

★WELCOA
News & Views

Changing the Game of
Health
Coaching

Christina Marshall says we can expect more from health coaching, but first we have to make a big change



WELCOA's News & Views

Changing the Game of Health Coaching

An Expert Interview with
Christina Marshall

ABOUT **CHRISTINA MARSHALL**



Christina Marshall is President of Totally Coached, Inc. and the founder of the Intrinsic Coaching® methodology. In 1998, Christina developed the concept of coaching integrated professional practices and created coach training curriculum for professionals wanting better results for, with, and through people in the context of their professional roles and responsibilities. In 2000, Christina was asked to apply this concept to the health industry and created a coach training curriculum for health and wellness professionals that had a singular focus: eliciting best thinking and decision making so people can create results that are important to them. With her methodology in continuous development, Christina introduced the Intrinsic Coaching® methodology in 2003.

ABOUT **DR. DAVID HUNNICUTT**



Since his arrival at WELCOA in 1995, David 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.

In 2003, Christina Marshall introduced the *Intrinsic Coaching*® methodology as a part of the continuing progression of her work. Informed by cognitive science, the methodology enables individuals to engage their own and other's best thinking for the purpose of making better, more intrinsically informed choices. In this exclusive interview, WELCOA president David Hunnicutt talks with Ms. Marshall about health coaching today and what this methodology means for wellness in the future.



HUNNICUTT: What exactly is coaching?

MARSHALL: Defining coaching is a wonderful way to begin. So much emphasis is placed on figuring out how to deliver health coaching and how to get people to interact with a health coach that the importance of paying attention to *what exactly coaching* is gets overlooked.

It is widely accepted to think of coaching as a partnership in which one person helps another person achieve goals by providing support, guidance, encouragement and accountability. Such a description may seem informative, but is it informative about the role or the skill? I've long believed most definitions of coaching have an inherent flaw in that they make the skills less important than the role, as if the presence of someone fulfilling the role is enough to accomplish the results.

In 2000, I led my company, Totally Coached, Inc., to abandon the definition of "coaching is a partnership," and defined coaching as "conversation that elicits best thinking." This inherently makes the skills more important than the role. At Totally Coached, Inc., if you don't have the skills, then you can't have the role.

H: What is health coaching?

M: From the perspective of the *Intrinsic Coaching*® methodology, health coaching is a series of unique decisions made during unique and unpredictable moments that occur between unique and unpredictable people. More than anything, health coaching inherently is a continuous stream of decisions made by a coach, which is why the skill of finding and applying one's own best thinking is essential. For health coaching to be good, the decisions made uniquely by every health coach have to be beneficial and productive. Best thinking about choices is key because most of what happens in health coaching is unpredictable while calling for an immediate response.

For an *Intrinsic Coach*®, health coaching is creating an environment where best thinking can occur. It is best thinking that accomplishes change, not curriculums, prompts, scripts, and software. Our long standing emphasis on skills for engaging best thinking is what makes the *Intrinsic Coaching*® methodology so uniquely effective for health coaching.

The descriptions of health coaching commonly used today invite skipping over what, exactly, coaching is and what, exactly, are the skills that produce dependably effective health coaching. Too often, "health coach" is understood as the name of a position and "health coaching" is understood as the delivery of a program, as if having a program and a person to deliver it is what will accomplish the result.

I received a call regarding a health coaching initiative for a well-known manufacturer. The caller was creating a coaching program and wanted to know how many times an employee needed to see a coach before wellness could permeate the culture. It didn't bother him that he had no expertise in coaching or that he was about to embark on a company-wide initiative without it.

H: What are the qualities we should look for in a good health coach?

M: It is important to give health coaches the ability to engage their best thinking with people while sharing the many moments that add up to create a health coaching conversation. The skill of engaging and applying best thinking is a coach's biggest asset and value and predicts that a coach's conversational choices will be beneficial and productive. This is a prerequisite to engaging someone else's best thinking because health coaching takes place inside continuously unfolding and unpredictable moments, each of which require a health coach to make a decision and a choice.

Consumers of health coaching should ask, "How do your coaches guide their thinking about their choices while they are coaching people?" "How do you improve and maintain the skill of finding, applying, and engaging best thinking?"

Without asking questions about the quality of investment made in best thinking, in and of itself, it is hard to know up front whether an investment in coaching services will pay off.

H: What resources should a health coach leverage?

M: We know that information isn't enough. With the right skills, the most valuable resources emerge from unique conversations between unique people in unplanned moments. These unpredictable resources become the palette from which best thinking is created and change occurs. This requires a different way of valuing and a smarter way of thinking and it can be learned.

This new way is described by every Intrinsic Coach® as I>E>S. It enables best thinking, which requires skillful intrinsic thinking. Intrinsic thinking is not a luxury. Without it, we're not as smart about people, including ourselves, as we want to be. For example, we humans tend to experience ourselves as interacting with a person when we are actually interacting with our ideas about that person, causing frustration when

the person doesn't enact an idea that would be good if the person would do it.

In the Intrinsic Coaching® methodology, this flaw in thinking is called *dominating systemic thinking*. It wastes time and money because it causes people to be seen in the light of ideas instead of the other way around. It's something every Intrinsic Coach® works hard to not do.

H: What's the biggest mistake people make in regard to health coaching?

M: The biggest mistake people make in health coaching is overusing systemic thinking to produce good outcomes because skills for intrinsic thinking are lack-

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ing. Health coaching can fulfill its potential only when unaware and habitual dominating systemic thinking is recognized as a barrier to achieving the results we want. Without the correction of skilled intrinsic thinking, the tendency will be to continue to do what we already know doesn't work.

The skill of engaging and applying best thinking is a coach's biggest asset and value and predicts that a coach's conversational choices will be beneficial and productive.

Systemic thinking is powerful, but it is not an effective substitution for working with the complexity of real people in constantly changing lives. Emerging complexity, inherent in health coaching, can be seen as a nuisance or, maybe, an excuse when systemic thinking dominates. Add the skills of intrinsic thinking and emerging complexity becomes a resource rich pathway.

The real stuff of health coaching does not come from programs or conversational templates and prescribed questions that direct the coaching conversation down a predetermined path. It does not come from being on-site or off-site and it doesn't even come from the personal qualities we want to see in every health coach. The real stuff comes from what health coaches, themselves, often say is missing when they sign up to learn the Intrinsic Coaching® methodology, saying, "There's got to be something missing because I'm not able to do what I'm supposed to do and it's not from lack of trying." What is missing is the skill of engaging best thinking, which is impossible without skills for intrinsic thinking.

H: What is intrinsic thinking and how does it relate to health coaching?

M: Intrinsic thinking is awareness and knowledge of intrinsic value and the intrinsic domain of life. Skillful intrinsic thinking enables building productively with that value. Intrinsic value is what is valuable in and of itself and for no other purpose. It is the value one becomes aware of when holding a brand new baby. Skillful intrinsic thinking enables building productively in the midst of infinite variability and constant and unpredictable change without becoming frustrated. Intrinsic thinking is information rich, mathematically complex thinking made possible in everyday life.

Health coaching inherently touches intrinsic processes, which permeate every moment of life and process of change. Too often, health coaches are expected to produce intrinsic results with systemic and extrinsic tools. Even Intrinsic Coach® professionals can find themselves in a system that does not support them in using their most valuable skills.

Health is not a mechanical result. Health is an intrinsic result and intrinsic results require intrinsic awareness, strategies, and skills. Change is not a mechanical process. Change is an intrinsic process and, likewise, requires intrinsic awareness, strategies, and skills. The shift from habitual and dominating systemic thinking to the smarter choices enabled by skillful intrinsic thinking is also an intrinsic process and counterintuitive for most everyone. I once heard a new Intrinsic Coach® professional describe the process, saying, "At first you're kind of confused. Then it starts to make sense. Then, once you know it, you wonder why you didn't know it all along."



Notable & Quotable

from Christina Marshall

We Often Fail To Focus On What Coaching Is

So much emphasis is placed on figuring out how to deliver health coaching and how to get people to interact with a health coach that the importance of paying attention to *what exactly coaching is* gets overlooked. **PAGE 3**

Success Doesn't Come From The Title

Too often, "health coach" is understood as the name of a position and "health coaching" is understood as the delivery of a program, as if having a program and a person to deliver it is what will accomplish the result. **PAGE 3**

Health Coaching, The Intrinsic Way

For an Intrinsic Coach®, health coaching is creating an environment where best thinking can occur. It is best thinking that accomplishes change, not curriculums, prompts, scripts, and software. **PAGE 3**

A Key Question You Need To Ask

Consumers of health coaching should ask, "How do your coaches guide their thinking about their choices while they are coaching people?" **PAGE 4**

A Barrier To Achieving Results

Health coaching can fulfill its potential only when unaware and habitual dominating systemic thinking is recognized as a barrier to achieving the results we want for, with, and through people. Without the correction of skilled intrinsic thinking, the tendency will be to continue to do what we already know doesn't work. **PAGE 5**

Intrinsic Results Require Intrinsic Skills

Health is not a mechanical result. Health is an intrinsic result and intrinsic results require intrinsic awareness, strategies, and skills. Change is not a mechanical process. Change is an intrinsic process and intrinsic processes also require intrinsic awareness, strategies, and skills. **PAGE 5**

A Whole New Game

The I>E>S hierarchy of the Intrinsic Coaching® methodology brings our thinking about people and ourselves to a whole new level and, for health coaching, creates an entirely new game. **PAGE 7**

For the health coach, the person being coached, and for pretty much everyone, intrinsic thinking changes your sense of what makes sense. It becomes a new guide for better thinking and better choices.


H: How can you tell if a health coach has received the right training?

M: The first thing I look for is how many times a health coach inserts himself or herself into the coaching conversation and the pace of these insertions. If the insertions occur two or three times a minute and the health coach begins talking as soon as the coachee stops talking, it indicates to me that the health coach has not been given training and support to engage best thinking. As a result, the coach would have to guide the conversation with his or her systemic thinking, causing the coach to work harder than the person being coached.

When the conversational insertions are few and also delayed, and the coachee works harder than the coach, it indicates the use of skills for engaging best thinking, including best thinking about conversational choices. These are coaching conversations in which the person being coached might even tell the coach, “Wait, don’t talk...I’m seeing something.”

H: What’s the best piece of advice you can give to health coaches and those looking to implement a coaching program?

M: Focus first on skills for intrinsic thinking and set best thinking, not best thinking about something but best thinking in and of itself, as a primary goal so that engaging best thinking about anything becomes possible. Without these skills, health coaches are left to keep trying harder and coaching programs attempt to produce intrinsic results with systemic means; for example, program content and other accompaniments, some of which are important, none of which should ever be mistaken as sufficient for engaging best thinking and accomplishing good coaching outcomes. Without skills for engaging best thinking, these accompaniments can even interfere with good outcomes due to their tendency to direct attention to topics when it would be better spent on a person’s considerations about change.

There can be a fear that intrinsic thinking, and the best thinking it generates, will be too complicated and take too much time. The hierarchy for best thinking, I>E>S, enabled by skillful intrinsic thinking, *saves time*. I>E>S flips in reverse what currently makes sense to create more productive conversations and better outcomes. The I>E>S hierarchy of the Intrinsic Coaching® methodology brings our thinking about people and ourselves to a whole new level and, for health coaching, creates an entirely new game. 

ABOUT TOTALLY COACHED, INC.



Led by coaching industry pioneer and thought leader, Christina Marshall, Totally Coached, Inc. is the source and leading force behind bringing the capacity and skill for intrinsic thinking to people and organizations. Totally Coached, Inc. has trained thousands of people in the Intrinsic Coaching® methodology, producing better thinking in life, in organizations, for health, productivity, culture, and solutions to recalcitrant problems. With Totally Coached, Inc., organizations increase their intelligence by activating the Intrinsic Coaching® methodology’s proven hierarchy for best thinking, I>E>S, as a powerful ambient capacity and organizing paradigm. Learn more at www.totallycoached.com.



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