

# Wellness is more than just physical, coaches say

BY JOE RITACCO  
Special Sections

It may be difficult to find one universal definition for wellness, but industry experts agree that it is often attained through some combination of physical, spiritual and emotional well-being that leads to personal and professional contentment. While many turn to psychologists and trainers to address their mental and physical needs, others turn to wellness coaches to create and maintain long-term lifestyle adjustments that will both cure their ills and help them understand the genesis of their troubles.

Beth Tansey Peller was drawn to the field after a career in nursing that began at the Englewood Hospital School of Nursing and led to Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. Her passion for writing would soon lead her to the field of medical advertising where she would continue to examine the relationship between medicine and lifestyle change and, more importantly, how that relationship could facilitate healthier living.

"I was always interested in the mind and body and how they worked together," she said.

Ultimately, Peller was drawn to wellness coaching due to the opportunity it gave her to work with clients on an individual level over a longer period of time. "Wellness training," she said, "just

women balance the stress of their personal and professional lives. Women who place an equal emphasis on both — described by Peller as dual-centric — need the willpower to manage stress and tension and maintain a healthy lifestyle. It can sometimes be as simple as an adjustment to a workout routine.

"Some women," she said, "work at a demanding job but still want to fit in a fitness routine. Even if going to the gym is difficult they can still change their diet a bit or go for a 10-minute walk at lunchtime."

Creating goals with clients and helping them achieve them is the primary job of a wellness coach.

All good coaches, be it health, real estate or baseball, are able to develop a philosophy designed to get the best of out of their "players," and that philosophy may vary from one to the other.

Verena Visser Aibel of Vibrant Visions International in Hackensack put her coaching philosophy into practice in 2001 after completing extensive training at Coach University, an organization created to share core coaching beliefs and practices with its students. Visser Aibel completed 200 hours of training and created a brand of guidance that helps clients grow at a personal and spiritual level. She works with her clients for no less than a year so that a bond can be established and greater depths can be reached.



PHOTO COURTESY OF VERENA VISSER AIBEL

Gayle Gruenberg, left, owner of Let's Get Organized in Park Ridge, initially sought guidance from Verena Visser Aibel, a Hackensack-based wellness coach, regarding business decision-making. The depth that their relationship has reached over the past two years, Gruenberg said, is beyond anything she could've expected. "I'm grateful for her every single day," she said.

She reached out to Wellcoaches Corporation — a network of wellness coaches certified in 2005 by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) — and learned of the positive impact that slow, sustainable growth can have for those who commit to it. The ACSM cited a wellness coaches' ability to "help people make lasting lifestyle change" as the primary reason for the certification.

Peller now practices what the corporation preaches by helping middle-aged

"It doesn't matter what someone comes to me with," she said, "we work on it all. Problems in somebody's personal life bleed into their professional life. Clarity in one usually brings clarity in the other."

Visser Aibel emphasizes that wellness coaching should go beyond therapy. People, she says, can have psychological clarity and still be in need of physical, emotional or spiritual guidance.

She preaches to her clients the importance of boundaries and understanding how much of themselves they can give. She warns them against trying to be all things to all people and advises them to gain a better understanding of what they want and need.

"It's not our place to tell people what to do," she said, "we just guide them."

One client that Visser Aibel has 'guided' for more than two years is Gayle Gruenberg, owner of Let's Get Organized in Park Ridge. Her business offers professional organizing and lifestyle management. The two were introduced at an event for the New Jersey Association of Women Business Owners, and Gruenberg decided to take the initiative.

"I wanted to feel like I deserved to be successful in business," she said. "I needed a coach."

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The pair worked together on several fronts, including developing strategies to help Gruenberg overcome her shyness in order to enhance her networking capabilities.

From there, Visser Aibel assisted her in developing a plan to grow her business in 2009 by stressing time management. The two analyzed Gruenberg's schedule from the year before and decided what things should stay, what should go and what should be handled differently. A budget was created to fit the new plan and specific goals were set. The plan, said, Gruenberg, has been successful thus far.

"I'm up to 2-3 clients per week," she said, "which is where I want to be."

While clients may rave about the benefits of having a wellness coach, the coaches themselves are quick to point out how rewarding the profes-

sion can be to them.

"It has absolutely made me a better parent to my daughter," said Robin Gardner, a wellness coach at Phoenix Life Coaching in Ridgewood.

Gardner has spent the past six years in the coaching industry, and had previously held coaching sessions for pregnant women and empowerment workshops for young girls.

"I was very naive when I started," she said. "There was a learning curve that initially was challenging. But the sky is the limit in the coaching industry."

Though proper fitness and dietary habits are obviously important, her philosophy on wellness is similar to those who are drawn to the industry in the first place.

"I have to support clients emotionally and spiritually, too," said Gardner. "How healthy is their thought process? It's important to help them understand when to say 'yes' and when to say 'no.'"