

## COACHING ON THE MOVE

### ***The Butterfly Effect: Building a Coaching Practise from Scratch***

Where shall I begin? If not for possible public preconception, I would probably refer to myself as a Euro-gypsy! I am British, brought up in France, married to a Dutchman (whom I met in Spain!). I have never lived anywhere more than 7 years: Great Britain, France, Holland, and Austria before our marriage; then my husband's diplomatic career took us to Africa for ten years: Cameroon, Uganda and Senegal. Two years ago we landed in Berlin, where we will stay for the next two years. Feeling dizzy? Yes, I sometimes feel it too, though less so since I discovered coaching.

The great side of this lifestyle is the opportunities to visit fabulous places, discover new cultures and people, and feel you are really taking huge bites out of life. I enjoy moving from one exciting location to the next. To be honest, I don't know anything else. I enjoy the discovery, the exhilaration, the feeling one is different and... again... that notion of making the most out of life, quite a *leitmotiv* (recurring theme) for me. I settle very rapidly... a whirlwind of activity the first three months till it feels like home for us and our three children. Along the way, I have been lucky to master English, French, German, Dutch and Spanish. I was always able to find suitable work wherever we went, in such varied positions as management consultant, development project manager, actress, fashion model, head of sales and PR for a removal company and my claim to fame, as President of the Dakar Women's Group. This dynamic organisation, regrouping more than 250 women from all over the world, was a life-line to many. Together we got to know each other, the country and its inhabitants better, embarked on self-development and reached out to less fortunate Senegalese women and children.

Fun as it was to be constantly experimenting with new jobs, there was a down side... what I call the "butterfly effect". I was doing a little of everything, hovering a while here and there, yet building nothing, starting from scratch each

time. This began to bother me more and more. My restlessness came to a head two years ago, upon returning to Europe. I suppose it was a bit of a midlife crisis. I had just turned 40 and gone from being an African Queen to a German Cinderella. Goodbye glamorous public speaker with a large back up of household help, hello Miss Overwhelmed never having cooked or run a household of five in Europe. The idea of re-creating myself yet again and resuming my self-imposed frantic pace of working, studying, and saying yes to anything on offer suddenly felt pointless. I was running, yet never arriving. I assumed I would charge straight back into a serious fulltime job; yet, I battled with my family values and the notion I didn't want to hand my children over to an au-pair girl.

To be honest, I didn't know what I wanted anymore.

### ***Coaching: A Brave, New World***

In the meantime, the synergies of life set in. Whilst talking to the school counsellor about one of my children, I had a wobbly moment and promptly dissolved into tears. She kindly mentioned the idea of being coached, a term I had never heard outside the sports arena. I came home and "googled" the term and beheld a whole new glittering world which seemed custom-designed for me. A profession I could fully relate to, which spoke to the go-getter, no nonsense me, as well as the caring, emphatic listener me. I then remembered Wendy, one of my members in Senegal, commenting I would be a great coach. At the time, I had taken this to mean I was successful through my energy and strong personality (i.e. bossiness) at keeping order in our huge General meetings, like a dynamic football coach with a whistle!

I found a wonderful coach in Germany who helped me untangle many personal issues I hadn't really realised were holding me back and colouring my vision. What a relief after a life time of being the cheerleader and Miss Energy and Positivity! What a relief to admit there were things worrying me and to actually have someone listen and question those issues!

Almost immediately, whilst working with Alexandra, I started looking for possible long distance coaching studies. I had this uncanny certitude as soon as I discovered the coaching world that this was what I had been looking for. I am naturally blessed with a very dynamic and motivational personality and have for years been looking for the right outlet for all this power. I loved the results side of management consultancy yet missed the human aspect; I loved the development work but felt we were only grazing the surface and failing to make sustainable change. I loved my Presidency of the Dakar Women's Group role as motivator, helping these women make the most of their posting; yet, I missed the financial recognition. Coaching seemed to incorporate all of these and enable me to make a positive difference in the lives of those around me.

Searching for the right coaching studies, I was at first overwhelmed by the choice of courses offered and, naturally, I wanted the best! But by asking around I found Gerard O'Donovan and Noble Manhattan Coaching, and they fulfilled all the criteria I needed.

How wonderful life can be: my coach helped me move forward, largely by getting me to examine a series of limiting beliefs I had been carrying around for a while and helped me fully define who I really am. But most importantly for me, my life purpose was revealed: to coach!

So here I am, with a profession I can take with me as we move every four to five years. Through my languages, I can reach out to a large audience; in particular, fellow expatriates who do not always enjoy their postings. I can continue learning and sharpening my skills instead of hopping around like a grasshopper with a sugar rush. And very importantly I do not have to choose between professional life and family life. I now have a flexible and rewarding profession which allows me to equally fulfil the family needs and the other dimensions of my life which are important to me, such as a lot of sports, cultural outings and taking time for those around me. I have discovered balance!

***Coaching: The Vehicle That Moves Lives Forward:***

I particularly appreciated the structural depth of the Noble Manhattan course and the support offered by the organisation. The modules and tele-classes provided all the learning material and were reinforced by individual mentoring sessions. The essays helped me focus my reading and concentrate on one topic at a time. It was ideal to be able to do this long distance and at my own tempo. However, once we had submitted some written work and completed a certain number of modules, students were invited, as part of the course, to Oxford for a three day residential seminar. This was a fantastic opportunity to meet live, professional coaches, as well as fellow student coaches. We worked hard during the day, soaking up all the words of wisdom with enthusiasm and motivation and experiencing many “a-ha” moments. There was also plenty of time for valuable socialising. Five of us went on to create a buddy group which provided a lot of support and encouragement during the studies, some of whom I am still in contact with now. The residential also gave me the courage to start off with the required pro-bono sessions (where we practise our newly acquired skills in real life scenarios, but free of charge), as I was somewhat frozen before the first leap.

Some parts of the course I found effortless, as if all that information was already deep in me. I realised I had been unofficially coaching for years. Other aspects were more of a challenge; in particular, not leading or suggesting. I battled for months with a natural urge to jump in with suggestions in a passionate desire to help my clients. It really took a while for the notion to sink in that each case, each person is different and, however close another situation I knew of appeared, it was still not the same. This helped me see that, by challenging and questioning in an open way, instead of serving up pre-baked solutions, I was serving my client much more effectively: enabling him to take ownership and re-apply what he had learnt about himself to other issues.

My fellow buddies and I went through many personal ups and downs during training...which is to be expected, since you cannot help but start with yourself. In some cases we opened cans of worms we had shelved years ago. Yet, how can you coach if your own cupboard is full of skeletons? You must be free of your own

clutter in order to listen to your client with 100% focus. There were moments when I felt knocked off my balance...not something I was used to... but it was definitely worth it. I emerged much stronger. Perhaps a bit less showgirl, but with a deep, rooted feeling of who I am, what my values are, and what my mission in life is. I felt myself come together. Rather than behaving like a faulty firework exploding in short bursts in all directions, I now had a worthwhile channel for my energy... unleashing a focused, more powerful fire.

All of this self-realization and actualization impacted those close to me. Today, I am more grounded, a better mother who listens and encourages rather than orders (well most of the time!), more generous and supportive as a wife (say I) rather than bitter and aggressive, perceiving household chores as a burden rather than an expression of what they really are; my desire to make our home a place of harmony. My husband and I also discussed our values. This was a very valuable exercise in itself since we had never really defined the values we shared. Thankfully, after 14 years of marriage, we discovered we do share a few! This helped us adopt a problem resolution strategy fraught with far less conflict. One of the most profound effects, however, was on the family. The five of us wrote a mission statement outlining who we are as a family unit, what brings us together, for what do we want to be remembered, and of what do we want more and less. The children (Kylia 12, Dylan, 10, and Shannon, 7) had as much input as we did and I was really impressed by their ideas. We now also have a logo, weekly family meetings where everyone is free to discuss an issue, and family outings we all decide on together. We speak more about how things make us feel and how we would rather have it instead of just yelling out. Of course it does still happen every now and then but we are so much more a cohesive group. I am grateful for this opportunity to teach the children already at a young age that there is always a choice in our behaviour and a possibility of change. The family unit is all we take with us each time we move and it is particularly reassuring for the children that it is a safe and loving one. I have always been an emphatic, yet challenging, friend but now I have the tools to be even more stimulating.

During the summer of 2009, I graduated from the Noble Manhattan life coach programme with a practitioner degree, (with Distinctions I immodestly add) and fuelled with a profound desire to help others make a positive difference in their lives. Happily, I set off on my career as a coach.

I cannot over emphasize the profound, life changing effect of coaching. It is so simple, yet so powerful, that people hesitate to believe it. After seeing people who have been in therapy for years still battling with non-traumatic, paralyzing past issues, coaching is like a breath of fresh air. Once these individuals decided to stop looking back, to stop moaning and blaming but decide what they want now and set themselves clear measurable goals, coaching moves them forward faster than they would ever have imagined possible. For some, simply raising awareness of their own life responsibility was enough to get them unstuck. We cannot change the events which happen to us, but we always have a choice in how to interpret them. For some, a negative event will become a huge shackle around their ankle; others will choose to learn from the event, then minimize it and move forward with trust and confidence. To learn from these events and emerge a stronger person, we must take time to examine who we really are deep down inside, to accept ourselves and discover our life purpose. I have witnessed firsthand the impact coaching can have on so many levels: Feelings of being overwhelmed, time management issues, relationship issues, sports and weight issues, career dilemmas, life/work balance, general feelings of purposefulness... I have had wonderful long-term coaching relationships where we have gone to the core and seen the effects snowball on all areas of the client's life. I've also experienced gratifying short-term relationships where an issue has been successfully resolved.

One of my favourite success stories is that of a client who found herself having to make a presentation in order to receive funding for her business start-up. She was terrified...felt totally incapable. After two coaching sessions where we focused on her motivation and the dream behind the business, she went ahead, firmly grounded in her vision, and ultimately won the first prize and the funding package

she needed. Best of all, she feels fundamentally more sure of herself, which is creating an impact in other areas of her life!

One life principle I use frequently, and which particularly appeals to me, is that of learning from the past (using failure as feedback and not as an obstacle), planning for the future (being goal oriented) yet living in the present (taking time to enjoy our lives and the people around us).

Despite everything I have told you up to this point, I'm still very aware of being a rookie. There is much more work to be done but the feedback so far has been encouraging. My clients tell me coaching has provided much-needed focus. Investing time and attention in their issues offers a safe, yet challenging space to think things through. The client is suddenly aware of having the power and responsibility to change. All he or she needs is the support, as the boundaries of one's comfort zone are moved further out. Several clients have thanked me for helping them to define what it is that they want, to determine if this is in line with their core values, and then be very specific about what needs to be done to achieve that milestone. Coaching has helped to transform the client's dream into a goal and monitor the client's success. Many clients believe the greatest miracle about coaching is the change to individual self-esteem and comment on how empowering it was that I, as coach, believed in them... before they actually did.

For now, I have chosen to focus on motivational coaching; a form of coaching that seeks the "why" behind the "what" and harnesses that discovery to motivate clients to achieve their dreams, with no obstacles hampering the outcome. Alongside motivational coaching, my specific expertise is, of course, Expatriate Coaching. By expatriate, I mean highly mobile clients who need help getting their life back on track after a geographical move. For some, it involves actually defining their lives and how their life purpose can move with them. It is often said that moving is as emotionally traumatic as bereavement. There is the physical change and need to adapt to a new environment, sometimes a radically different culture and language. Everything needs to be resettled: from an actual place to live, with all the necessary utilities to set up, to finding new medical care,

new shops, a new gym or just simply finding your way around! All of this can be incredibly overwhelming. One can feel very alone, alienated. Added to this is often a feeling of responsibility towards children, helping them adapt to a new school, fit in and adjust. Once the material side of settling in, unpacking, and developing new routines is set, the accompanying spouse (if there is one) often goes through much soul searching to uncover what this new location holds. A coach can provide a lot of support, encouragement and clarity in getting one's life back on track (or finding the track full stop) and enjoying the new posting.

I believe I could coach on any non- traumatic issue (though as coach it is crucial to recognize when the client is outside of the "normally functioning" category and needs appropriate specialist help), as long as the client is committed to doing what it takes to bring about the change. However, the world and the market are big, and I trust the experts when they say you must create a niche.

My coaching journey has just begun. I am sure there will be many more niches discovered along the way. Whomever I coach and whatever topic we discuss, I never cease to be amazed by the huge energy burst it gives me. When the session is over, I am often found to be performing a wild dance in the living room, fuelled by pure exhilaration at having been privileged to accompany a soul towards being a happier, more fulfilled person.

### ***The Never Ending Journey***

I, for one, am thrilled, grateful and privileged to be part of this positive, society- enhancing profession. I believe coaching arose to fulfil a cultural need. In most of the Western world our basic needs are fulfilled. We have no survival purpose. We live in a materialistic society, yet are discovering that material goods alone do not bring fulfilment. The world is suddenly much bigger with the global market. People move around more, weakening the concept of community and traditional family structure. Technological tools, such as the Internet, force us to live in a faster world with more stress and an overwhelming amount of possibilities. Our society, especially now in times of financial crisis, is waking up to the fact that



we need more than a job and money to be happy. We run all day long yet, at the end, still feel unsatisfied. Coaching fills the gap for people who have suffered no serious trauma requiring therapy, yet feel unsatisfied and unable to manage moving forward in life. Coaching responds to a profound need for people to be listened to, to be stretched and shown other ways of viewing situations, of being made aware of who they are and how they fit in to the whole, of being made responsible for taking their own lives in hand and finding inner happiness and balance to be able to reach out to others.

Some say, “but can’t they do that on their own?” Yes they probably could, but very often don’t, whether from lack of distance or space for reflection, time or whatever other reason. Sometimes, all we need is a little safe haven to explore, together with a professional armed with skills, qualities and a positive mindset, in order to re-situate ourselves before moving with focus and motivation along our path again.

Through my coaching practice, Kennedy Personal Coaching, I aim to help my individual clients become their personal best by empowering them, inspiring those around them and playing my small part in bringing attention to the importance of coaching to society as a whole. Technology is then a positive factor, as my website can move with me and, thanks to systems such as Skype, a free telephone service via the Internet; I can reach out to my clients anywhere in the world.

My path has just unrolled, offering a horizon of future courses to be enjoyed, books to be read and positive differences made in my clients lives. Coaching synergizes for me my results-oriented management consultancy background, multi-cultural understanding and language abilities with a natural positivity and boundless energy, allied with a sincere empathy, yet challenging touch, and a profound desire to help.

What better way to live one’s life than to work in a profession that not only earns money but also provides me with a meaningful and exciting purpose, helps others, and keeps my life on track!

I feel as though my whole life pointed me in this direction. All the various jobs I have held, studies I have done, extra activities I have taken on, people I have met... all these things which, at first, seemed like frantic butterflying about, have now come together like many jigsaw pieces, clicking together in one satisfying clunk. No need to keep recreating the wheel at each new assignment; I can take my career with me wherever I go, and be available to help people when they need it most.

Seize the day, hop on board and set off on your life coaching journey!

Julie Kennedy, Potsdam, November 2009