

The Sunday Times - Sport Pages

June 08, 2003

Your Fitness: Time to get a life

To get in shape mentally as well as physically you need a life coach. Fitness expert Paul Stephen Lubicz explains their role.

If you don't know where your life is heading, help could be at hand. Life coaching is a new development in the field of health and fitness. It has already made huge strides in the US, and Britain will not be far behind.

Unlike a personal trainer, a life coach can offer psychological as well as physical guidance. The relationship between coach and client is built on trust, honesty and willingness to change, and life coaching has evolved into a useful tool for people who want more out of life, people who are going through career transitions, or are looking to improve their health and fitness levels.

The life coach can often meet you at your workplace, or at home if you prefer to be in a more familiar environment. By working with you, he or she can help you become more focused on the steps necessary to reach your goals.

The coach can provide insight, advice, motivation and, most importantly, support to help you deal with any fears and uncertainties in your life and to achieve a positive outcome in your endeavours. A good coach knows how to ask the right questions and will help you realise that you already have the answers to many of life's problems — only you didn't realise it.

Another aspect in which life coaching is different is the fact that the client, not the consultant, is the expert on his or her life. The concept also differs significantly from psychotherapy, which is mostly issue-based. Life coaching is action-based and designed to help you move forward. Clients use a life coach for any, or a combination, of the following reasons:

- To make substantial personal changes, including stress reduction and lifestyle simplification;
- To improve communication and language skills to be more effective personally and in business;
- To design a complete Life Plan, including business and personal goals;
- To prioritise, basing personal and business goals on an individual's own values;
- To improve your life physically, mentally and spiritually.

Take time to sit down and decide the values by which you want to live your life. Just turn off the television set, ignore the telephone, and reflect on a few important questions.

Think about what true values are and what you want to do with your life. Decide what really matters to you. Examine your fears, both personally and in your professional life — what are you afraid of losing or gaining? After you have answered these questions, ask yourself what action you can take based on what you have learnt about yourself, and whom you can call on for support in striving to achieve your lifestyle goals.

A support system is one of the most valuable tools you can have when it comes to improving your life, and a coach can help you establish such a system or be a part of it. He or she can help you make changes in your life — and stick by them — and not by merely improving a health and fitness regime. A life coach can also help you to develop a lifestyle strategy to take you step by step to improved happiness and fulfilment in the way you live day to day.

Danger in the kitchen

Those tempting but unhealthy foods in the cupboard or refrigerator originated at the supermarket. So if you tend to overeat, it is a good idea to work out the "trigger" foods that will start you on a feeding frenzy. Develop a strategy to avoid buying them in the first place. Human nature means people are programmed to eat and they only need the reason that the food is there to justify eating it. By following these simple tips when shopping at the supermarket, you can achieve a greater balance with your eating plan:

Try never to hit the supermarket on an empty stomach. When you are hungry, everything looks good. So don't test your willpower by arriving at the store feeling peckish, because that way you can almost guarantee that those unnecessary snacks and sweets will end up in your shopping trolley and ultimately in your kitchen. If you eat a piece of fruit before you head down to the shops, you are less likely to arrive home with your bags full of chocolate, cakes and biscuits;

Plan before you shop. This will save calories, cash and time. If you think about what you want to purchase, and write it down in advance, you will be more aware of coupons and discounts of which you can take advantage. With a shopping list in hand you can whizz through the supermarket without being tempted by too many fattening treats.

Another trick is to estimate how much your food shopping will cost and take only that amount, with a small buffer to allow for VAT and price miscalculations. If your available cash is limited, you will be more careful about what goes into the trolley, so as not to risk embarrassment at the check-out when it is time to pay.

When you go shopping, it can be a good idea to shop only around the perimeter of the store. If you stick to sections around the outer walls of the supermarket, you will be able to pick up all the necessities — bakery items, fresh meats from the butcher's department, fruits and vegetables in the produce section.

It is the other aisles of the supermarket that cause us problems, because that is where all the packaged processed foods, snack items and sweet treats are kept. Stay away from the aisles and you will find your trolley will be filled with healthier contents. That can only be good for your well-being and your waistline.

Exercise safely

If you are embarking on a course of exercise for the first time or after a long lay-off, it would be wise to take advice from a medical practitioner. And remember that exercise is not supposed to hurt, so do not risk injury by continuing if you start to feel any discomfort. Before starting any exercise session, it is best to warm up with some light activity and a few stretching exercises. It is also advisable to cool down with a few stretches. This helps your body adjust and could mean you avoid unnecessary injury.

For inquiries about personal training with Paul Stephen Lubicz e-mail Getfit@psltraining.co.uk