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WELLNESS IS A PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHOICE

By J.B. Hunt

As an advisor to CEOs and other leadership executives, I've consistently noticed virtually all sustainably successful C-Suite executives are relatively physically fit (PQ) and have observable high emotional intelligence (EQ).

As modern brain scientists study human behavior, they find we operate more unconsciously than previously assumed.

It's not that we're automatons without free will or that we lack rationality and refined decision-making skills. Our brains (specifically, the frontal cortex) simply drive us to act in ways that frequently bypass civilized thought processes—much more often than we'd like to admit.

How else do you explain the increase in overweight, diseased, stressed-out and addicted people each decade, despite our vast knowledge of health, nutrition and fitness?

World Health Organization statistics reveal there are

now more overweight than undernourished people worldwide. Only one in 20 U.S. adults engages in all top-six health behaviors according to David Berrigan article in Preventive Medicine, “Patterns of health behavior in US adults”:

1. Regular exercise
2. Healthful fat intake
3. Consumption of 5 servings of fruit and vegetables daily
4. Limited drinking (alcohol) and drug use
5. Nonsmoking
6. Maintaining a healthy weight

Apparently, the more our standard of living improves the less life satisfaction we report. Countries track their Gross National Product (GNP) and education levels to measure citizens' quality of life. In addition, Great Britain recently decided to track its population's health and wellness. The latter is now considered as essential to life satisfaction as money or education.



Wellness Defined

In past decades, psychologists used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to gauge satisfaction. Maslow measured five key life spheres:

1. Physical (food, water, shelter, sleep)
2. Safety and security (property, employment, resources)
3. Social (love, sex, relationships)
4. Esteem (confidence, achievement, respect)
5. Self-actualization (morality, creativity, problem-solving)

More recently, psychologist Martin Seligman's research on optimism and happiness proposes five elements of well-being:

1. Positive emotion: what we feel (pleasure, rapture, ecstasy, warmth, comfort)
2. Engagement: thoughts and energy flow; immersion in a desired activity

We find innumerable excuses to justify our negative health habits

3. Relationships: essential social connections
4. Meaning and purpose: our interpretations of what really matters
5. Accomplishment: our desire for achievement and task completion

As a broad term, wellness describes overall health and well-being in terms of optimal functioning of the body, mind and spirit. Our daily choices—what we do, how we eat, the battles we fight, who we love—help determine our wellness level.

For our ancestors, running from a tiger meant staying alive.



Early humans were forced to be strong and agile and didn't have easily available foods. Modern life offers far too many opportunities to make poor choices.

The Paradox of Choice

Each of us has a personal responsibility to make prudent health choices. But even in today's information-driven society, we choose to ignore much of the available health data. We find innumerable excuses to justify our negative health habits.

Doctors' schedules are so packed that they often neglect to provide behavioral wellness plans. They may implore patients to adopt healthful diet and exercise habits, but they're continually frustrated by rampant noncompliance. This leaves patients with no follow-up or clear action steps for achieving optimal well-being.



It's estimated that more than half the population is operating on autopilot at work. In fact, many of us work and live in a state of perpetual non-engagement, just trying to get through the day without any conflict. Is it any wonder so many of us turn to unhealthy habits like excessive smoking, drinking and sex to relieve our stress and boredom?

Wellness Coaching 101

Many of us wait to see a doctor until our symptoms become unbearable. Similarly, we'll avoid booking an appointment with a therapist, marinating in denial and insisting, "I'm fine...really." Only a heartfelt desire drives us to seek deep and lasting change.

Wellness coaches are credentialed professionals with expertise in a variety of health domains: exercise, smoking cessation, nutrition, weight loss, stress management and life satisfaction. They work with clients to effect change through personally tailored behavioral plans. Without the support and structure a coach imposes, it may be impossible for you to achieve the changes you seek to make.

While personal trainers offer side-by-side instruction, wellness coaches provide tools that allow you to discover and implement your own solutions. You learn how to meet your specific needs with available resources.

Effective coaches know how to ask the right questions, leading their clients on a path of self-discovery. They employ "appreciative inquiry," focusing on what their clients do right instead of delving into and analyzing the negative. Storytelling is another coaching tool that helps clients connect challenges and experiences to their own life stories.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation's 2012 annual survey of employer health benefits, 63 percent of U.S. companies offer at least one wellness program, be it a weight-loss program, discounted gym membership, on-site exercise facility, smoking-cessation program, nutrition/fitness class, web-based resources for healthy living, wellness newsletter or personal health coaching. 21 percent of small companies (3-199 employees) and 56 percent of large companies (200+ employees) actually provide lifestyle or behavioral coaching.

If your company has not yet implemented a wellness program, talk with your employer about adding one. Consider working with a wellness coach to achieve more healthy habits and life satisfaction.

Wellness is a personal and professional choice. Choose wisely.

*This Monthly Mentor was created by
The Hunt Executive Search, Inc.
Lead Editor: J.B. Hunt*

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JOSEPH HUNT

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212.861.2680 | 800.486.8476

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