



## CELEBRATE SUCCESS!

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by Dixie Stanforth, Ph.D., FACSM and Alex Weidenheft, M.Ed.

**Wellcoaches Corporation:** <http://wellcoachesschool.com/research-and-resources/>; [www.coachmeg.com](http://www.coachmeg.com)

*The Wellcoaches Story:* What makes a great coach? Is it the ability to instill positive mindsets and self-management? Teach how to upgrade performance? Cultivate and deploy new strengths? The best coaches do all this and more...so it is no surprise that “personal coaching” has become a compelling career path in the past decade. No longer tied exclusively to sports, opportunities abound for health and fitness professionals who learn to master coaching — the art and science of facilitating change and growth. Starting as a pioneer almost 20 years ago, Wellcoaches Corporation is globally respected for training and supporting coaches who help clients make lasting change by engaging in healthy lifestyles including exercise, healthy nutrition, emotional well-being, and adequate sleep while decreasing alcohol, tobacco, and substance use. Having trained more than 11,000 coaches, Wellcoaches is well on its way to building a workforce of more than 100,000 health and wellness coaches who can help their patients or clients prevent, treat, and even reverse chronic diseases related to unhealthy lifestyles. The need is vast — for example, 86 million people today, or one third of the population, have prediabetes, in addition to all those vulnerable to cardiovascular disease and other health conditions (CDC DPP Web site).

Margaret Moore, aka Coach Meg, founded Wellcoaches in 2000 with a dream (and a patent application) of large-scale, Web-supported wellness coaching. Before Wellcoaches, she had established a career as a biotechnology executive in four countries, developing and marketing new medicines and vaccines. Moving to

Boston from Canada to marry her husband, previously her biotechnology patent lawyer, Moore shifted her professional focus to create Wellcoaches and help people engage fully in healthy lifestyles — something she had explored and practiced from a young age. Searching for organizations that valued evidence-based practices, Moore cold-called James R. Whitehead (CEO) and Walter R. Thompson, Ph.D., FACSM, (past president) at the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). Wellcoaches formed a partnership with ACSM in 2002, and its endorsement helped ensure the successful launch of Wellcoaches. With access to ACSM members, Wellcoaches recruited 100 students in its first year, growing exponentially to 10,000 coaches trained in 50 countries by 2016. Today, more than 1,000 health and fitness professionals register for Wellcoaches programs each year.

The Wellcoaches curriculum, books, and protocols are firmly rooted in scientific theories including self-determination theory, the transtheoretical model, motivational interviewing, positive psychology, nonviolent communication, self-compassion, and mindfulness, whereas the Wellcoaches team has developed new theories, including relational flow and multiplicity of mind. Wellcoaches coaches learn how to ignite growth and lasting change for their patients or clients by:

- developing a partnership that improves personal responsibility, autonomous motivation, confidence, positivity, and mindfulness and
- navigating the ups and downs of habit-making with a growth mindset.



Photo courtesy of Wellcoaches.

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Before Wellcoaches launched its School of Coaching in 2002, the company was focused on delivering coaching services to support corporate wellness. Moore and her colleagues quickly realized that a science-based curriculum for health and wellness coaches did not yet exist...and that realization was the impetus to start a school to train coaches. Moore assembled a team of experts in counseling and executive coaching, along with the previously mentioned theories. Together the team designed and tested a model to effectively change the mindsets and habits of people who are struggling to improve health and well-being. Within 2 years, the protocol was used to train hundreds of coaches, and ACSM began to endorse the industry's first Wellcoaches wellness coach certification launched in 2004. The Wellcoaches protocol is now captured in the *Coaching Psychology Manual* in its second edition, a treasured resource for coaches around the world, published by Wolters Kluwer and endorsed by ACSM.

### FROM CHALLENGES TO PIVOTAL MOMENTS

The strategic move that inspires the most gratitude at Wellcoaches is the close collaboration with ACSM. In 2000, the concept of bringing a coaching curriculum to the world of health and fitness was ahead of its time, and the fact that ACSM was willing to support Wellcoaches offered a pivotal moment. Another challenge was the prevailing mindset of the industry: personal trainers and fitness professionals believed they already had good coaching skills. Traveling the conference circuit enabled Moore and her team to coach in public, allowing others to experience the transformational change that is delivered by coaching, beyond reach by untrained coaches. Rather than criticizing existing skills, she

demonstrated visible change during coaching demonstrations... similar to assessing a functional performance deficit and demonstrating how a corrective exercise might quickly improve a motor pattern.

A pivotal milestone was to support original research to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Wellcoaches protocol; now there are 10 peer-reviewed papers of positive coaching outcomes for almost 22,000 coaching clients and 8 peer-reviewed case studies, all together showing the wide applicability of Wellcoaches coaches in diverse populations and settings, including diabetes, heart disease, wellness, cancer, and fibromyalgia, and in corporate and clinical settings (<http://wellcoachesschool.com/research-and-resources/wellcoaches-research/>).

In 2018, Wellcoaches launched a lifestyle medicine coach credential in partnership with the American College of Lifestyle Medicine. More strategic moves are on the way to integrate lifestyle medicine coaching into the health care setting. Each of these steps is crucial in helping Wellcoaches become what it is today. And there is still another story to share.

### THE LEADERSHIP STORY

Building Wellcoaches called on hidden skills: initially, Moore identified with being an entrepreneur and didn't see herself as a coach. She imagined her role as leading health and wellness coaches — not to become a coach. As she began coaching clients, she noticed how natural and nourishing it felt, how much she enjoyed helping people change and grow. The moments she coached in public uncovered new strengths and enabled her to learn and grow personally and professionally. Her newfound alignment was confirmed by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator,



Photo courtesy of Wellcoaches.

a personality test, which indicated that she was strongest in introverted intuition — just what you need to help clients unlock their potential. When working in the biotechnology industry, her extroverted, analytical thinking strength was engaged, and she was most comfortable working with facts, evidence, and thoughtful analysis. Coaching tapped into her intuitive, creative side. A natural ability to help people change their mindsets to improve their lives led to a new identity: “Coach Meg.” In her words, coaching and training coaches is her “sweet spot” that calls on the integration of all of her abilities.

To disseminate coaching science and to award coaching research grants, in 2009 Moore cofounded the Institute of Coaching at McLean Hospital, a Harvard Medical School affiliate, and the Institute’s annual Coaching in Leadership & Healthcare conference. She coauthored two Harvard Health books and started teaching coaching psychology at Harvard Extension School as well as transformational leadership at Harvard Medical School’s Office of Global Education serving health care leaders around the world.

In 2016, she co-led a partnership between the International Consortium for Health & Wellness Coaching and the National Board of Medical Examiners, which enabled the launch in 2017 of national standards and a national board certification for health and wellness coaches. The volunteer efforts to build the Institute of Coaching and the International Consortium for Health & Wellness Coaching showed that a combination of leadership and coaching is a powerful force for good. As coaching competencies are fast becoming the repertoire of the best leaders, Moore’s combination of leadership and coaching is emerging as the next calling.

### Share Your Success Stories!

We hope that you, too, will be inspired and work to bring about meaningful change in the realm of health and fitness wherever you are. We would love to hear how you are changing your world! Please send us your stories for publication consideration. If your story is selected for publication in *ACSM’s Health & Fitness Journal*<sup>®</sup>, we will contact you for additional information. To submit, simply email the following to [HFJournal@acsm.org](mailto:HFJournal@acsm.org):

A Word file with

- your story
- lessons learned
- advice
- your contact information (name, affiliation, mailing address, phone number, and email address).

## A FORCE FOR GOOD

In the end, the mission of the Wellcoaches team is to serve the greater good, helping so many who are struggling with living a life that supports health and well-being. The countless days invested over a decade of unpaid volunteer work, along with all of the time spent advancing the highest standards for the Wellcoaches team and programs, are an investment in a future still unfolding. Although many days the progress to build a workforce and a field seems slow, the focus and dedication don’t wane. Moore has grown to realize that her work has shaped her into a strong leader and looks forward to the opportunity to help others grow their leadership and coaching skills. One of the coaching greats, John Wooden, said, “Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be.” Moore’s journey from “entrepreneur” to “wellness coach” to “leader” exemplifies the change process, along with the ever-evolving definition of what it means to be a “coach.”

Now, Moore and Wellcoaches are disseminating coaching habits to everyone, connecting the art and science of coaching to the basics of human nature: intrinsic motivation, positive relationships, competence, leadership, and thriving. In this age of accelerating and unpredictable change, it’s time to help everyone learn how to coach themselves and others to create a healthier, happier, more rewarding, and meaningful future.



**Dixie Stanforth, Ph.D., FACSME**, is a senior lecturer in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education at The University of Texas at Austin. She developed and directs the Personal Training Specialization for undergraduates. She serves on the editorial board of *ACSM’s Health & Fitness Journal*<sup>®</sup> and is a frequent presenter at *ACSM’s International Health & Fitness Summit* and other national conferences.



**Alex Weidenheft, M.Ed.**, completed her M.Ed. in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education at The University of Texas at Austin. Teaching enabled her to work with undergraduate students to expand their coaching/programming skills and their understanding of movement. She also works as an athletic development coach in the Austin area and enjoys helping children ages 10 to 18 develop a love for fitness and improve their athletic ability.