

# Want to Thrive in Healthcare? A Life Coach May Be for You

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Think of the best professional athlete or sports team you know. Now think of the best boss you have ever had. What do you think these examples share in common? Innate skills? Natural affinities? A sense of determination?

Certainly all three, but we would argue for a fourth: their mindset, a system of beliefs that resulted in habits and behaviors that ultimately led to their success, whether on the football field or in the medical field.

What people allow to occupy their headspace—what they think about—often leads them either to achieve great things or to cower in fear, not getting to create the relational synergies with colleagues that can help them reap the success and greatness that could be theirs.

As professional life coaches, we also know from experience that oftentimes all it takes to overcome this fear is the same thing that helps high achievers to excel in sports and other realms: a great coach.

Indeed, it might surprise you that many academic radiology chairs and chiefs work with high-performance executive life coaches to

help develop their professional and leadership skills.

You can think of a life coach as a personal trainer for your mind. After all, it is your thoughts about a situation, not the situation itself, that cause your feelings and emotions and the action(s) you take or don't take as a result.

A good coach is non-judgmental and does not jump into a 'misery pool' with the client. Instead, they will create an emotionally safe environment in which to dissect difficult or uncomfortable topics. In this way, a coach can help the client to identify and improve upon their weaknesses, as well as to create a plan to clarify and achieve their goals. This can include developing new skills, improving efficiency, and expanding their knowledge base.

Here are five ways that a life coach can help you take your own professional performance to a higher level and bring back the joy of practicing medicine.

## Help Prevent Burnout

We often meet with clients who say the increasing volume and complexity of patient cases and studies in radiology are forcing them to practice unsafe medicine. When we ask them how they are dealing with these situations, we often get responses such as:

"Oh, I just work here. I can't do anything about it."

"I have no power. No one values my opinion."

"I have to do what I am told, or I'll be considered unprofessional."

"Everyone else is faster and smarter than I am. I don't belong here."

It's true that our places of employment, the administration, the people we work with, PACS, and any number of other external factors can be sources of great stress to those of us who work in healthcare. However, a wealth of research has shown that we reap the most benefit when we focus on the things we can change in ourselves; for example, all-or-nothing thinking, perfectionism, people pleasing, and defeatist attitudes.

Ruminating over things we cannot control can make us unhappy, hurt our morale, and even lead to burnout. Indeed, the US Surgeon General declared burnout among healthcare workers to be a national crisis in his 2022 Advisory.<sup>1</sup>

The good news is that multiple studies have shown that life coaching significantly decreases emotional exhaustion, reduces "imposter syndrome," and increases self-compassion scores.<sup>2</sup> They have also found that a life coach can help provide healthcare workers, including radiologists, with strategies to manage stress and avoid burnout.

These include a recent study published in *JAMA*, "Effect of a Novel Online Group-Coaching Program to Reduce Burnout in Female Resident Physicians: A Randomized Clinical Trial,"<sup>3</sup> and one published in the *Annals of Surgery*, "Impact of a Virtual Professional Development Coaching

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Program on the Professional Fulfillment and Well-Being of Women Surgery Residents: A Randomized Controlled Trial.”<sup>4</sup>

### Help Foster Resilience

The word “resilience” has been known to make many physicians cringe, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it has been found that coaching does enhance the quality of resilience,<sup>2</sup> which is critical for coping with the stresses and challenges faced in the reading room.

Working with a coach, one can develop skills and strategies to avoid and bounce back from setbacks, juggle the never-ending litany of phone calls and reading lists, and maintain a positive outlook, regardless of circumstances. There’s even a monetary value to coaching, as studies have shown that it can cost up to \$1 million to replace a physician who resigns.<sup>5,6</sup>

### Help Improve Communication Skills

Coaching can also help in more concrete, practical ways. Take communication, for example. Radiologists must communicate effectively with referring physicians, technologists, administrators and even patients, at times, to ensure appropriate care. High communication intelligence helps a radiologist to provide better care in a more meaningful and impactful way, while

low communication intelligence can render even the most brilliant radiologist highly ineffective. A life coach can teach radiologists communication techniques that build rapport, increase engagement, and provide clear and concise instructions. This, in turn, can lead to more effective and appropriate patient care.

### Help Foster Collaboration Skills

Radiologists also work closely with other healthcare professionals to ensure high-quality patient outcomes. Coaching can help radiologists cultivate not just the skills, but also, more importantly, the attitudes needed to collaborate effectively with other members of the healthcare team, including referring physicians, advanced practice providers, and other specialists.

### Help Renew the Joy of Practicing Medicine

Great leaders—great professionals in general, for that matter—radiate authenticity, encourage unity, are approachable and inclusive, and embrace vulnerability and risk. These characteristics can inspire others to follow in their footsteps and take more action, responsibility, and accountability for their own success and that of the organization.

Life coaching can give radiologists the tools and support they need to

grow these attitudes of mind, enhance their skills, prevent burnout, and foster greater communication and collaboration with colleagues and patients.

In short, coaching can help you bring back the joy of practicing medicine.

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