

## Intention: A Powerful Force for Creating Wellness

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*Nothing contributes so much to tranquilize the mind as a steady purpose—a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye.*

—MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY  
(1818/1992, p. 16)

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, readers will be able to

- Understand how intention has been effectively used to support health and wellness,
- Identify methods that activate the power of intention, and
- Participate in an intention-creating exercise that can be used personally and with your clients.

“**W**hat do you really want?” This is a simple phrase that we use, often without really thinking about the question—or, for that matter, the real answer. However, the question—and one’s response—can have a significant impact on one’s wellness and one’s mind, body, and emotional well-being. At its very best, this question is asking “What is your intention?”

Our intention lies deep within us. We can find our intention by examining who we are, what we feel passionate about, and what we want to create and experience in our life. Whether it’s vibrant health, financial success, positive relationships, or the experience of inner peace and happiness, having an understanding of what we really want is the first step to clarifying our intentions.

Intention is similar to tuning in to the radio station that broadcasts the music we really want to hear. Clear intention helps us find the music we love among a variety of stations and

unpleasant static. We must locate and stay tuned to the correct frequency to receive the music (life) we want.

*Your intention creates your reality.*

—WAYNE W. DYER  
1993, p. 91)

Wayne W. Dyer has researched intention as a force in the universe that allows the act of creation to take place. His bestselling book, *The Power of Intention* (2004), explores intention not as something you do but as energy of which you are a part. His book looks at intention as a field of energy that you can access to begin co-creating your life. Answering the question “What do you want?” is not just declaring a goal; it is also activating a force or power of attraction within you that focuses your energy to propel you toward that which you seek.

Intention comes from within. It is what you want to feel, be, experience, create, or have. The manifestations of intentions stem from the core of our being. The Chinese have understood intention as derived from the core of the heart and the mind for thousands of years. In fact, the Chinese character for *intention* literally translates into “voice of the Heart Mind.” In Chinese medicine, when people strengthen the energies of their inner virtues to the point where they neutralize their inner deficiencies, they then naturally possess the necessary resources and healing power to create and sustain well-being.

Health practitioners and therapists who take a health coaching role help clients learn to focus on what they really want, and they support clients in setting and achieving goals and action steps that are aligned with their true intention. The client’s energy is then channeled toward empowerment and healing instead of stress and anxiety, which suppress the immune system.

## Using Intention in Wellness and Health Care

Emerging trends in research help us see the potential for intention in having a positive impact on health and wellness.

The findings of several historic reports from the U.S. government are impressive. For example, *Healthy People 2000* and *Healthy People 2010* reported that 70% of disease is preventable (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991, 2000). This concept was reinforced by former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and James Fries, who reported, in a landmark 1993 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, that 8 out of 9 major causes of disease are preventable (Fries et al., 1993).

This compelling research has created a radical shift in the definition of health care and medicine. In the former paradigm, it was believed that innocent people were struck by disease and needed medicine to fix them. The breakthrough work in health care suggests that people are responsible for their own health status and that they can reduce their risk for disease through information, personal action, and inspiration to shift individual behavior (e.g., diet, exercise, lifestyle).

## ***Intention and Body Chemistry***

Our intentions are the direction we take toward wellness. Wellness of mind, body, and spirit transcends simply being of good health and can lead to a happier state of being.

Are happier people healthier? Studies have proven that the happier we are, the better our body chemistry. Bruce Lipton, in his study of genetics and the biology of thought belief, found that 95% of body health is determined not by genetics but by our beliefs about life and our stress level (Lipton, 2005–2006).

Until recently, it was thought that genes were *self-actualizing*—that they could turn themselves on and off, so to speak. Such behavior is required for genes to control biology. Although the power of genes is still emphasized in current biology courses and textbooks, a radically new understanding has emerged at the leading edge of cell science. It is now recognized that the environment—more specifically, our perception (interpretation) of the environment—directly controls the activity of our genes. Environment controls gene activity through a process known as *epigenetic control* (Lipton, 2005–2006).

This new perspective of human biology does not view the body as just a mechanical device but incorporates the role of a mind and spirit. This breakthrough in biology is fundamental in all healing practices because it recognizes that when we shift out of stress-reducing perceptions or beliefs, we can send health-inducing messages to our cells and reprogram their expression. The new biology reveals why people can have spontaneous remissions or recover from injuries formerly deemed to be permanent.

Coaching clients and helping them access and use their inner strengths and assets can give them the power to make personal changes and maximize wellness of their body, mind, and spirit. The power of intention is at the core of it all.

## ***Subtle Difference Between Intentions and Goals***

People often ask me what the difference between *intentions* and *goals* is. The terms have similar meanings but have subtle differences. We create goals in life because what we really want is to have our intentions, or our passions, to be fulfilled. Our intention is the ultimate destination; our goals are the road map we use to get there. Goals are tangible, measurable outcomes, whereas intention is a power, a force. Our intention is the ultimate inner drive and motivation behind our goals. Our goals are the pathways and strategies for how to get there.

By developing intentions from our hearts and minds, we can create specific goals and actions that support the fulfillment of our deepest core values. Actions based on goals that are in accord with our deepest intentions are *power goals*. They are the most likely to be fulfilled because of their alignment with our true nature.

For example, perhaps your intention is to be healthy, vital, and at your ideal size. The goal—or the strategy—that you use to get there is to exercise 5 times a week. Exercising is not your intention; it is simply the means to get you to what you really want.

Some people associate goals with stress and great effort—something difficult to attain. Focusing on intention or life passions can free up the negative connotations often associated with goal setting and make goal attainment easier and more likely.

## *Two Examples of the Difference Between Intention and Goals*

When a person's goal springs from a deep intention, it is easier to achieve. Consider the following two examples.

**Example 1:** Michael, a coaching client, determined his intention and created an especially focused goal.

- ✦ Michael's intention: To be fit, vital, with a healthy heart, enjoying time with my children and grandchildren.
- ✦ Michael's goal: To exercise for 1 hour 5 times a week.

Exercising is the means to fulfill Michael's deeply held intention. The intention has the power; the goal is the means by which he will create what he really wants. The intention is where the source energy of his motivation, passion, or power resides.

**Example 2:** A Circle of Life coaching breast cancers support group in which several of the 12 women shared the same intention:

- ✦ Sarah's and Mira's similar intention: To be healthy and prioritize taking loving care of myself.

Their goals (i.e., the means for how to get there), however, were different:

- ✦ Sarah's goal: To resolve stressful relationships and be surrounded with loving, supportive relationships.
- ✦ Mira's goal (using the same intention): To implement a healing nutritional program for myself.

As you can see, Sarah's and Mira's motivation, or desire, was the same, but they each found the specific and unique goals that would be most supportive to fulfilling the same intention.

## **Circle of Life: An Intention-Driven Wellness Coaching Process**

In my 25 years of health and wellness coaching, I have witnessed the power of intention. This has been particularly true as I observed the correlation between the power of intention and the possibility of personal change. In the following sections, I refer to the process of harnessing the power of intention to create mind–body wellness, “The Circle of Life,” which I developed with Roger Jahnke (Figure 5.1).

The Circle of Life is built on the foundation laid by ancient traditional Chinese medicine as well as drawn from some of the work of John Travis (Travis & Ryan, 2004), a pioneer in the wellness industry. It also includes the use of proven mind–body self-care practices, such as breathing techniques, self-massage, gentle movements, and affirmations and visualization. All of this is centered around the power of intention.

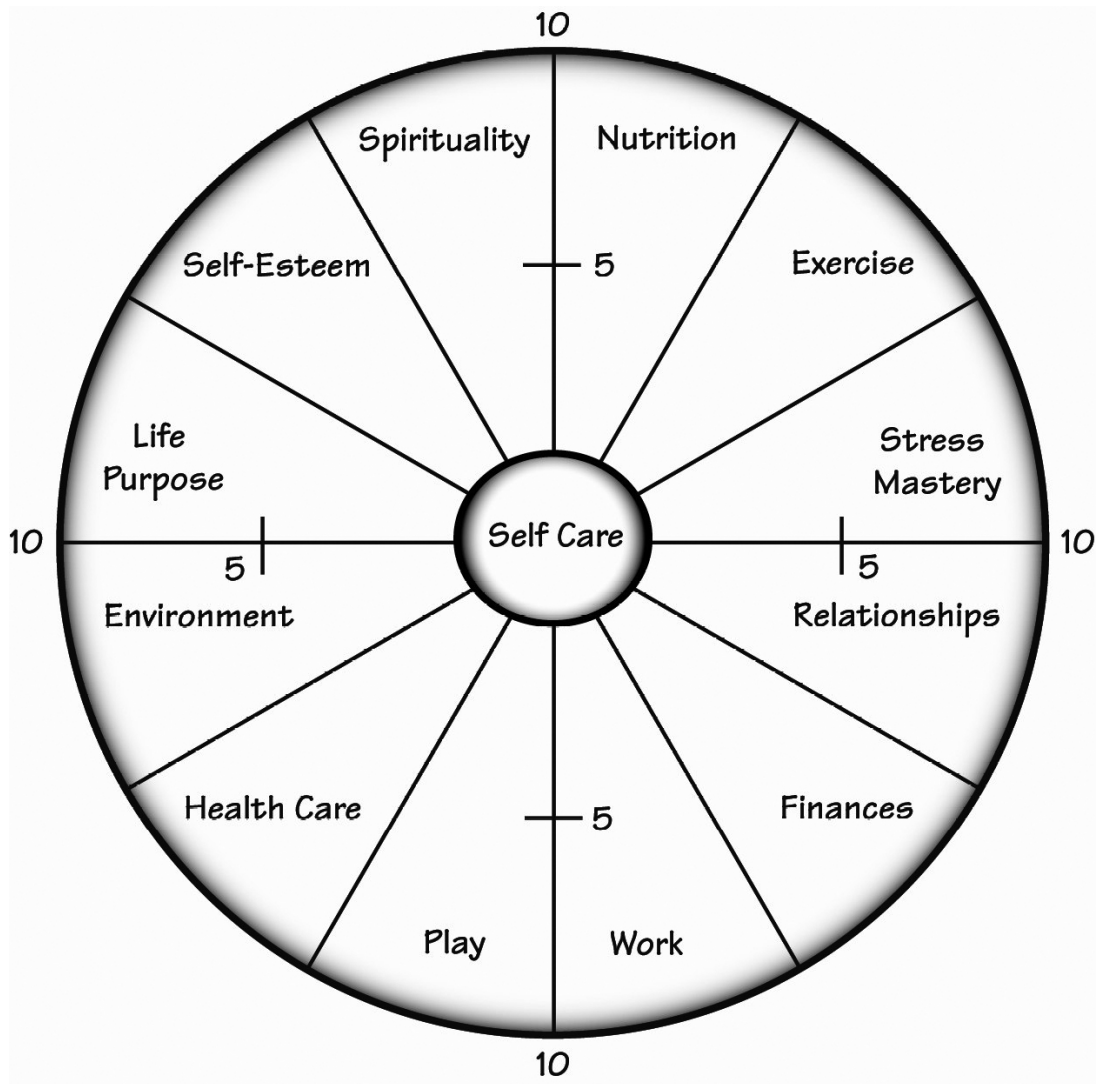


FIGURE 5.1. The Circle of Life Assessment from the Circle of Life Wellness Coaching System.™ © 2007 by Rebecca McLean. Used with permission.

The Circle of Life is a holistic (body, mind, and spirit) coaching process for individuals and groups. Certified Circle of Life coaches use the coaching process to help their clients make healthy lifestyle changes, with measurable results, in hospitals, government agencies, clinics, spas, fitness centers, churches, universities, and private practices throughout the United States. Registered nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, clergy, health coaches, alternative health care practitioners, and counselors are among the professionals who have been trained and certified in the Circle of Life wellness coaching method.

Since 1986, through Health Action Synergies, our consulting and training business, Roger Jahnke and I have helped individuals and groups use the power of their intention for healing

and mind and body wellness. In the following paragraphs, I provide examples of clients in our clinical practice, many of whom have had major healing and life breakthroughs.

*Intention is a truly powerful force for creating wellness.* Countless clients over the years have embodied that statement. Each client is a living, breathing example of success. The best way to state the case for the impact of intention on wellness is to tell some stories of real people and institutions.

I begin with the highly successful example of a progressive hospital that used our group coaching process to facilitate measurable change in health status for a wide range of people with varying health challenges and diseases.

### **Case Study: St. Charles Medical Center**

Between 1998 and 2004, St. Charles Medical Center, in Bend, Oregon, integrated the Circle of Life coaching process into their reduced symptom reduction program called “New Directions,” which comprised three 10-week programs a year.

The groups were facilitated in 3-hour sessions for patients with mixed diagnoses. In general, there were 20 to 25 people in the group. The patients in the groups usually had multi-system involvement, such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, as well as many psychosocial symptoms.

The medical director and a team of nurses recorded the group members’ blood pressure and weight and conducted a self-assessment of all body systems, including neurological, respiratory, cardiovascular, and so on. The medical team also tracked cholesterol and blood glucose levels before and after the program. This allowed for the tracking of improvements.

Incredibly, the health outcomes were so great that several insurance programs covered the expense of the whole program through reimbursement.

The directors of the program, Michael Harris (medical director of St. Charles Medical Center), and Debra Harris, a nurse, stated that

Our biggest contract though was with an insurance company who ran a pilot with us for 2 years and found their members who completed the program decreased their utilization of healthcare benefits by 57%. So several other insurance companies followed their decision to cover this program. (M. Harris & D. Harris, personal communication, February 2004)

### **Why the Circle of Life Process Works**

The Circle of Life process, which is based on proven strategies and incorporates the power tools of intention, affirmation, inspired goal setting, support from group members or a coach, and accountability, has been noted to be highly effective for any mental or physical symptom. When a person is pursuing what he or she really wants by aligning the powerful energies of his or her passion and intention, that is when he or she will be motivated to make healthful changes.

The process also works because of a single underlying principle: The human system is programmed to self-repair and self-improve. This is the basis for how we thrive in life and recover and heal from disease and discomfort. Our actions and attitudes can aggravate our condition and slow or prevent healing, or our actions and attitudes can support health and activate healing.

Here are two cases in point: Nancy is a cancer patient who has a stressful job, does not have a support system, feels helpless, often eats in fast food restaurants, and does not exercise. She is a classic “old style” patient, one who is primarily dependent on medical care. In the former era, this was a reasonable approach. The most important and hopeful breakthroughs were medical. Personal behaviors and attitudes were believed to be inconsequential in healing.

Compare this with Marcia, a second cancer patient, who is in a Circle of Life support group, working with her intention, goals, and self-care strategies for healing and wellness. She has learned about health-promoting nutrition and has integrated a healing diet. She is involved with her church, where she is receiving spiritual support and prayer. She has learned stress management techniques and integrates them into her life. She is practicing yoga and takes a daily nature walk.

Marcia has researched her particular type of cancer and a multitude of treatment options, including some complementary natural healing methods, such as acupuncture and massage. She is proceeding with doctors whom she has carefully selected and a comprehensive treatment plan in which she has confidence. This woman is a “new era” patient: She is more like a partner, a student, and an active participant in her healing process.

Which patient do you think will experience fewer physical and emotional stress symptoms? Marcia, who is an active participant, has the better chance of achieving remission. Her family will be able to engage with her process of self-improvement instead of merely having to take care of her as a passive patient.

For Nancy, the power of intent is minimal; at most, it exists as a hope that someone will “fix” her. In Marcia, the power of intent is like a magnet, attracting a wide range of resources and leveraging her enthusiasm for engaging in health-inducing activities.

Lawrence LeShan, a 30-year pioneer in mind–body work with cancer patients and author of *Cancer as a Turning Point* (1994), found that people who took charge of their lives were more likely to recover from cancer and enjoy a much higher quality of life.

With the Circle of Life process, the coach facilitates the clarification of the client’s intention, which can support the mobilization of the individual’s internal resources; bring forth problem-solving strategies; and help to create the victories, breakthroughs, and positive outcomes that the person needs, wants, and deserves.

## Circle of Life Process

The first phase of the Circle of Life process begins with assessing one’s life using a scale of 1 to 10 to measure one’s satisfaction in 12 areas of life. The 12 dimensions of human wellness that are attended to in the process are the following:

1. Stress mastery
2. Relationships
3. Finances
4. Work
5. Play and creativity
6. Health care
7. Personal environment
8. Life purpose
9. Self-esteem
10. Spirituality and beliefs
11. Nutrition
12. Exercise

The following outline of the Circle of Life process demonstrates how, through the various processes and steps, we can harness the power of intention for creating mind, body, and spiritual wellness.

The Circle of Life process is an ongoing self-assessment of satisfaction in 12 areas of life.

1. Assess 12 areas of life and acknowledge strengths.
2. Decide which areas of life to focus on and determine readiness for change.
3. Clarify intention.
4. Set realistic goals.
5. Recognize the mental, emotional, physical, situational, and relationship challenges that could keep you from fulfilling your intentions.
6. Use positive affirmations (self-empowering messages) and visualization to support your intentions.
7. Design and schedule the right size and pace of action steps to guarantee successful outcomes and gradual but assured improvement.
8. Receive support and resources through the wisdom of a group and coach.
9. Access inner guidance and use the power of self-inquiry.
10. Set accountability with Circle of Life group members or with the Circle of Life coach.
11. Learn and implement mind–body self-care practices each week.
12. Celebrate victories, then reevaluate and revise course of action.



## **Case Study: Intention and the Little Big Man**

Billy was a 20-year-old who began health coaching after his second of two major car accidents, during which he had sustained severe back and neck injuries. He was receiving unemployment benefits, going to multiple doctors, and feeling worse, not better.

At 6 feet tall, Billy was bent over and weighed a mere 120 pounds. He could hardly climb up the steps to my office at the clinic. He was on medication for depression and pain, and he felt the negative side effects of being overmedicated. He had recently been fired from his job and was suicidal and in poor health.

### ***How Billy Created His Intention and Acknowledged His Strengths***

During the first session, Billy took the Circle of Life assessment of 12 areas of life. Through this assessment, we discovered and focused on Billy's strengths. Circle of Life coaching is *assets based*, founded on the principle that whatever you focus on expands and multiplies. It is always more empowering and energizing to focus on a person's strengths than to focus on a person's problems. This is also the key in Chinese medicine: Find what is right and expand it. Two of Billy's strengths were that he cared about others and had a special connection with nature.

Billy needed to feel the desire and hope for living, so I asked him a series of self-reflective questions: If you could change anything in your life, what would that be? And if that changed, how would your life be; describe it to me. What does it look like? What are you doing, and how do you feel?

While he answered, I wrote down his responses. I reflected back to him what he had said and what I noticed about his body language. Through this self-inquiry process, we uncovered his heartfelt intention and passion, which was "to find my inner power, become physically strong . . . and to help others to be healthy and happy." He also wanted to backpack in nature and learn about herbs and how to use nature remedies for healing. He wanted to share his healing wisdom with others.

Billy's inner flame was so small that we needed to fan his flame of life force energy to activate his healing resources. He needed to discover an area of life that would energize him. We established that he was interested in exploring nutrition for the purpose of fulfilling his intention of building physical strength. This gave us the spark of intention with which to begin. Because I owned a holistic clinic, I had several books and resources to share with him. After the first session, he left with a book in hand (that he had chosen) and, with his first action step—to read the book—he began on his path to transformation.

### ***Goals, Challenges, Action Steps, Affirmations***

With his intention clear, during his second session, Billy set his first goal: "to nourish my body every day with highly nutritional food, herbs, and vitamins so that I can recover health and vitality." We then met 1 hour every week for 6 months.

We wrote down his challenges, such as negative beliefs about himself, lack of knowledge about nutrition, counterproductive eating habits, overmedication, lack of motivation, and so on.

Once Billy and I partnered to discover what he really wanted for himself (i.e., his intention), we used this spark of energy to create goals and turn them into realistic and successful small steps. That moved him forward.

As his health and wellness coach, my role was to be “the believing eyes,” dream holder, cheerleader, and partner—but not the expert. Billy is the “chief of staff” of his own life. He would take responsibility for himself, and together we would map out new action steps, work through challenges, celebrate victories and learning, reevaluate direction, use mind–body self-care practices, and create affirmations. His affirmation was, “I am strong, happy, and powerful, and I am helping others to be healthy, too.”

### ***Connecting Intention With Accountability and Inner Resources***

As a coach, I helped Billy connect with regional health improvement facilities, teachers, and practitioners and kept him accountable for his action steps. As he took his step-by-step journey, his goals would eventually fulfill his intention of being physically healthy, inwardly powerful, and serving others.

I led him through a visualization that I have created called “journey to your sacred power place.” He shared with me the inner guidance, symbols, and images that he experienced during the visualization that were available to him as inner support on his path to health and to finding his inner power.

### ***Empowering Ending: Intention Fulfilled!***

Billy went back to school, got off unemployment, and became a physical therapist with a great practice. He became a health-conscious man, gained 55 pounds of muscle, and was soon free of all pain and antidepressant medication. He no longer had doctor visits that treated only his symptoms. He chose real health care (meaning “caring for health”) through education, coaching support, and taking self-responsible action steps.

Through his occupation as a physical therapist, Billy now supports and empowers others on their journey to health and mind–body wellness. Today, he is filled with radiant health and well-being that illuminate his whole life, and he now shines this well-being on others.

## **Case Study: Healing, Intention, and the Power of the Circle**

In the beginning of July 2004, I received a grant to lead 12 women in various stages of breast cancer through the Circle of Life process. We met 3 times for 3-hour sessions over a 4-month period.

### ***Intention Setting, Acknowledging Strengths***

First, the women assessed the 12 areas of their lives using the Circle of Life graphic assessment (see Figure 5.1 and Chapter 1). Next, each of the women acknowledged and shared their strengths and victories.

Using the Circle of Life coaching process, I then asked the group members to write down their responses to a series of self-reflective questions—for example:

- ✦ What kind of life would make you happy, healthy, and fulfilled? (Describe it, please.)
- ✦ If you could change or create anything you wanted for yourself, what would that be?
- ✦ What do you value the most, or what is your top priority at this time?

After asking a few more questions similar to these, each woman became clearer on what she really wanted for herself and what her intention was.

Part of my role as the women's wellness coach was to support them to focus and visualize what they wanted rather than state what they did not want. Statements such as "I don't want breast cancer" or "I don't like being in my negative, draining relationships" focus on what a person does not want; in contrast, intention focuses on what you *do* want, such as "I want radiant health, peace, and well-being" or "I want to be surrounded by positive, supportive people who love me." The following are some of the women's intentions:

- ✦ To be healthy and prioritize taking loving care of myself!
- ✦ To activate all the healing resources within myself and to have the perfect support for my healing.
- ✦ To live my life passionately and joyfully by being my true self.
- ✦ To be at peace and to let go of the past to create a happy, healthy future with my family.

Next, with intentions clarified, each woman set a goal that would support the fulfillment of her intention. Here are some of the women's goals:

- ✦ Heal and resolve and be at peace with my relationship with my husband and mother.
- ✦ Take 3 hours a day for my self-care.
- ✦ Change my stressful job into higher paying, more satisfying work.

### ***Accessing Inner Resources From the Group***

My role as a coach was to facilitate the group wisdom, resources, and experiences so that each woman could be supported in finding the resources and ways to clear or move through her challenges more easily, gently, and effectively. They were supportive of each other with regard to ideas, referrals, encouragement, and even prayer.

I led them through guided imagery so they could access inner guidance. We practiced mind-body self-care exercises to enhance their bodies' capacity to heal. At the end of each session, each participant stated an action step for the week, the mind-body self-care practice she would use for the week, and her affirmation.

We met as a group every other week. On the opposite weeks, participants met with each other as partners by phone or in person to coach each other in the Circle of Life process. They often met with each other between sessions to take a yoga class, take a walk, or have a healthful meal. This reinforced healthy self-care and the healing energy of caring for each other.

### *Two Years Later: Remissions, Healing, and Fulfilled Intentions*

The women and I held a 2-year reunion in July 2006. Eleven of the women were in remission, and one woman was in her second recurrence. Each attributed her remission to staying in the process with themselves and with each other. Some of their fulfilled intentions were as follows:

- ✦ Carol had experienced the healing she wanted in her relationship with her mother and her husband. She stated that she felt lighter and freer and more alive than ever.
- ✦ Kathy developed a 1-hour yoga practice 5 times a week, meditation, and prayer/intention process that has given her deep peace, remission, and inner power that permeates every aspect of her life.
- ✦ Martha fulfilled her intention of being cancer free and moved to work in Paris (one of her lifelong dreams).

All 12 women stated that they had changed their lives in profound and wonderful ways, using the power of intention and the ongoing support of each other in the Circle of Life process.

Stories like these are inspiring. The capacity of focused intention to support personal transformation is profound—especially in groups.

### **Example of Choices**

*As a being of power, intelligence, and love, and the lord of his own thoughts, man holds the key to every situation, and contains within himself that transforming and regenerative agency by which he may make himself what he wills.*

—JAMES ALLEN  
(1902/2007, p. 6)

Let us say that two people each have an intention or desire to feel less stressed, or to “feel better.” One person—Pat—might try reducing her stress and feeling better by smoking cigarettes, or eating ice cream, or watching television. Another person, Robin, chooses to take a walk, do yoga, or talk to someone who she knows can be supportive. Both Pat and Robin have the intention of feeling better, but they go about it in very different ways. Although smoking a cigarette and eating ice cream may give Pat a temporary feeling of euphoria or less stress, what will the result be in the end? Most likely, Pat’s intention will not be met because of side effects or negative things that result from the choices she made. Robin, on the other hand, took the right steps to achieve her ultimate goal. She kept her focus on what she ultimately wanted, and therefore she was able to realize her true intention.

Which approach do you take? Which will you coach your patients to choose: Pat’s quick-fix approach or Robin’s get-what-you-really-want approach? Our role as practitioners is to help clients find out what their real intention is and then help them choose the wellness route to get what they want. By knowing a client’s intention, we can help guide that client and coach him or her to fulfill that intention. We can help him or her prepare appropriate action steps.

## Recalling the Power of Intention

*Whatever is impressed, is expressed. Whatever you impress deeply into your subconscious mind will eventually be expressed in your external world.*

—BRIAN TRACY  
(2003, p. 178)

When intention speaks, our whole being responds. Take a moment for a brief recollection to witness the power of intention in your own life. At various times, you have probably experienced firsthand how powerful intention can truly be. Take a few moments now and tune in to a time when you had an intention . . . then had it fulfilled. It might have been deciding to buy a house or selecting the home in which you now live, starting a career or making a career change, making a lifestyle change; meeting your partner or spouse, achieving a more preferred body weight, or succeeding at learning something new.

In your mind and awareness, go back to when you first declared “I want this!” At that moment, you activated the power of intention. Think about how you might have affirmed it: out loud, in writing, or simply by stating it to yourself. Did you visualize your intention becoming a reality? Could you see it in your mind’s eye, or imagine it happening? Did you feel passionate or enthusiastic about it? What goals did you establish to help you get there?

Most of us have a history of fulfilling an inner longing or desire. We have experienced the inner aspect of intention attracting that which we desired. Some of us, however, may not have taken time to note this power. It is a power that can be used purposefully, especially by paying attention to the intention.

### *Exercises for Bringing Attention to Intention*

*Your imagination is your preview to life’s coming attractions. Imagination is more important than knowledge.*

—ALBERT EINSTEIN  
(1929, cited in Keyes, 2006, p. 52)

You can help your clients learn the power of intention and how to focus on the positive energy to give the right attention to intention. Try one or both of the following experiments for 2 to 3 weeks. Suggest to clients that they keep a journal of their feelings and observations.

#### Experiment 1: Identifying the Power of Intention in Others

Identify people around you who seem to always have things work out for them. (Also notice the people who have recurring challenges.) Try to determine what they are focused on, where their energy lies. How do they speak about their desires and goals? Is it stated in the positive? Or do they talk about what they don’t want more than what they do want? What do they seem to do in the face of challenge? Do they seem to be able to more easily overcome obstacles?

#### Experiment 2: Paying Attention to Your Intention

Focus on what you want, your intention. Tune in to your thoughts and how those thoughts align with your intention. Are they supporting the energy of intent or neutralizing it?

Repeat your intention as an affirmation.

Visualize and imagine that your intention has already been fulfilled and feel the feeling, as if it is happening *now*—as if it has already become real. *This is key!*

Every time you feel your mind start to wander off course, bring it back, and shift your focus back to what you want—your intention. Return to the “feeling good” energy—knowing you are creating your preferred future by aligning your desires, thoughts, and feelings. Practice bringing attention and positive emotions to your intention. Notice any coincidences or synchronicities that may appear the more you focus on your intention.

### ***Practices, Tools, and Methods That Activate the Power of Intention***

Intention is clearly a powerful force. Coaching is a remarkable context through which to leverage intention and its powers. To supercharge the power of intent, my colleagues and I have discovered over the years a number of especially useful practices, tools, and methods as we have refined the Circle of Life coaching process. Like the concept of intention itself, these tools are located within us. At first we discover them—often with the assistance of a coach. Then we explore them and practice using them, exercising and improving our skill. Finally, we become proficient in their use and the benefits show up in our lives.

The process of making a lasting change or improvement in one’s life requires access to inner resources as well as a practical step-by-step action plan. Access to inner resources such as innate knowledge and intuition can make an enormous difference in a person’s capacity to experience healing and transformation. We all have an aspect of ourselves of which we are unaware in the day-to-day busy-ness of life that is a powerful source of inner strength. Tapping into your inner resources can be a profound tool for healing and transformation.

## **Self-Inquiry and Intention: Impact on Healing and Wellness**

Self-inquiry is a master key that opens the door to the discovery of the inner self. Self-inquiry initiates a profound process of awareness. There is a saying: “If you are aware, you are halfway there!”

In our wellness coaching and support group work, my colleagues and I have found that people often experience great relief simply by identifying challenges and clarifying what they do want or need. Without clarity, a person can feel powerless and directionless. Self-inquiry consists of asking a self-reflective question to elicit awareness and then responding with an inner dialogue. This creates an opportunity to bring up and review all that we have learned, read, experienced, or intuited regarding the issue.

By consciously inquiring within, we often find we have more information than we realized. We all have experienced some time in our life when someone asked a really good or a really powerful question that made us step back and reflect on and discover our answer. The question helped us access our inner knowing and truth. In the Circle of Life, the wellness coach helps formulate self-reflective questions that enhance the person’s insight, awareness, and clarity.

This “coach approach” means the helping professional is not the expert; however, the coach empowers clients to find what they need and want and supports them in the unique ways that

work for them. When the answers come from within the person, he or she is motivated from within and can become the director of his or her own life.

I often ask my coaching clients to make a list of everything (big and small) that drains their energy. Then I have them make another list of everything that gives them energy. This is a powerful and useful self-inquiry process. This sheds light onto and awareness into what a person needs and wants, not only to survive but to thrive. This also gives powerful insight for how to set intentions and later specify goals. Try this out yourself; it's quite enlightening.

We can use self-inquiry to evaluate what we are doing that improves our health and identify those things that may be moving us in the wrong direction, whether they involve food choices, stressful environments, and so on. This can help us sort out our level of improvement and determine whether we need to seek additional medical resources, collect more diagnostic information, seek alternative approaches, or implement new health strategies. It also is important to identify periods when no progress is being made and new solutions are needed.

### **Affirmation**

*Life reflects your own thoughts back to you.*

—NAPOLEON HILL  
(1967, p. 44)

*The body is the outward manifestation, in physical space, of the mind.*

—CANDACE PERT  
(1997, p. 187)

Along our life journey, our own attitudes, behaviors, and internal dialogue can either support us to fulfill our intentions or slow down our progress. It is important to be sure that we are not self-saboteurs or that someone else in our life is not unconsciously sabotaging us. One of the most powerful tools for eliminating this internal negativity is the use of *positive self-messages*, also known as *affirmations* or *power statements*. Replacing negative self-talk with positive affirmations creates new possibilities and breakthroughs.

A major percentage of all conversation in which we engage consists of inner dialogue with ourselves. An affirmation creates a new, positive self-message to remind you of your intention and of the power of your own mind to create your reality.

Candace Pert is a key research scientist for the National Institutes of Health who has conducted research on affirmations. She has found that carefully constructed affirmations can create shifts in the internal chemistry of the human body; specifically, she has found significant changes in brain chemistry and immune function. Her studies reveal that when a person has an affirmative thought or attitude, he or she can effectively neutralize a negative thought and its effects (Pert, Dreher, & Ruff, 1998).

The following are some sample affirmations from my heart disease and diabetes wellness support coaching groups:

- ♦ I make the right food choices, my heart is getting healthy, and I feel and look great!
- ♦ I am getting healthier, losing 30 pounds, and looking good through daily exercise.

- As I breathe in, I gather in peace, fresh energy, and healing; as I exhale, I release negativity, fear, and sickness.
- I have found the right balance of taking care of others and taking care of myself.
- I now prioritize 2 hours of daily self-care, and I am reaching my all health goals.

Affirmative inner dialogue can become as powerful a habit as negative inner dialogue.

### ***Gaining Insight Through Guided Imagery***

Interactive guided imagery (IGI) is a cognitive–behavioral intervention designed to help patients relax by using mental images to discover and cultivate healing intentions and to reflect on the meaning of these images.

Researchers from the Institute for Health and Healing at California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco assessed whether a program of six weekly IGI sessions was useful in helping 323 patients with a variety of conditions gain insight into their health condition.

Questionnaire items measuring cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual benefits of IGI were factor analyzed into two factors: Insight and All Other Benefits. The investigators concluded that both the process of doing IGI and the patient’s relationship with the practitioner were independently associated with patients’ insight into their health problems (Scherwitz, McHenry, & Herrero, 2005).

I have used the tool of guided imagery with almost everyone in my health and wellness coaching practice. During the sessions, clients frequently perceive symbols, images, or metaphors that are supportive to fulfilling their intentions. The images may be in the form of a spiritual or religious figure, an aspect of nature, or a sacred place or talisman.

After leading clients through a guided imagery, I have them select an image that is especially symbolic of the support they want or need, or I have them bring and focus on an image that represents their intention. One woman, Karen, brought a picture of a mountain meadow with flowers. She said she wanted to feel like a flower, high up on the mountain, close to the sky, blossoming. Matt experienced a picture of a beautiful home overlooking the ocean with an image of him playing with his children. Susan experienced an image of a legion of angels.

Having symbols and engaging the senses support the attainment and fulfillment of our intentions by anchoring them in deeper levels of our mind and nervous system that bypass the limitations of the conditioned conscious mind.

### ***Harnessing the Power of Intention Through Visualization***

I have done a great deal of work with seniors. One man, Bert, was 78 and young in spirit, but he was feeling depressed because of a great deal of arthritis pain in his joints. When I asked him about his intention, he stated, “I want to be out of pain!” My next question was, “What you would you be doing if you were out of pain?”

He replied, “I would be dancing the foxtrot and singing a song onstage with a big band.” In his town, there were music and dance events, but he had had to quit going because of pain and problems with flexibility. A favorite big band dance was coming to town in 6 months, and Bert really wanted to go. We found his intention: the motivation to do whatever it took to dance at this event. Bert changed his eating habits, got acupuncture, took up Tai Chi, and so on.



My wellness coaching homework assignment for Bert was to put on big band music and visualize making all the dance movements in his mind for 15 minutes twice a day. The visualization starting programming his body and activating healthy and happy memories. He flashed back to memories of when he was younger. He really enjoyed this process.

Herbert Benson is the founding president of the Mind/Body Medical Institute and the Mind/Body Medical Institute Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. In his book *Timeless Healing* (1997), Benson discussed experiences such as Bert's as "remembered wellness." He stated that when we remember times of health and happiness, we activate the chemistry of health.

Because of the healthful changes Bert made and his daily practice of visualization, he did go to the dance, and he danced the entire night away. He even sang a song on stage (which he also had visualized and practiced every day). Bert met a lovely lady his age who became his regular dancing partner. Bert was not pain free, but he felt that the pain was 60% better, and this was enough to have him dancing every week. Harnessing the power of intention, positive action, and visualization works at any age!

## **Gratitude**

Gratitude can be a potent ingredient in maximizing the power of intention to create wellness. People in the wellness community, and those who study brain chemistry and stress management, know the magical formula that helps shift a client's focus to optimism: gratitude. Gratitude brings altitude!

Gratitude is the fast track to creating a positive feeling. It can bring you to a state of well-being, which in turn can lead to healing on many levels. In the book *Deep Healing: The Essence of Mind–Body Medicine*, Emmett E. Miller (1997) stated that gratitude can actually shift the body's chemistry out of stress-producing mode (adrenergic) into self-healing mode (cholinergic). This mobilizes the body's natural inner resources, which include the triggering of self-healing and pain-reducing biochemistry.

Miller is a renowned pioneer in mind–body medicine with over 30 years' experience teaching people how to enhance their health and well-being. He believes that whether we feel gratitude and fullness or loss, deprivation, and resentment, a corresponding chemical state is created (Miller, 1997). In essence, Miller found that grateful people heal faster. They are better able to shift their focus away from harmful behaviors to live happier lives. And that is the essence of well-being.

## **Intention Through Prayer**

Related studies have shown that the stronger the intention, the stronger the force that seems to pull you toward the direction of the intention. These studies focus on one form of intention: prayer.

A poll taken by *Newsweek* stated that 95% of Americans said they believe in a higher force, and 87% said they pray regularly (Woodward, 2000). Moreover, in his groundbreaking book *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine* (1995), integrative medicine pioneer Larry Dossey studied the healing effects of prayer. He reported a double-blind study in which cardiac patients who were prayed for had a fivefold reduction in the need for certain

medications (Byrd, 1988, cited in Dossey, 1995). The study revealed a reduction in the need for medical intervention because of particular complications. According to these findings, prayer may be an effective complement to standard medical care. This is a powerful statement, indeed, and an affirmation of the power of intention.

## Experiencing the Power of Intention: Now It's Your Turn

*Cherish your visions and your dreams as they are the children of your soul; the blueprints of your ultimate achievements.*

—NAPOLEON HILL  
(1928/2008, p. 180)

It is clear that intention is a powerful force when it comes to seeking wellness of mind, body, and spirit. Here is a golden opportunity to create your own intention to leverage your own well-being so that you can, in turn, coach your clients to create their own well-being.

Intention is like the wind in that although it is invisible to the eye, it is a great force, so powerful that it can propel you toward wherever you want to go.

So, what is calling you, or where do you want to go with your life? What do you feel passionate about? What gives you a feeling of positive energy when you think about it; what feels good to you, and what is attractive? Is it inspiring work, a beautiful view out your window, an uplifting relationship, vibrant health or healing, or a creative endeavor? What do you really want?

### Create Your Intention

Remember, intention is anything you want to feel, be, experience, have, or create.

Answer from your heart any of the following questions, which can support you in creating your intention:

- ✦ If I can have, change, or experience anything in my life, what would it be?
- ✦ If I had a magic wand and could create what I really wanted, what would I create for myself or others?
- ✦ I would love to fulfill my passion for \_\_\_\_\_.
- ✦ I want to fulfill my dream of \_\_\_\_\_.

If you need help, here are some examples:

- ✦ Be healed of \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in blank) and experience excellent health, take care of my family, and live past my 80s.
- ✦ Experience energizing, loving, fulfilling personal relationships.
- ✦ Be empowered to create great abundance to easily support my family.
- ✦ Live and work in a beautiful and spacious home with an ocean view.

### **BOX 5.1. Phrasing Intentions in Positive Terms**

We sometimes think we're focused on our intention when the simple fact is that we're focused on the opposite. The term "self-fulfilling prophecy" attests to this phenomenon. This well-known term explains that we have the power to create the circumstances our mind dwells upon, whether positive or negative. So, it is best to practice consistent presence of mind to ensure that our thoughts are focused on the positive feeling of what we want to create.

Think of intention fulfillment as a "match game."

When your thoughts are focused on what you don't want, you might simply sabotage your good intention. For example, when you say, "I don't want to be fat and lazy and out of shape," all your attention is on being fat, and all your energy is directed into what you don't want! It is better to focus your energy on what you do want: "I want to be fit and feeling good in my shorts as I walk joyfully the beach."

Or if you said, "I don't want these bills," you may want to replace that thought with "I would love to create an abundant stream of money to provide for all of my family's needs and more." "I don't want to be in this stressful work" can be replaced with "I would love work that makes me happy to get up in the morning and comes with more ease and flow."

If you visualize and focus on your intention (e.g., seeing yourself feeling great, how you look and feel, how you would feel from the outcome you wanted), you are strengthening your motivation and your ability to tap into greater energy and to make choices that create the outcomes you want.

- ✦ Have work that is creative, that I feel passionate about, and that I easily make six figures doing.
- ✦ Feel deep peace and joy every moment, knowing that I am perfectly guided and connected to God.

Pause for a moment and ask yourself, "What is my intention?" "How do I want to feel; how do I want to be; what do I want to create, have, or experience?" Be sure to phrase your intention in positive terms (see Box 5.1). Try it here:

My intention is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

By letting intention serve as a guiding force, we can have the motivation, insight, and information not only to chart a course, but also to chart the right course for us. By clarifying our intentions, we prioritize our goals and focus our time, energy, and actions toward reaching them.

Clarifying our intentions and then setting goals involves skills worthy of constant refinement. Most people are adrift in an ocean of details. Purposefully setting and prioritizing intention and goals toward their fulfillment can bring a greater sense of order to the chaos of life and put a person in charge of the course of his or her life.

If a person is unclear about what he or she intends or wants, he or she can be confused as to what goals to pursue or what choices to make. Sometimes, decisions are made by default because a person did not choose. When we are clear on our purpose and intention, we can set goals that are congruent with that intent.

Then, when faced with a decision, we can more clearly decide to make the choice that is in accord with our true priority and values, therefore staying focused on creating what we really want, and not something less. We can clearly decide to make the choice that is in favor of our intention.

My goal is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

### *Visualize Your Intention*

*Visualize this thing you want. See it, feel it, believe in it. Make your mental blueprint and begin.*

—ROBERT COLLIER  
[AQ: provide reference]

From a still and quiet place, we can announce our intentions. By imagining all the details from every angle, including scent, color, and how it would feel to have it, we design our dreams to our specifications.

Now, visualize yourself successfully what you want in your life. Close your eyes. What is it? What are you doing? Where are you? Notice all the details of the environment: What does it look like? Is anyone with you? Imagine you are there—feeling and experiencing it as though it is all happening right now.

Similar to dropping a pebble into a pond, the ripples created by our thoughts and feelings travel quickly from this place of stillness, echoing out into the universe to align and orchestrate all the necessary details to bring our desires into manifestation.

Before leaving this wonderful space to come back to the world, you may want to release any attachment to the outcome and express gratitude. By doing this daily, we focus our thoughts and our energy, while regularly mingling with the essence that makes it possible to build the life of our dreams.

Many of us block that which we most want to receive or limit our intentions by expecting them to be in a particular form or timing. Release your intention to your higher power. Allow yourself to receive the grace and gift of what you have intended. Releasing feelings of “I’m not worthy or good enough” and opening the heart to receive will complete the process of manifestation. You might also work with someone who can assist you in a process of clearing any negative beliefs or resistance.

You may want to keep a journal of your intentions. Observe what begins to positively shift and change in your life, instead of just what is lacking. Focus on what you want. As you do, you will begin to understand yourself better, leading to clearer intentions. At the same time, you will begin to trust the higher power to respond to your intentions.

For best results, hire a coach, or start or join a mastermind or a peer-coaching group, or have an intention/accountability support buddy. This will greatly accelerate your success. Bring your new awareness to others. Intentions empower. Invite your children, spouse, friends, and clients to state their intentions before starting a new endeavor.

When talking with people who are endless complainers (including ourselves, sometimes), invite them to shift their focus by saying, “Let’s focus on what you do want instead of what

you don't want, so that all of us can put all our energy toward getting what you want. I can support you in that!"

## Intention: The Key to Opening the Door to Your Preferred Future

We experience plenty of evidence for the fact that we all create a major portion of our life experience. To some extent, perhaps even some great extent, we create our experience from the inside, by what we believe and by what we focus on. It may be our preference to have better health and be free from pain, or we may desire to have more energy, more fun, or more income. It may be our aspiration to take a new direction in success, creativity, knowledge, or confidence. In all cases, intention is the key to opening the door to what we want.

Intention is not just having an idea; it is energy, a power. The magnetic force of intention has the pushing power of your desire and choice plus the pulling power of that which you have chosen. The force of intention, in collaboration with choices and inner resources such as self-inquiry, affirmation, and more, mobilizes healing, wisdom, creativity, and the ability to experience mind, body, and spiritual health and well-being.

Intention may be the most powerful healing tool that we have. Remarkably, this power is not expensive or difficult to locate. It is within us, and it can be cultivated and refined with incredible benefit.

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