

# Dr. Wayne Andersen

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## The Pursuit of Healthiness

With any problem in life, you can choose to treat the symptoms, or you can choose to treat the root cause. It was this simple realization that compelled Dr. Wayne Andersen—known far and wide today as Dr. A—to give up his position running an intensive care unit, acting as chairman of its Department of Anesthesiology and as the Director of Critical Care for a hospital in Dayton, Ohio. “I realized I was tired of simply reacting to disease,” he remarks, now the co-founder of a comprehensive lifestyle program called Take Shape for Life. “I’ve always been extremely passionate about what I do and about taking care of people, but I realized I was getting up everyday to put band-aids on people without ever actually addressing the root cause of the ailments.”

Working tirelessly at the bedsides of the critically ill, Dr. A was used to wrestling with dire straights and long shots. As the first member of his family to attend college, he later found himself impassioned by the urgency of the critical care unit in medical school. Noting the disconnect between different medical professionals and their focus on isolated parts of the body, he was a pioneer student in the study of multi-system organ functioning that soon proved so important in critical care situations. Though he didn’t come from a prestigious, well known training program, he earned one of three spots in the Critical Care Program at the University of Miami, trumping many other applicants and graduating as the tenth critical care specialist to be board-certified in the nation. Committing his best to his work and beating the odds had always been enough for him, yet as time passed, he found himself wanting something more.

Dr. A had noted that these root causes of ailment so often lay not in a sudden accident or

isolated mishap, but in the subtle yet powerful effect of daily lifestyle choices on overall health. It is readily acknowledged that diet factors prominently into one’s ability to achieve and maintain a healthy weight, but few approaches to weight loss also factor in how a person moves their body, how they sleep, how they handle stress, and a myriad other incremental details that seem insignificant on their own but actually form an important index to success when taken together and over time.

This idea forms the basis for *Habits of Health*, the renaissance healthy-living concept Dr. A has developed and honed over the last nine years to help individuals all across the country live the life they deserve. Most people are initially attracted to the ideology because they hope to reach a target weight, but they soon find that Dr. A’s approach extends far beyond the concept of diet. Rather, it poses the trilogy concept of optimal health, which addresses the physical, spiritual/mental, and financial realms as a unified consortium.

“Beyond meal choice, people need to develop the time and resources to really focus on their health,” Dr. A explains. “Their work should have an intrinsic value and meaning to them beyond providing money for basic survival, and it’s important to note that psychological stress can make it very difficult to maintain long term success. Yet when one can obtain a balance in these three areas, the optimal feedback loop makes it much easier to stay healthy.”

Take Shape for Life is a division of Medifast, a meal replacement program whose science-based and results-oriented approach has been verified by prestigious institutions like Johns Hopkins University and the National Institute of



Health. Medifast had achieved substantial success on its own, yet many of its customers would regain the weight they had lost after completing the program and returning to their previous lifestyles. When Dr. A met with the CEO of Medifast in 2001, he found that the void the company sought to fill in its own method was the same void he himself had identified in society, and the same void he had sacrificed everything to fill.

At the time, Dr. A had sold the beautiful home he had spent four years building and moved his wife and two children out to Oregon in search of a new level of balance in life. He had kept one relic of his previous lifestyle—a 911 Porsche—which he used to drive his young daughters on adventures around the countryside that his previous hundred-hour workweek would never have allowed. “I tried to start a business that failed within seven months of launching, and I fell into considerable debt, but I was spending quality time with my family that took my fulfillment level to new heights,” he reminisces.

It was this new exposure to the importance of life’s varied spheres that lent Dr. A the perspective with which he was able to identify Medifast’s limitations. He recognized that today’s leadership should be about results that lent real, observable value to peoples’ lives, and he felt that the best way to accomplish this was through empowering them with the tools to take control in each area of life. Despite the soundness of this conviction, however, Dr. A reports that launching Take Shape for Life has been far from a cakewalk. “Being an advocate for what I thought was right was a lonely and uncertain road at times—a continuous struggle for many years in many different areas,” he says. “But I can tell you today, now that we’ve reached the other side, that it’s been the most powerful thing I’ve ever done. Take Shape for Life isn’t just a legacy; it’s actually changing the social fabric of this country.”

The initiative originally started as a licensing agreement with Medifast that allowed Dr. A to build a new company, called Health Inventions, around the meal replacement product. The entire infrastructure of said company was launched in the basements of two residential houses in Oregon, and Dr. A also opened a call center in Utah wherein he trained several staff members on how to talk to people about health. He had promised Medifast that each client would receive proper and individualized care, so his wife

Lori, an RN, interviewed every single person who joined the program. Within a year, the operation had grown so much that Medifast asked Dr. A to serve as its medical director. Along with Medifast’s CEO, Brad MacDonald, Dr. A then made the decision to buy out all of the company’s other partners to make it a wholly owned subsidiary of Medifast. As a result, Health Inventions became Take Shape for Life in the summer of 2002, officially opening for business in January of 2003 with Brad and Dr. A co-founding the new entity.

With the general concept in place, Dr. A was then charged with figuring out how to build a working model for the enterprise. He created a division for healthcare professionals, wherein MDs, DOs, chiropractors, naturopaths, or others encourage Habits for Health in their patients. These efforts are supplemented with a lay division of health coaches, which anyone can join. Coaches receive compensation as a percentage earned from meal replacements. Dr. A then developed a program revolving around his conceptualization of the six key ingredients to weight control, which lay the foundation for the Habits for Health program he perfected later on.

“Habits of Health is a system that teaches people that creating health is an active process, versus the reactionary process that follows an affliction,” Dr. A emphasizes. “It’s more than prevention, it’s a change in orientation. If people in today’s society accept the status quo, relying on their genetics and their natural inclinations, America’s energy-dense foods and stressful yet sedentary lifestyle will make them obese and sick. It’s not merely enough to abstain from outright unhealthy practices; one must actively pursue the goals they wish to attain.”

Habits of Health helps people to do this by equipping them with their own coach and with what Dr. A refers to as a bionetwork—a network of doctors, nurses, institutional support, and online support that individuals can access from the comfort of their own homes. Taken together, the program utilizes the meal replacements, the Habits of Health System, the guidebook, a workbook, and a set of DVDs to create the most comprehensive blueprint on the market. “It’s a self-study and an actualization in health,” Dr. A says with confidence.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this approach is the fact that there is no coaching

fee on top of the cost of the Medifast meal plans. "I'm a patriot, and I love this country," Dr. A puts simply. "Anyone who raises their hand and makes the decision to get healthy should be able to afford this program. It costs no more than regular food. We're not about money; we're about changing the tapestry of health in this country to make it better and to revive the American Dream. We've got to get our heart and spirit back, and this starts with our health. I want to gather a storm of people that literally say, 'Yes, I'm going to take responsibility for myself.' By reinvigorating the population in this way, we help them to organize their lives around what matters most, and that's what life is all about."

With this vision, Dr. A's bionetwork model functions to help people heal themselves from the inside out, and quite often, these people are then compelled to become health coaches, reaching out to help others find the same success. Overall, this creates a community and an underlying structure of people who make health a priority in their lives. "It's about synergy; it's about people reinforcing and enabling each other to lead healthy lives," says Dr. A.

In advising young entrepreneurs entering the workforce today, Dr. A stresses an usual lesson that proves an invaluable component to self governance, which is a foundational tenet of leadership in any scenario. "Don't spend time justifying a given reality as compared to another given reality," he instructs. "Instead, look at each situation in its true nature. When you experience a strong emotional response to something, stop to understand and challenge the feeling, and then make the choice that will best support the outcome you want. For so many people, their emotions are the centerpiece and driving force of their lives. But once you can discipline yourself and make that mental shift to control your emotions instead of allowing them to control you, you'll be surprised at how the world unfolds for you."

This concept translates into a similar idea that Dr. A first grasped when he was nine years old. As a young boy growing up in a military family, he was used to moving every several years, but he felt the sting of nostalgia particularly strongly when the Andersens had relocated from New York City to Spain. "It was October 31<sup>st</sup>, and I remember feeling sorry for myself because I was missing trick-or-treating," he recalls. As he sat in melancholy, however, an ape suddenly popped up

from the vegetation beside him. Realizing he could either resign to sadness or instead embrace the wonder of being in a place where such a thing could happen, he decided that from that day forward, he would change his focus and thinking and go out and experience all the great things his life had to offer.

"I realized that you can either let circumstances dictate your life, or you can be the dominant force of your life," Dr. A marvels now. "The erosive forces of life are powerful, and if you just accept them from birth to death instead of actively pursuing what you want out of life, you're going to end up with the shorter end of the stick. You've got to work for what you want, no matter the adversity. As we grow up, we are so often told no, and we are so often forced into a box to the point that many people resign and accept their reality, rationalizing it by claiming that they're doing okay. But this is the recipe for a pacified life rather than a driven life, and I believe that the people of this country were built for something more."

To date, Dr. A's system for health has helped over 500,000 people, and that number is growing rapidly as Take Shape for Life impacts upwards of 100,000 clients a year. With 10,000 coaches right now, he envisions a force of one million, and considering that there are about that many physicians operating in America today, this dream literally leaves no stone unturned. As Take Shape for Life progresses toward this goal, one can only imagine the transformation our nation will undergo as its people begin to pursue lives that are happier, healthier, more productive, and more fulfilling.

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President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to

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