



Episode 31 - Curious about being a physician coach?

Dr. Heather Fork interviewed by Dr. Cesar Vazquez

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HF: “Physicians do not cry easily. We do not. It's wrong and it needs to change. I know I'm not going to change the system, but I am going to do everything I can until they cart me off and put me in a pasture to create resources for physicians to be able to figure out how they can find the joy in their work again”.

Welcome to The Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. If you're questioning your career in medicine, you've come to the right place. I'm Heather Fork, a former dermatologist and founder of The Doctor's Crossing. As a master certified coach, I've helped hundreds of physicians find greater happiness in their career, whether in medicine, a nonclinical job, or something else. I started this podcast to help you discover the career path that's best for you and give you some resources and encouragement to make it happen. You don't need to get stuck at the white coat crossroads. So pull up a chair, my friend, and let's carpe that diem.

Hello, hello and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. You are listening to episode number 31. Today we're talking about one of my favorite topics – “Coaching”. I decided to do this episode because a lot of physicians seem to be interested in becoming coaches, whether as a side gig or a career.

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I'm often asked, "Are there already too many physician coaches?" I will say upfront that I think there's definitely room for more. Coaching is a powerful approach to help individuals make transformative changes. You can literally be a coach in anything where you're able to help your client get a result or achieve a goal that has a positive impact for them.

We're also familiar with coaches for athletes and high-level business execs. Coaches are used for everything from weight loss, to getting out of debt, finding your soulmate, or writing a book. People also use coaches to be a better communicator, cope with a difficult marriage or start a business. And of course, I have to mention, career coaches.

One way to think of coaching is as a three-legged stool. The first leg is the client has a problem that they can't solve on their own. And the second leg is the coach has a solution often because they've experienced a similar challenge themselves. And the third leg is the client is willing and able to pay for this help. If you have those three legs, you could potentially have a coaching business.

When a physician reached out to me recently to ask about getting into coaching, I thought "Instead of me just chatting with him, one-on-one, why don't I do a podcast episode where he can interview me and ask away?" And that is just what we did.

You'll hear some about my own journey into coaching, as well as information about the coach training, figuring out your own direction, the income range, some of the challenges, and also the difference between coaching, therapy, and consulting.

My interviewer is Dr. Cesar Vazquez, a board-certified pediatrician who practiced for almost 20 years before transitioning into the role of a physician advisor. As is often the case, there's so much more that I would have liked to have shared on this episode, but had to leave out due to time limitations.



For additional information on coaching, you can go to doctor's crossing.com/coaching for a free download, as well as visit the show notes on the website for this episode.

All right, time to dive in and welcome my kind interviewer, Dr. Cesar Vasquez to the podcast.

CV: Thank you, Heather. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for having me.

HF: I am really excited about this. And before we launch in with you interviewing me, I'd love to have you tell us about your interest in coaching.

CV: Well, thank you, Heather. So, my background in clinical medicine comes from a general pediatric background and training. I did some extra training and cardiology as well. However, my main focus was working in a solo practice, as well as a group practice, for about 18 years. And during that time, I took an interest in leadership and getting into more of the financial aspects of medicine, to the extent that I'm involved in some leadership within our medical society. And as time went on, practicing about 18 years went into a nonclinical career called physician advising, many of your listeners may know what that is.

And as time went on, I was very passionate about talking to doctors about, "Hey, there's a world out there besides clinical medicine. There are many, many other opportunities that some doctors can really connect with".

And in addition to that, I noticed that doctors were concerned because they felt maybe locked in, in their clinical job because they sort of had to continue to earn an income. And I think it was important for me to help them understand that there is an opportunity to earn a decent income as a physician doing nonclinical work.



So, I became interested in two things. One, helping doctors navigate through some of the challenges involved with nonclinical careers transitions. As we all know, it's very easy to get our first clinical job, but it is a little bit more difficult to get a nonclinical job. And at the same time, to help them with some basic fundamentals of financial management. And so, that got me sort of interested more and more into the coaching field and I started to seek this out, talking to people and obviously reaching out to you and here we are. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to pick your brain and get a little bit more information for our listeners about this field.

HF: Absolutely. I'm happy to do that for you. And I think that there's a real need for physician coaches to help in the area of financial coaching. It's such a big area. So, I'm excited that you have that interest. I am an open book.

CV: Great, Heather, thank you. So, the first question I'd like to start out with is, more or less general. What's the difference between being a therapist, a coach, and doing consulting?

HF: Great question. And there is some overlap when you're a coach and those areas, but if I were to define them, a consultant is usually hired for their expertise and they give information and they give advice, and they're also providing answers.

In coaching, it's more about partnering with your client to help them find their own answers. And when I did my coach training, they had this mantra, which was that your client is naturally creative, resourceful, and whole, and we're not in this role to tell them what to do, but really help them find their own answers.

As far as therapy goes, there are therapeutic elements absolutely to coaching, but in general, when someone seeks out a coach, they're ready to move forward, they're wanting to go from A to B with a goal or a result or change something within them.



In therapy, it could be about reaching a goal, but the emphasis is more working through the past healing wounds, looking at limiting behaviors and patterns that are a bit entrenched. And that's not the way in coaching, we don't look at limiting beliefs and behaviors. We absolutely do. And we do reference the past because as human beings, we all have a past. And often when I work with physicians, we are looking at things that have (roots) sort of beliefs and patterns that are from childhood even.

The difference is that once a client is made aware of these things and they're able to make some shifts and then move forward without spending a lot of time on these things, coaching can be appropriate. However, if they're having trouble making changes that they want to, then they may need to spend more time talking to a therapist. Coaching and therapy are not mutually exclusive. I have clients who do coaching and therapy at the same time. They just have a bit of a different focus.

CV: That's very interesting. Being that, we're all unique and the decision to make a career pivot and transition to the coaching field is a very personal decision. I'd like to know how you came about wanting to become a coach.

HF: It's funny. This always makes me laugh because if I had followed the advice that I give my clients, I would have really seen the writing on the wall a lot sooner. Because what I say often is pay attention to what you're doing that nobody's paying you for and see if you can make a career out of it.

Well, when I was still in practice, I loved personal development, I loved personality type that's when I began learning the Enneagram. I also would go to these workshops where you learn a tool or a technique to improve yourself. And so, I would go to these workshops and then I come back to practice then I'd say, "Well, who wants to let me take them through a program?" And I remember my aesthetician went through one with me and that was a lot of fun. I had a friend who was a family practice physician, and we did a program. I didn't call it coaching. I don't think I knew what coaching was at that



time, but I liked it for myself and I really like seeing other people make big changes that were impactful for them.

Well, then I ended up selling my practice and leaving medicine, but at that time I really didn't put two and two together. It wasn't until a bit of time that I had just taken after practicing to figure things out that all of a sudden it just hit me. Like, of course, this is so obvious. This is absolutely what I want to do. And I remember the day that I made that "aha", I started googling programs and I started talking to people, to coaches who had gone to different programs. When I found where I wanted to go, that was in California and it wasn't going to start for six months. And I have to say that that was the longest six months I've ever waited in my life because I just knew that was what I was supposed to do.

CV: That's wonderful because it's not often that easy for people to just have this moment, sincerely an epiphany and realize, "Wow, this is what I was really meant to do". And having said that, being a coach obviously has different dimensions and it appears that your focus is mostly into career coaching, but in general, how does somebody decide what area of focus to really target on?

HF: Sure. I made that decision kind of backwards. Well, I kind of happened into it and this is how it may happen for other physicians or anyone who wants to go into coaching. When I was in my training, we had to have five paying clients to even get into certification, that part of it. And so, I was an oil can coach. Basically, I coached whoever squeaked and I beat the bushes. I canvased my banker, my chiropractor, people I did volunteer work with, people I trained with. I even got the checkout girl at World Market to sign up for coaching.

And in that process, I had a couple of physician clients and I just loved working with them. I didn't know any physicians had issues or had burnout. I really thought I was the only one and I loved working with them.

So, I would suggest if someone's interested one way to start assessing what coaching direction would be right for them is to try coaching, especially if you're in training, people from all walks of life, different professions, people have different challenges that they're facing and see who is attracted to you and also who you really like working with.

CV: And that's very important because it boils down to sort of what are your skills, your passions are, your interests, and so on. So, we've sort of discussed the differences between therapy, coaching, consulting, and sort of your pathway into career coaching. Having said that, what is your day-to-day like as a coach? Just your typical day. Any comments on that?

HF: Every day is a bit different. And since I work for myself, I do get to arrange my schedule. There are three buckets of work that make up my business, which is basically a bucket, which is the coaching that I do. Another bucket which is running the business, the emails, the invoicing, working with the accountant and working with my business manager.

And then there's the bucket of marketing. And I have to say, I never wanted to be a marketer, I never thought of myself as a marketer and I've never had an ad or done any kind of marketing campaign. So, for those of you who are thinking, "Ah, that sounds terrible to have to do that (marketing)". What I do is I just create content and I started creating the content for my blog initially, which I did for 10 years and then now the podcast. So a lot of time goes into this content creation.

So, in my day, I usually do the content creation and the business part in the earlier part of the day. And then I do the client calls in the afternoon and evening because those are the most fun for me. So, it is sort of like downhill – "Oh yeah, I get to coach now".



CV: Yeah. And I was just going to say, I was thinking about how does one become a coach? How do you get into the field? It's not so easy as just saying, "Okay, I'm going to be a coach. And that's it". It requires some training, I suppose. And I feel that there's a few different options out there. Could you comment on how hard it is to get into a program? Maybe the cost associated with that and the different options and levels.

HF: Now, one thing that's interesting about coaching, not a lot of people might not be completely aware of is there are no requirements. No one has to do any type of training at all, or be certified. There is no licensure. You can just call yourself a coach and hang your shingle and off you go.

That being said, I think there's a lot of value to having some training, because even though as physicians, we are very used to listening, asking questions, interacting with people on a very intimate level. So, we have a lot of those natural skills, but the coaching training really helps you hone the skills, use them in a slightly different way because we're not giving a lot of information as a coach.

And then one of the best values of training is getting feedback. So, we had a lot of feedback during training. We also had to record our calls during certification to get feedback. And you also get to see different coaching styles demonstrated. I would say the training is incredibly valuable and the next decision to make would be, "Do you want to go through a certification program and do a program that's certified by the International Coaching Federation?" Which is the biggest established body that accredits programs.

CV: Thank you. That's what I heard as well. One of the things that comes up often is this is probably the type of investment on the front end, where you would be paying for some coursework, certifications, et cetera, while having your day job. So, this is something that doctors would probably do in the evening or after hours. So, one question was, "What's the average cost to get certified, say a master certified coach?" But more



importantly, I think a lot of the listeners would also want to know what is the income potential as a part-time coach, perhaps, or as a full-time coach?

HF: Okay. So, you ask a couple of questions there. So, let me just first start to talk about the cost is, my program, it's CTI - Coactive Training Institute. I just checked the prices currently. And training there is divided into a curriculum which you could think of like medical school. That's a basic curriculum that a lot of accredited programs have. That's \$6,675 and it's five modules. Now it's I think four days (for each module), because it's remote. Before it was three days when it was in person. And then if you do the certification, that adds on about the same amount. So, the total cost to get certified is about \$12,600.

Compared to other programs it's fairly well in the middle, there are some that are less and there are some that are close to \$20,000. I saw a weekend course for \$149 but that's not to be certified.

And that in terms of the time that it takes, that program took me about nine months, but you could definitely do it while you were working a 40-hour job. Not 60 hours, I don't think that would really be good, but you can spread it out. So a lot of these programs have some flexibility that you really don't need to stop your job to do the training. And then you asked another question.

CV: Just about the income.

HF: The income, right. Okay. There's a lot to say here, but I'll try to be brief about it. The way coaching was when I started over 10 years ago and the way it is now. And I think the way it still will be in 10 years from now is that it's a great hobby, but it is a bit of a difficult job or career or business to have.

That being said, many people are making very healthy incomes, replacing physician incomes, there are physicians who have more than a million-dollar income from their coaching. High six figures. But what you don't hear a lot about are the many physicians and others who go through these very good training programs and struggled to get clients, struggle to establish a business and struggled to get hired.

CV: Yeah, I suppose that it sort of has a variety of different levels and it really boils down to your commitment and passion for it. So that's helpful because I think a lot of physicians who are starting out in this field would want to know, at what point would you be able to replace your income and continue to do the coaching on a full-time basis?

One of the questions that is included in this category would be, there's one-to-one coaching, which you essentially are working alongside a person individually over a period of time. However, what are opportunities for group coaching or being sort of keynote speakers and so on? Is there a lot of opportunities to do that as well?

HF: One of the great changes that's happening, which is going to help physicians be more profitable in coaching and potentially more successful is that they don't have to just be limited to one-to-one coaching. There's a way that they can create passive income by adding on things such as a digital course that covers a lot of the material that they teach that a client could use and utilize and not have to have that high cost one-to-one coaching fee, but get a lot of the value from the coach.

So, coaches are adding on digital courses to enhance their offerings, making it easier for them to have a living wage. And in that model, they may have group coaching that they're doing to a number of clients going through their programs. As you mentioned, they could do speaking as well. They can go and offer workshops, some write books, others might be doing different models, where they have coaches working under them. Physician coaches are doing that now, they have both physicians' coaches working under them and others. So, everything is, I think, exploding in the coaching realm.



There are companies now that are hiring coaches that were not in existence 10 years ago. And something I'm seeing on LinkedIn, which I haven't seen, I didn't see five years ago, all these job ads for coaches and health coaches. Now, they are not paying a lot of money. It might be \$15, \$30, \$40, \$50, \$60 an hour, but I see more and more there are health insurance companies and telemedicine companies, there are programs that want to offer..... I even saw a medical school wanting to hire a coach for the students.

If I look in my crystal ball, coaching is exploding. It's on fire because companies and individuals are really starting to see the ROI, the return on investing in it. But that being said, I still would recommend people to be careful, to not leave a job and jeopardize their income in thinking that this can be a quick turnaround in terms of making that physician salary, because it's not easy. I will say that.

CV: Right. And I agree with you. That's what I've seen on my side here, where I work in my local community and just talking to a lot of physicians. First of all, there's that physician burnout piece of it. Then we were hit with a pandemic and COVID suddenly made many physicians rethink their career path because while they thought at one point that they were protected from income loss or job loss, it became a reality with many of the doctors that I know, were either having to close practices or got furloughed or their incomes were reduced.

And that was something that was completely unexpected. You go to medical school and do your training. You dedicate yourself all these years and at the end of that amendment, you expect to be fully employed. And that was not the case anymore. So, that really triggered this groundswell of interest among physicians to come up with sort of either side gigs or other options so that they would continue to be marketable and not only depend on the clinical work that they were doing.

So that's extremely important. And I've also noticed that GME programs, residency



programs as well, we have a local medical school here, and they are also looking at working together with coaches to start talking about these subjects early on in their career, as opposed to when it's too late, when doctors are already sort of overstressed and considering other options for their career. So, that's very important.

I'm just curious to know in the last, I don't know, six months or so, what would be your typical client? What would be the most common reason for somebody to come to you? Maybe if you can just talk about somebody in particular.

HF: The healthcare system. Do we need to say more? I call it, this pandemic has brought on an epidemic in physician burnout and dissatisfaction. I have never had 50 people on my waitlist. I've been doing this for 11 years. I have never had to keep people waiting like that. So we, as physicians are suffering. There are huge issues out there with how the system is asking us to practice. And I think I really shouldn't get talking because it's something I get a bit hot under the collar about because I see so much pain.

I have physicians when they come to me, it's not unusual for them to cry. And physicians do not cry easily. We do not. And it's wrong and it needs to change. I know I'm not going to change the system, but I am going to do everything I can until they carve me off and put me in a posture to create resources for physicians, to be able to figure out how they can find the joy in their work again.

CV: Right. And it's all about that. It really is about that personal touch, having somebody sort of guide them into finding and discovering themselves who they are and how they can leverage their skills and talents to pivot into another career path that is just as rewarding and satisfying from an intellectual standpoint, but also from a financial standpoint. So it is very interesting that there's so many doctors that are kind of experiencing the same challenges.

And having said that, not everybody's cut out to be a coach. So, one of the questions that comes up is "What's a typical personality for somebody who would make a good coach?" And then as a side question to that, what's the easiest part or the funnest part, and then what would be the hardest part of being a coach?

HF: Okay. So the first part is who makes a good coach? What's a good personality? I'm sure there's quite a range. We have Tony Robbins who is a fantastic coach. You have people coaching in the athletic world, the executive world. So I think part of it is finding a good match for your personality and what your experience is. And that being said coaches in general, I think love people. We love to ask them questions and get curious about what makes them tick.

So, I think that natural love of humanity and really loving personal development and helping people be their best. If that is something that's really important for you and sharing often a very intimate partnership with another person, another human being to help them live their fullest potential. If that excites you, then you're a natural coach. And it's just something that once you are bitten by it, it's hard to get enough of it because seeing that transformation in people never gets old.

CV: That's great. Yeah. Great, great feedback.

HF: I didn't answer Your question. Sorry. The easiest and the hardest part. So, I'll be really quick on that. So, the easiest part is the coaching. Totally. For me, it feels effortless. The hardest part is I think for most people, the marketing of the business, how do you put yourself out there? How do you get noticed? How do you get more clients and get hired? I think that's the challenge for people.

CV: Yeah. And I'm glad you mentioned that because I think 10 years ago, there were probably not very many resources, but nowadays there are so many Facebook groups.



There are so many podcasts, there's books. I'm sure at the end of this podcast, you'll be posting some links on your website to do more resources.

So, the information is out there and all it takes is just accessing that and starting to go through that internal discovery part to see if there's something that makes sense to a physician who's really interested in doing this type of work. Any other thoughts, any final thoughts about your career or your experience and just your overall life as a coach?

HF: Yeah. So, before I have a final word, what I would like to say since you were mentioning resources is that there will be a download. I love downloads for you guys and it'll have information on coaching, some books you can check out, some podcasts. It'll also have some information about how to explore a training program. So, you'll be able to get that on my site. In the show notes, there'll be a link for it, but you can also find it at doctorscrossing.com/coaching.

A final word. I always would just encourage you if you have any interest in coaching at all, to give yourself a chance to explore it, because I know pretty much anyone who's tried coaching and find that it resonates with them, loves it. I don't mean likes it, loves it. Because how can you not love seeing someone become who they're really meant to be and break through barriers and find that joy? I mean, it's addictive. I never want to stop doing this. So, I encourage you to give it a chance if there's a spark there and see where it takes you.

CV: And that's a far cry from many doctors who unfortunately have made a decision into a particular sort of specialty, and then they come to find out that it just wasn't a good match for them. So, this is great news that you're sharing that with us, because I'm glad to find out that there are coaches that are doing it, and they really enjoy it and love what they're doing.



HF: It's been wonderful to do this interview with you Cesar. You've been really great. And thank you so much for helping me get the word out.

CV: Oh, you're welcome. And thank you so much for spending the time away from your busy day to do this. I'm sure your listeners will be very excited to listen to this and take away all this great information you provide.

HF: All right. Well, thanks again. And let me know if you go onto coaching. I'd love to have a financial coach to refer to.

CV: I appreciate it. Thank you.

HF: All right. So, thank you Cesar. Thank you so much. All right, guys, I'd like to just thank you for listening and don't forget to carpe that diem and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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Podcast details

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