Claire was 39. The mid-life era is one that is often associated with a re-appraisal of one's past and one's future. For Claire, her looming 40th birthday coincided with her youngest child starting school, giving her both the impetus to start thinking about her career plans, and the opportunity to put some of her ideas into practice. Before our first session, I asked Claire to design two collages and bring them along to the first session. One was to be a collection of images which Claire felt reflected some of the key aspects to her life as it currently was, and one with images of her life as she would like it to be in the future – perhaps ten or so years down the line. We started the first session with a discussion about how Claire had found the task (enjoyable and insightful), and how she was feeling about the career coaching (excited and nervous), and then spent some time contracting. We agreed to have three sessions together and then review where we had reached. I introduced the GROW model, which tends to be my coaching model of choice for career coaching interventions and we agreed a goal for the session.

Claire had worked for over ten years in recruitment before her children were born. The long hours and the travelling meant that this was not a role she felt that she could successfully combine with motherhood and so took a career break whilst her kids were young. Now nearly ten years on, she felt no inclination to return to the cut and thrust of the business world, but didn't really know what else was open to her, and feared that having been out of the workplace for so long, that her skills would be out of date and her credibility very low.

Using the strengths finder (www.authentichappiness.com) Claire identified her signature strengths and together we thought about a range of different environments which might allow her to make good use of these. Initially Claire was adamant that she was not in a financial position to re-train, but as discussions progressed, she began to see that confidence was more of a barrier than money, and she began to consider options that involved new qualifications.
By the end of the second session, Claire was becoming increasingly interested in counselling. She decided to start volunteering for a local voluntary organisation which would give her some insights into the counselling process and give her the credibility associated with some experience in the field. In our final session we discussed some cognitive based coaching techniques which Claire could practice to help boost her self-esteem.

After three sessions, Claire seemed much clearer about the direction she wanted to explore and more confident about her ability to achieve her goals. We ended the coaching relationship at that point, but discussed the possibility of Claire coming back later in the year after she started her volunteering either to re-think her plans, or for some help with putting in an application for a counselling course.