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Small steps to big change: Life coaches help clients achieve their goals — one step at a time

On Sept. 10, 2001, Mike Jaffe was eating lunch outside his office building in downtown Manhattan. With an MBA and a thriving corporate career, Jaffe felt dissatisfaction with his life and that he wasn't doing his "right work."

Jaffe's commute to work was two hours each way on the train.

"My daughter," Jaffe said, "Was 1. When I left for work she was sleeping. When I came home she was sleeping."

"So, I thought, all right, what can I do?"

Jaffe decided to take one small step toward change. The next morning, he would have breakfast with his wife and daughter and take a later train in.

"Once I made that choice," Jaffe said, "it felt like I was taking control of my life. I felt bullet proof. Awesome. I was very happy."

Sept. 11, Jaffe said, "I sat down and had a really nice breakfast with my family."

He took the later train. When the first plane hit the first tower of the World Trade Center — Jaffe's office building— Jaffe was in the subway.

Coming out of the subway, Jaffe said, "I look up and see a big hole in the 96th floor — my floor. The first plane hit my floor, it hit my desk."

Jaffe's boss and work team were all killed.

"I would have been killed."

Today, Mike Jaffe is a life and business coach. The mission statement of his Connecticut based company, Jaffe Life Design, is called The Wake Up Revolution.

"Life is a gift," Jaffe said, "and every day counts." With this philosophy, Jaffe helps people "discover new worlds." Removing barriers such as fear, Jaffe says, helps people discover their potential and possibility.

"Because," Jaffe said, "when there's no possibility, there's no hope."

Life and Business coaching are on the rise.

According to the International Coaching Federation, its membership has doubled to 9,500 since 2001. The spread of coaching may have some connection to media exposure, but an article in Fortune magazine refers to the rise as "grassroots," and "word of mouth."

Jaffe himself has a coach, KC Christensen Lang.

Lang has been a life and business coach for 3 years and is owner and president of Happiness Is ... in Cape Neddick, Maine. Lang co-authored the book, "Speaking of Success" and has over 30 years of management, promotion and marketing experience. Lang also works as a PR consultant/Publicist.

Like many coaches, Lang does much of her work by phone. She begins the process of coaching prior to the first meeting with two questions.

The first question, Lang said, is "What 3 challenges face you in your business today?" Lang said, "It could be not getting along with other members of a team, having trouble communicating. That would be about working better with people.

Or it could be ... you never get anything done. That's organization, time management. Or you're depressed at your job or hate your job. That's about dreams and goals. First, why do you hate the job? Is it that you're short staffed or that you picked the wrong career? It runs the gamut."

The second question, Lang said is, "If you could change anything in your life and had enough support to do it, what would it be?"

"The client sets the agenda," Lang said, "whether it's pursuing a goal, a feeling, a dream."

A life coach, Lang said, is trained to listen and ask the right questions to help the client find his own answers. Life coaches help clients establish goals and act on them.

One thing coaches agree on: coaching is not therapy.

Cynthia Grace Luma, M.Ed., of Kittery, Maine, has been a psychotherapist for over 30 years. She is also a life coach.

Luma said in psychotherapy, "People are dealing with feelings and emotions. There may be places where someone is stuck and they want to grow." In psychotherapy, sessions focus on the past,

present and future.

With life coaching, Luma said, it's about "Who are you right now? How do you want to enhance the quality of your life? Maybe someone wants to go back to college, or maybe they want to write a book and they've never done it because they're so busy. It's someone to be on your team as you move forward to goals."

Sometimes, Luma said, it's about clarifying those goals.

Luma said, "One woman, all her life had been very successful but not in relationships. She'd had relationships but not one where she settled down with someone. After coaching, she cleared out some ideas about her ideal partner and was able to manifest that in her life."

KC Christensen Lang said as a coach, she believes in her clients.

With someone to believe in them, "People can take steps they've never taken before, try new things they've never tried." People have "gotten out of their shell, gone back to college. Everyone needs someone like that. Someone to believe in you."

Lang offers clients unlimited emails during the month between sessions. She doesn't want clients to have to wait to share their progress or successes.

"It's not just an appointment with a doctor or a dentist. I'm here for you every day." Also, Lang said, "In between sessions, many times people can get off track. It's a lot easier when the session comes along," if clients have stayed on track.

Phil Kimball, one of 3 owner-brokers of ReMax Realty One in York has worked with Lang as a life coach for 2 years. He said, "KC has been an important part of my professional life," and calls Lang, "my success coach."

He added that a real estate brokerage can be stressful.

"You can end up agonizing over a decision. When I call KC, she really knows how to get to the crux ... Her mantra is work smarter not harder."

Kimball added that Lang has also helped him in creating a balance between professional and personal life.

Tami Esty, owner/President of Thee Privileged Pet in York has worked with Lang as a life and business coach for over a year.

"As a new business owner, " Esty said, "there were things I was struggling with and I'm a big believer that if there is something you don't know how to do, you find someone with expertise in that field."

Esty had confidence in her ability to work with and care for animals, "But I was in a new position, being the boss and running a corporation."

Lang has helped Esty in grooming management, conflict resolution between employees and employee discipline.

Like Kimball, Esty said it's about balance too.

"When I first met KC, I was struggling, working 80-90 hours a week and I couldn't take it anymore. Now, I don't work as many hours. I can accomplish the same amount of work in less time." Being more productive and managing people better, Esty said, are ways she's working smarter not harder and making more time for family.

Lang encouraged Esty and her husband to arrange a weekly date, an evening focusing on their relationship, not business.

"And a year and a half later, we still do that once a week and we look forward to it."

Self care, Lang said, is important.

Of his work with Lang, Jaffe said, "If I'm not taking care of me, I can't take care of other people. So it's making it all work."

In his work, Jaffe finds that with factors such as company downsizing, "There's so much pressure. People are doing two to three jobs' worth of job. And that's spilling over into what would normally be family time or me time, or down time. Coupled with technology, there's never a chance to unplug."

Jaffe works with clients to be more efficient and carve out more time for themselves. But, he says, "You have to be responsible. You have to own it."

One way of doing that is setting boundaries and training others about those boundaries.

Of his coworkers on the 96th floor of the World Trade Center, Jaffe said, "I can't say why this happened. Those were all good people that worked up there. They were good people with dreams and good families. I wasn't the chosen one. I was given a gift. What am I going to do with it?"



As more coaches enter the field, the profession is being better understood.

But Jaffe said, "There's very little barrier from someone to call themselves a coach ... There's a lot of difference in quality," in the profession.

Finding the right coach is important, Jaffe said, "You need to feel truth and confidence," with the coach. "Someone that listens to you, someone that helps you to come to your own answers."

On his website, Jaffe encourages people to realize that small actions can make big differences.

"I've seen remarkable changes," Lang said. "Sometimes even one hour will literally change their lives."
