

# Sort yourself out!

Is life coaching a valid tool in our search for happiness?

**Jane Turney** gives it a go with west London coach Liz Wilde



**W**hen I volunteered to be a guinea pig and try a couple of sessions of life coaching with Liz Wilde, colleagues raised a chorus of disapproval. First there was the complaint about the seeming ubiquity of life coaches these days and then there was the question "why would anyone pay someone else to help them sort their life out, if they're not obviously depressed?"

This is what I wanted to find out. I have a good job and a busy social life, and yet there is a sense of something missing. Turns out I'm typical of most of Liz's clients: "The average client coming to me will be in their 30s or early 40s and have reached the stage where they want to change. They may have been doing the same job since they were 18 and have never felt really passionate about it, or they are experiencing a relationship break-up, or they may be going through a sort of early mid-life crisis and think "surely there must be more to life than this?"

Good to know that I'm not alone with my niggling sense of malaise – but how could Liz help? One of the first things she did was send me a true values programme – which involved selecting four words out of a list of about 150, choosing those which represented the values closest to my heart. Then I was able to check to what extent I was being true to these in the various areas of my life.

But most of us are simply too busy being busy and we lose sight of what is most important to us. As Liz puts it: "We get stuck living our lives! When you know what your values are, then you can start to live by them." And we all have limiting beliefs and patterns of behaviour which prevent us reaching our full potential. But whereas in counselling or psychotherapy these behaviours and cognitive patterns may be pathologised, life coaching sees them just as bad habits to be changed, rather than personality issues to be explored in depth.

The emphasis is always on taking action in life coaching. "Even if you deal with past areas, it is always about taking action to get through them and to get on with your life," says Liz. "I would never sit and listen for half an hour while someone told me what a terrible childhood they had. A client knows if they come to a

So what sorts of issues does she deal with? Her specialities include work/life balance, self-confidence, stress reduction, attraction, fitness and weight loss, goal setting, health and money. Liz has worked as a health and fitness journalist for over 15 years, and has written nine books on these or related subjects. Her training with Coach University included modules on listening, life-planning strategies, empowerment and financial advice, as well as 200 hours of coaching practice before she could qualify.

Many of the things that life coaching offers – a positive focus, encouragement, motivational tools, practical advice – may sound like common sense, so why not just get your best friend to coach you? Well, as Liz points out, no matter how well meaning your friends, they are often not the best people to push you or to be really

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honest. A coach is trained to listen fully to what you say, what you are trying to say, and what you are not saying. "The whole idea with life coaching is that the answers are in the client and the life coach gets them out," says Liz. "It takes courage to look at your thought processes and admit you have been sabotaging your life."

So, having had a couple sessions with Liz, would I recommend her – and life coaching generally? Definitely. I was amazed at how much we covered in the two half hour sessions – including looking at and setting objectives for work/life balance, self-confidence, career, creativity and general motivation. The trouble is, now I've stopped talking to Liz, I've become too busy again to make time for my true priorities. Help – I need a life coach!

*Liz offers a free 30 minute introductory session for potential clients. She charges £240 for three 45 minute phone calls per month; £180 for two 45 minute calls, with extra support in between, if needed. For more information call 020 8742 0083, or visit*