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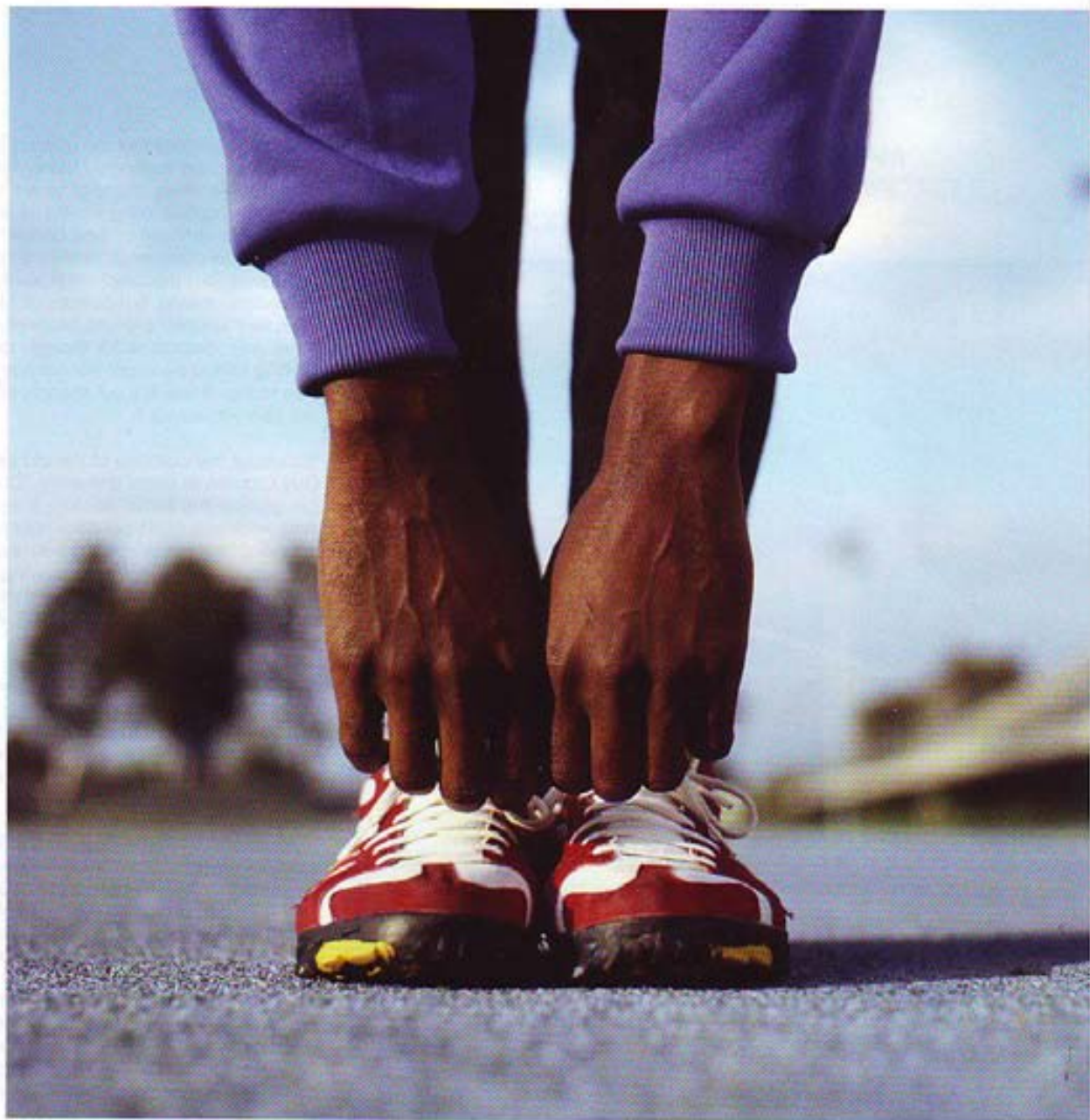
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## LIFE COACHING



By Susan Comrie

## MIRACLES WORKERS OR FRAUDS? LIFE COACHING IS ATTRACTING CRITICISM ALMOST AS FAST AS IT IS ATTRACTING FANS.

 No one could forget Al Pacino's moving speech in the movie *Any Given Sunday*. It was the kind of speech that not only made his players want to win, but made the rest of us want to get up off the couch and walk out onto the field with them. And it's precisely because of coaches like Al why more and more people are turning to coaching instead of therapy for a new attitude and a quick fix to everything from business problems to broken marriages.

Life coaching is still considered new age to most South Africans, but in the US it has become a billion dollar business and second fastest-growing industry in the country. Ten years ago there had to be something seriously wrong with you before you asked a professional for help, but these days having a life coach is no different from having a personal trainer

in the gym. Unlike like the "let's talk about your childhood" stigma attached to therapy, this new breed of life coaches, mentors and gurus claim that you can get everything you ever wanted simply by adjusting your attitude.

"In the US every executive has a coach," says master coach Marc Steinberg, founder of South Africa's own Creative Consciousness International. "What I love about coaching is that it is measured by its results. Like with sport, you can have a good time being coached, but if you don't win your coaching wasn't good. Either you win the game or not; and instead of dealing with the problems you have had in the past, coaching deals with your future and what you want to achieve. It's about handling the obstacles that are standing between you and your goals."

MANY CONTINUE TO MONITOR AND COACH  
THEIR GRADUATES TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY ARE  
ABIDING BY A CODE OF ETHICS



It's easy to understand the appeal of coaching. With religion and the extended family taking a backseat in a lot of people's lives, many of us are looking for someone or something that can provide us with all the answers in the shortest amount of time and with the least amount of work. The commercialisation of spirituality has given us a sense that personal change isn't a life-long struggle for understanding, but as easy as clicking on amazon.com for the latest esoteric best-seller. Self-help books have only taken us so far though, and what we are now looking for is a personal connection with someone who can make us feel like our dreams not only matter, but are also within reach.

"It's about the collapse of the old certainties," says Prof Guy Claxton of Bristol University. "Communities, the wise old granny, the family doctor - they're no longer there. And what you don't get from your psychotherapist, your doctor, your priest, is a personal quality, some charisma... With gurus, we're saying, 'Here's me with my confused world. And there's that person, who seems so clear and calm. I might get some of that if I hang out with them.'"

Charisma can be a dangerous thing though, and as quickly as coaching is growing it is also rapidly attracting criticism from people who warn that some self-styled coaches are actually doing the opposite of what they claim, creating devotees instead of empowered individuals.

"People can become coaching junkies," warns cult expert Rick Ross. "They become excessively dependent upon their coach to determine nearly everything in their life - a kind of guru who makes all of their value judgements as they increasingly dispense with their ability to make value judgements of their own."

It's hard to ignore the similarities between some kinds of life coaching and charismatic religions like Scientology, which preach self-empowerment as long as you continue to pay. Even reputable coaches agree that allowing the wrong kind of person into your life can cost you emotionally and financially.

"Of all the people who call themselves coaches 80 to 85 percent don't have any real coaching training," Marc says. "They may have done a crash course in life coaching because it's the latest thing, but they are not qualified. There are many coaches out there who go into a client's mind and give a little bit of advice here and a little bit of something else there. It can be a lot of trial and error which can be dangerous."

For the moment life coaching remains totally unregulated without an official body or official qualification to distinguish between genuine coaches and frauds. Reputable coaches say that a good coach should help you to set out goals that you want to achieve and agree on a fixed amount of time for you to be coached by them. Marc, for instance, says that he generally recommends that his clients have between 10 and 12 sessions of coaching and that they decide on coaching milestones throughout that period, whether it's finding a new job, going on a date or getting a relationship back on track.

"It takes quite a lot of work from the individual," says trainee coach Candy Ristic. "A mentor can take you through the process of change and highlight certain



things for you, but they can't do it for you – you have to do the work. Sometimes just having that space to talk to somebody and having somebody who holds you accountable if you don't follow through with your goals is all that people need."

#### **Finding a coach:**

If self-help books are leaving you wanting more, and you are interested in being coached in a one-on-one environment by a professional, it is important to do your homework.

"If you are looking for a coach the first thing to do is to ask if they have any diplomas or training from a credible coaching academy," says Marc. "The second thing to look out for is testimonies and references. Don't have inhibitions about calling up people to ask them about their experience being coached. You have the right and the responsibility to ask why this coach is the best person for the job."

Candy, who has a lot of experience in business coaching, says that a good way to avoid self-appointed gurus is to contact somewhere like the UCT Business School or CCI and ask them to put you in contact with one of the coaches they have trained. Although only some of these training institutions are officially recognised, many continue to monitor and coach their graduates to make sure that they are abiding by a code of ethics.

And finally, use your common sense.

"If you're drawn towards someone, look at them carefully, and see if you like the people around them," Prof Claxton recommends. "Do they seem exploited? Do they seem dependent? If not, and if you like what you see, then maybe you've found a good coach." ■