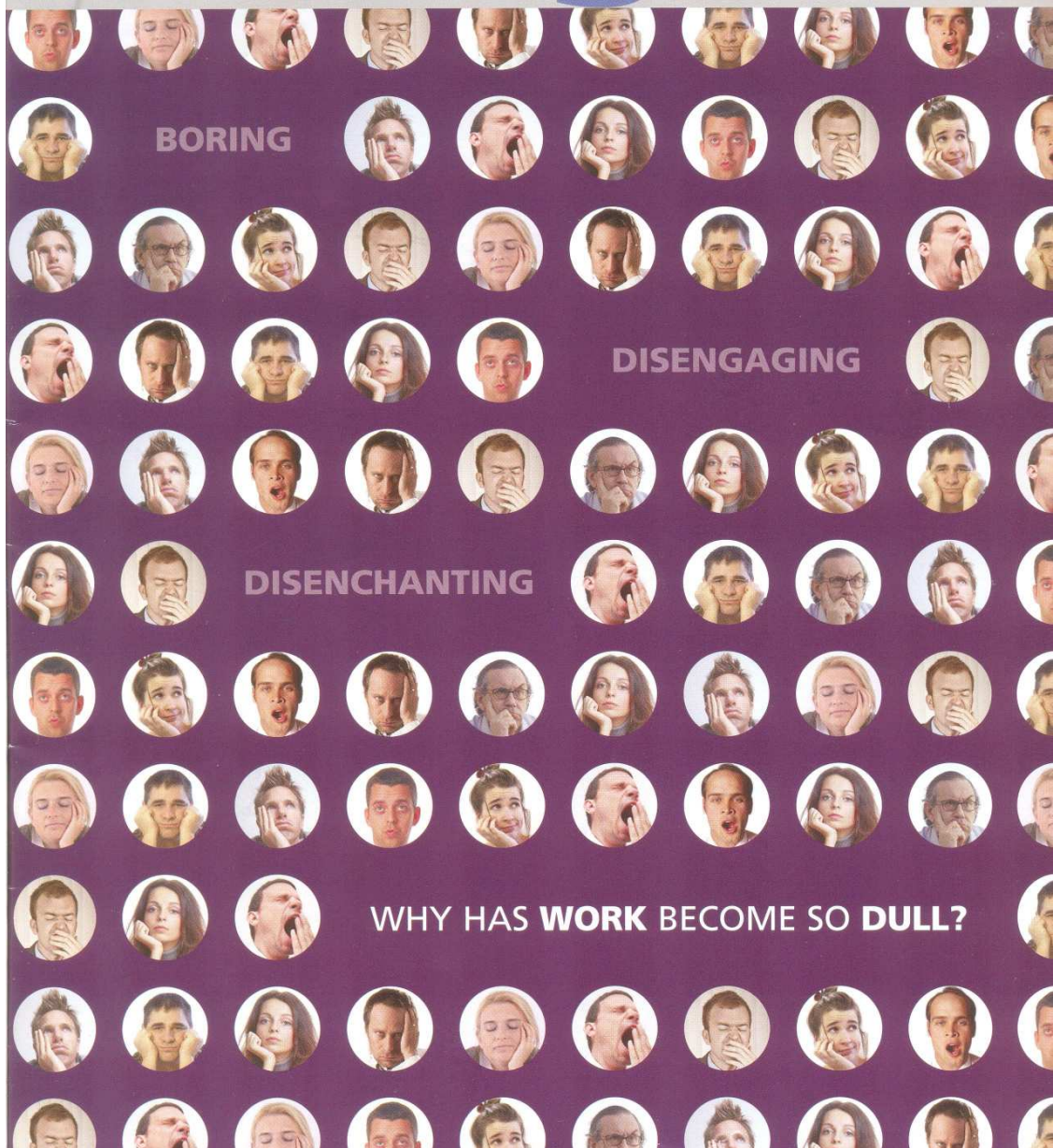


PROFESSIONAL manager

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE CHARTERED MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

£3.85 VOLUME 18 ISSUE 4 JULY 2010

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LIFE CHANGERS

It is said that coaching is 90 per cent attitude and 10 per cent technique, but could an executive coach really turn your career around, how much would it cost and where do you find a good coach? Report by Erika Lucas

There can't be many people reading this article who can put hand on heart and say they feel totally confident about their career prospects.

The media is still dominated by reports of yet more redundancies, recruitment freezes are widespread and many organisations are cutting back on all but essential training and development.

In such turbulent times, people often feel they need help, either to re-think their career plan, strengthen their standing within the business or pick themselves up after redundancy.

Career coaching can be a useful tool to help people focus on what they want and identify the practical steps they should take to achieve their goals. But how exactly does career coaching work? What can you expect to gain from the exercise? And in which circumstances is it likely to be most effective?

Executive career coach Hilary Wilson believes an important first step is for people to acknowledge that careers, quite simply, aren't what they used to be. "The career ladder as we once knew it has now smashed to the ground and become a career lattice," she says. "It is flatter and there are a lot more opportunities – but we need to spot them."

Actively managing your own career is now vital, she adds, because if you don't do it no-one else will. "Job

security only exists inside of us now, it doesn't exist out there externally," she says. "To create that security I think we need two things – skills the marketplace wants and needs, but also the ability to self-market those skills."

"At a time like this we need to be clear about our values, our key transferrable skills, our achievements and the benefits we bring. It's about being able to sell yourself based very firmly on facts and evidence."

External perspective

Of course career coaching isn't just something to reach for when times are tough and you have been made redundant or are worried about your job security. It can be useful at other key times of transition too, such as returning to work after maternity leave, getting back on your feet after a period of poor health, or in the lead-up to retirement.

An external perspective can also be valuable if you've reached a point where you are bored and de-motivated, or if you are champing at the bit for the next promotion or planning to go after a particular secondment or assignment.

Interestingly, Hilary Wilson believes that career coaching can also be extremely relevant in the first few months of a new job. "In the first 90 days people tend to do an awful lot – but are they doing an awful lot of the right things?" she questions. "That first 90 days is a great opportunity to really work on the personal brand you want to establish and to identify your key stakeholders and plan how you are going to engage with them."

Career guru John Lees (author of *How to Get a Job You'll Love*) adds that the career coaching that goes on when times are good can often pay the best dividends. "I find the most rewarding careers coaching is with people who are not under pressure to take a new job and have a bit of time to reflect and reposition themselves," he says. "It can involve a bit of personal development and listening and exploring other avenues – but not the crushing pressure of having to earn another income."

This calmer, more forward-thinking approach to career management means people are also under less pressure to



'THE CAREER LADDER AS WE ONCE KNEW IT HAS NOW SMASHED TO THE GROUND AND BECOME A CAREER LATTICE'

Hilary Wilson, executive career coach

compromise and move too far away from the things they really want. "There's a huge amount of psychological pressure at the moment for people to compromise a long way from what they believe is the right mix," says Lees.

"But if you do that it's going to have a big effect on your CV and future work prospects, so it's an important time to think carefully about what 10 out of 10 looks like and then work out how much of that you are going to trade away because of market conditions.

"Once you get to about six or seven out of 10, careers tend to work because it's a healthy overlap between your motivators and drivers and what the role actually requires. The problem with a big compromise is you are often doing something where you have no motivators and are possibly poorly matched for the role, and that's where things can go wrong."

Finding a coach

So if you decide that career coaching could help you, how do you go about finding the right coach, and what can you expect to pay?

Coaching is an unregulated profession and there is no convenient 'one-stop-shop' where you can go to find a reputable career coach. The Institute of Business Consulting has members who specialise in executive coaching and a *ConsultancyFinder* service, listing members offering these services. You will also be able to find coaches listed in local directories, via the numerous career related websites and publications or simply through word-of-mouth.

But it's essential to make sure from the outset that any prospective career coach is clear about what you want to achieve from the sessions – and that you are clear about what they have to offer and how they will be able to help you.

"I think it is important to contract right at the beginning for what the person actually wants," says career coach Lynne Dorling. "People's needs can be very different. I have done just one single session for people who needed help with their CV, or two or three sessions over a period of time for people trying to decide whether to stay in their current role or move on. Both circumstances require a different approach. One is about practical help – while the other is more to do with helping people think through their values and how closely they align to the values of their current organisation."

Rates for career coaching vary widely and can range from under £100 to around £650 per session with an executive coach. What will you actually get for your money? Again, coaches will vary widely in their approach and the tools and techniques they use.

Typically, you might expect a coach to help you work through some psychometric profiling tests or diagnostic self discovery tools to help you get an insight into what makes you tick. They may use other tools to help draw out your career values, help you negotiate your way around perceived or real barriers or help you pin down suitable occupational areas or new future directions.

Executive coach Hilary Wilson runs workshops to help people get to grips with what 'managing your own career' really means in practical terms. "I ask people to think

'I THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTRACT RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING FOR WHAT THE PERSON ACTUALLY WANTS'

Lynne Dorling, career coach



Top tips on developing your reputation and visibility

- Spend 10 minutes – interspersed throughout the day – chatting to people
- Become more relationship focused – say hello to more people
- Join a cross functional committee
- Take opportunities to present at meetings
- Job shadow
- Get seconded
- Go on a course
- Write an article
- Stay in touch with people
- Contribute in discussions
- Always do what you say you will
- Join an in-house club or society that interests you
- Sit with different people at lunch
- Find out who the movers and shakers are in your industry – notice what they do
- Demonstrate initiative – move away from being passive and seek opportunities to actively offer ideas and suggestions.

Courtesy of Hilary Wilson, *The Little Black Book of Career Success*, Cheeky Monkey Publishing

'THERE'S A HUGE AMOUNT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE AT THE MOMENT FOR PEOPLE TO COMPROMISE A LONG WAY FROM WHAT THEY BELIEVE IS THE RIGHT MIX'

John Lees, author and career guru



Key questions to ask a careers coach

- What is the hourly charge?
- Is there VAT on top?
- Am I committed to a programme of meetings? How much flexibility and choice do I have about the programme?
- How long does it normally take to the point where I have a fairly clear picture of what I have to offer, and where I want to be?
- Do you offer a free introductory session? If not, what information about your working style do you provide in advance?
- Are you going to use any tests? If you are using ability, interest or psychometric tests are you qualified by the British Psychological Society to conduct these tests?
- Do you follow a Code of Practice?
- What happens if you feel you really can't help me? If I feel you can't help me?
- How do the sessions work? Do you support clients long-distance?
- And possibly the most important question: What strategies do you use to help people who have no idea what they want to do next?

Courtesy of John Lees, *How to Get a Job You'll Love*, published McGraw-Hill, £12.99 (ISBN 9780077121808)

about whether they manage their career like a frog or a bat," she says. It's an odd, but powerful analogy which is explained in her book *'The Little Black Book of Career Success'*.

A frog sits passively on his lily-pad, flicking out his tongue to catch the insects that come his way. He is happy and has enough to eat. The bat, on the other hand, uses his sophisticated sonar system to track information, lock on to what he needs to eat and chase after it. Once he's eaten, he moves on and continues gathering whatever information he needs next.

"There's nothing inherently right or wrong with either style, but the workplace is rapidly changing and getting the right mix of the two styles will help you enormously in your career," says Wilson. "Time on a lily-pad as a frog is critical for recharging and reflecting. Just don't get too comfortable, or it might limit your career success. The ideal mix of bat and frog behaviour is 70/30 – this will enhance your career sustainability."

Identifying your USP

Wilson also helps clients identify their USP and learn how to effectively self-market – an area she finds people often struggle with. "People say 'but I don't want to blow my own trumpet' or 'I dislike people who are always self-advertising'," she says. "But there is a difference between self advertising and the invaluable skills of self marketing."

The importance of this has been graphically illustrated in the results of some research conducted by IBM. The study looked at the behaviour of 253 managers to try to find out what differentiated people and got them noticed. The results showed that task (what people actually did) accounted for only 10 per cent. Much more important was behavioural style (30 per cent) with reputation and visibility topping the list at 60 per cent. So it's very much a case of it's not what you do, but how you are seen to be doing it.

Chris Gulliver, director of LeaderShape, who chairs the Institute of Business Consulting's Coaching Expert Advisory Panel, cites a powerful example of this in practice. He recently worked with a senior manager who needed help shifting his image from that of an 'operational guy' to someone with a strategic perspective.

"He was very good at tasks but not very good at delegating, so he couldn't raise his own game," says

Coaching and careers information

Members of the CMI have access to a range of information on coaching and careers management. Our online subject search service includes a range of learning resources, from video and podcasts to e-learning modules, checklists, books and journal articles. To access these resources visit www.managers.org.uk/subjectsearch

Careers advice and information for CMI members includes information on CV writing, interview techniques and career change and can be found at www.managers.org.uk/careers

Gulliver, "I worked with him to improve his ability to delegate – but also coached him on how to network around the business and develop a broader understanding of what was happening within the organisation and the sector generally.

"This meant that when he met senior people in the business he could have a much broader conversation and create a different sort of relationship with them. This helped to reposition him in people's minds as someone who understood the whole business and the environment they were working in. It took him to a different level and created a greater awareness of who he was and what he could do – and he has now been promoted."

IBC director Lynda Purser says: "The right support at the right time can make a world of difference to someone's career trajectory. It is important to seek out and find a coach with the necessary qualifications and experience. They also need to be someone with whom you will feel comfortable about addressing all the key issues that you need to explore in order to develop your career potential. We are pleased to be supporting executive coaches in this expanding sector through the work carried out by our Expert Coaching Panel."



'THE RIGHT SUPPORT AT THE RIGHT TIME CAN MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE TO SOMEONE'S CAREER TRAJECTORY'

Lynda Purser, director, Institute of Business Consulting

Coaching Expert Advisory Panel

The Institute of Business Consulting (IBC) has set up the Coaching Expert Advisory Panel to support IBC members who offer coaching services. The objectives of this panel are to provide specialist support, advice and guidance to members to help them match best practice and succeed in a highly competitive market place. The Coaching Expert Advisory Panel is supported by the EMCC (European Mentoring and Coaching Council). For further information visit www.ibconsulting.org.uk/coaching

The IBC is the professional body for business consultants and advisers and is an organisation within the Chartered Management Institute. For further information about membership call 0207 421 4252 or e-mail ibc@ibconsulting.org.uk

The direct URL for the IBC's ConsultancyFinder service is www.ibconsulting.org.uk/consultancyfinder. If you require any further assistance or information about this service, please call IBC commercial activities manager Julie Cleasby on 020 7421 4244 or e-mail julie.cleasby@ibconsulting.org.uk