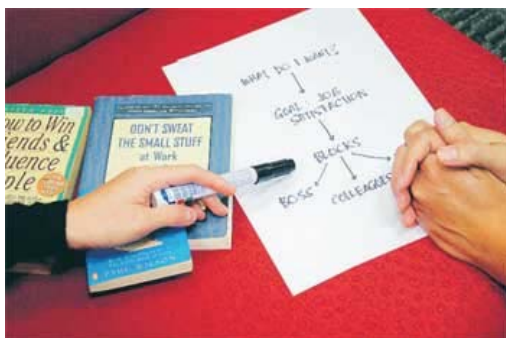


2008/03/17

Get a life with a coach

By : Suzanna Pillay

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A life coach helps a client identify his goal and the obstacles that are stopping him from achieving it.

Emotionally upset or mentally troubled? SUZANNA PILLAY suggests you see a life coach instead of a psychiatrist or psychologist.

HOW do you live your life to its full potential? In the United States, life coaches are all the rage in freeing people stuck in a rut.

A USA Today report by Karen S. Peterson said these coaches give clients the confidence to change careers, repair relationships, or just get their act together. To quote Peterson, they is "a new option for the worried".

So, what is life coaching exactly?

"A life coach is just like a sports coach in bringing out the best from an athlete. Working on life issues, they help clients identify goals, and then equip them with the resources to reach their objectives," said Dr Edward Chan, principal consultant psychologist of the Malaysian Psychology Centre (MPC).

"This involves changing negative thinking and encouraging positive behaviour," added Dr Chan.

He said people are willing to seek the counselling of life coaches, as opposed to seeing psychiatrists or psychologists, because there is less stigma attached to the practice.

"You do not need to have a mental illness to see a life coach."

Dr Chan said the practice of getting life coaching is starting to catch on here.

The demands of urban living and increasing alienation from traditional sources of support like families, friends or religion are contributing factors for this trend.

Dr Chan said Malaysians are facing the same mental health problems as others from the rest of the world.

"Relationship conflicts among married couples, family members and colleagues at work are the major stresses. It affects emotional well-being, and can lead to depression, panic attacks and substance abuse, resulting in lower productivity at work," he said.

K.Vijayan, spokesperson for the life coaching division of the MPC, agreed.

"Apart from increased work pressure, people today tend to have fewer close friends to share their woes. So they turn to professionals trained in giving counselling."

Both Vijayan and Dr Chan are trained life coaches.

Their clients are mainly working professionals in their late thirties and above, in the middle and upper income bracket. Occasionally, parents bring in children who haven't been doing well in their studies.

Life coaching sessions cost between RM200 and RM800 per session.



Less stigma is attached to life coaching compared with psychiatric counselling, says Dr Chan.



Life coach Sharmini Hensen (right) conducting a one-to-one session.

Life coaching empowers people to look for solutions within themselves, getting them to act on decisions and taking responsibility for their actions.

It does this by asking questions, listening and exploring different options open to the clients.

Life coach Sharmini Hensen, who has coached individuals groups in relationships, careers, and health and finance, said: "It's about being self-confident and becoming the best you can be. We are here to support, motivate and cheer on the client."

Hensen cited the example of a client who was facing problems in her work environment, not getting along with her boss and colleagues.

After life coaching sessions with Hensen, the client persuaded her boss to send her for training which empowered her to change how she felt about her job.

"She's doing great in her job now, even progressing up the career ladder," said Hensen.

Hensen also founded the Sistas Network, a coaching support work group for women.

It aims to instil confidence among women and challenge them to have a rewarding career, happy family life and marriage, while contributing to the community.

Members are mainly middle-income women aged 25 and above. Meetings are held once every second and fourth week of the month in the evenings, said Hensen, who is also a trained Neuro-Linguistic Programming practitioner.

Peer coaching and discussions among members are typical of meetings.

Hensen's goal this year is to coach children, starting with underprivileged children aged between 12 and 16 at a welfare home in Petaling Jaya.

For those interested in being life-coached, you are advised to check the credentials of those offering life coaching services, asking for their testimonials as well.

"Consult associations like the Life Coaching Chapter of the Malaysian Society for Complementary Therapies and the life coaching division of the MPC when in doubt," said Vijayan.