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Life

SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST FRIDAY, AUGUST 17, 2007

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A decade ago, they were considered a passing fad. Now, life coaches are an integral part of the business landscape, writes **David Momphard**

Walking the walk



After graduating with an economics degree, Hong Kong native Fraser Reid led something of a drifter's life, going from teaching English in Japan to hosting a beach party in Morocco. That is, until last year, when he returned to help manage his father's air-conditioning firm.

The switch to corporate life was stressful, but Reid says consulting a life coach has helped smooth the transition. "It was a major life situation for me," says the 26-year-old. "It wasn't exactly my life's dream; I kind of fell into the role. But having someone there coaching me made for an almost instantaneous improvement."

A relative newcomer to the self-help industry, life coaching is an extension of business coaching which provides support for professionals who want to improve their performance or effect a career change.

The Hong Kong International Coaching Community (HKICC) is the umbrella organisation for both kinds of coaches. Most of its 80 members list themselves as career or business coaches, but many also claim expertise in managing some aspect of personal life.

Brigid Enochs, director of marketing for the International Coach Federation (ICF), the world's largest coach accreditation body, says such specialisation reflects the rapid growth of a service that was almost non-existent a decade ago.

A recent survey commissioned by the ICF found that an estimated 30,000 career and life coaches worldwide now earn about US\$1.5 billion annually.

"Coaches are specialising in more niche areas such as retirement planning, wellness and social networking," says Enochs. "It's growing at an accelerated rate around the world."

For Reid, a recent impasse with his father and the company's long-time business partner made him realise he had to address some personal questions before he could succeed.

"I stuck to my guns," Reid recalls. "I said, 'This is my perspective and if you don't like it, you don't like it.'"

The partner left the meeting abruptly. That was when he called Pia Mugerud, a business and life coach. "My reaction was emotional," Reid says. "But she asked me questions like, 'How can you imagine the situation being put right?' Asking those questions settled me down," he says. "It was a reality check."

Although he initially sought her help with his career, the focus of their sessions quickly turned to self-realisation.

"It happens a lot of the time," Mugerud says. "[Solving problems] always comes down to who you are and what it is that's not working in your life."

Although coaches help examine aspects of their clients' personal lives, they're quick to point out that they're not counsellors. Angela Spaxman, a past president of HKICC, says coaches take a different approach to resolving issues.

Counselling is generally for people who have serious personal problems and the guidance is designed to get them back on their feet, she says. "Coaching works with people who are already successful. They don't necessarily have problems; they just want to achieve something more."

Hongkongers seeking help are more ready to accept the idea of coaching than counselling, says S.K. Shum, co-author of *Parent Coach*.

"In the past, there was a stigma about seeking therapeutic or psychological help," he says. "But the coaching concept evolved by offering to help people look at their problems from another angle."

"Instead of concentrating on the past, we help clients look forward and see what they want to be doing in the future."

Eric Choy Siu-wai, a direct-marketing executive, says this approach works for him.

It has helped him balance his job with the need to devote more time to his wife and two children who live in Canada. "In the past, it was an either-or thing; I couldn't have both," Choy says. "That's why I sought [Shum's] advice."

Working with a coach prompted

the 50-year-old to rethink his priorities and how he handles them. He learned to prioritise, which gave him more time to focus on his family.

"My [old beliefs] limited my ways of thinking about and doing things," Choy says. "My kids are adolescents and starting to become rebellious. My wife was trying to use the traditional Chinese way to raise them, but they're obviously having a lot of conflict. [The kids] are trying to assert their own identity. We need to give them more freedom and respect by guiding them and showing them love."

Working with a coach isn't for everyone, though. When potential clients see the coach's role as that of an adviser the relationship is often destined to fail, says Mugerud. "Coaching is about probing for answers that the client often already has inside."

But self-knowledge isn't enough unless people are ready to use it to improve their situation. "I had a client who was unwilling to go beyond what he already knew because he was fearful of what that might entail," she says.

Coaching is about probing for answers that the client often already has inside

Pia Mugerud, business and life coach

Coaches adopt different techniques to help clients figure out what they want. Shum prefers to begin with a sort of 20-questions process; Mugerud uses a pie-chart - what she calls a wheel of life - setting out such areas as career, relationships, health and recreation, and asks clients to rate the importance of each aspect on a scale of one to 10.

With Reid, she began by focusing on the low-scored areas. "Fraser is incredibly open and willing to do the work, so he's forging ahead," she says. "For him it's about how he can work in this very corporate-minded, results-oriented world we have and still be the guy he wants to be. And he's starting to understand how those things can fit together."

Exercises such as the wheel of life have come up with some surprising results, Reid says. For one, he's realised that he can stay spiritually grounded while adjusting to the demands of the corporate world. "I have [personal] objectives and it can be difficult to hold on to them," he says. "But right from the get-go there was a structure to looking at my own life. And that has actually been unexpectedly powerful and helpful."

Reid is settling into his job, and although he isn't sure how long he'll keep up the weekly sessions with his coach he's sure that the progress he's made will have long-term benefits - learning to address issues that he's neglected, for example. "I expect many things that I haven't been paying attention to will come up."



Fraser Reid consulted a life coach to clarify career priorities. Photo: May Tse

People

Photo: AP

It smells like porn, says Nirvana baby

Almost two decades after becoming the music world's most famous naked swimming baby, Spencer Elden says he feels like a porn star.

The 17-year-old Los Angeles high school student was the centrepiece of one of the best known record sleeves of all time in 1991, when a photo of him swimming underwater graced the cover of Nirvana's hit album *Nevermind*.

But Elden said on MTV.com that his small role in music history has given him mixed feelings. "It's kind of creepy that many people have seen me naked," he said. "I feel like I'm the world's biggest porn star."

Nevermind became a huge success for Seattle-based rock band Nirvana, whose lead singer Kurt Cobain committed suicide in 1994. The album sold more than 10 million copies in the US alone.

Although Elden has received no royalties, he continues to make money from media requests while attending school and working part-time in a juice bar.

"It's kind of cool, knowing that I've been on an album cover, but I feel pretty normal about it because, growing up, I've always known I was the Nirvana baby," he said. AFP



Miller gets cosy with co-star Rhys

After being romantically linked to co-star Sean Bean earlier in the week, Sienna Miller proves that she really does like to mix business with pleasure, with recent reports saying the actress has fallen for Matthew Rhys, another fellow actor.

British papers reported that the pair became an official item after they met on the set of the Dylan Thomas biopic *The Edge of Love*, but tried to keep their burgeoning romance under wraps, according to Britain's *Daily Mail*.

With encouragement from mutual friend and co-star Keira Knightley, Miller (right) and the Welsh actor dated in June.

"This is the first guy Sienna has

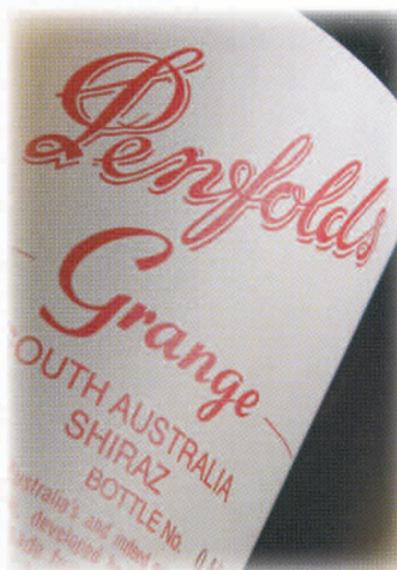


been serious with since splitting from Jude [Law]," a friend reportedly said. "These vicious allegations of her being with Sean Combs and splitting his relationship with Kim Porter are awful. But they've worked in her favour. It's taken the heat off their relationship."

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