological level is to prevent dis-ease and support ease of physiological harmony. A health-based coach will be familiar with the common denominators regarding how we humans resort to ill health as opposed to well-being. At the root of dis-ease is stress. Stress is the familiar term we use for our physical constitution not being in harmony. Trauma is also important in conceptualizing how the physiology becomes stressed. Both of these concepts are fundamental in understanding the physiological basis of inflammation which contributes to dis-ease.

Stress and Trauma

Is trauma the same thing as stress? No. There are certain types of stress that are not only not associated with trauma, but are actually quite beneficial to the sustained health of a client. Trauma is often a sudden event that dramatically explodes into our lives and changes the way we perceive the world. More generally, trauma is associated with a specific, intrusive event or with a series of related intrusive events, whether they are emotional or the blunt force physiological invasion of our homeostatic biology.

Stress, on the other hand, tends to be related to an ongoing environment condition and to one’s own perception of and reactions to this environmental condition. While a traumatic event is often immediately life-threatening, stress doesn’t typically constitute an immediate existential threat. We are not “killed” by a pending job performance review or pile of unpaid bills. Rather, the challenging job or financial hardship is a long-term source of potential threat. Stress is usually sustained over time rather than being a sudden intrusion.

Negative stress is defined as anything that poses a sustained challenge or threat to our well-being. Conversely, positive stress is defined as anything that poses a sustained challenge which leads to new learning, excitement or an ultimate release of tension. For instance, we can find the climbing of a rock face to be challenging, but also exciting and

highly rewarding—just as learning and mastering a difficult piano score can be a source of initial anxiety and later a source of personal pride. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes this state of positive stress as a threshold between anxiety and boredom—and provides a label (“flow”) for the remarkable experience associated with the state when we are navigating the rock face or music score.

Of greatest importance for the health-based coach is the role played by positive stressors as motivators for change and guides for movement towards a more harmonic state of wellness. We recognize while on the rock face that some time each week needs to be set aside for exercise and outdoor experience—whether it is climbing the rock face or running five miles. While playing the piano, we come to recognize that it is important for us to take care of our health if we are to continue enjoying the music. We seek out “flow” and recognize that life is worth living in health. We want to frequently find flow in our work, our family and our time of re-creation—so we try to remain healthy.

As health-based coaches we can offer an even more expansive framework regarding stress. While stress is often referred to as a negative factor, it is an essential part of our life. Without any stress, our lives would be boring and would probably feel pointless. We would be living at one end of Csikszentmihalyi’s spectrum: boredom (and stagnation). However, stress that undermines both our mental and physical health resides at the other end of Csikszentmihalyi’s spectrum: anxiety (and overwhelm). Anxiety-filled stress is considered negative, while flow-filled stress is considered positive – an important discrimination to be made by a health-care coach when helping their client “manage his ‘stress’.”.

In this essay we shall be focusing on negative stress—the kind that leads to disease. This is typically the focus of an early health-based coaching session: we start with what isn’t working or that which is threatening our well-being. Negative stress results from any challenge or threat to our homeostasis or sense of normal functioning—regardless of whether it is real or perceived. The response to this threat remains the same physiologically—whether or not the threat actually happens. Just the anticipated fear that the threat will happen is stressful.

A stress response is the body's activation of physiological systems to provide a sense of safety and protection. Interestingly, this activation of protection can inadvertently cause the reverse effect and challenge our physiology—if it is regularly activated with intrusive threats. This activation is based in the HPA axis (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis) and is directed toward restoration of normal functioning and eventual reduction in bodily alarm from the threat.

Chronic activation of the stress response can lead to wear and tear that eventually predisposes an individual to disease. When exposed to intense and unwelcomed stress we begin to feel powerless and inevitably vulnerable to a stress-inducing environment. We become not just stressed IN our personal life and work environment; we also become stressed ABOUT living this life and working in this environment. We believe (and feel) that we have no control over our life and our exposure to stress. In other words, we become stressed about being stressed. It is a vicious circle – a “double whammy.”

As a health-based coach we can be of great help to our client if we address two fundamental questions about stress: (1) Is stress always bad—when is stress a good thing in your life? And (2) when stress is harming you, what do you do about it? Following are some more specific questions that you, as a health-based coach, might pose to your client:

- What physical indicators tell you that you're stressed?
- What are the primary sources of your stress: internal (inside your head and heart) or external (family, work environment, physical environment, finances, life habits and demands, etc.)?
- What are your primary internal sources of stress: fear of failure, performance anxiety, generalized worry/fear of unknown?
- What are your primary external sources of stress: financial, relationship, family, death, moving, occupation change?
- How do you currently manage your stress?

There are also several more provocative questions to posed with our client:

- Do you ever get stressed about being stressed?

- What would happen if you became healthier? How would you be different? How might your relationships with other people be different?
- What would you have to give up in order to lead a healthier and less stress-filled life?

The Perfect Storm: Trauma Meets Stress

So, what happens when repeated trauma and stress become more the norm than the occasional happenstance? Frankly, it is a “perfect storm.” As we look specifically at the biological processes associated with stress and trauma, we find nothing but bad news. Under sustained conditions of stress (especially unwelcomed stress) we become increasingly sensitive to events that are potentially traumatizing. What used to be a source of mild stress now becomes highly stressful –even traumatizing. Our mental categorization of trauma and stress become part of our daily life. Thus, we end up in a “stress rut” We become more easily stressed and thus traumatized by once-minor intrusions. The world becomes increasingly unsafe for us—in fact as well as in our state of anticipation. Everything that challenges us is heightened.

It gets even more complex and bleak. In essence, our body remembers past stress and trauma. What does this mean? Basically, it means that our body along with our brain stores information (negative and positive). Our body is prepared for the repetition of events from earlier in our life and makes adjustments (involving such diverse functions of our body as our hormonal system, reproductive system and sleep cycles). This means that our body operates as an integrated system that demands “all hands onboard” when a real, anticipated or imagined trauma occurs.

We will add one additional factor. This is the impact on our social relationships when stress and trauma come together. Increasingly, in the field of health care (and in the emerging field of health-based coaching), a multi-disciplinary perspective has emerged: biological, psychological and social processes are integrally involved in physical illness and health, medical diagnosis, medical treatment and recovery from ill health.

We propose that a holistic, integrative biopsychosocial perspective on health is fundamental to any health-based coaching strategy. The need for seeing the health care world through a biopsychosocial lens is particularly important when considering the interplay between stress and trauma. When we are stressfully traumatized, our social relationships are often blown up – or at least distorted. We tend to become preoccupied with our own welfare and our cognitive functions are impaired (we become cognitively focused and rigid). We see life through a distorted lens.

A World and Life Filled with Lions

Essentially, under conditions of stressful trauma we are running away from the imagined or actual “lion” (challenge), with all of our attention and physical energy being devoted to saving our own life. We are not in the mood for building new relationships or enhancing existing relationships -- unless this relationship can help us escape the lion (what is often called a focus on instrumental or functional relationships). It is only after we have escaped the lion that we can devote ourselves to nurturing relationships. Post-lion recovery can promote intimacy and allow us to be vulnerable, (which in turn leads to our own continuing maturation and emotional development). We can sit around the campfire, roast marshmallows and talk about our successful race away from the lion. But this can take place only if we have escaped the lion. Otherwise, the lion is sitting around the fire with their friends talking about the great meal just consumed (gnawing on our left leg).

The problem arises when we are always imagining that lions are chasing us – in other words when we are always under stress in a world and life filled with lions. Everything is traumatizing or at least potentially traumatizing. Under these conditions, it is never time to form or sustain a meaningful, growth-enhancing relationship. We can never find the time or energy to engage in anything besides instrumental relationships.

This means that we are not likely to find any meaningful support among people around us when we are confronting sustained stress and impeding trauma. We are standing alone, with no one to hold our hand or offer support (and helpful advice) about how we might best address the stress and trauma. This is where a health-based coach can be of greatest

value. If our coaching client can begin addressing the stress and trauma issues in a successful manner, then it is possible for them to begin building meaningful and supportive relationships. A new, constructive cycle is engaged.

Inflammation and Disease

If the prospect of always running away from lions and finding no time for meaningful relationships is not sufficient to convince our potential clients that health-based coaching can be of value, then the prospect of reducing inflammation and disease might get their attention. An increasing body of evidence shows that chronic inflammation causes and advances many common diseases. The negative impact goes even deeper and wider. Our brain as well as our body can be impacted: neuroinflammation is inflammation of the nervous tissue. It may be initiated in response to a variety of cues, including infection, traumatic brain injury, toxic metabolites, or autoimmunity.

The good news is that our more informed understanding of inflammation opens new possibilities for treatment and therapy that focuses on blocking the inflammatory processes. Here is the critical point to be made: every chronic disease is an inflammatory response to the body's inability to heal. The bodily inability to heal, in turn, often is attributable to the body's ongoing, distracted engagement in stress-related behavior. There is no time for the healing of bodily functions if I am always diverting attention and energy away from this healing to escape from the lion. "I will get to the inflammation reducing procedures later—right now I am trying to remain alive." But the day for repair never comes. And the diseases mount up – leading to an even more stressful life, a greater sense of helplessness, and greater vulnerability to trauma.

The HPA Axis

We can now turn briefly to the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) Axis which plays such an important role in the interplay between stress and trauma. This axis can be our helpmate when we are serving as health-based coaches. It can also be the enemy. The HPA axis is a complicated set of relationships and signals that exist between the hypothalamus, the pituitary gland (a pea shaped structure located below the thalamus in the brain) and

the adrenal glands (a small conical organ located on top of the kidneys). The delicate intertwining of the hypothalamus, adrenal glands and pituitary gland works in a very straightforward manner to activate the central nervous system. This activation, in turn, is a major neuroendocrine system that dynamically controls our stress response, digestion and immune system.

It is important to recognize that these complex interactions also control our emotions, moods, energy levels, and sexuality. While research with rats makes a distinction between social stress and physical stress, the HPA axis is involved in regulation of all forms and sources of stress regardless of how it is experienced. The HPA dynamic becomes even more complex when we acknowledge that several neurotransmitters are involved in regulating the HPA axis. Furthermore, there is evidence that oxytocin, a neurochemical resulting from positive social and sexual experiences, suppresses the HPA axis—thereby counteracting the stress response and promoting the more positive health aspects of human nature.

The Gut-Brain Connection

We wish to introduce another important (and often neglected) sector that actively interacts with other physical and mental processes ongoing in our body—and that needs to be acknowledged in any effective and systemic health-based coaching engagement. This sector is the gut (our lower abdominal digestive system). The gut microbiome is a vast ecosystem that contains many, diverse organisms such as bacteria, yeasts, fungi, viruses and protozoans. These organisms live (and hopefully thrive) in our digestive pipes, which collectively weigh up to 2kg (heavier than the average brain).

The gut is increasingly treated by scientists as an organ in its own right. Each gut contains diverse bacteria, many of which are vital—breaking down food and toxins, making vitamins and training our immune systems. Many major neurotransmitters and brain proteins are found in the gut. Furthermore, the gut contains 100 million neurons (more than are to be found in the spinal cord). It seems that our gut is a highly complex biological system—it is not simply our full or empty “tummy”.

Genetics-Epigenetics

As we come to the end of this brief journey through the interplay in human biology, environment, psychology and neurobiology, it is important that we understand and have appreciation for the role played by the basic building block of biology: the gene. We must acknowledge the critical role played by numerous genetic variations and epigenetic regulations. They play a role (in complex interaction) not only in creating and sustaining a healthy body, but also in creating multifactorial dis-eases– such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer. This genetic dysfunction is the focus of much current research and is proving to be a huge challenge: adding to the vast array of reasons why some people have more health disruption than others.

As in the case of all forms of human biology (and the biology of all living entities) the role played by genetics can never be separated from the role played by both the environment in which the neonate lives in their mother's womb and the environmental factors that influence development after birth. The nature/nurture debate is no longer viable. A highly interactive model of human life (and human health) is now dominant in our understanding of and appreciation for the complex interplay between genetics, the womb and life experiences. Adult health depends on an interweaving of inheritance, nutrition and the physical and social environment throughout prenatal development and childhood—an important lesson to be conveyed to a client by a knowledgeable health-based coach.

Nutrition

Each of us has many choices to make about what we can import from our external environment (plants, animals) and transform into part of our internal environment (converting food to bodily energy and restoration). If we are moderately well off economically, we have sufficient funds to select what we consume. Then the choices are many and the consequences of the choices being made are significant in terms of our health. In the role of health-based coach, we can facilitate the reflection of our clients about nutrition and enter into a dialogue about the food choices being made: This dialogue

should take into account the nutrients in food, how the body uses nutrients, and the relationship between diet, health, and disease.

At the heart of the matter is our inclination to purchase, prepare and consume food that might be delicious (pumped up with sugar and fat), but does not play very nice with our body or mind (inducing inflammation). Here is the bottom line: we need to purchase whole foods and organically raised foods. Following are examples of inflammatory foods (this is not an exhaustive list): Dairy, Margarine, Processed/cured meats, Vegetable oils, Refined carbohydrates, Sugar, Tropical Fruits. Most of us are familiar with the deleterious impact of most items on this list. It is often a matter of finding acceptable substitutes for these seductive entities.

We just provided a list of what we should not consume. Fortunately, there are other lists that contain appetizing options. These lists can be found in many places on the Internet—but should be reviewed and downloaded with care. Is there credible evidence to support the assertions being made? Is this list simply a promotion financed by a specific industry that extolls one food group while disparaging another food group (such as the condemnation of fats by the sugar industry and complimentary condemnation of sugar by industries relying on fats for enhancing flavor and texture). The simplest pieces of advice to be given are: (1) try enhancing the flavor of food with natural spices and herbs, and (2) consider consuming vitamins that are contained in food (rather than in supplements). Another piece of advice: wisdom is to be found in the sage insights offered by many of the older schools of health care in the West (e.g. homeopathy) and the perspectives and practices embedded in many Eastern health care traditions.

Exercise

When we turn to exercise, we focus on the way in which we engage our world. We know that brain functions shift when we are moving through an environment and when our visual field is changing (as a result of this movement). We also know that muscular activities activate other mental and bodily functions. Just standing at a desk rather than

sitting makes a difference with regard to our mental and physical state (as media commercials are now telling us in the promotion of standing desks).

The key point, however, concerns the matter of confronting stress and trauma. As in the case of nutrition, we all know that exercise is important to our health. It is only a matter of setting this as a higher priority. One way to invite more attention to this way of using the external environment for our benefit is to re-invoke the lion!! When we run away from the lion, we are making use of the energy that has been generated for the chase. Unfortunately, we often are too weak or too slow to out-dual the lion (unless we are Tarzan) or outrun the lion (unless we are a Marvel comic character). As a result, we tend to choose the option that is selected by most other weak and slow animals (such as small rodents): we freeze in place and hope that the lion will not recognize that we are nearby. Unfortunately, we haven't learned from the rodents much about what we do after we have been frozen in place for several minutes (with the lion moving on after ignoring us or neglecting to see us).

The rodent will begin shaking and shivering—a valuable way in which to burn off the accumulated and blocked (frozen) energy that was generated for the unwise (and bypassed) flight or fight. As very stupid human beings we tend to stay frozen for a much longer period of time (not being able to determine when the imagined lion has moved on). Then we go back to work or try to find ways that will avoid our lion in the future. We do nothing to burn off the accumulated energy. We don't exercise. And the unspent energy (adrenaline and related hormones) will be quite mischievous—working in a very destructive manner on all of our bodily and mental functions. So, as weak and slow human beings we must exercise. As health-based coaches we can help our clients identify ways that they can fit exercise into their busy life and ways in which they can determine which type(s) of exercise are of greatest benefit (and most enjoyable).

Here is our partial list of exercise options (some traditional and some nontraditional) (you can add to this list your own favorites): Walking, Yoga, Cardiovascular movement, Free Weights, Karate, Running, Swimming, Bicycling, Dance, and even just a little bit of

stretching—and how about shaking like that engaged by the much smarter rodents (or is this what we do when we dance!!).

Sleep

Sleep is obviously a critical element in the restoration of health and prevention of disease. As health-based coaches we can be of great value to our clients if we help them identify ways in which to extend the duration of their sleep (goal: 7-8 solid hours of sleep per night), as well as improve the quality of sleep (the goal being to spend significant time in at least three of the four stages of sleep)

Many of the symptoms associated with sleep problems are obvious: difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep throughout the night, trouble getting back to sleep when awake during the night, and waking up too early. The impact of inadequate or low-quality sleep can be pronounced and have a wide-ranging impact on our waking life: not feeling refreshed after sleep (non-restorative sleep), feelings of fatigue, low energy or being always tired, struggles concentrating, mood swings, aggression and irritability, problems at work, school or in relationships. These latter symptoms are often not directly attributed to sleep problems—having many other sources. Yet, sleep is often primary.

Sleep quantity is impacted by many factors. Many people are “too busy” and have too many other priorities and life demands to set aside 7-8 hours for sleep. Many people might be in bed for 7-8 hours, but a significant proportion of this time is spent in a waking state or in fragmented sleep (dispersed states of sleep and wakefulness) Diurnal (bi-phasic) sleep is very common: 3-4 hours of sleep at start of the night and 2-3 hours at the end of the night with a period of wakefulness between these two sleep episodes. How does one build a bridge between these two episodes? It is especially common for the bridge to grow longer and become harder to cross as we age; long bridges are also often associated with alcohol consumption and late meals.

Sleep quality relates to what we now know about the four stages of sleep—each of which proves valuable in restoration, reorganization and storage of memories and general capacity to remain alert during the day. Stage three and four (and stage four in particular)

are often not found in our sleep as we age, and are suppressed in our sleep if we take sleep-aids (especially strong sleep-aids that we can only access with a prescription)

How do we, as health-based coaches, assist our clients regarding their sleep? First, it is important for our clients to discover their own preferred sleep cycle: when does our body say we are ready for sleep and when does our body say we're ready to wake up? This cycle differs from person to person and there tends to be a shift to earlier sleep and earlier wake time as we grow older. Having identified the appropriate cycle, we can establish a regular time to go to bed in the evening and wake up in the morning. As coaches we can encourage our sleep-challenged client to abstain from alcohol immediately before going to bed (the wake up six hours later is related to alcohol withdrawal). The other obvious recommendations concern reduced caffeine consumption (none after one [pm]), and early evening meal times (the six-hour digestion period ends resulting in increased arousal sometime during the night)

There are many other paths to high quality sleep. As health-based coaches, we have identified 50 pathways (available to you by request)! The list includes strategies related to *sleep preparation* (reading, relaxation/meditation, taking a hot shower, identifying three positive things that happened during the day). We have also identified ways to *create a sleep-enhancing environment* (bedroom temperature, darkness or warm lighting, comfortable bed, pillow, sheets). This list is completed with the identification of many *sleep aids* (ranging from CPAP and other sleep-inducing machines, to the use of essential oils, melatonin, herbal sleep aids, tryptophan, and over-the-counter sleep aids with and without alcohol or painkillers). A health-based coach can bring this list (or their own list) to the coaching sessions and help their client identify the best for them to use – or better yet devise a plan to test out various options and record the impact on their own sleep duration and quality. Sleep is gold when it comes to health – and sleep should be mined and cherished as if it is gold.

Toxins

Toxins are very important when we (as health-based coaches) survey the sources of health—and the sources of both our client’s injuries and their illnesses. There are several different kinds of toxins. First, there is a cluster of toxins known as “neurotoxins“. These toxins are substances that alter the structure or function of the nervous system. There are also environmental toxins: including cancer-causing chemicals and endocrine disruptors. They are both human-made and naturally occurring—and can harm our health by disrupting sensitive biological systems. Finally, there are toxins that are often not recognized – at least by those engaged in environmental advocacy. These are toxins that we are labeling: “cultural toxins.” These are the unhealthy interpersonal conditions that exist in our workplace and community. There are also “political toxins” As citizens, we rely on the leadership of our governments (local, state and federal) to protect us from irresponsible parties polluting our environment. We are often disappointed in the policies and protective actions taken in this regard.

The Mind-Body-Spirit Connection: Plotting New Directions for Health-Based Coaching

The field of professional coaching grew directly out of several different psychologically-based human services – in particular career counselling, leadership development and organization development. It is not surprising, therefore, that health-based coaching is aligned with and makes extensive use of many psychological principles and strategies. It is even more the case when we come to recognize that physical health as well as mental health is deeply immersed in psychology—especially the interweaving of emotions, cognition and physiology.

Revolutions in the field of neurobiology are now closely aligned with (and complement) a comparable revolution in the field of cognitive psychology – mind meets brain and body. We see this alliance in the brief description we offered earlier of the biopsychosocial perspective on health. We also see this alliance operating in the close relationship between

health-based coaching and the engagement of three other human service strategies: psychotherapy, biofeedback and (the newest of the psychologically-founded strategies) neurofeedback. We will briefly touch on each of these.

Psychotherapy is the use of psychological methods, particularly when based on regular personal interaction, to help a person change behavior and overcome problems in desired ways. Psychotherapy aims to improve an individual's well-being and mental health, to resolve or mitigate troublesome behaviors, beliefs, compulsions, thoughts, or emotions, and to improve relationships and social skills. We have found that many health-related issues (especially those involving trauma and sustained negative stress) are best addressed jointly by a health-based coach and an experienced psychotherapist. As professional coaches, some of our best work is done when we help our client recognize that they need work with a therapist, while also working with us.

Biofeedback is a technique you can use to learn to control your body's functions, such as your heart rate. With biofeedback, you're connected to electrical sensors that help you receive information (feedback) about your body (bio). Biofeedback is an effective technique for training people to change the variability and dominant rhythms of their heart activity. Once again, an alliance between health-based coach and bio-feedback technician is often of great value—especially in the reduction of negative stress.

Neurofeedback is a type of biofeedback that measures brain waves to produce a signal that can be used as feedback to teach self-regulation of brain function. Neurofeedback- is direct training of brain function, by which the brain learns to function more efficiently. We observe the brain in action from moment to moment. We show that information back to the person. And we reward the brain for changing its own activity to more appropriate patterns. A health-based coach will find it of great value to become knowledgeable about this new technology and to partner with a technician (or psychotherapist) who is using neurofeedback in their work. There are several “over-the-counter” devices being marketed as neurofeedback devices that can be self-applied. We urge caution in the use of these devices by yourself or your client. Someone with training is needed – especially because

these devices will often activate the HPA Axis in response to re-emergence of traumatic memories.

In recent years, a substantial shifting of attention has occurred with regard to what is often called: “the Mind Body Spirit Connection.” This involves the crossing of significant boundaries between psychology, biology and spirituality. It also involved a crossing of the Pacific Ocean. West is meeting East. Buddhism dances with Judaism. Psychotherapy interweaves with the practices of Yoga. Stress reduction strategies are infused with the practices of meditation. The holistic health perspectives of Vedanta India complement the healthy lifestyle perspectives that drive the formulation of integrative medical practices in North America. At the heart of the new alliances are four closely-related practices: mindfulness, meditation, guided imagery and visualization. Each of these practices can be demonstrated by a health-based coach or can be a valuable tool used by a practitioner who is referred by the coach.

Mindfulness is an incredibly powerful tool in the treatment of mental health disorders, stress-related conditions, cancer, as well as cardiovascular conditions. Mindfulness can play a vital role in the prevention of many mental health disorders through creating directed and focused attention on the present experience. The connection between our minds and our bodies is something we can instinctively feel. But how much attention do we pay to our bodily sensations from moment to moment? To truly understand our own emotional lives and those of the people around us, we need a level of awareness. This awareness is achieved through the practice of mindfulness and the development of body intelligence.

Bringing All Health-Based Strategies and Tools to the Coaching Engagement

In this essay, we have offered only a glimpse at the major strategies and tools that can be brought by a health-based coach to their work with clients. The coach can be of great value in helping their client recover from an illness or injury. Even more frequently (and even more importantly) the coach can help their client prevent illness and injury by adopting a

more health-oriented lifestyle. It is in the arena of prevention that a health-based coach is likely to find greatest success – and greatest credibility. It is so much more rewarding to remain healthy and vitally alive than to devote time, energy (and money) to recover from a disease that could be avoided or somehow survive in and adjust to a work setting, physical environment or culture that is toxic. Healthy lifestyles and healthy communities are growth enhancing at all levels (biologically, psychologically, socially and spiritually). They can be achieved by any of us during the challenging 21st Century – with the assistance of a health-based coach.

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