

Life Coaching – a change of perspective

How can you turn the current challenging environment into an opportunity? We all have different perspectives on what is going on right now – a few are rubbing their hands in glee because the credit crunch has made it easier to buy theatre tickets, get into restaurants and even drive around London while a lot of us are finding life challenging with more worries and stresses than we had this time last year

The one thing that we can all agree on is that times have changed and everybody is feeling it in some way. Actually, how we are feeling and reacting to the current environment is the key according to Anna Percy-Davis, the Westover Executive and Life Coach, and will help define whether we can be that person who can turn the credit crunch to their advantage (regardless of whether you are in a job or not). According to Anna, one of the biggest current concerns is that sense of feeling out of control. A lot of self-help books and professionals focus on teaching us to let go, to stop trying to be in control – who likes a control freak anyway? The standard line is the more you try to be in control, the more you get out of control with all sorts of dire consequences. But Anna says get as much control as you can. Feeling in control gives us confidence as long as we work out what we can control and we really focus on that. For instance, much of the time, we can control our response to things that happen to us. It is very difficult in the current environment to control whether we are made redundant or not but we can control how we respond to being made redundant. And, the first step is to cultivate measured responses to events like redundancy or increased stress and there are a number of ways of doing this (hiring a coach being one of the most obvious ways!).

So how can we be measured in our response to highly stressful events? Anna's view is the best place to start is by cultivating good habits. The individuals who turn tough times into opportunities tend to be those individuals who live their lives in a certain way. Firstly, looking after yourselves is important – eat properly, try to make sure you have good and regular sleep patterns and exercise. It is difficult to fire on all cylinders if you aren't looking after yourselves. For instance, being fit is an easy way to feel better about you - producing a few endorphins on a regular

basis is definitely uplifting. Anna is not suggesting you all have to take up running marathons – the odd Pilates session is often enough to put you in that feel good space. Another good habit is to be organised. For instance, if you are looking for a job, treat it like a full time job. Have a routine, define a strategy, use all those skills you developed and used while employed to get another job. In the same way, if your job is particularly stressful at the moment, be organised. Creating some sense of order is a good way to feel in control and it helps to keep things in perspective.

Normalising your situation is another helpful way to weather the current storm. If you start to catastrophise your situation you can make it a lot worse. 90% of the reactions we have to difficult experiences are very normal. For instance if you are overeating or not sleeping you are not a freak, there is nothing wrong with you – you are having a very normal reaction to stress. Don't hate yourself or think you are weak just accept it and start looking at other ways to manage your stress. Knowing that we are normal, even though things remain tough, can be a huge relief and often gives us the energy to go forward. Coaching can be very effective in helping us to normalise our situation.

Anna also suggests we look at ways to be sociable and to find places where we can have a laugh. Loneliness is not a good place to keep things in perspective and a good way to normalise one's situation is to be out there as you are sure to discover someone else who is in a similar or even worse situation! Also, a lot of us process stuff and get things in perspective through talking (another reason why coaching can be effective!) but it is worth remembering that, in a social context, the reaction you get from some people about your situation is often a reflection of them and not of you. Often with the best intentions, your nearest and dearest will be very quick to judge or advise you when sometimes you just need some space to work stuff out. It is therefore worth trying to find a neutral person to talk to. If you decide not to use a coach, find a cousin 3 times removed, an old friend you have not seen for a while and who is not involved in your current life, an old colleague, someone who you can just bounce ideas around with. It really is helpful if the person is neutral ie. Not invested either emotionally or financially in you or your future.

But Anna does encourage us to keep the lines of communication open with our loved ones. Don't take responsibility for their angst about your current situation and the impact it might have on them but be honest about what is going on for you and get them to be honest too. There is nothing worse for a relationship than a whole lot of unsaid worries and stresses. Start talking about it; it is amazing how good it feels if you both know what the other is thinking and a burden shared is a burden halved.

So, who are the winners in times like this – having good habits helps but what else? Anna quotes, Barbara Stanney in her book "Secrets of a six-figure woman". Barbara has identified some key character traits that successful people share and Anna believes it is definitely worth nurturing these in the current environment. Stanney calls them audacity, resilience and encouragement. Audacity is the gumption to step outside one's comfort zone to try something you aren't sure you can do, it's the courage to give something a go even if there is a high risk that you will fail.

Resilience is the grit to get back up and keep going when you don't succeed or when you encounter setbacks.

And, encouragement is the ability to have strong nurturing relationships with people who really believe in you. Having a relationship with someone who encourages, supports and roots for us and sometimes prods us along is hugely beneficial and is often cited as essential to being successful. Anna encourages clients to look at their relationships. When times are tough it is worth trying to spend more time with the people in our life who champion and affirm us rather than with those who, often due to their own stuff, are unable to do this. Again, this is where coaching can really help, Anna sees one of her key roles is to help an individual work out what they do well and then she encourages them to really build their lives round these strengths.

So, to summarise, how can we weather the current turbulence such that we can turn it into an opportunity. Anna's tips are pretty simple. Firstly, develop or strengthen your good habits particularly in terms of looking after yourself and having some fun while not catastrophising either your bad habits or your current life – it will be ok if you think it is ok! Try to be organised and nurture your audacity, resilience and encouragement which

will help you to be on your front foot and therefore in a position to spot the opportunities and to be able to act upon them.

It is not rocket science but it can be very powerful especially if you work with a coach like Anna to make these changes. Coaching is all about you working out what's great about you and what choices you really have. Coaching also helps you work out where you want to go from here and how to do it and then actually makes sure you do it! Coaching is a very positive, upbeat and energetic process. Do think about using Anna if you are feeling at all stuck, low or just want to get firing on all cylinders!