Introduction

Drawing from the Cognitive and Behavioral Processes of the TTM, as well as from evidence-based principles of behavioral psychology and positive psychology and Wellcoaches’ experience in coaching clients and training and certifying coaches, Wellcoaches created a graphic metaphor for health, fitness, and wellness coaching known as the Mount Lasting Change Pyramid (http://www.wellcoach.com/memberships/images/Mount_Change1.pdf).

This Pyramid provides a guide to what it takes to make lasting changes in personal responsibility, behavior, self-awareness, and self-image.

The Pyramid has 15 building blocks that take us to the top – being one’s best self. Thirteen of the 15 building blocks are not about action; they are about thinking. If we prematurely jump into action (to the third level of the mountain), i.e., a quick fix, we proceed on a shaky foundation.

The base level of the Pyramid represents the vision and higher purpose for change. First, we decide to take charge. We then define our best selves – what we value most about ourselves and about life, and why being well is deeply meaningful to us. We also identify the skills and knowledge we need and the strategies for using our strengths to reach our vision and deftly handle our big challenges.

The next level addresses how the vision is turned into a realistic plan, including behavioral goals and our support team, and how to increase confidence. Then a commitment is formalized. The third level depicts the doing process (specific behavioral goals) with early wins and constant fine-tuning. The fourth level represents the approach to sustaining new behaviors.

The top is “my best self.” This is what we yearn to become or uncover through the change process. Arrival to the upper levels (or even moments spent there) is a big cause for celebration.

Change isn’t a linear process, where one proceeds from the bottom directly to the top of the Pyramid. People cycle up and down the five levels, sometimes for years. When people don’t make lasting change, they typically have missing or weak building blocks. We can help our
clients lay down the structure and assemble the building blocks to get to lasting change and “the real me.”

The Mount Lasting Change Pyramid can be applied to any area of health, fitness, and wellness. One can use the Pyramid for single behaviors (three 30-minute walks per week) or groups of related behaviors (nutrition including five servings of fruits and vegetables per day, balanced breakfast five days a week, healthful snacks five days a week).

VISION LEVEL

The bottom, “vision level” of the Pyramid is the foundation for change. It is essential to not rush through this level. Devoting the time to generously explore a client’s positive core – the vision-level building blocks – prior to moving into preparation and action is enlightening and valuable. Revisiting and reinforcing the vision building blocks along the way breathes life and inspiration into the change process.

Responsibility + Self-Discovery

Developing mindfulness and self-awareness of where we stand with all of the building blocks is an ever-present theme. Taking charge and personal responsibility for change is our call to action. People choose to make specific changes at specific times and for specific reasons when they are ready, willing, and able.

Strengths

The change process is much more likely to succeed if we identify and stay connected to our strengths and abilities that have proven successful in other parts of our lives. Building on what’s working now is a key approach when it comes to coaching.

Values + Meaning

This building block is at the center of the foundation because it represents both the higher purpose and deeper meaning for the change. Our values, when clearly articulated and kept in view, are what keep us going in the face of big and small challenges.
What people value about change and meaningful about being well is highly personal, ranges widely, and changes over time. Some values include being a role model, having peace of mind, looking good or youthful, living in balance, and exercising self-control. To discover client values, ask about whom they want to be and why they want to be that way. Of course, one can’t become that person overnight, but one can start doing the things that person would do. Acting “as if” is a great way to get on track.

We often need permission to live from our values, especially when that means saying “No” to others to practice self-care. Coaches can assist clients to recognize that this practice undergirds being our best in life and work.

**Benefits + Information**

One must identify, explore, prioritize, and emotionally connect with the list of potential benefits to be derived from making lasting change. Getting just-in-time education and information on the new behavior(s) and understanding all of the building blocks are both vital and ongoing.

**Challenges + Strategies**

Identifying and exploring our significant challenges, such as competing priorities, lack of time, lack of confidence, and the benefits of not changing, are ongoing life processes. Raising our awareness of how our challenges not only hurt us, but also serve us, is important thinking/feeling work for those in the early stages of change.

The thinking/feeling work around our significant challenges then leads to the thinking/feeling work around realistic strategies for moving forward. Some clients will get so excited about a new interest that challenges will seemingly fade from view. Other clients will want to develop specific strategies for dealing with challenges, especially if they have a long history of derailment. Either way, the key to masterful coaching is to elevate a client’s confidence in their ability to move forward successfully. At its core, coaching generates hope in a client’s ability to change as well as awareness of realistic strategies that work.
**PREPARATION LEVEL**

*Confidence*

Before proceeding and while on the change path, it is vitally important to have a moderate to high level of confidence in one’s ability to be successful. If our confidence level is less than a score of 7 out of 10, more work is needed to increase the level to at least a 7 or even an 8. One of the most important goals of the behavior change process is “self-efficacy”: the confidence that one has the ability to initiate and sustain a desired behavior, even in the face of challenges.

*Commitment*

When we make an oral or written commitment to another person – a family member, friend, colleague, physician, or coach – to establish a new habit, we increase our probability of success. Having a high level of integrity, we want to honor our commitments.

*Support*

Making changes can be tough and having support from family, friends, or colleagues – who can help us work through the change process, stay on track, and provide positive feedback – is extremely valuable. It’s often helpful to ask for support and be specific, explaining the kind of support that is working or not working.

*Goals + Plan*

The details are crucial. Developing and updating a detailed plan describing our scheduling and preparation, as well as clearly defining the behavioral goal (drilling down to nitty gritty details of what, when, and how) is an important activity. Tracking our performance is also important – using journals or logs, for example, to record how we eat, exercise, and relax.
**ACTION LEVEL**

**Behavioral Steps**

Choosing, refining, and committing to specific behavioral goals which are realistic, while challenging, is the all-important “doing” part of behavior change. Committing to the mastery of a new behavior in 3 months, and then maintaining it for a further 3 months, reaching high self-efficacy, is a good target for change. The goal should be specific and measurable – replace “exercising more” with – “I will walk 4 days a week for 30 minutes at a moderate intensity.”

Building up to the 3-month behavioral goal should progress gradually each week, in manageable steps. Some weeks, more progress will be made than others. A good starting point would be “walking 4 days for 10 minutes” or “walking 2 days for 20 minutes.”

**Problem Solving**

While we first addressed challenges and strategies on the vision level, as part of the foundation for change, clients inevitably encounter challenges and setbacks along the way to reaching and mastering their behavioral goals. Coaches can assist clients to view such times in a positive light – as opportunities to learn and grow. An effective problem-solving process, including brainstorming, enables rapid self-awareness, increased desire to stay on track, and prompt, corrective actions, which may include brainstorming and experimenting with new action strategies or even tweaking the behavioral goals themselves. The secret is to normalize and appreciate such experiences for the gifts they have to offer, rather than to catastrophize and depreciate them as beginning a downward spiral.

**Rewards**

To reinforce our motivation and confidence, it is important to experience quick “wins,” to enjoy extrinsic rewards, and to savor the intrinsic value of behavioral changes. We generally start to feel better, stronger, lighter, or more energetic, for example, when we start to exercise more, eat better, relax more, are more engaged with life, or have more fun. We need to mindfully observe, enjoy, and celebrate such rewards to fully engage with and sustain the change process.
**RESULTS**

**Lasting Change**

It feels great when we’ve adopted a new habit and we’re confident that we can sustain the new habit for the foreseeable future. The diligent effort to build up to our behavioral goal and embrace the challenges along the way has a big payoff when we’re successful. The key is to move from extrinsic inducements to intrinsic motivation and contentment. That is the work of masterful coaching.

**Relapse Prevention**

Even after we’ve mastered a new behavior, there is still potential to get sidetracked. Shift happens. New challenges emerge as we get older and our lives get more complex. Developing strategies to prevent relapses (when we stop doing the new behavior) is the thinking/feeling work required when we’ve reached the maintenance stage of change. Finding ways to be a role model for others is an effective way to prevent relapses.

**The Real Me**

**Best Self**

One of the big bonuses of lasting change is that we expand our sense of self and get closer to becoming our best self – or the real me. Often the real me is buried under extra physical and emotional weight and stress and is revealed when we master change. Take time to notice, embrace, and enjoy our best selves. As we reach the top of the Pyramid, it’s definitely time to celebrate!

**Sources:**
*Changing for Good, Prochaska, DiClemente*
*Health Behavior Change, Rollnick*