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"Life doesn't have to be like that"

HOW PERSONAL CONSULTING CAN GET YOU YOUR HEART'S DESIRE



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Is there something about you've been promising yourself? Maybe you are putting up with a difficult situation because you "have no choice", or simply because you don't know how to go about tackling it, or where to start? Or perhaps uncertainty is holding you back in some way, or fear of failing prevents you from taking that vital first step.

In this article I'll explain what Personal Consulting is, how I came to develop my approach, and how it can help you get more of what you want in life.

What is YOUR heart's desire?

Do you have a dream? Perhaps you fantasise about a better life, maybe you are plotting a new career path or a lifestyle that'll free you from the daily grind? What about a relationship? Mills and Boon made real; you'd like to spend the rest of your days with the perfect partner...

We all have them (dreams I mean, perfect partners are a little harder to come by). We promise ourselves that, when we get our act together, or we finally have the time or the money... we'll do such-and-such. Or maybe it's even more vague than that; you simply KNOW, in the back of your mind, that you'll take certain steps to do certain things to improve your situation... some day.

Personal Consulting will help you when you have a dream, a goal or ambition that you've not actually got round to acting on. It's also handy in a crisis; when a relationship is struggling, or major change is staring you in the face. However resourceful, confident and upbeat a person is, we all experience moments when we feel stuck, or unsure about which way to turn. This is why I've coined the slogan "Life doesn't have to be like that".

How did Personal Consulting come about?

I developed my Personal Consulting model out of my work as a Solution Focused therapist and coach. My career has had a dual path. Originally trained in brief therapy I've worked with individuals families and couples for over thirty years. In parallel with that, I've also had a thriving career as a workplace consultant and trainer. As much of my work involved conflict, I also qualified as a workplace mediator, and I taught conflict resolution at Birkbeck College, at the University of London.

There is quite an overlap between the two strands of therapy and workplace consulting, and over the years, a third strand emerged. People would contact me for work or lifestyle guidance that didn't fit easily into either a therapeutic relationship, nor a training one.

'Consulting' was too broad and 'businessy', but Personal Consulting seems to set the right tone for what I do.

I should mention that for most of my working life I have also run my own businesses, either as my main activity or as a sideline when I was in paid employment. I've been described as a serial entrepreneur. I know how to start and run businesses, but more importantly in my line of work, I know a LOT about being working for yourself, work/life balance, focusing on a talent and generally dealing with all the personal challenges of starting up and running your own business.

Business consulting is directed at helping the client with structural and organisational matters. In Personal consulting, by contrast, the emphasis is very much on the 'personal', which means the emotional and psychological aspects of a given situation.

While I don't think that it's essential for a consultant or coach to have such a broad range of experience, mine has certainly given me insight into much of what my clients want to discuss. helped me to identify with them. It has also, as they often tell me, lent a degree of credibility to our discussions.

Unavoidable certainties

It is inevitable that all of us will have to deal with change and challenge in our lives. How you approach it and what you believe are the possibilities are crucial, not just in getting what you want, they'll affect whether you tackle it at all. Many people soldier on believing that they have no control, or not knowing where to start. Personal Consulting can help in situations like that.

You might feel that circumstances are limiting your options, or that are hemmed in by self-doubt. Caution is one thing, but if you are frozen in the headlights of your own beliefs you CAN break loose if you go about it the right way. As I've discovered time and again from my clients, and my own experience, taking time to talk through ideas can reveal strengths the options you haven't seen before.

I have spent three decades helping people with personal change and while there are no miracles, I have seen miraculous things happen. It occurred to me early in my Personal Consulting career that "life doesn't have to be like that" is a useful reminder that – when you feel stuck and unable to move in the direction you want – there are possibilities even though, at that moment, you may not be able to see them. The slogan became my catch-phrase.

Not helpless, but wanting help

There is no client 'profile'. People have come from all walks of life, all social circumstances, all ages, races and gender. They were all people who wanted change, and who hoped that it could happen (why else seek help?), but there is no typical client.

For the most part, my Personal Consulting clients have been fully functioning, rational and intelligent adults. Some were unemployed, others were very successful; in conventional terms, they had 'made it' with lifestyles that were envied by peers and colleagues. Yet, it's fair to say, most had come to me with a 'problem' that was not new or even recent. Sometimes they had suffered with it for months or even years. "Why now?" I would ask them. The answer was always that some trigger event, often a crisis, had pushed them to consider seeking me out.

If there has been one constant in my varied work over the years, it's my amazement at how much people will put up with. Often suffering in silence, they'll chug through life, KNOWING that something needs to change, but unwilling or unable to take the first step. Often this was because they were caught in a trap of their own making, a kind of false logic that simply confirmed their doubts and uncertainties, rather than revealing opportunities and solutions.

For example Bernie (not his real name), in late mid-life, had spent over 35 years in a job he didn't like, saying he "had no choice", even though his hobby (music) earned him a second income when he could find the time, and he was constantly turning commissions down. He'd followed a career path chosen by his parents, ignoring his heart's desire of becoming a professional musician. Bernie is one of many who proved that it's never too late to follow your heart.

Then there was a young woman of 30, Sandra. Having had almost as many jobs (as her years), since leaving school, she believed herself to be "unemployable". But the evidence showed that she was far from unemployable – she'd applied for and got dozens of jobs – the problem lay elsewhere. Careful discussion helped her get a new perspective and with it a new sense of purpose.

Both of these clients and many more have been stuck in situations they wanted to change, but it took literally years for them to get round to doing something about it. They chose Personal Consulting to get a fresh perspective on a persistent problem.

True, there was a trigger event. In his case it was possible redundancy, in hers, it was a relationship breakup which meant that she needed a steady income to support herself. Both of these people moved towards their goals with confidence with the help of Personal Consulting. What's more, they managed to do it quickly; I saw Bernie for a single session, and

Sandra twice.

Going it alone

There's a pervasive idea floating about out there. It is that when we are faced with a problem we should be able to sort it out by ourselves.

For many people, asking for help is seen as a weakness, seeking advice signals stupidity. It's as though reaching out places us lower down in some invisible hierarchy. Getting another person – even an expert – to problem-solve with us is an admission of failure; it says something about ourselves that is too hard to bear. Better to suffer in silence than to accept that we are stuck.

Ideas like these are propped up on something more basic. It is that looking into ourselves and facing a difficulty makes us uncomfortable. It can generate all sorts of excuses "*I can sort out my own problems*" (when obviously, you can't); "*This is my business*" (It may be, but and you're clearly struggling and others worry about you); "*Nobody understands me as well as me*" (OK, but a fresh perspective can work wonders).

Avoidance and denial are often the obstacles that stop people getting the help they need. This is when they can get caught in a self-perpetuating cycle of aggravation, powerlessness and isolation. To say that it's stupid to be stuck in a trap of one's own making may seem harsh, but sometimes it takes a shock to get us to accept that things need to change, and that change IS possible.

I have found that 'acceptance' is the key word that prompts people to seek out a Personal Consultant. The realisation that one isn't able to go it alone any longer is so powerful that it alone will trigger positive change in many cases (some of my clients have jokingly called it 'desperation').

Getting help or advice is a personal choice, and finding someone you respect and trust can make the decision harder. But getting free of a situation that's frustrating you or making you unhappy is far more worthy of your talent, time and effort than just slugging away in a situation you are not happy with.

Why Personal Consulting is so Valuable

The BIG thing that people so often forget or don't understand, is that when two people engage in meaningful discussion, BOTH their minds become more creative. It is far greater than 'two minds are better than one', it is that when two minds come together you can

discover things that neither one alone would ever be able to predict.

This is what the Personal Consulting relationship is all about. It's not about handing out advice nor fixing the clients' difficulties. It is a collaboration where we work in equal partnership. Conversations are creative, and yield ideas and inspiration as well as support.

What can Personal Consulting do for you?

Personal Consulting will help you identify your goals and ambitions, and make a plan to achieve them. In the role of Personal Consultant, I work a sounding board and coach to help you determine what's important to you and how to go about getting what you want from life.

Without the 'hearts desire' fairytale language, it comes down to what you want for yourself in your life. "In your life" is not just a qualifier; it means something real. You have one life, it's single journey, and so when it comes to dreams and ambitions, 'some-day' also belongs in fairy tales. Replace 'some day' with 'when?', and it starts to get a bit less abstract. Turn a hope or a dream into an ambition, and you have something to get hold of, making action and change possible.

All change brings a degree of uncertainty, but that need not stop you taking the step – or even the leap – that you really want to take, when you have the right support.

What does it cost?

I charge £65.00 (\$100 US) a session. A session lasts as long as it needs to, typically one to two hours. I know that the norm is to charge by the hour, but I have never been happy about imposing a limit just because of convention. Conversations are generally wide-ranging and engaging, it's rare that they fit conveniently into an hour. I find that sessions have a natural life-span, and in most cases we both sense when it is the right time to stop.

Make fantasy real AND pay the rent

We are surrounded by lifestyle advice that seeks to inspire us and lead us to our heart's desire. There are any number of gurus and writers ready tell us how we can set ourselves free and live the dream. The reason that most of us never follow their advice is that we can't. We have responsibilities, others who depend on us, jobs, bills to pay and all the rest.

We are driven on daily by the need for financial security and stability, not airy-fairy pipe dreams about creating the perfect lifestyle. We all know we COULD, if we were brave enough, in the meantime there's the mortgage to pay.

The great thing about spending some time to focus on a vision is that you soon realise that it

is never an either/or decision. It's possible to follow a dream and still pay the mortgage; moving towards a new goal doesn't mean you have to abandon the old life.

If you have big ambitions like living the dream, Personal Consulting may be a good starting point. But the reality is that most of us are pretty happy with what we have; we know more or less where we are going in life, as each day we get up and get on.

Inevitably, though, there are those life events like a crisis, a crossroads or an opportunity where we just wish there was someone to talk to, to help us get our ideas straight. That's where Personal Consulting comes into its own.

About

Barry Winbolt is a Personal Consultant, therapist and writer. He lives in South East England, and works with clients worldwide via Skype. He is committed to sharing his knowledge and experience through his writing, training and personal consulting practice. His driving idea is to show how easy it is to improve emotional wellbeing and to sweep away the doubts and uncertainties that often prevent people from sorting out the things that trouble them.

He blogs on self-help ideas, and signpost guidance for avoiding many of the common psychological traps we can fall into. His slogan "Life doesn't have to be like that" has come out of his passionate belief and experience, that whatever the problem there is always a way to get a better handle on yourself and life in general.

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