

★ WELCOA's  
**News & Views**

The **Evolution** and **Dilution** of  
**Wellness  
Coaching**

The Value of Coaching  
in Today's Industry

PART 2

A WELCOA Expert Interview with Dr. Michael Arloski

# WELCOA's News & Views

## The Evolution and Dilution of Wellness Coaching: The Value of Coaching in Today's Industry

(PART 2)

An Expert Interview with  
**MICHAEL ARLOSKI**

### ABOUT MICHAEL ARLOSKI



Michael Arloski, Ph.D., PCC, CWP, is a licensed psychologist, Professional Certified Coach (ICF) and a Certified Wellness Practitioner. Founder and CEO of Real Balance Global Wellness Services, Inc. ([www.realbalance.com](http://www.realbalance.com)), his company has trained thousands of health and wellness coaches around the world. Dr. Arloski's perspective on wellness coaching comes from his pioneering work training wellness and health coaches, authoring the field's foundational book *Wellness Coaching For Lasting Lifestyle Change*, and serving as an Executive Committee member of The National Consortium for Credentialing Health & Wellness Coaches. A member of the Board of Directors of The National Wellness Institute he has also served as President of The Ohio Society For Behavioral Health.

Professionally contributing to the field of wellness since 1979 Dr. Michael Arloski is a thinker who synthesizes wellness down to what really works. Continually working to help people find ways to improve their lifestyles, he has presented at the National Wellness Conference over thirty times, and has keynoted and presented on wellness on four continents. Michael's mission is to build allies for a healthy world across the globe.

Michael and his wife, Deborah, work, live and play together in Fort Collins, Colorado.

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### ABOUT RYAN PICARELLA



As WELCOA's new President, Ryan brings immense knowledge and insight from his career that spans over a decade in the health and wellness industry. He is a national speaker, healthcare consultant, and has designed and executed award winning wellness programs. Known for his innovative and pragmatic approach to worksite wellness, Ryan looks forward to furthering the WELCOA mission and vision and continuing to position the organization for success for the future.

Ryan Picarella can be reached at [rpicarella@welcoa.org](mailto:rpicarella@welcoa.org).

In Part 2 of this insightful conversation about wellness coaching for today's health promotion program, Michael Arloski provides ideas you can use right now. Whether you are interested in becoming a wellness coach or interested in working with a wellness vendor, you'll benefit from these strategies for incenting for wellness coaching, integrating health coaching with other program offerings, and choosing the best of the best coaching certifications and training programs.



**Q1** Michael, in Part 1 of your interview, we talked about the current state of wellness, and you described some potential barriers that the industry faces. Today, let's tackle the best ways to position wellness coaching for success as the health and wellness industry evolves. So, do you think health coaching then is for anyone—whether they are anywhere on the continuum from very sick to very well? Can everyone benefit?

**Michael Arloski:** Everyone can benefit from having their own wellness plan and maintaining their good health, because without the conscious effort to be healthy, they are probably not going to succeed at maintaining it. We see too much of what Dee Edington likes to call migration from low risk individual to high risk individual. His contention that everyone can use a wellness coach is a good one.

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Now, does everyone need a wellness coach? I would say not really. I would say the very self-directed person who has enough support and not much in the way of barriers can—and often does—succeed at lifestyle change. It would be wise to look at how we can provide a different kind of level of lifestyle improvement offerings to people and reach people at the level that is appropriate to their needs.

There are some people who function well and have enough self-efficacy that all they may be working on is one single behavior like being more physically active. Research is starting to show if we just send some tailored text messages to them as reminders to help them track it and stay inspired then they can be successful.

Many other people are going to need a whole lot more. For many of the people we are trying to reach the need for an ally who can provide structure, proven methodology for behavioral change and the support and accountability needed for success will always drive individual and group coaching. Getting through internal and external barriers is difficult to do on your own.

**Q2** Let's talk about how we currently encourage employees to utilize wellness coaching. What are your thoughts on incentives? I think a lot of organizations have struggled with the whole carrot versus stick. Do you think that participants should be incented to participate in health coaching opportunities?

**MA:** The incentive debate is a huge one right now, as we know. And I think companies have to take a really close look at this because, if a company is spending more money on incentives than they are spending on their wellness program, there is something terribly wrong. That is not really effective thinking about how to help people improve their lives. We want to put our dollars into comprehensive wellness programs that work which include wellness and health coaching and find effective methods to drive engagement.

One of the challenges that I hear all the time from coaches that I train is when people are incented to come to a health coaching/wellness-coaching program, it is pretty much something that they resent having to do in order to get that discount on their health insurance or whatever it might be. If people are participating just to play a game (like I said, resentfully), get their prize, quit the game, and go home, nobody has accomplished anything. It is like paying for a health risk assessment that is never interpreted to anybody.

What we have been trying our best to do is train coaches really well in how to meet that resentful incentivized client. Meet them with

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plenty of empathy and understanding and work with them to create a genuine alliance. When that happens we can say the incentive at least got them through the door.

**Q3** Yeah, I agree that the goal is certainly to make sure that motivation becomes intrinsic, even if the employee was there for an extrinsic purpose initially.

**MA:** Yeah, I mean there is abundant evidence that arriving at intrinsic motivation is exactly what we want to have happen so that individuals are doing it for themselves. They are doing it for the sheer joy and experience of it, and they really feel the benefits of improving their lives and their lifestyle. That is what we want to get to.

**Q4** Absolutely. So how do you think that the value proposition of health coaching has changed? I know in the wellness industry, there is a search for the Holy Grail of ROI (Return on Investment). Is ROI really the important thing to be looking at? Or would you suggest maybe there are other more important things that would lead to some better outcomes than just trying to stay focused on return on investment?

**MA:** Well that is really two questions. To me, the value proposition has not changed. The value proposition of coaching is incredibly attractive. Having an ally to assist you in the lifestyle improvement process is immensely beneficial. The value is seen in many ways including reduced health care costs, improved performance, lower absenteeism, and personal thriving. What has changed and is changing is the way coaching is offered. This is where the value is diminished and sometimes significantly diminished.

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The need for people to improve their lives is always going to be there and I think wellness coaching makes a great value proposition in that regard. The way we offer it, are we offering it adequately with enough quality? Or are we searching, like I have been told many times, for the minimum number of minutes that will still produce a measurable outcome? We are seeing organizations often cutting back the number of minutes in a coaching session, or the number of coaching sessions available to the client. Companies seem to want minimum coaching contact with the same coaching results. When it comes to wellness we are talking whole-person well being. ROI may be too simplistic a measure for looking at this. We can measure reductions in health costs, etc., but it's challenging to measure the savings in what didn't happen, that is, prevention.

I think something we really have to remember is that as we look for evidence to justify any program, one of the problems with research on any kind of human-helping profession is that it is not single variable research, a nice little contained study that fits neatly in the journal article. We are dealing with real live human beings. And they have very complex lives. Changing behavior, as a psychologist I can tell you, is not the same as doing research on a single variable.

I think we have to really look through the eyes of a behavior change specialist like a psychologist, not through the eyes of the accounting department, when we are talking about being effective at helping people change behavior and improve their lives. Does that make sense?

“The need for people to improve their lives is always going to be there **and I think wellness coaching makes a great value proposition in that regard.**”

**Q5** That makes perfect sense. Let us talk about integration in holistic programs. I think there is definitely a push to really approach the whole person, and I think this is where health coaching fits in beautifully with the future of wellness and wellness programming. How have you seen health coaching integrated into other components of comprehensive wellness programs?

**MA:** Yeah, I think coaching really works best when it is part of a comprehensive wellness program. Imagine a three legged stool where coaching is the delivery mechanism, but you have also got to have

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an education component. And you also have to have a culture access facility type of component as well. People have to have the opportunity for being well, and we have to make it easy.

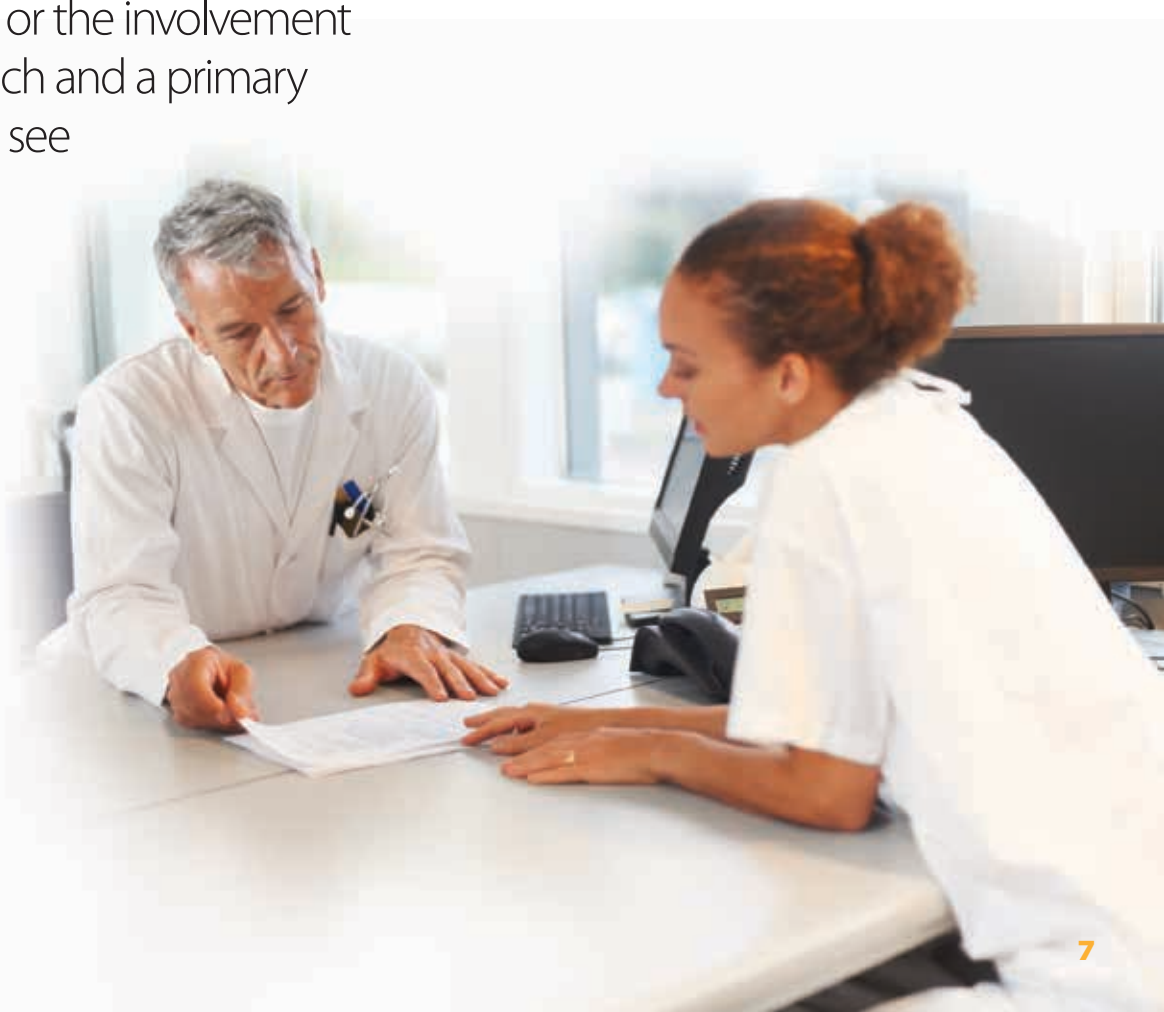
But coaching is an integral part of wellness programming now; it is seen as a best practice for a comprehensive program. We have been seeing coaching well-integrated with the work and services of other professionals like dietitians, fitness trainers, and so forth. Also, there is not only individual coaching we have got to remember, but group coaching as well. Group coaching can be especially designed around a common health challenge like a weight loss group or a smoking cessation group or a group for people who want to thrive with diabetes or manage their heart disease really well. All those kinds of coaching programs are showing to be very effective.

A lot of times, we use health coaching in a system where program goals are focused on health risk reduction. Health risk data helps identify people with multiple health risks, and then they are invited to come to health and wellness coaching. That may get them through the door then it is up to us to help them really succeed in identifying what they want to work on, getting a clear picture of where they are, a clear picture of their vision of being healthy and living the best life possible. Then we create a really effective plan for how to get there.

**Q6** What are your thoughts on the relationship or the involvement between a health coach and a primary care provider? Do you see any overlap between the two?

**MA:** What I see is a golden opportunity for the primary care provider to have a tremendous ally. I mean the primary care provider wants his or her patient to succeed at medical compliance, number one, and at lifestyle improvement, number two. They are always writing the so-called *lifestyle prescription* for people. They would love it if people had the support that would allow them

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to actually succeed at it instead of just taking that great advice, going out and struggling, and probably not succeeding.

So what is beginning to happen is primary care practices are starting to employ coaches to help provide greater outcomes. Under the Affordable Care Act, higher reimbursement rates are given for practices that show that they are having more positive outcomes.

So I think, until we figure out a separate way to bill for health and wellness coaching, what practices have to look at is how could having a health and wellness coach in the practice do two things. First, how is it adding greater value, perceived value, to our whole practice so that we are a more attractive practice than the one down the road? And number two, how is it helping us produce even better patient outcomes so that we get the maximum reimbursement rate?

**Q7** What advice would you give an organization that was considering adding health coaching as part of a comprehensive program, but just did not know where to begin? What would be one of the first steps or a good place for those folks to start?

**MA:** The first thing would be to find out more about wellness and health coaching, really do your homework. Find out more about the field and how it works. Read about it. Read some of the good books that are out there on it like my own I have got to say. Become educated about the range of quality that is out there.

Some companies do well to find a good wellness-coaching provider that they are satisfied with. Others find that they are not satisfied with their providers and start to bring it in house and train their own people to provide the health and wellness coaching services. The determinant of success there is to get the best training for them and then continue to keep up on their training through continuing education. Determine if the training is wellness and health coaching specifically. A life coach training is inadequate. Also, the feedback we get all the time is that the actual behavioral change methodology that we have built our training around at Real Balance is what sets us apart. Does the training have a real methodology or just skills training. Also, the training can include motivational interviewing but needs to be more comprehensive than just that.

I think the other thing is taking a look at how we evaluate health and wellness coaching within a company. And I think one of the big mistakes that can be made is if we try to measure the effectiveness of health and wellness coaching by

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Check out Michael Arloski's book, *Wellness Coaching for Lasting Lifestyle Change*

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only looking at the employees, for example, with the greatest health concerns. For example, people with morbid obesity have a statistically very, very small percentage of success at improving their health and well-being. Measuring the wellness-coaching program by the results of that very small group is not fair to the coaching program. And is not really giving you the answers you are looking for.

I think another strategy is to take a look at how effective the coaching is at producing an increase in the person's readiness for change. James Prochaska and his people have a lot of evidence that if you just help someone move up one stage, say from contemplation to preparation, the person has doubled their chances of actually taking action at behavioral change. So taking a look at that as well is really important.

**Q8** What if I am an individual who wants to be a health coach and I have been out in the field for a while. If this is a passion that I would like to pursue, what direction or advice would you give those folks out there who are interested in pursuing health coaching as a career?

**MA:** Well, there are two different levels there. One is for someone with a healthcare background who wants to combine their current occupation with health and wellness coaching. They may want to be more coach-like in the way they do their job. Or they may want to, in fact, pursue more of a complete career as a health and wellness coach. or, as we often see, they have been either assigned or recruited to do more direct health coaching as their job.

But if someone is entering the field without that background, they can still be just as successful. There is actually no evidence that a healthcare background helps someone be a better coach. As long as someone stays within their scope of practice as a coach and works in conjunction with treatment teams, they can still be a very effective coach being the expert at improving health behavior, not an expert in other areas.

So if someone wants to look into health and wellness coaching as a career, the first thing to do is read all you can about it. Learn about it. Find out what is being offered in terms of training programs out there. Again do your homework. Talk to people who have been through other programs. What did they say about it? Call up

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organizations that offer training and have conversations with them. And you will get a pretty good feel for it right there. If they come across that they are more about sales and making you rich, it is probably not a really solid type of program for training you to be an effective health and wellness coach. I would advise people to learn how to distinguish the program that is going to serve them the best by doing their homework.

**Q9** Great! Well Michael, is there anything else you would like to add in terms of positioning the industry for future success?

**MA:** I think one important thing is knowing how to leverage the numbers. Coaching takes time. We almost need a triage system to help people get the level of assistance with behavioral change that they need. Maybe we can take care of thousands of people just with some of the technological solutions. Maybe we can take care of thousands more with some kind of group process, some kind of minimal connection combined with education. But we are always going to have the need for a great number of people that really do need to roll up their sleeves and finally succeed by having an individual or a group coaching experience.

I think we also need to get to a point where coaching can be reimbursed directly. It is hard to get people to think just in terms of added value. We need to develop solutions to fund coaching, making it affordable for people as part of benefits packages, but also affordable to the self-employed person who is not in the womb of some big company.

To close, I am very excited about this field. I think it has tremendous promise. And the promise is already being delivered. It is not just something that is going to happen some day in the future. It is happening now. And as your former esteemed colleague, David Hunnicutt, said, now is the time to launch your ships. The tide is in. 

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