

HEALTH COACHING: THE SCIENCE BEHIND CHANGING LIVES

Chronic health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, type II diabetes, and certain cancers are some of the leading causes of modifiable and premature death in the U.S.¹ These conditions can be prevented and improved through modifications in diet, physical activity, stress management, and other lifestyle changes. Obesity is associated with chronic conditions (heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and certain types of cancer) as well as poorer mental health and reduced quality of life.² In 2016, treatment for chronic health conditions totaled 1.1 trillion, or nearly 6% of the U.S. gross domestic product, and obesity is the greatest risk factor contributing to the burden of chronic conditions in the U.S.³

There are several strategies to address these conditions including, pharmacotherapy, do-it-yourself programs, and behavior change programs delivered digitally or in person. One of the most effective methods is to utilize a health coaching model to initiate and maintain behavior change. Health coaching is an emerging field influenced by healthcare and incorporates elements from psychology and adult learning theory.⁴ A theoretical underpinning of health coaching is that behavior change is sustainable when it is personally meaningful to the individual and contributes to an individual's sense of purpose.^{5,6} The role of the health coach is to increase member self-awareness, motivation, accountability, and confidence through support, feedback, and education.⁷ Research supports health coaching as an effective strategy to help others manage chronic conditions as well as improve physiological, behavioral, and psychological conditions.⁸

Profile by Sanford is an evidence-based, behavioral health coaching program that offers a variety of tools to help an individual acquire and sustain new ways of healthy living with health coaches playing a key role.

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The underlying basis of the Profile health coaching philosophy is simple:

1. MOTIVATION MATTERS:

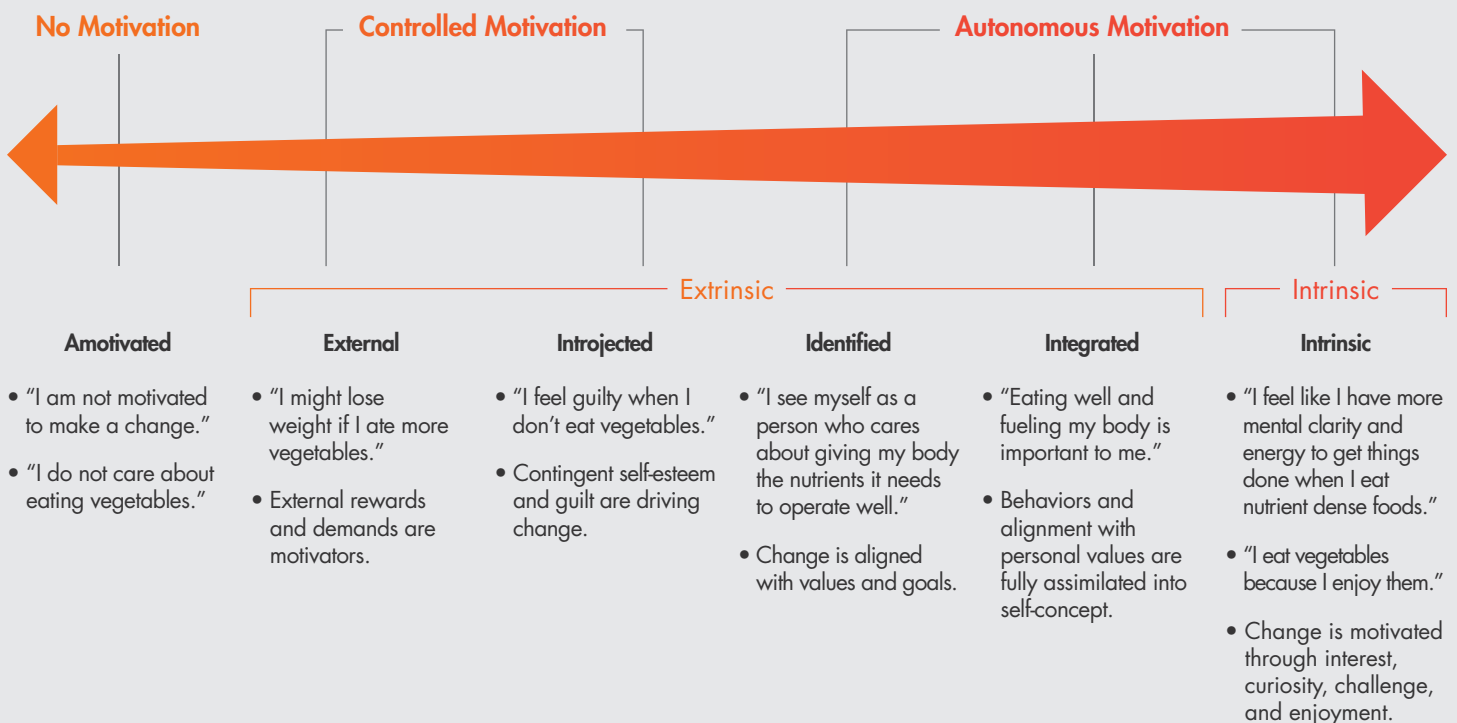
Motivation is the driving force behind someone making a change or reaching a goal. Deci and Ryan's^{9,10} Self Determination Theory (SDT) represents motivation on a continuum from extrinsic towards intrinsic motivation in a step-wise fashion.

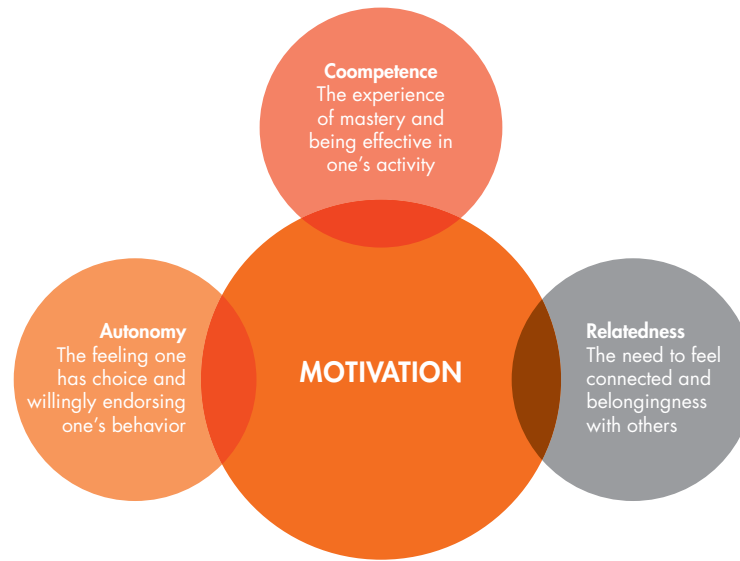
Extrinsic motivation is controlled by outside forces: getting good grades, receiving praise from your boss, or seeing your weight change on a scale. Intrinsic motivation comes from within and occurs when behavior is aligned with a person's identity and core values. With this model in mind, Profile coaches and members can work to explore ways in which lifestyle changes are personally meaningful, emphasize how they fit in with a person's view of themselves and their core values, and identify changes that are interesting and satisfying to the member.

SDT continuum has amotivation and intrinsic motivation on opposite ends, with four levels of extrinsic motivation in between. It is not until an individual progresses to identified regulation (when change becomes personally meaningful) and beyond into intrinsic motivation that they are most likely to engage in and sustain behavior change. Think of the difference between eating broccoli to lose weight (controlled, extrinsic motivation) and eating broccoli because it makes your body feel good (intrinsic motivation). The same applies to physical

activity: there's a difference between being active to change your physical appearance (controlled, extrinsic motivation) versus being active because you love a certain activity and it makes you feel great (intrinsic motivation). When people move into autonomous/extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, they are more likely to sustain behavior change.^{11,12} Health coaches can help navigate the path from extrinsic toward intrinsic motivation by helping a client identify ways in which change is personally meaningful and aligned with their values and goals.

Three needs must be satisfied in order for a person to flourish, according to SDT. Autonomy involves the perception and belief that behavior is voluntary and authentic, and that people are in control of their behavior. Competence includes improving and gaining a sense of mastery over a skill (such as the skill development necessary to go from a sedentary lifestyle to walking or running a 5k). Relatedness is the need to have meaningful relationship and interactions with others. A member's social support from family and friends as well as their relationship with a health coach fits within the relatedness need in the SDT. These three basic needs are essential and must be satisfied for people to achieve optimal performance and wellbeing and increase intrinsic motivation.





2. EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND MEMBER-CENTERED COMMUNICATION:

Profile by Sanford embraces a dual expert approach in the coaching room by honoring the member's expertise of their own self and life experiences (the member's unique understanding of their past successes, areas of opportunity, and which changes are personally meaningful) while coaches are experts on Profile plans, education, and supporting the behavior change process. Members are more likely to reach their goals when both partners come together to share expertise.

Building a relationship is critical to this partnership and is intentional. Health coaches are focused on empathy, creating a nonjudgmental environment where members are able to share

about their experiences without fear of judgment. Coaches utilize active listening skills to connect and empathize with members. Active listening is a key ingredient in motivational interviewing (MI), and a necessary starting point for coaches to be able to reflect and affirm members throughout their journey. Research indicates this spirit of partnership and acceptance that the coach embodies when working with members is one of the most promising mechanisms of motivational interviewing.¹³ Additionally, embracing a nonjudgmental and collaborative approach to build rapport with members is aligned with the relatedness (to care about and be cared about by others) component of the SDT.

EMBRACING THE TWO EXPERT APPROACH



THE COACH IS AN EXPERT
Behavior Change
Effective Relationships
Education and Skill Building

THE MEMBER IS AN EXPERT
Their Past Experiences
Their Needs, Wants & Motivations
Personal Strengths and Opportunities

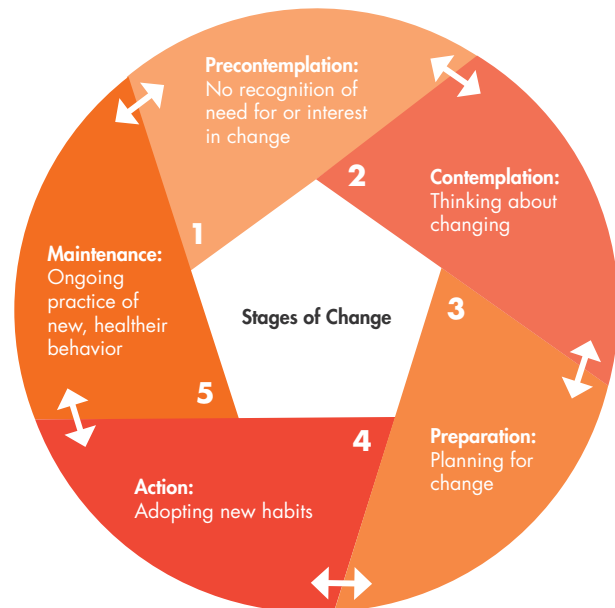
THERE ARE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF MI¹⁵:

1. Express Empathy through reflective listening
2. Help members see any gaps between what their goals and their current behaviors
3. Rather than argue and confront people about changing, empathize and listen for opportunities to affirm what's good
4. Resist fighting against or using persuasion against a member who is unwilling or not ready to make a change,
5. Support member's belief in themselves and optimism for change.

To continue to develop rapport, coaches can communicate effectively through MI. This style of conversation widely used in health professions helps others resolve feelings of ambivalence and identify internal motivation needed to change behavior long-term.¹⁴

SDT is a theoretical framework from which motivational interviewing operates: both SDT and MI assert people have an innate tendency to strive for personal growth, and MI seeks to elicit reasons and desires for change. MI is an evidence-based practice in the field of health and human behavior that outperforms traditional advice giving in a wide range of behavioral problems and chronic conditions and significantly improves health behaviors.^{16, 17, 18} MI is most effective when an individual is in precontemplation, contemplation, or preparation stages of the transtheoretical model or "Stages of Change" model, as these stages are most likely to involve ambivalence.¹⁹

Given the efficacy of MI to improve diet and physical activity behaviors, Profile by Sanford coaches receive training and ongoing education credits to improve motivational interviewing skills. Coaches are trained to assist members in identifying internal desires, reasons, and needs to change behaviors.



3: EDUCATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

Nutrition knowledge alone provides only a limited benefit in improving dietary intake and sustaining healthy dietary changes.^{20,21} Education by itself is a small component of a comprehensive program. We believe education is a powerful tool to change behavior when paired with a skillful health coach. Education resources must go beyond nutrition education and include a wide range of topics related to behavior, activity, and other topics focused on improving knowledge and skills focused on sustainable health behavior change. Profile Health Coaches have a variety of resources to discuss with members to increase knowledge on nutrition, activity, and lifestyle topics. Profile education resources are regularly presented in a read-do-reflect format in order to 1) introduce a skill or concept, 2) have the learner apply the skill/concept, and 3) have the learner reflect on the experience of applying a new skill/concept and (in doing so) increase self-awareness. For example, effective stress management requires knowledge of different management options, the skill of executing a particular stress management strategy, and reflecting on that experience to explore ways to continue with the behavior or any necessary adjustments.

Profile coaches work with members to discuss meaningful changes, provide education to help a member apply new knowledge or skills, and set goals to apply new behaviors consistently. For example, SMART goal setting is an effective tool²² used throughout a Profile member's journey to help identify goals, make commitments, and work toward them.^{23,24} It is important for individuals in the preparation, action, and maintenance stages of change¹⁹ to identify and implement specific, measurable, attainable/actionable, realistic/relevant, and timely goals using the SMART goal approach. Profile coaches are trained to guide a member in co-creating SMART goals.



Through regular interactions, members receive support in reaching their goals. The health coach/member relationship is an extension of the relatedness component of the SDT that increases intrinsic motivation. While many members may begin their Profile journey fueled by the accountability of having a coach (introjected, extrinsic motivation according to the SDT), over time accountability from coach matters less as the member begins to identify and experience personal life-enhancing benefits that come from change (intrinsic motivation). Many programs and interventions fall short due to lack of ongoing support and programs that do not last long enough to support effective behavior change. For optimal behavior change, it is recommended that a minimum intervention should be designed to last 6 to 12 months with regular interactions.²² The CDC Diabetes Prevention Program (2018)²⁵ recommends 16 appointments within the first 6 months and 6 appointments throughout the next 6 months for a 1-year lifestyle change program.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)** represents motivation on a continuum from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, and evidence supports that intrinsic motivation is needed for behavior change to last. Profile coaches work with members to explore ways in which lifestyle changes are personally meaningful, emphasize how they fit in with a person's view of themselves and their core values, and identifying changes that are interesting and satisfying to the member. Coaches can help members move away from extrinsic rewards toward intrinsic satisfaction of various lifestyle changes.
2. **Relationship building** is a crucial component of health coaching. Profile coaches are trained to create a nonjudgmental space for members to share experiences freely, actively listen to a member, and express empathy.
3. **Effective Communication** is implemented through **motivational interviewing**. Profile coaches are trained to help members resolve feelings of ambivalence about behavior changes under consideration. MI is most helpful for clients who are in the early stages of the transtheoretical model, or "Stages of Change" model.
4. **Education and accountability** help members and coaches throughout the preparation and planning processes. Education resources are delivered in a read-do-reflect format in order to introduce the learner to new knowledge or skills, have them apply and implement that new knowledge/skill, and then reflect on ways in which that behavior can be maintained in the future. **SMART goal setting** is part of the planning process and is a known effective mechanism of successful health coaching programs.



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