

Using a combination of excellent coaching skills and clever marketing tactics, Business and Life Coach Darren Cockburn (MBA), a Coaching Academy graduate and NLP Practitioner, has developed a very successful coaching business but has no desire to make it a full-time career. He explains why. By Marie-Louise Cook.



In five years, Darren Cockburn has moved from being a coaching client to running a part-time coaching business that has become so successful his appointment book is nearly always full. Despite his success, he does not plan to give up his day job as a Senior IT Manager for a large UK retail company.

'I don't think I will ever coach on a full-time basis because I enjoy doing lots of different things,' he says. 'I find coaching is challenging: you aren't just thinking about your clients when you are on the call with them but also in between sessions. I can only take on so many clients a week before the quality of my coaching would begin to reduce. I definitely wouldn't do it on a full-time basis.'

But even at work as an IT Manager, Cockburn uses his coaching skills whenever possible.

'Rather than tell people what to do or advise them, it is also useful to ask questions to help people find their own way and tap into their own creativity and find different ways of doing things. If managers continually tell staff exactly what to do and don't allow them to think for themselves, they are not going to get the best out of them. I have always measured people by outcomes so I

I Only Want to Coach Part-Time

give them an objective or outcome and it's up to them how they achieve it – within boundaries.

'You have to get the balance right but I think most people like to be asked to find their own ways of doing things rather than being told what to do. When you're interacting with members of staff or project teams if all you do is ask questions then they will get frustrated. Sometimes it is appropriate to give someone a direct instruction and ask them to do something in a certain way.'

Cockburn's own foray into coaching began when he felt the demands of his day job were having an adverse effect on other areas of his life and sought help.

'I was focussing too much on my job and not giving enough time or energy to my family life. When I was at home, I was quite tired and irritable. I was struggling to work through that on my own. I found a local coach in Nottingham through the Yellow Pages. I wasn't really too sure what to expect. I had heard about life coaching but that was my first contact with a professional coach. ↻

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'She really helped me to understand what my options were and how to get to a better place and lead a more balanced life. I had about six sessions and it was life changing – it really helped me get the balance right between work, home and my family. It actually helped me perform better at work too.

'I started doing some coaching and mentoring on a voluntary basis, helping people to get back into employment. I also set up a personal development programme called 'Life Tools' at a number of universities.

'I initially taught them myself - I had done an element of training within my IT career - but because of time constraints I now provide a shrink-wrapped programme and training materials to the universities which enables the students to deliver the course. That way, thousands of people can benefit.

'I would recommend that any coach who wants to build their practice or get into coaching does voluntary work initially because it really helps to build a network and your experience and confidence. Without doing the work I did at the university, I don't think my business would be in such a good place as it is now.'

His coaching clients come for either life coaching.

Interestingly, Cockburn says most of his clients come via the Internet. 'I don't do a lot of business networking events or a lot of face-to-face networking. It's not my primary way of attracting clients. I use the power of the Internet to do that.

'My website ranks quite well with the search engines so that generates quite a bit of traffic and I am also registered with a number of coaching directories. I also offer my services to individuals through forums and business networking sites.

'It takes time, but I do tend to get quite a good conversion rate because I target forums and people who will benefit from my services. I go onto websites and forums, like The Coaching Academy forum, anywhere where people are talking about their problems and challenges.

'That is just one form of

advertising. The best thing a coach can do is have a number of different things to generate the numbers they need. Most coaches with successful practices will probably agree that marketing is an ongoing challenge. Activity equals results – the more you get yourself out there the more business you create.

'I spend about three hours per week on marketing. It's amazing how much you can do in three hours if you focus. You have to invest in the marketing.

'I work with people to help them put a system in place so they are clear how much action they will take each week, how many emails they will send, how many calls they will make, what they will do with the website etc and then it's a numbers thing. You need to understand the numbers because otherwise you can get frustrated. A business coach could send, for example, 12 emails out to business owners, fail to get a response and become frustrated. In fact, they might need to send out 15 or 20 before they get a response.

'It needs to be targeted and the marketing message needs to be appropriate. You do need to do quite a lot of research initially but once you get a good system in place, life gets easier. I help coaches create a system that suits their own particular strengths and constraints.

'It depends where your business is at as well. My business is at the stage now where I am comfortably filling the slots that I have available each week. If someone is just starting out, then 100% of their time could be spent on marketing activities. Businesses in general are like that: to begin with you spend a lot of time marketing and promoting your services rather than necessarily delivering them. Coaching is no exception. People often underestimate quite how much effort is required to get themselves to a good place and get the numbers and income they want out of it.'

Jenny Charles was a qualified counsellor, specialising in anger management, but had moved away from that career into

Darren Cockburn's Clients

Client's Story: From Lecturer To Business Owner



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full-time lecturing in mental health. At the time she found Darren Cockburn's Life Coaching advertisement, she was unhappy in her work but unsure what her options might be.

'I didn't really have a goal in mind – I just wanted to be able to sound off to someone really: "Here I am in this position. Give me some guidance to where I might be able to go."

'At the end of the first call, I felt so motivated.'

Telephone coaching suited her schedule whereas face-to-face coaching would have meant an additional hour of travelling to and from the appointment. 'I knew I had an hour when I could make the space available.

'I had about 10 sessions. Initially the sessions were an hour long but as I started to get my business going and become more involved in it, I didn't need the full hour so we would 'bank' the remaining half hour and use it another time. I found that flexibility really helpful.

'During the session I would write notes but afterwards, Darren

Darren Cockburn's Clients...

From Lecturer To Business Owner cont...

would email me with a list of action points that we'd agreed on. It was great because I might have missed something that we had agreed was part of the action plan.'

The first few sessions took place on a weekly basis but were then moved to once every fortnight and then every month. Now Jenny books a session when she needs it.

'I've left my full-time job and started my own company, Counselling Solutions and I counsel people one to one and by email and online and do training within organisations. I love it. I'm much happier. I'm making around the same level of income and working less hours. It's great.

'I made the decision to resign from full-time employment quite early on in the coaching sessions, probably within the first two or three weeks. Darren helped me to look at what my exit criteria needed to be because I would be going from a full-time salary to the vulnerability of working for myself. I have commitments so he helped me to look at what I needed to do to make the transition. In the beginning, I was all guns blazing, thinking "I'm going to hand my resignation in now" which would have been a totally wrong move. Darren helped me to look at the consequences of doing that and to look at other options and as a result I spent six months preparing and left my job in September.


'One of the things I hadn't thought about was the consequences of me giving up a full-time job and putting in extra hours to build my

own business would have on my role as wife and mother. Darren helped me to clarify the effects it would have and to talk to those it was going to effect and get support from them where I might need it and so everyone was comfortable with my decision. I wouldn't necessarily have thought how it would impact other people.

'Darren helped with me to look at other areas of my life too - things like my exercise and diet. He explained that because I was working at full pace, I needed to be sure that my body was up to that. I now make sure I have regular breaks and take time out for lunch and exercise on a daily basis. I wasn't exercising before but I do now. It's great. I do have much more energy.

'My husband has built a small gym for us at the end of the garden so I go and spend half an hour on the running machine and do some weights. I didn't need to lose weight but I have definitely toned up.'

'Without life coaching, I think I would have still been procrastinating. It gave me clarity and courage and above all, it motivated me. We worked on a business plan with projected hours and projected income so it took it from being an idea in my head into something that had a reality to it. Once I could see it was workable it gave me motivation.

'I recommend life coaching to everybody. I have thought about doing life coaching training myself... I think it will be something that I do in the future.' 

further information

Darren Cockburn is an established Life Coach and Business Coach and helps coaches build successful coaching practises specialising in client generation, sales and marketing for telephone/Skype coaching. He received an MBA with distinction from Nottingham University Business School and has a background in IT management. To discover more about the services offered through his organisation (My Life Coach) visit his website www.my-life-coach.co.uk.

Before he discovered life coaching, David Phillips was on a fast-track to senior management at work but felt as if he was being railroaded into a career he wasn't sure he wanted.

'I was being pushed into a management role and heading into a senior management leadership team. I was working far too many hours and starting to wonder if this was it, if this was what I would be doing for the rest of my working life. I was thinking surely I should be happy that I had this career but I wasn't. I was so bogged down and blinkered. I was in a hole with no light.

It felt like, "This is it, this is me now." I had been caught in a bit of a maelstrom - I was either working or sleeping.

'My housemate at that time suggested I speak to Darren. He'd been to see him and thought it would help me too. He thought I was starting to disappear within myself.



I had about 10 sessions. Initially the sessions were an hour long but as I started to get my business going and become more involved in it, I didn't need the full hour so we would 'bank' the remaining half hour and use it another time.



further information

You can contact Jenny Charles at Counselling Solutions, www.counsellingsolutions.co.uk or email jennycharles@counsellingsolutions.co.uk.



further information

You can contact David Phillips at david_phillips@hotmail.co.uk and read his travel blog by visiting writeronthestorm.wordpress.com. He wants lots of reader feedback!

If your aim is to work as a coach for small and medium enterprises The Diploma in Small Business Coaching from The Coaching Academy is for you. For further information visit www.the-coaching-academy.com/small or call 0208 789 5715.

Darren Cockburn's Case Study

From Fast-Tracked Manager To Travel Writer

'I spoke to Darren and we had single session and he ran through some exercises about my current priorities and what I would like them to be. I could see just from that one exercise that I wasn't concentrating on stuff I really enjoyed. I never really took the time to stop and evaluate what I was doing. The exercises gave me the opportunity to just see things from different angles, to see what I thought I could do better and to think about whether I could stick on my career path or whether there was something else that I wanted to do. When I re-evaluated what I'd like to be doing, my two main priorities were travelling and writing.

'It is a bit of a strange process because Darren never suggested anything. I just worked through the

exercises and it started to become clear. I could look at it objectively and say, "Hold on. I am following a path because it's there and it's not what I want to do at all."

Directive coaching would not have worked for him. 'I think if Darren had said, "I know what you want to do. You want to go travelling and writing so you need to quit your job," I would have thought "No way." I'd have rallied against it even if it was something ultimately I wanted to do. Darren helps me to retain focus on what I have decided is going to be my goal and helps me to put goals in place within that but at no point is he saying, "You have to do this." He prods me to start thinking about it myself.

'I made the decision about leaving my job and travelling about six months

ago. Since then, my sessions with Darren have been about keeping on track because I work better to a timetable.

'I finish up my job in a couple of weeks and then fly to America. I'll spend three months there and then go into Mexico. I'll be writing a travel blog and submitting articles to magazines, websites and any publications to build up a portfolio.

'Coaching helped me look at the way I am living my life as opposed to the way I want to live my life. It's all about giving me a bit more structure to my day and channelling my energies into different things. Being coached gives me the ability to step away from what I am doing and evaluate it, to understand why I have done the things I have and what I am going to do in the future.' 