

# How a life coach saved my life

A life coach helped **Victoria Mary Clarke** see that she had the power to transform her life



**'A** LIFE coach? You've got to be kidding! I'll run your life for you. I'll charge you half what she's charging."

A fairly typical reaction, when I announce that I'm about to engage the services of a life coach.

"She charges how much?!" Consternation, when I tell them how much. "Jaysus, there's money to be made out of this racket. How long is the training?"

Foaming at the mouth now. "How long? Six months! €100 an hour?"

There followed an intense mixture of indignation and admiration for whoever can get away with this. As it happens, Ann Kelly is working with me *pro-bono*. But if I were a regular client, she would be charging quite a lot of money.

And it is true that anyone can train to be a coach in a relatively short time. There doesn't appear to be any law against you or me setting ourselves up in business tomorrow — with no qualifications. And yes, coaching first became popular with Americans and celebrities, so you've got to be a bit sceptical. But never being one to knock a thing until I've tried it, I did try it. And not only is it worth it, I am prepared to make the extravagant claim that my life coach has saved my life.

I wasn't about to die, physically at least, when I met Ann. But mentally, emotionally and spiritually, I was abandoning ship. The hopes and dreams I'd had as a kid had long since died. If you had told me, at the age of 16, that I would not be a millionaire by my 21st birthday, I would have laughed in your face.

Enormously ambitious at that age, I was confident that I would be a movie-star by 20 and a supermodel/fashion designer/best-selling author as well. So confident was I that I didn't think I needed to do anything to make this stuff happen, except wait.

By the age of 35, I was still waiting. To add to this, I had recently broken up with my lover and partner of 15 years. I had moved to Dublin where I was broke, single, approaching 40 and sharing a bedroom with my ten-year-old nephew. A long, long, long way from being a movie-star. I had been prone to depression from the age of 12, but it was getting worse.

Now it was all I could do to get out of bed and microwave a TV dinner. Friends didn't know what to say. I wanted

someone to take me away from my life. And then the miracle happened.

I should mention here that I have always been interested in the really big questions like, Is there a God? And if there is, why am I not a supermodel? To this end, I have learned to contact my guardian angels and I often ask them to guide me, even in my deepest depressions. On this occasion, they guided me to Ann Kelly, the life coach.

She met me and asked what I wanted to achieve in life. I didn't believe that any of the things I wanted were achievable. But I did want to write a book about my conversations with angels because that was the one thing that made me feel safe, loved and looked after. Immediately, Ann wanted to know what I was doing in order to achieve this particular goal. Well, I said, I was waiting. Waiting for what?

Waiting for inspiration, waiting for divine intervention, waiting for the right time, just waiting, I said. Procrastinating, she said. By the end of the first session, I had agreed to set time aside, every day, to talk to my angels and work on this book. We would meet in a week's time and discuss my progress.

At no stage did Ann actually tell me what to do, although she did tell me what she thought about what I was doing and not doing. We negotiated the homework that I would do for the following week and, quite often, I didn't do it. When this happened, we would discuss my motivation and try to find out what was putting me off.

As it turned out, I was afraid to show my work to my agent in case she didn't like it. And I was right. She hated it. I was upset, but didn't take to the bed. Instead, I started making phone calls to new agents, as agreed with Ann. This re-



**ANN KELLY:** Provides guidance towards the answers the client already has. Photo: Donna McBride

sulted in a meeting with Marianne Gunn O'Connor who had just negotiated a spectacular deal for Cecelia Ahern and who offered to sign me up. A massive breakthrough.

Ann and I have been meeting for a year. I haven't always looked forward to our sessions. Much of the time, I have dreaded them because it is a requirement that you be honest with yourself and this isn't always pleasant. I didn't like to admit, for instance, that despite my ambition to be rich, I was in the habit of ignoring my finances completely. My philosophy was, if you ignore a problem long enough, it will go away.

**I** WAS persuaded, reluctantly, to open all the bills and bank statements that I had shoved in a box and to add up what I was spending and what I was earning and subtract one from the other. Very scary. But it's nice to put the card in the cash-point without wondering if there's anything in there.

My previous approach had been to cry about the things I didn't like; to stay in bed more, eat more chocolate,

drink more wine and watch more telly. Ann calls that avoidance. When asked what I intended to do about the damp, dark dingy bedsit that I had moved into and which I hated passionately, my inclination was to avoid thinking about it. Instead, I found myself moving into a bigger, brighter, friendlier place which I like being in.

The driving principle behind coaching is that you, the client, have all the answers to your problems, you just need to have them coaxed out. And it worked. I didn't even need Prozac. Which is why I am willing to say that my life has been saved by the life coach. A life of depression really didn't seem worth it, so who knows where I was headed.

Coaching is not therapy, Ann emphasises. The reason it cured me, I believe, is down to my own need for structure and my need to reframe my negative thoughts about life. Instead of thinking how awful and unbearable everything was, I began to take steps to change things and to build my confidence. It's an ongoing process; there's plenty more to work on. But I can say that I'm no longer depressed, in

fact, much of the time I'm now suspiciously happy.

Wondering if it works for other people too, I introduced life coaching to Una, an artist friend who was terrified to have an exhibition. A couple of months later, she had her first solo show and sold more than half the work. This, she says, was inconceivable before she got coached.

"I have very limiting beliefs," she says. "Or at least I did, until Ann came along. She encouraged me to regard problems as opportunities, to stretch my creativity and to find solutions. It worked in every area of my life, even the worst possible situations, like dealing with builders!"

So what's the difference between paying a coach and getting a friend to listen to you?

"It's mainly about structure," says Mary Curran, from the Coaching from the Heart Centre in Dublin.

"Your friend's responses will depend on her own agenda, what she thinks is best for you and best for her, because she is emotionally involved with you. The coach will ask a series of questions designed to uncover your motivation. Whereas your friend might just tell you you're a lazy feck!"

Life coaching cuts through the facades that we all put up, says Bryan Ryan, a former IT company director and now trainee coach. It goes right to the soul and exposes the vulnerability that we all feel, deep down. And that's where you have to start if you want to really make changes. It's also shown me how much we all need to have a good chat and be listened to.

Ann Kelly (021) 435 4725 or [annkellycoach@eircom.net](mailto:annkellycoach@eircom.net)  
Mary Curran, the Coaching from the Heart Centre.  
086- 2328143. Bryan Ryan  
086-1084700



**MARIANNE GUNN O'CONNOR:** Victoria approached her after starting life-coaching sessions