

WHITE PAPER

Breaking Through:

30 years later, why people still struggle to maintain good health and what you can do about it.

By Shawn T. Mason, Ph.D. &
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As healthcare costs continue to rise, it is apparent that although we have spent the last 30 plus years trying to solve the health crisis of the nation, we have made significantly less progress than we had hoped. This paper will discuss why we believe many efforts of the past have been met with substantial limitations. It will outline a paradigm shift which we believe is necessary for improving health, motivating individuals for sustained behavior change and achieving outcomes that are more meaningful, going well beyond traditional health outcomes.

National attention on health and health improvement has occurred mainly over the past three decades. Judging from the current and expected healthcare crises, we are not making progress fast enough. We have seen the history of failures, success and dramatic shifts in the landscape of individual health, including the struggle for a sustainable business model. The question remains, why is it taking so long? And, if we are looking to make a more meaningful and timely impact, where do we need to go next?

We started by evaluating our fundamental beliefs and identifying assumptions we have made over the past few decades. Each has its limitations. For example, we've assumed people will improve their health if provided the right education, access to resources, or if scared enough by impending health problems. If these had been true, most everyone with a healthcare degree, a gym membership, and terse advice from a physician would be healthier. Another assumption is that people will improve their health if they have the necessary time. However, this is predicated on the assumption that people inherently want to improve their health, but can't due to hindrances. Hence, removing barriers of time becomes the main objective of intervention. Although,

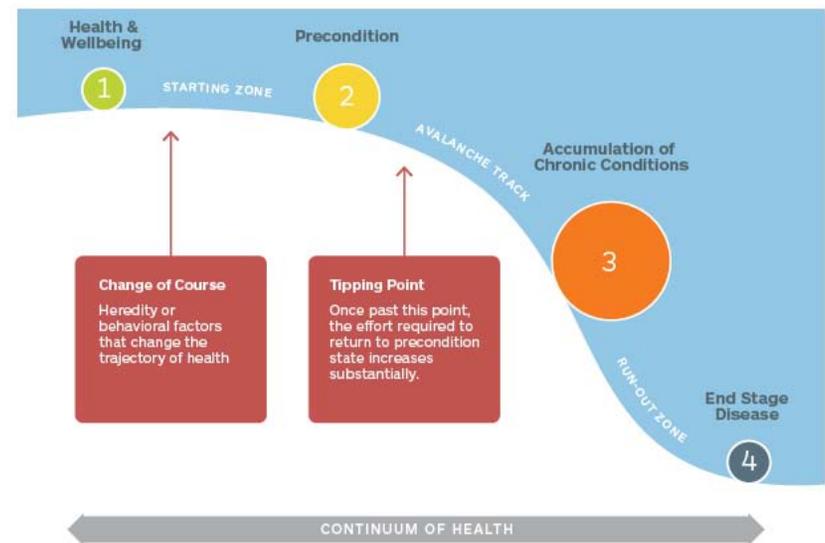
these were reasonable to test, many have either not worked by themselves or not at all. Interestingly, similar efforts continue despite knowing of these limitations. Do we truly believe that optimizing these approaches will lead to better outcomes, or is it time to change our approach all together?

New ways of approaching health and wellness are being more closely reviewed. For example, we think it's important to ask how your health affects how you "perform" in life, how your health can help you do something meaningful, or even more relevant, how wanting to do something meaningful can help motivate you to improve your well-being and health. We think these are the kind of questions worthy of closer review.

Historically and culturally, health has been most associated with physical conditions (e.g., disease), and, substantial advances in disease science and medicine, which have been aimed at both specific diseases and overall disease across populations, have followed. One of the most significant conceptual advances from a lifecycle perspective comes from James Fries and colleagues who presented the Compression of Morbidity Hypothesis in the 1980's.¹ Here, Fries suggests that humans have a biologically predetermined maximum lifespan of just over 100 years, and that we should be trying to compress diseases or conditions into the latest part of our lifespan rather than solely improving longevity. Although this concept has generated a great deal of research, an actual depiction of this phenomenon over the lifespan was never tested. Recently, a concept called the Avalanche Hypothesis was advanced that suggests another important factor.² Here,

a gradual accumulation of momentum takes place with age making it harder to regain health once descending "down" the slope. Our group tested this concept in a large dataset of over 50,000 individuals and results depict not only a significant slope, but that we are not accomplishing Fries' Compression goals very well.

However, medical outcomes are only half the story. In 1948 the World Health Organization advanced a significantly more encompassing definition. It stated health is "a state of complete physical, mental, and social-well being not merely the absence of infirmity or disease".³ After more than 60 years, we are unfortunately still struggling to adopt this on a population level. Many of the cultural and institutional dogmas have been slow to change; however, we live in exciting times and may witness a fundamental shift in cultural views, practices and paradigms.



One such shift became apparent when the Harvard Business Review printed a happy face on their cover accompanied by the title, “The value of Happiness.”⁴ The edition implies that the relationship between happiness and the bottom line may be changing, which would help advance the field significantly. Although examining the business model of happiness is relatively new, in the past three decades entire fields of study have developed to address this notion of well-being in health. Among them include Subjective Well-being which was introduced by Ed Diener, positive psychology, championed by Martin Seligman, and a more general advancement of Quality of Life (QoL), which nicely captures each of these and provides a more comprehensive approach to assessing health and wellness. Not only do we see that this shift is occurring in the field, as witnessed by the Harvard Business Review

article, but we see identical patterns in our own research. As an example, we conducted a qualitative and quantitative study on a representative sample of individuals (N=3007), asking about motivators, attitudes, beliefs and barriers to health and wellness participation and found that QoL was ranked highest when asked about ways that individuals would expect their life to change as a result of making progress towards their goal.⁵

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So what does QoL really mean? Although there has been significant variability, Felce & Perry⁶ advanced a definition that captures the concept nicely. They describe QoL as the perceived congruence between the objective nature of one’s situation and their needs or aspirations. As such, we have been using this notion of QoL to help address a more comprehensive approach to health and population health management. As the definition describes, both the objective and subjective domains of the individual must be addressed.



To help address this question, we looked to our own data. Across 2.2 million employees and insureds in our book of business, we compared the effects of medical disorders and psychological symptoms to determine their relative impact on QoL. Medical factors combined explained less than 5% of how people rated their QoL, but psychological factors explained nearly a five-fold increase. Not only did we present

these findings at the Association for Psychological Science last spring, but we were also convinced that these powerful findings required further research. We believe that if we want to accomplish our goals of improving overall health and well-being we will need to address both medical and psychological factors in order to truly engage with patients and the population differently than we are today.

IGNITING

As we all know, a major trend in healthcare has been increasing costs of ‘preventable’ or ‘lifestyle’ related conditions and as a result, employers and health plans alike have advocated for improvements in lifestyle and habits. However, many behaviorally oriented factors such as sedentary lifestyle, eating poorly, or living chaotic and stressful lives have proved very difficult to change. And behavioral factors are the largest contributor to health status and longevity.⁷ This kind of change requires not only fundamental change in institutional practices, but active individual participation accompanied by sustainable motivation. Psychological therapies and techniques (e.g., Motivational Interviewing and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) have been developed to address just this issue, resistance to change. They operate on the premise that people need to discover their own motivating factors instead of being heavily coerced. They further advance the notion of connecting people to values they hold dear to help them sustain change.⁸

Purpose in living and values are fundamental to humans as a species. You might say they are in our DNA. For example, cultures around the globe have been asked to report their values and when combined, they all converge to show fundamental similarities.⁹ Hence, there is a universal structure of values, some of which include self-direction, benevolence, power, security, and achievement. Self-Determination Theory is another universal theory of human motivation stating that we have three universal motivators: 1) to feel understood by and connected to others, 2) to have a sense of personal choice or autonomy, and 3) to feel competent or experience a sense of mastery in life activities.¹⁰ The more universal a human characteristic tends to be, the more it suggests some biological or hard-wired foundation. Because these are such fundamental and motivating factors for humans, it only makes sense to address them in health and performance improvement.

IGNITING (CONTINUED)

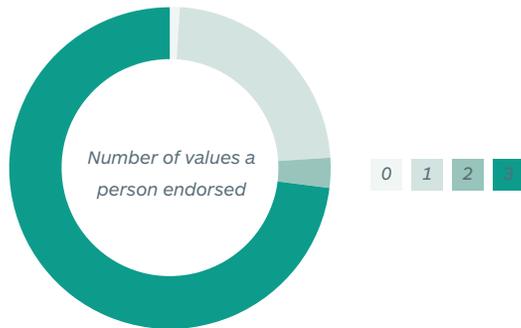
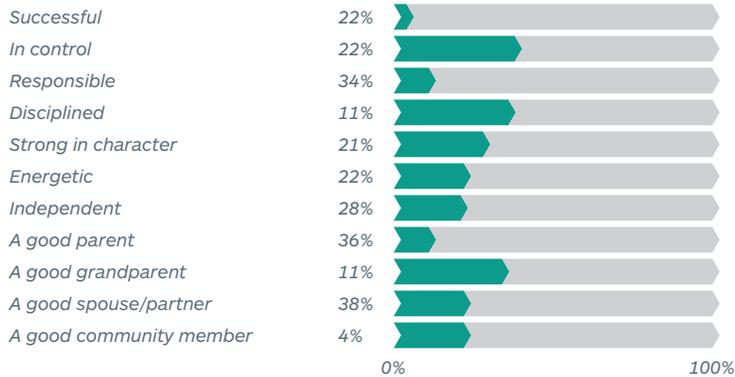
HealthMedia® Digital Health Coaching solutions have taken these factors into consideration by asking individuals to identify the things they value and tying those values to their behavior change motivation and intervention. We have looked at data from over 19,000 individuals and the values that they tend to endorse and found the following:

“The more universal a human characteristic tends to be, the more it suggests some biological or hard-wired foundation.”

Which value, trait, or characteristic best completes the following sentence:

“Being _____ is important to me.”

Please choose up to three.



Data from Care for Your Health book of business data, (n=19, 141)

IGNITING (CONTINUED)

In addition to seeing certain values such as being responsible, a good parent and a good spouse/partner be endorsed more frequently, we also see that certain values tend to cluster together for individuals. These include values around personal relationships, and responsibility, independence and discipline. Interestingly, endorsing values is also associated with higher baseline motivation and confidence scores as well. ¹¹ We have also expanded this concept to our portal and ask people to develop a personal mission statement. When looking at data from individuals who created a personal mission statement versus those who left a default mission statement, those who created their own statements were 28% more likely to go on and engage in a Digital Health Coaching program (n=2,422, Wellness and Prevention internal database). Both our internal data and that of researchers such as Michelle Segar at the University of Michigan suggest that tying behavior change to deeply held goals and values is more likely to drive sustained engagement and longitudinal behavior change. After we identify the values we care about most, or the behaviors we want to develop or change in support of those values, how do we stick to them? Kelly McGonigal, PhD, a health psychologist from Stanford University provides insights on the familiar concept of willpower. She explained willpower as the following,

“Many of us think of willpower as a kind of moral virtue or a personality trait you either have or don’t have. But it turns out that willpower is more like an instinct that we all have, that we can turn it on when we need it in order to find the strength to do things that are difficult, or to resist temptation and a big part of behavior change is actually learning new strategies for finding a way to tap into that willpower instinct even in the face of stress or temptation.

I think one of the biggest misconceptions about motivating behavior change is we start from the premise that people don’t really want to do the thing that we are hoping they will do, that we are hoping they will change one of the missing pieces. I think in a lot of programs are helping people identify what I call the want-power, before they find the willpower. That is to actually tap into their deepest motivations and realize that these behavior changes are consistent with the goals and the values they already have to see how making a change will actually contribute something to their lives that they already deeply want and from that point of view we don’t need to spend as much time or as many resources bribing people or threatening people to make a change but can help people actually find the internal motivation to make that change.”

When asked about ways that willpower are optimized and supported, McGonigal states that there are three things one can do to boost willpower. These include getting regular physical activity, proper nutrition

“...tying behavior change to deeply held goals and values is more likely to drive sustained engagement and longitudinal behavior change.”

IGNITING (CONTINUED)

and good quality sleep. These factors have all been positively associated with boosting willpower.¹²

It is clear that connecting desired behavior change to life values is an important mechanism for driving sustained

engagement and behavior change.¹³ Therefore, having solutions that combine sound behavioral science with the art of building intrinsic motivation through connecting individuals with values and purpose is necessary to make a meaningful and lasting impact.

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PERFORMANCE

You may be asking how health and motivation through values and purpose relate to human performance. We have all read the literature suggesting that health is related to work productivity, but we assert that human performance is much more than that. We start with the question “performance for what?”...an Olympic race, a world-series game, better performance at work or perhaps having the patience to teach your teen-ager how to drive, or being able to go fishing or fully engage in a meaningful conversation with your best friend? We would argue that if the design of human existence is to survive and thrive, human performance includes all these things. At the Human Performance Institute, a Division of Wellness and Prevention Inc., Drs. Jim Loehr and Jack Groppel have been using similar themes combined with

advanced technology from sport science for the past two decades to help people perform better in sport, military and law enforcement operations, show business, and life. The main techniques include eating for energy, appropriate physical training, connecting individuals to a purpose in their lives (e.g., ‘Mission’ in HPI terms, and most likely derived from their work with the military), and helping them identify core values in combination to navigate through challenges on their mission. Findings from HPI outcomes suggest this has been a powerful intervention for many. Significant improvements have been reported for improved energy (i.e., vitality), general health, emotion, social, and mental health in 6 month follow ups. Each of these domains was measured by the well established Short-Form 36 Questionnaire,

PERFORMANCE (CONTINUED)

which is a global measure of health and quality of life. It has been used and validated globally for decades.¹⁴ See Figures 1 and 2 for distribution of vitality (i.e., energy) and general health scores before and after 2.5 day onsite Corporate Athlete HPI training.

In addition to these outcomes, Dr. Loehr recently published a book “The Only Way to Win” where he takes his experience working with elite performers and derives a message for how to both achieve at the highest levels and generate life fulfillment at the same time.¹⁵ Dr. Loehr found a perplexing phenomenon through his work. He often worked with individuals who accomplished tremendous feats and found they were no happier than before. The promise that achievement delivers happiness was failing. He notes,

to hold onto regardless of whether or not the external world that you were chasing was actually achieved- you succeed in both cases.”

The main message from Dr. Loehr was that building a life on strong character provides the opportunity to live a fulfilling life despite your perceived level of achievement. The intrinsic value of maintaining good character is the fulfilling element. Achievements and extrinsic rewards (e.g., money or fame) have a short ‘shelf-life’ and come with empty promises. The paradigm of health for health sake is shifting and much of the evidence is pointing towards the critical importance of higher order goals of living aligned with one’s values, mission and improving quality of life as drivers of change.

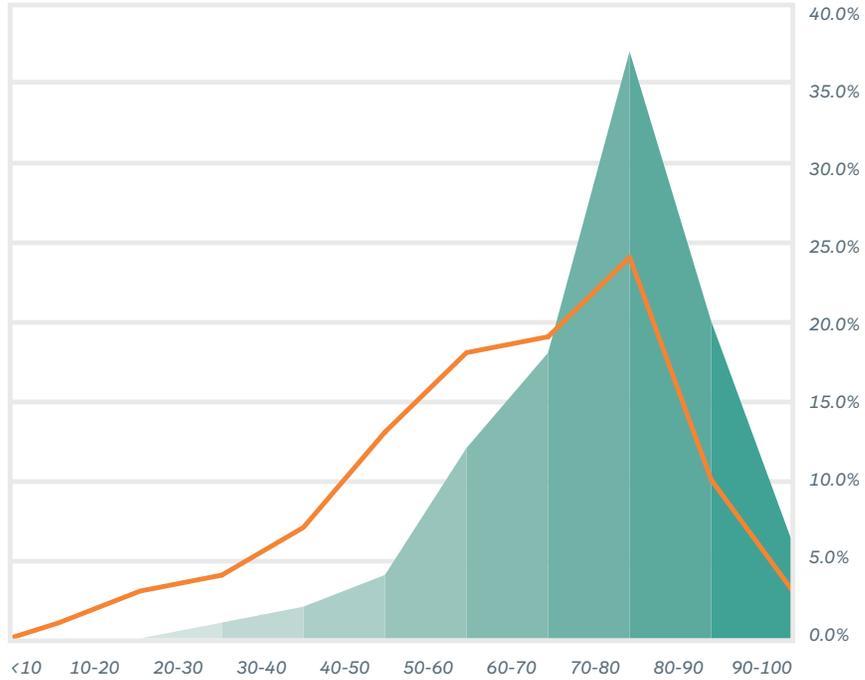
“We have worked with sixteen number ones at HPI and I must tell you that many of those even though they were the best on planet Earth had the sense that it really wasn’t that meaningful, it didn’t sustain itself and they were really puzzled by the fact that they always believed since they were five years of age that if they could win this unbelievable title, if they could achieve this Olympic honor that their life would come together. But the fact is that is a false promise, the only thing that matters ultimately is the sense of fulfillment one receives from that extraordinary kind of pursuit and what we’ve learned is that if you use all of these stresses and trials and tribulations that are involved in the training, all the failures, all the setbacks, all the injuries to hone skills that get you closer to who you most want to be in life then you never lose. You won’t lose in terms of whether you win the Olympic medal or not, you still feel like the pursuit was worth it and you have something

PERFORMANCE (CONTINUED)

SF-36 General Vitality Scale — T1 vs. T2

Scores represent SF-36 mean score changes from baseline to 6 month follow up on N=290 from HPI Participation. Participants are grouped by percentage of respondents (Y-Axis) in each of the score ranges (X-Axis).

T1
T2

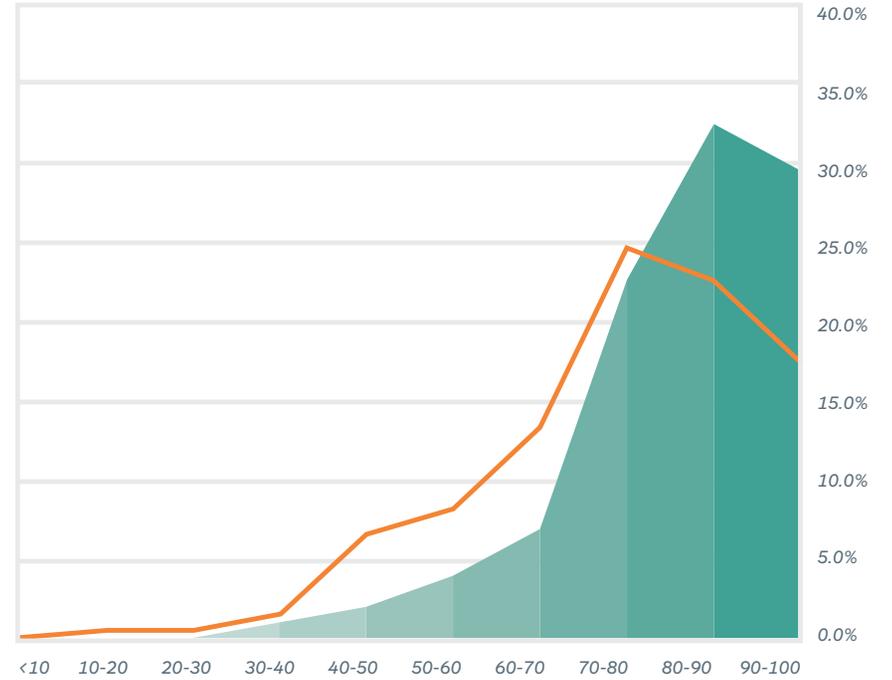


PERFORMANCE (CONTINUED)

SF-36 General Health Scale — T1 vs. T2

Scores represent SF-36 mean score changes from baseline to 6 month follow up on N=290 from HPI Participation. Participants are grouped by percentage of respondents (Y-Axis) in each of the score ranges (X-Axis).

T1
T2



SUMMARY

At Wellness & Prevention Inc. we believe that our tagline Health Igniting Performance is a 21st century metaphor for improving quality of life and lives. Embedded in our organization are the concepts that we have to look at health differently than merely a physical condition, we need to be accessing hard-wired elements of human motivation to capitalize on health and behavior change, and that performance constitutes an appreciation for the elite activities of “everyday achievements.”

Health **Igniting** Performance™

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