

# Building the ultimate wellness-coaching program

Key must haves in your critical first four sessions

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If you downloaded this white paper, you know that no matter how sound of an exercise program you design, very few people will adopt it long term if you don't first address the fact that many barriers to consistent exercise are mental.

In fact, it was predicted almost 10 years ago how wellness coaching will change...

*“The field of wellness coaching is shifting from the status quo of prescribing exercise and diet plans and then hoping for the best, to the science of systematic behavior change.”*

*(Hunt, P. & Hillsdon M. 1996.)*

All the membership retention research data shows that properly onboarding new members can improve retention outcomes of new members by as much as 75%. To learn more about the latest in retention research, you can download our e-book [here](#).

Having a great onboarding process in place, though, is not going to generate the results you'd hoped for if you don't also have a solid wellness-coaching program. That program is not just about exercise prescription. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

Wellness coaches have to be very proficient in identifying their clients' mental stage-of-change, as well as helping them through the behavior modification process.

(For more on this process, we encourage you to [download](#) our free e-book, Behavior Modification: Proven strategies on making a lasting impact with your members. Many of the concepts peppered throughout this white paper are discussed in further detail in the ebook, but don't worry. It's a quick read.)

O.k., so if you have already brushed up on basic concepts of behavior modification, the question is how do you put together a program to make the greatest impact? Is there any research on what needs to be included in each of my coaching sessions with my client?

The answers are yes and yes. The purpose of this white paper is to outline what should happen in each of your coaching sessions, particularly in those first 3-4 meetings with your clients.

So if you are ready, let's get started.

## Appointment 1

In your critical first appointment, there are five important things you must do:



1. Determine where your client is in their stage-of-change. As you know, understanding your client's stage-of-change determines their self-efficacy, or level of confidence in adopting a new exercise program. And that drives everything from the number of handholding sessions needed, to how intense the exercise programming should be. The stage-of-change model is fully described in the behavior modification e-book mentioned above. Click [here](#) to download.

During this process, you should also assess your client's tolerance for exercise discomfort. A little hint here is that if your client is on a lower scale of the stage-of-change model, then they will have a very low tolerance for exercise discomfort.

2. Set process-oriented goals, not outcome goals. Now, there is nothing wrong with using "outcome" goals, particularly when focusing on the long-term, but from a behavior modification standpoint, it's not the most effective thing to do right out of the gate. A more powerful approach that will build-self efficacy

is to set “process-oriented goals.” Some examples are: minutes of cardio for the week, number of visits to the gym, etc. Set process-oriented goals that are challenging but can be achieved fairly easily.

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Note: The higher level your client is on the stage-of-change scale, the more challenging you can set the process-oriented goal.

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### **Research behind the power of goals**

“Goals serve to direct a participant’s attention and action by mobilizing energy and prolonging effort.” They also facilitate individuals’ interest in developing relevant self-management strategies for sustained progress.

(Locke & Latham, 1985)

3. Determine the barriers and then formulate relapse strategies to help your clients when you are not with them. Coaches should acknowledge that all people

will have obstacles that will hinder them from sticking with a long-term exercise program. It's important to note that these barriers we are discussing most often occur during the action stage-of-change.

Now, there are two types of barriers: environmental, such as lack of time, increased work demands, injury or other medical issues, etc.; and the second type is internal, or what we call “perceived” barriers. Some examples include: self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-body image, and intimidation in the gym environment.

It is the job of the wellness coach to help their clients in addressing their barriers. Here is a four-step process:

1. Identify barriers or sources of potential relapses
2. Recognize that relapses are inevitable
3. Reframe the perception of relapses...call them “slips” rather than “failures”
4. Anticipate barriers and potential relapses, and develop effective coping strategies

4. Take the client out on the floor, explore, and have fun. Oftentimes, when we get into behavior modification, we tend to spend too much time sitting down and talking. A much better way to approach this topic with a client is to walk and talk. This has been shown to be far better in building rapport, and allows people to open up and communicate more effectively.

What types of exercises should you recommend? The short answer is that it doesn't matter! Most importantly, you pick exercises with your client that they find enjoyable. So let them pick and show them several options.

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Note: In every coaching session you will be learning more and more about what gets your client excited. Always look for other key programs that your facility provides that would be a great fit for your client.

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5. Schedule the next appointment before they leave. See below for recommendations for the following onboarding appointments.

## Appointments 2-4

See below for the key elements to include in appointments 2-4. Notice that in session 3 or 4 you can begin to introduce gamification and member challenges.

### Second Appointment (1 week later)

- Review long-term and short-term goals, celebrate success, set new short-term goals
- Reassess self-efficacy
- Review relapse prevention strategies
- Adjust exercise program if necessary and teach them something new
- Introduce tracking tools
- Take them on the floor, explore, and have fun
- Set next appointment

### Third Appointment (1 week later)

- Review long-term and short-term goals, celebrate success, set new-short term goals
- Reassess self-efficacy
- Review relapse prevention strategies
- Review tracking tools/progress
- Adjust exercise program if necessary and teach them something new



- Take them on the floor, explore, and have fun
- Set next appointment

#### Fourth Appointment (1 week later)

- Review long-term and short-term goals, celebrate success, set new short-term goals
- Reassess self-efficacy
- Review relapse prevention strategies
- Teach them something new
- Take them on the floor, explore, and have fun
- Enroll them in a challenge if self-efficacy has improved
- Set next appointment if deemed necessary

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Note: The above suggestions should be modified depending upon the client's stage-of-change. For example, someone who is already in the action or maintenance stage has a higher self-efficacy and can handle more variety, intensity, and exercise duration, and won't need as much attention as a client in a lower stage.

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Well, there you have it. Obviously, there are multiple combinations you can use, and can get as creative as you want in your wellness-coaching sessions; however, the components described above are key elements that you

should include in your wellness-coaching program to produce the greatest impact with your clients.

## About MobileFit

We are a company dedicated to helping your fitness center or YMCA amplify your members' experience to ultimately reduce membership churn. We do this by applying proven processes supported by technologies that drive consistent onboarding of new members, and then providing daily wow factors for your membership base. Visit us at our [homepage](#).