

CASE STUDY 3: COACHING TO 'GET BACK ON TRACK'

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Kelly was in her mid-thirties. Six months ago she left her job borne out of a prolonged and growing dissatisfaction with it, combined with a desire and increasing sense to pursue her own creative business ideas. However, needing to make ends meet she had taken on agency work in the media industry, her area of work and expertise. But this agency work rapidly became full-time and very demanding, leaving her feeling low and frustrated as she had little time or energy to focus on her own plans, projects and aspirations.

Kelly was keen to have some coaching to 'get her back on track' to pursuing her career goals and to gain a greater sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. In thinking about Kelly's situation in relation to her stages of career change (Barclay et al., 2011) and to Prochaska and DiClemente's model of change (1984, 1992), Kelly could be considered as having moved through cycles of pre-contemplation, contemplation and preparation, and though motivated to change, was struggling with putting her plan and aspirations into action and maintaining her desired role.

In Kelly's initial coaching session we explored those areas of her work that gave her joy and meaning, her goals and the particular aspects she wanted to focus on. She was keen to focus on her various creative business ideas. As the session developed, Kelly (using a large sheet of paper and coloured pens) spent time drawing, mapping out and writing down those elements she had identified as most important to her (Rogers, 2004; van Nieuwerburgh, 2014). She found doing this engaging and enjoyable, keen to take it home, and inspired to continue working on it.

The session concluded with Kelly confirming her commitment to developing her creative business ideas, and we agreed to a further session or two to help Kelly with exploring options regarding particular goals she had identified. I also introduced Kelly to the GROW model (Whitmore, 2002), suggesting we could use it as a framework for our next session. She liked the structure, forward focus and practicality of the idea, with it seeming to make good sense for her.

In her feedback Kelly was feeling positive and motivated stating it had ‘really energised her to getting her back on track’ and was much looking forward to the next session. At the beginning of the next session Kelly, however, seemed distracted. She started with an apology, explaining that just as she was leaving work, a difficult yet influential colleague ‘had dumped’ a problematic situation on her needing to be resolved Monday morning (it was now Friday evening) and then whilst travelling to the coaching session, she had received unexpected news about her flat share arrangements. This too was troubling her.

Given her preoccupations and being mindful not to move the session on too prematurely, I listened carefully to the situations Kelly presented. Using open questions, affirmations, paraphrasing and summarising and drawing on a person-centred humanistic approach (Joseph, 2010; Rogers, 1957), Kelly began to reveal insights about the nature of the ‘obstacles’ she was facing in being able to achieve her career goals and in putting her ideas into practice.

As well as concerns about finances, what emerged were particular difficulties regarding her flat share situation. There were aspects she was unhappy about. It was also compromising her ability to work at home in a positive and creative way. She also started to express some self-limiting beliefs including her feeling ‘guilty’ and ‘undeserving’ in her decision to pursue her creative passions.

Kelly’s situation illustrated the holistic nature of careers, of how work is placed within an individual’s broader life context. The coaching session allowed Kelly to raise her awareness and develop insights into the links between the different aspects of her life (her home, finances, and internal conflicts) and her work and career ambitions. Kelly’s case demonstrates how career decisions and the ability to change are part of a complex set of factors that impact on each other, a basic tenet of Savickas et al.’s Life Design theoretical approach (2009).

The start of Kelly’s third session revealed positive developments in her life with some notable shifts in key obstacles. Kelly had decided to ‘be courageous’ and to have an open and frank discussion with a close family member. The outcome being the prospect of Kelly being able to move out of her current place and into a new housing situation with the possibility of having light, space and the ability to work in the way that she knew was important to her. Kelly said the realisation this could be put in place made her feel relieved and much happier.

We used the third session to help Kelly with identifying specific action steps she would take. As Kelly worked through some sequencing, I asked about how these related to a key goal she had previously identified in our first session together. Kelly paused. There was an ‘aha moment’ as Kelly realised that working on one of her creative projects and developing it into a business prospect (a goal in its own right) was also about helping her to have a belief in her creative abilities and giving her the confidence she knew she would need for her longer term goal of making a documentary.

We had one further shorter session as Kelly wanted to use this for focusing on priorities and sequencing around specific aspects of her project and developing her business ideas. Afterwards we agreed to close the sessions as Kelly felt much more equipped to properly focus and to put her plans of action and career goals into place. She said she was feeling good and excited about her projects and her prospects.

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