

# Lessons From Health Coaching... The Essential Reading List for Effective Coaches, Part One



...by **Paul Terry** and **David Anderson**

*Time* Magazine has its “All Time 100 Novels,” the *New York Times* has its “Guide to the Best 1000 Movies Ever Made,” and *Rolling Stone* Magazine has published its “500 Greatest Albums of All Time.” Such lists are fun because they generate impassioned debates (and we love to debate). But they’re also useful because they stimulate thoughtful conversations about the merits of those who made the list and those who were left off.

This part 1 offers 5 heavy-weight contenders in our top 10 reading list for your consideration. We invite you to weigh in with your reactions: Whose writings help you be the best possible health coach/wellness practitioner. We’ll debate your input, make some final choices, and share a final top 10 list along with our rationale (and yours) in our next column.

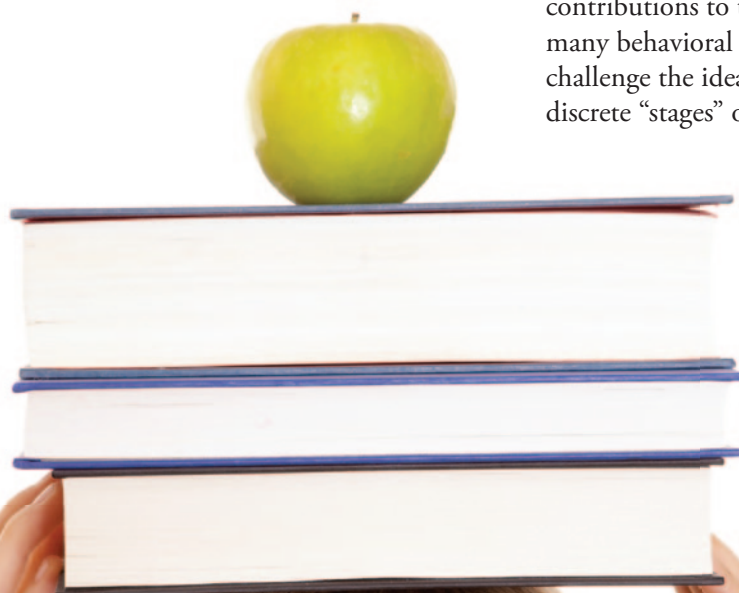
Keep in mind we’re thinking of writings by all-time experts who have produced time honored ideas or are still defining and shaping the field. David is ever the pragmatist and leans toward contemporary authors who offer useful frameworks and hands-on tools for coaches; Paul can’t resist useful theory even if from scholars long dead. Accordingly, we hope we’ve blended the best of both these perspectives. Here are the first 5 in our suggested list:

**1. Albert Bandura.** He is our consensus thought leader for coaches. Not only has he produced a prolific body of

work on how thought and belief shape actions, how actions affect environments, and how environments influence behaviors, he taught a generation of health education leaders who’ve never considered behavior and culture as rivals, but rather understand the need to view the individual in a social context. If Bandura has been following the rediscovery of how important a “culture of health” is in influencing individual health behavior, he’s likely bemused — and wishing more professionals would study what he’s explained so well for half a century. Read: “Social foundations of thought and action: a social cognitive theory.” Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986.

**2. James Prochaska and colleagues.**

To summarize why we think Prochaska’s Transtheoretical Model (commonly called stages of change) is so important, let us flatter Jim by quoting from Bandura’s book, “Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control”: “Most of the models of health behavior are concerned mainly with predicting health habits but offer little guidance on how to change them. A theory that offers both predictive and operative power has greater utility than one that is limited to prediction.” Though Bandura wrote this in the 1980s and was referring to the utility of cognitive self-efficacy, he could have been writing a preamble about the importance of Prochaska’s amazing contributions to the field. While many behavioral theorists would challenge the idea that there are discrete “stages” of change,



we find the Transtheoretical Model an incredibly comprehensive and practical framework for thinking about the process of changing behaviors. It helps you focus on the right things in the right way at the right time. Read: “Changing for Good” by Prochaska, Norcross, and DeClemente, New York NY: William Morrow Publishing, 1994.

### 3. William Miller and Stephen

**Rollnick.** Sustained commitment is the fuel that drives and maintains change. What are your tasks in helping participants achieve and keep up the motivation they need to change successfully? How do you ask open-ended questions that guide participants in meaningful directions? How do you deal with resistance at the beginning or later in the change process? How do you know when to direct and when to just reflect? Where is the line between clinical counseling and motivational interviewing? Miller and Rollnick have been instrumental leaders in transforming behavioral and counseling theories and techniques into valuable tools. Read: “Motivational interviewing: Preparing people for change” (2nd ed.) New York NY: Guilford Press, 2002.

**4. Martin Seligman.** Who knows how long the field of psychology would have been mired in illness instead of wellness were it not for Seligman and others who’ve shifted the focus of cognitive-behavioral thinking toward a positive psychology of strengths and assets. Though his work is not without critics, his book on character strengths and virtues served as a powerful counter to the profession’s preoccupation with psychological deficits and disorders. Bringing concepts of humanity, courage, and transcendence into our scientific terms offers a vital reminder that supporting behavior change will never be a formula. Defining these concepts has provided helpful

tools for supporting change. Read: “Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life,” New York NY: Knopf; Penguin Books, Free Press, 1998.

### 5. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein.

Like books by Malcolm Gladwell, Thaler, and Sunstein draw fascinating intersections between the behavioral sciences and their new field of behavioral economics. They offer plenty to consider regarding how to facilitate goals that are inspirational rather than mechanical. Read: “Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness.”

Now it’s your turn to help shape our list. Offer your opinions on our website under “Essential Readings for Coaches” at: [www.staywellhealthmanagement.com/Community/Blog.aspx](http://www.staywellhealthmanagement.com/Community/Blog.aspx).

To get your wheels turning, here is a diverse list of thinkers and expert practitioners whose writings we’ve been debating: Albert Ellis, Aaron Beck, Carl Rogers, Gordon Allport, Marshall Becker, George Mead, Kurt Lewin, Daniel Pink, Rick Botelho, and Bob Merberg.

Did we mention we love to debate? We look forward to your suggestions about essential readings. 🗨️

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## Avoid These Wellness Campaign Mistakes

Your culture will dictate what’s an appropriate campaign design, but some things sure to set you back include:

- **Rewarding only group achievements.** Team activities can be great motivators and lots of fun, but don’t limit recognition to teams at the expense of individual accomplishments.
- **Rewarding only individual achievements.** Although health is largely the result of personal choices, optional group participation makes incentive programs dynamic and — if done right — more supportive of individual efforts.
- **Rewarding only with a prize drawing.** While a chance at a grand prize drawing can add some pizzazz to a program, each participant should have an opportunity to earn an award and/or recognition. 🏆

## Coming Soon...



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