

IT'S OK TO BE A RISK-TAKER

That's one of the lessons Jenny Radcliffe learned with the help of her coach. And now she's turned her back on a successful, high-flying career to take a flyer at a new, and rather surprising, business venture of her own.

Jenny has always been a high-achiever: regularly top-of-the-class at school, she went onto higher education and a career in buying and supply chain management that culminated in a senior position with a Fortune 500 company ... and all before she turned thirty.

But something was missing for Jenny: "I had a good job, I was financially comfortable and secure, I was doing an MBA, I was getting job offers, I was (and still am) happily married ... but I knew in my heart it wasn't enough. I couldn't see where my next challenge was coming from. I felt I'd done it all before and already proven myself. In short, I was restless."

She turned to coaching for some answers. But of course the answers were there all the time, it was just a question of helping Jenny find them for herself.

Jenny & her coach started by exploring her values – the beliefs that really make Jenny the person she is. She discovered that it was important for her to be her own boss, that she needed to be able to take risks – not something that you can easily do as an employee. She also learned how creative she is and realised how the working life she'd always led was actually constraining this and leading to feelings of frustration and impatience.

"The great thing about working with my coach

was that he was someone with no emotional investment in me as an individual – unlike friends or family – who could give me an unbiased, totally objective perspective", says Jenny.

"I had the answer all the time – I was already a risk taker, I was even planning my new business, but it was just a hobby, I didn't see it is a real life option. Coaching just helped me to make up my mind, to take action, to make a change."

Jenny is now about to start the new business that she'd thought of only as a passing interest. She's going to open a beauty salon ... running the business but employing trained therapists – she has no plans for learning how to do a French manicure herself!

"I know it seems like a bit of departure from the world I used to inhabit, but then I've also realised I'm a bit unconventional ... something else that coaching has helped me to understand about myself.



Of course, it's a good business opportunity too – I'll need all the skills I've learned in my career and my studies. That includes the people management side of things and I'm looking forward to working with young people and helping them to develop.

Starting her new business is also going to give Jenny the opportunity to get involved with the local community – something she's never really been in a position to do before. She has become actively involved in "Sefton Women in Business" networking group, and is acting as a mentor to local teenagers who are studying business for the first time.

"My coach helped me to break through my conventional life and go for what I really wanted. I've come to terms with the high expectations I've always placed on myself and which I believed others had for me too. And I still have my ambitions ... I'm going to build an empire you know!"

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A CERTAIN KIND OF BLINDNESS?

Writing in **The Psychologist** (September 2003), **Michael Apter** admits that psychological researchers might be guilty of failing to view concepts and techniques with fresh eyes, so missing things that are obvious to everyone except psychologists! ... a phenomenon described back in 1899 by William James (a founding father of psychology) as 'a certain kind of blindness'.

Among the examples Apter gives is the notion of a trait – a central concept in all psychometric work on personality. He suggests that it is in fact obvious that we are very different kinds of people at different times in everyday life and that this is the essence of what makes us human. Personality is dynamic, not static. For instance, you might be extraverted at a dinner party on one occasion and introverted on another.



He believes that this is the result of an ever-changing internal (as well external, environmental) context to our actions. We want different things at different times and so we behave differently; our personalities are shifting and inconstant.

Not only is trait theory over simple, he asserts, it is also unhelpful. To give someone a test and then tell them this is what they're like, limits them and their possibilities. This 'chronotyping' mistakenly assumes that a person will remain the same. In practice, using personality testing to select a person for a job doesn't help them change, grow and develop into and beyond it.

Ed: Although psychometrics are a useful tool in coaching, it's important that clients don't label themselves and try to live up to that label – "I'm an introvert, so I'd better not say much at that meeting ...". We believe that the full range of human behaviour and response is available to a person in a given situation.

It's therefore vital to understand the exact context in which a client wants to perform and in which they feel their performance is blocked. We call it 'framing'. It's also important to recognise that people are changing all the time. Coaching can guide that change in directions that clients thought were not open to them.

TAKING A LEAD FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR

According to Gareth Huw Davies, writing in the **Sunday Times**, an increasing number of senior managers in the public sector are now seeking the services of executive coaches.



But why, he asks, do people who have successfully negotiated the most rigorous selection and interview process decide they need the intervention of someone who may know little about the complex inner workings of local councils or the intricacies of the government's health-modernisation agenda?

Many of their counterparts on the private sector, which has long recognised the value of coaching, will know the answer to this. In fact, it is often when people move into a new job, particularly when switching from the private to the public sector, that they feel coaching is needed.

As Virginia Pearson, chief executive of South Somerset NHS Primary Healthcare Trust puts it: "People may assume that because you have skills and qualifications in one environment, you can make the transition into another. But that's a high-risk strategy. You're investing a lot of money in people and giving them a huge amount of responsibility: it's reasonable that they are supported."

She sees the value of coaching in the opportunity to step away from the day to day problems of running an organisation and look at problem issues objectively and from the perspective of the many different groups of people she works alongside. "I feel energised when I come back from coaching sessions ... and that's communicated to my colleagues. It has also had an impact on my decision-making, something I know my board observe. It's about improving your focus."

THE BEST OF TIMES ... THE WORST OF TIMES

Singer-songwriter Seal was abandoned at birth and cared for in a foster family until he was four. But it was when his biological mother came back into his life – and then his violent father – that his troubles really began.

In an interview with **Ria Higgins** in the **Sunday Times**, the 40-year old claims, despite this, to be a very optimistic person, always looking for the light at the end of the tunnel, even if it's "so faint you can hardly see it".

Seal's father was a bitter and frustrated man who took his anger out on his son. "He beat me in ways I wouldn't beat my enemy", he says, "but he was consistent. If he'd said one breath and you're the next, that would have been emotional abuse and that's when the real psychological damage can set in, when you're left with the deepest scars, the ones on the inside."



"I know he did terrible things and I don't excuse them, but now I

At some point you realise that life is about how you relate to it, not how it relates to you, what you give to it rather than what it gives to you.

don't have any anger about the way he treated me. If anything, I feel compassion, because in the end I think it was his anger that killed him."

Ed: This is an extraordinary and real demonstration of the benefit of not blaming others for their behaviour, but keeping the focus on them. Paradoxically, if you blame others, you put the focus on your own negative feelings and that's not helpful.

Seal believes he was a constant reminder to his father of his own missed opportunities in life and a cause of resentment.

"It's really sad, but I'm not grieving about it. At some point you realise that life is about how you relate to it, not how it relates to you, what you give to it rather than what it gives to you. My father couldn't see when life was good; he refused to look for the light at the end of the tunnel. I could be like him but I know I never will be

because I've seen what all that anger, bitterness and negativity does to you. I've come through relatively OK. I'm a lucky guy."

Ed: Seal understands that you can choose how you react to situations. He's chosen to stay focused on the future, rather than dwelling on the past. And it's a useful choice: even though his experiences might have prevented him taking advantage of his talent, he's made a huge success of his life.

Optimism is a learned – and learnable – response and one that can be very effectively developed through coaching.

MEET THE COACHES

Rachel Brushfield is a self-confessed 'hybrid', combining business, life and career coaching with expertise in brand marketing, to create a very powerful approach helping people, brands and businesses excel.

With over 17 years' experience in 60d and retail marketing behind her, both on the client-side and with leading marketing agencies, Rachel has worked with high profile names such as Honda, Interbrew UK and Motorola.

Although clients tend to use her expertise either as a brand specialist or a coach, she has handled assignments to which she has been able to apply both skills very effectively, notably where businesses have had to make redundancies, adding real value. Rachel can help those leaving the company to brand themselves effectively in the job market, while working with the survivors to 're-brand' themselves for roles that may well demand a different range of skills. Her combined skills are also ideal to help companies define their corporate values and then coach their staff to deliver these values through their individual roles.

In fact, one of the latest developments in coaching to come out of the US – Personal Branding – supports Rachel's unique approach to coaching.

"I work with people to help them see themselves as unique brands," she explains, "enabling them to move forward and change in a way that will bring real satisfaction to their working and private lives."

"I'm also a very positive person: I simply don't believe in the word 'can't'. There's always a way round an obstacle if you choose to see it – I just help people to see it for themselves."



LIFE'S A.....

Alan de Botton's book *'The Consolations of Philosophy'* takes several problems of every day life and asks what famous philosophers have had to say.

Last time we looked at 'unpopularity'. This time its **'not having enough money'!**

Botton draws on Epicurus, c 341bc, to create a list of essential ingredients for pleasure — non very costly:

- ? Friendship
- ? Freedom
- ? Thought

Friendship

Riches mean nothing in themselves but a handful of true friends could deliver the love, attention, respect a fortune tries to but can't.

Freedom

Having the freedom and independence to live up to one's own true values and not have to deny / defy them



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Thought

Learning to analyse one's anxieties about money, illness, death etc. Sober analysis calms the mind.



Epicurus went on to divide our desires into 3 main categories:

Natural & necessary

Friends, Freedom & Thought

Natural & unnecessary

Grand houses, private baths, banquets, servants, fish & meat

Neither natural nor necessary

Fame, power

Ed: 400 years later a wealthy man paid for a huge advert (4 metres high) on a wall in a market place that read "Luxurious foods & drinks in no way produce freedom from harm and a healthy condition in the flesh. One must regard wealth as no more use than water to a container that is already overflowing" We've been putting a lack of money into its true perspective for a long time!

Next issue: what the philosophers have to say about ... frustration

About us

Coaching for Success provides executive and personal coaching that helps individuals perform to their maximum potential.

Our corporate client list covers a range of industry sectors, including pharmaceutical, retail, finance and construction, and high profile names such as Laing, AstraZeneca, KPMG, Abbott and Marks & Spencer.

Our coaches work with company personnel, on a one-to-one basis, enabling them to recognise the choices and opportunities available to them, to make decisions about career and personnel development and then to create and implement a plan of action designed to achieve success.

We deliver a comprehensive coaching service by combining approaches in three key areas:

- ? Personal change techniques – Cognitive psychology, NLP etc.
- ? Counselling – careers, stress management and change management
- ? Advice - health, fitness and nutrition