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Finding the potential within

Helping others achieve their goals is a satisfying career indeed. SHARMILLA GANESAN speaks to a life coach about the relatively unknown profession.

LIFE coach Sharmini Hensen works from home, where she has the flexibility to spend time with her family. She loves her job and finds it both fun and fulfilling.

Her childhood ambition was to be a psychiatrist, and she feels that she has always had the ability to relate to people and make them feel better. Life had other things in store for



Sharmini finds satisfaction in helping others reach their goals.

her and Sharmini went on to do a degree in botany, before working in various fields such as sales and marketing, high-end real estate and retail consumer products. In 2002, Sharmini attended a coaching-based training programme by Asiaworks, and was amazed at how much she discovered about herself. Enthusiastic about the field, she went back after her training to do volunteer coaching.

"The turning point in my career came when I lost my job two years ago. I took it as a sign to go where my heart compelled me to, which was full-time coaching," says the 36-year-old mother of two.

"I also thought that it was rather similar to my dream of being a psychiatrist, in that it allowed me to help and support people, while also achieving something different."

Deciding that she needed the proper tools before becoming a full-fledged life coach, Sharmini took a Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) training course, which is an international certification for a set of techniques that focus on personal development.

The three-week course involved a week's training in Kuala Lumpur and the Gold Coast, Australia. She is now a certified master practitioner.

"NLP is a manual for your mind. It's to do with how your mind stores information through the senses. By changing the modality of the senses, what you store in your mind can be changed," says Sharmini, adding that the method can be used in belief change processes and phobia processes among others.

My job involves?

... relationship building. Most coaches believe in finding a niche, and mine is relationships. My motto is, "When your relationships work, your life works."



Sharmini (in pink) conducting a Sistas Network session.

Coaching is so new in Malaysia that most people don't even know about it. They think it is similar to being a counsellor or therapist.

In counselling and therapy sessions, you usually discuss problems you're facing. In coaching, we don't even talk about the problem, we work on

finding a solution.

As a coach, I always work with my client's goal. My role is to give feedback on how to achieve this goal, because I can see what they can't. My primary job is to get them to be committed and do whatever it takes to achieve the desired outcome.

Among the things I do is personal coaching, corporate training and parenting workshops. I also run the Sistas Network, a coaching support group for women that I started this year.

My morning starts off with?

... checking my emails, because I get a lot of enquiries through the Internet. Then I meet a client over a cup of coffee for a coaching session. Usually, I also meet my business network members to discuss my work. Some nights, I have my Sistas meetings, and some afternoons, I take time off to work with other coaches. I also work on the coaching materials that I use in training sessions or talks. The rest of the time, I spend with my children.

I meet, on average, about two clients a day, and conduct about two corporate training sessions a month. My Sistas group coaching sessions are held twice a month.

To qualify, you need?

... proper certification that allows you to acquire the necessary skills. It could be NLP, ICF (International Coach Federation) or any other that suits you, as there are many coaching institutes out there. After that, what is necessary is a belief in your ability to support people and to commit to your clients.

The best person for the job is?

... someone who has an innate desire to support people. There are many coaches with many different personalities, and you don't necessarily have to be an extrovert. We are all so different from each other that it is difficult to pin down one trait, and different types of coaches attract different clients.

You need to, however, believe in the potential people have in them, and have a desire to be with others in a powerful way. You also have to be someone who always wants to learn, discover new things and grow.

Prospects for the future?

... are amazing! There is so much potential for the field in Asia, and Malaysia specifically. Our economy is growing. Society is also becoming more open, and realising that it is all right to reach out for support.

I think everybody needs a coach; to excel and reach your goals faster, and to achieve high productivity in a short period of time. I believe there may even come a time when parents will send their children to a coach instead of tuition, because learning is so much more than just memorising facts.

I love my job because?

... I get to touch people's lives in a powerful way, and support them in being what they want to be. It is extremely gratifying and fulfilling. It's fun, and a part of my life. I truly think that it is a privilege when someone says to me, "Sharmini, support me to go where I want to go"!

What I dislike most?

... is the misconception surrounding the seeking of support in Asian society. I have to spend so much time explaining what I do, and battling people's mindsets. But then again, that just encourages me to come up with creative ways of handling those misconceptions.

Another challenge is that most people only come to see me when they are facing problems. They should also come to see me when they need to excel or achieve their goals.

A millionaire by 30?

Of course, if you want to be one! The only thing standing in the way is

you.

Initially, I had to invest a lot of time and money into my career, but it was worth it. My income when I first started was about RM3,000 a month. I charge RM250 an hour for personal coaching, while for corporate training my fees are RM2,000 to RM3,000 for half a day, and RM5,000 to RM6,000 for a full day.

If you want to be a millionaire, set a plan, break down the goals, and of course, get a coach! (laughs)