

SCARSDALE

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magazine

YOUR ULTIMATE **DINING** GUIDE

HOW TO BEAT
THE WINTER BLUES

LIFE COACHES
COME TO TOWN

+
REAL ESTATE
FLIPPING, FAMILY-
FRIENDLY ESCAPES,
FUN EXERCISES
NEAR YOU & MORE!

OFF the



COUCH

Move over, psychoanalysts, therapists, and career counselors. The age of the suburban life coach has arrived.

BY NICOLE SPRINKLE

Despite a successful, decade-long career in marketing, Dobbs Ferry's Jennifer Sherman couldn't quell a nagging sense that she was missing her calling. She was good at her job at USA Network, but she was even better at doling out advice to others on how to improve their own lives.

Her office seemed like a revolving door of freelancers and temporary employees—people she barely knew. And yet, despite this, they always ended up at her desk, spilling their career dilemmas and picking her brain for help. “It was like I had a ‘mentor’ stamp on my head,” she jokes.

When her fiancé, who worked in sales and was also a reservist for the U.S. Marines, got unexpectedly deployed to Afghanistan, she knew it was time to make a change. She needed to immerse herself in something she was passionate about—if only to keep her mind off her fiancé's military duty. She enrolled in a life-coaching program in New York City. In the next year, while her fiancé was in Afghanistan and later Iraq, Sherman quit her job and launched a new coaching business. She's now one of many who've jettisoned corporate America for the increasingly hot field of life coaching.

Once the therapy *du jour* of celebrities and wealthy urbanites, life coaching has entered the mainstream. And in affluent suburbs like Scarsdale, it's more than just a fad—for many devotees, it's a lifestyle. Working moms trade success stories at cocktail parties; thousands of suburbanites, like Sherman, have shed their established careers to become coaches; and even Oprah explains how, for men, coaching doesn't have the stigma of psychoanalysis. In the personal growth market, it seems, motivational mantras have upstaged medical diagnosis.

Even if you haven't seen a life coach yourself, ask around. Chances are you know someone who has.

A Certified Trend

What distinguishes life coaches from psychoanalysts is that, quite simply, the coaches aren't peddling therapy—at least not in the traditional sense. Life coaching (or personal coaching, as it's more commonly called on the East Coast) is designed to help well-functioning people set and meet goals. Save your depression, phobias, pathological anxieties, and other disorders for another professional. A coach's primary goal is to get you “unstuck”—be it in your career, a

relationship, or social life. No diagnosis is made, no insurance companies are billed, no medications are prescribed. A life coach is just an objective—and enthusiastically optimistic—human being who helps you unravel the tangled threads of your life, create an action plan, and move forward.

Popular as life coaches have become, there's one thing the profession is still striving for: legitimacy. Jen Zobel Beiber, a coach based in Scarsdale, is helping to change that. Beiber ditched her 10-year career in TV production, during which she worked on popular shows ranging from ABC's *20/20* to *The Sopranos*, to become part of an expanding crew of coaches who are actually certified—in her case, from New York University.

A few years ago, there was only one school, the Internet-based Coach University, offering accredited programs in life coaching. But as the profession took off, higher education—and even the Ivy League—took notice. Now universities like NYU, Georgetown, and the University of Pennsylvania offer certification. There's even a study underway (the first of its kind) at NYU researching the effectiveness of life coaching versus other, more traditional therapies. Sure, you can't get an M.A. or an M.D. in life coaching—yet. But for women



Scarsdale's Jen Bieber spent 10 years in TV production before becoming a life coach.

like Bieber, who went to Columbia for her undergraduate degree, such a career switch would have been a huge gamble without the university affiliation.

Working from her home office in Scarsdale, Bieber coaches "high-achieving" clients by telephone throughout the country. "I work with people who want to take risks,

your mother, and not you, who's wanted you to be a doctor your whole life. Above all, the coach will demand that the client take action. Clients get homework—assignments to write about a dream job, speak into a tape recorder, or draw a new life blueprint. The coach will help set up weekly goals and ways to achieve them. Action, action, action. It's a word that keeps popping up in life coaching sessions.

For people who arrive focused, and know exactly what their goals are, the sessions focus less on problems and more on brainstorming solutions. Bieber says she strives for what she calls an "80/20" shift. "In general," she says, "people spend 80 percent of their time planning, researching, and worrying about their careers, and only 20 percent of the time taking real action. I try to flip that equation so that 80 percent of the time is devoted to taking specific steps."

The biggest hurdle to the productivity flip? The Internet. "People will spend hours in the same search engine looking for the same jobs over and over to no avail," says Bieber. "I say, let's start taking different steps. Let's get on the phone—who do you know that works in the field? Have you fol-

lowed up on that resumé you just sent out? I'm not your nagging husband or wife, but someone else who's just there to give you a kick-start. I don't come with an agenda or baggage under the bridge, so you're going to have a different kind of conversation with me than with a family member."

Though Bieber has spent as little as one month with a client and as long as one year, three to six months is the optimum time frame for life coaching. Unlike therapy, which can go on for years, it's meant to have a clear beginning and end.

"People spend 80 percent of their time planning, researching, and worrying about their careers, and only 20 percent of the time taking real action." —Jen Bieber, personal coach

who want to push past fears, and come to terms with their expectations of themselves versus the expectations of others," she says. "I have a lot of clients who are trying to launch projects, or who've gotten to the top of the mountain and are now asking, 'What's next for me?' They're dealing with things we all deal with—stress, inhibitions, and lack of time. They're not coming to me with inner demons, but with butterflies in the stomach." This, Bieber explains, is a key difference between therapy and coaching. Therapists ponder the demons; life coaches swat away the butterflies.

Ready, Set ... Action Plan!

A typical life coach client might be confused about her career trajectory, her dating options, or even where to live. The coach's job, according to Bieber, is to absorb all these challenges and then help the client decide which goals are genuine and which ones may only be conditioned responses—*perhaps it's really*

Rockin' the Chakra

When Laurie Kaplan set to work on her second novel, she was near the end—of her rope. The Ossining-based writer had already self-published one book and her encore was proving even more challenging. Plus, she was spearheading her own publicity and starting a fund to help people pay for their pets' cancer treatments. When she saw an advertise-

how to choose a life coach

There are many people out there who call themselves life coaches, but who don't have an ounce of training. Since the field is still relatively new, it only recently began to set standards for training and accreditation. The International Federation of Coaching (ICF) now oversees the field and is working to create and enforce standards in life coaching. They keep a list of ICF-certified practitioners and programs at www.coachfederation.org.

- Check the Westchester branch of the ICF (www.westchester-rocklandcoaches.com) for names of nearby life coaches. You can also call schools like NYU to see if they can direct you to certified life coaches in the area.
- Most coaches will offer a complimentary session so you can see if you feel comfortable working together. If it doesn't feel right, keep searching.
- Life-coaching fees vary, but a good rule of thumb is \$250-\$500 for a month of sessions, one per week.

recruit a coach near you

■ **Jen Zobel Bieber:** Scarsdale; 472-1843; jzbieber@yahoo.com

■ **Christine Cookman:** New Rochelle; 917-826-0749; cecookman@msn.com

■ **Jennifer Sherman:** Dobbs Ferry; 914-674-0790, www.envisionyourpossibilities.com

■ **Suzi April:** South Salem; 763-3237; LiveLifeCoach@att.net; www.lifelifecoach.com



Health and fitness guru Suzi April also coaches clients about spiritual harmony.

tracted clients from all over New York and Connecticut, and most usually visit her in person—another difference between April and other life coaches, most of whom counsel over the phone.

“If someone is blocked in her life,” says April, “healing the body can help unclear the mind.” But her approach isn’t all touchy-feely. “The person coming to be coached has to be ready and willing to take the steps forward, to take the action. They’re held accountable each week. In the end, it’s about teaching people to streamline their lives, to eliminate the negative energy, and to live in the present-perfect.” Or, as Kaplan bluntly puts it, “She gave my brain a kick-start.”

While you probably don’t want to choose a life coach based on a photograph, Kaplan

says that it’s important to find someone with whom you click. And if you have a shared affinity for practices like Reiki, all the better.

From Marriage to Moving

Though many people go to life coaches to sort out career choices, some treat it like good old-fashioned spiritual pampering. Bieber says that many of her clients schedule coaching like they would yoga or massage. “Think of the mothers out there who would just love to have someone listen to them for an hour,” she says. There are also coaches who specialize in relationships, coaches for people struggling with their weight, parenting coaches, coaches for college grads, even coaches for brides.

Christine Cookman quit her job as a partner in a White Plains technology firm to become a life coach for stressed-out brides. “After all,” she says, “life coaching is about taking risks. What’s a bigger risk than marriage?” After the weddings, though, many clients continued to seek her advice. Now based in New Rochelle, Cookman coaches clients throughout Westchester, New York City, and Connecticut who are looking to start a new phase of their lives—regardless of whether it involves the phrase “I do.”

There’s been much speculation that life coaching might be more popular with men, by virtue of its name alone. However, Martha Beck, the life coach who appears frequently on the Oprah Winfrey TV show and writes a column for *O Magazine*, has been quoted as saying, essentially, it’s OK for a man to see a coach but not a therapist. But Bieber dismisses that notion as stereotypical. Most of her clients are women, she explains, adding, “The term ‘coaching’ is gender-neutral.”

Nor is coaching just for type-A personalities. Everyone has areas that they’re fearless in, and others where they’re afraid to take risks. “I like to think of it in terms of



New Rochelle’s Christine Cookman left the tech biz to coach stressed-out brides.

York City for a while. My big dilemma was: Which do I pick first: the city or the job?”

Over the course of 10 weekly one-hour telephone sessions with her life coach, plus regular “thinking” and writing exercises, Goltz eventually came up with a third scenario that she hadn’t considered: moving to a completely new city. As she looked for jobs in her initial two metropolitan targets (New York and D.C.), it became clear that her ideal lifestyle could be found in another city altogether: Boston. In the meantime, she met a guy there, which helped clinch the deal.

The coaching experience, she says, really helped her succeed in interviews, too. “When you’re looking for a job, you really feel at the mercy of the market and the employer. But my life coach helped me understand that it doesn’t have to be like that, that there’s room for negotiation. I went to the interviews and was able to ask myself, ‘Is this what I really want?’ instead of just using the time to impress the interviewer. I began really thinking on that granular level about what I need.”

She now has her dream job and a boy-

“I like to think of it in terms of life helping, not life fixing.”

—Amanda Goltz, life coach client

life helping, not life fixing,” says 28-year-old Amanda Goltz, who lives in Boston. She went to a life coach during her final year of graduate school in New York City. With a master’s degree in public administration, she had a lot of questions about what kind of job she wanted, and where to live. “I grew up in Washington, D.C., but I’d been in New

friend in a city she hadn’t even considered before. Her advice to those interested in coaching: “Be sure you’re really ready to wrestle with whatever’s blocking you. That doesn’t mean you need to cry; just be able to make some decisions and trade-offs, and get off the sidelines.” There’s a reason, after all, that they’re called coaches. **S**