

The coach approach

Life coaching can help you make changes, keep resolutions

BY LISA D. WELSH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM RETTIG

Happy New Year! This year, Americans are going to (pick one):

- Lose weight
- Pay off debt/ save money
- Get a better job
- Get fit /eat right
- Get a better education
- Drink less alcohol
- Quit smoking
- Reduce stress
- Take a trip
- Volunteer to help others

Popular New Year's resolutions listed at FirstGov, the U.S. Government's official Web portal, convey commitments that promise to make everything all right — or at least stop some nasty habits.

Year to year, resolutions don't change much, but over time, they can be a reflection of a civilization's standards. (An ancient Babylonian's most popular resolution was to return borrowed farm equipment.)

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Cathy Fellenz is a life coach in Central Massachusetts.

Although the idea is to keep at it until the goal is met, February finds most New Year's resolutions forgotten. But while the ancients were on their own, modern man and woman have a distinct advantage to keep themselves on track: a life coach.

The word "coach" is usually preceded by a sport name: basketball, tennis or softball, for example. The concept of a life coach is similar: Just as a track coach guides a runner's progress, in the game of life, a life coach is an authority figure in the achievement process — preparing for competition, conditioning for endurance and responding to setbacks.

Life coaching developed out of business leadership training and was first offered in California in the 1990s. Today, life coaching is a mainstream industry on the West Coast with 75 percent of the 20,000 coaches in the country coming from that area. According to the nonprofit International Coach Federation, coaching has grown in the last three years because the world has changed a lot, and coaching is a useful tool to deal with many of those changes.

Cathy Fellenz, one of the few life coaches practicing in Central Massachusetts, says the life coach-client relationship is unusual because the client gets to set the agenda, yet the coach joins the person on a life journey for a period of time.

"I work with people who are at a particular time in their life and say, 'I want something different,' " Fellenz says. "Maybe it's a dream that they want to pursue, or there's change that they've been considering."

A life coach can be "a confidante, a cheerleader, somebody ... who is truly non-judgmental, unlike your mother, or your husband, or your girlfriend, or somebody that has known you as you have always been," she continues.

According to Fellenz, the coach approach can be the key in reaching goals.

"It's not enough to make a resolution; it is necessary to explore the underlying motivation for a resolution," she says.

This takes time, focus and more commitment than selecting Jan. 1 as the day that will change your life.

"It's not just saying, 'I want to lose 20 pounds.' You have to figure out what losing 20 pounds gives you," she says. "Is it

about improving health? Is it about the way you look? The way that you feel? Is it about being able to move differently? If you are really going to keep your resolution, you need to look at what's driving the goal."

Fellenz knows the benefits of life coaching from the client's perspective because she hired one for herself. A familiar face in local nonprofit management circles for 30 years, she enjoyed success as a career counselor at the YWCA, in various management roles with the United Way of Central Massachusetts, and as the executive director of the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging, but it was important to her to look at the last chapter of her career in a different way.

"I didn't see myself working full-tilt until I was 65, but I needed to work," Fellenz says. "After so many years in nonprofit management — the politics, personnel files, budgets and committee meetings — I realized I was burned out. So I actually got coached myself."

Before she set out on her own, Fellenz sought advice from two other area life coaches, Rose Hayes and Dave Rynick, both



Dave Rynick became a life coach after more than 10 years as executive director of Dynamy Inc.

of Worcester.

Rynick started coaching in 2002, after more than 10 years as executive director of Worcester's Dynamy Inc., a nonprofit educational organization that arranges internship and mentoring programs for 17- to 22-year-olds.

"I found that what we were doing at Dynamy was what people were doing all over the country, but we didn't call it coaching, we called it advising," Rynick says. "It's not magic, not voodoo, it's common sense," Rynick continues. "A life coach can help you discover what's getting

in the way of your own success. Each of us has something unique to contribute to the world, and our truest happiness lies in discovering what it is we are called to do and doing it wholeheartedly. A life coach can help you find that."

Both Fellenz and Rynick say their goal is to help clients achieve what they want after the client decides what that is.

Says Fellenz, "The coach invites somebody to step off the stage of their life for a little while and together we look at, and then offer a new script, of the way you'd like your life to be." **W**

Smart strategies

**Life coach strategies from
Cathy Fellenz and Dave Rynick:**

Clarify your vision. Why is this particular goal important to you? How does it connect to the life you want to create for yourself?

Craft a SMART goal — specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely. Ideally, this goal is written down and spoken out loud to significant people in your life.

Design Accountability. Create a support team that will be invested in helping you follow through.

Anticipate potential obstacles — both external and internal. Look at what has gotten in the way in the past. The fresh eyes and ears of a coach can shed light on your inner critics.

Organize the forces to deal with potential obstacles. Depending on the situation, options include redesigning your environment; filtering out information and intrusions that do not support your goal; periodically reviewing the written plan, and celebrating progress as well as shortfalls, both of which are sources of learning.

Learn as you go — you are entering new territory, doing something you don't yet know how to do. As you progress, learn about yourself and what you are doing.

Once you have done your part, let it go and trust the universe to do its part. Some liken this step to being in a restaurant: You look over the possibilities, decide what you want, speak your choice and wait for it to arrive, trusting that it is indeed cooking.

Be kind to yourself. Making mistakes is part of how we move forward. It's not all or nothing. If we gave up at the first or even the hundredth failure, none of us would have learned to walk.

To contact the International Coach Federation, a nonprofit, individual membership organization and the largest worldwide resource for life coaches, visit www.coachfederation.org/ICF/.

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