



Life Worth LIVING

Working with a life coach helps you
move forward with purpose

by JANET LEES ✦ photography by RICHARD GALLOWAY

“**T**he unexamined life is not worth living.” Those words, spoken by Socrates in Plato’s Dialogues, have been my personal credo since reaching adulthood. I have been a self-help nut for at least 20 years, reading everything I could get my hands on, from Deepak Chopra to Wayne Dyer to Byron Katie. So when I heard that there is a group of life coaches working in Southern Georgian Bay, I was intrigued. I decided to try out a session or two with Thornbury-based coach Cathy Smart to see what it was all about.

Although I was open to exploring my life and identifying areas in need of improvement, I admit I wasn’t sure what to expect from “coaching” (it’s a relatively new field, around for about 10 years and used widely in the corporate and leadership arenas, but really just hitting the mainstream as a personal tool). Would life coaching be a thinly disguised attempt to psychoanalyze me and tell me everything that is wrong with me? Would we spend hours talking about my childhood? Or, on the other end of the spectrum, would I be bullied into coming up with all kinds of “goals” and then made to feel a guilty failure if I didn’t reach them within a prescribed timeline?

Thankfully, none of these approaches describes how Cathy works. She is more part-best-friend, part-tough-love-counsellor, part-cheerleader, listening intently

LEFT: Thornbury life coach Cathy Smart takes a proactive but non-judgmental approach with her clients.

and using phrases like, “Have you considered ...”, “I invite you to ...” and, “What is possible?” but refraining from judgment or advice.

“I make requests of my clients and I hold them accountable in a very positive way,” Cathy explains. Of course, different coaches have different styles, but at its core, coaching is about focusing on the present and creating possibilities for the future. When certain issues from the past do come up during my session, Cathy says, “We all have our stories”, but there comes a point where we need to choose – do those stories fit who we want to be and where we want to go with our lives?

“It’s your life,” she declares, and this deceptively simple statement hits me like a revelation. “Are you going to choose how to live it, or are you going to let other people live it for you?” Perfectionism, the urge to please others, the mindless pursuit of money or status, the insistence on playing a victim role – these are all examples of how we fail to take responsibility for our lives and give our power over to others.

After going through some of the basic values I hold dear, such as honesty and integrity, Cathy pulls out a sheet of paper called a “Life Wheel” and hands it over. Around the outside of the wheel are all the areas that create a full life: career; family and friends; significant other/romance; fun and recreation; health; money; personal growth; physical environment. “Put a dot in each of the areas to show how satisfied you are in that area of your life,” instructs Cathy. This done, she takes the paper back and joins up the dots around the circle. Only it doesn’t look like a circle. More like a trapezoid.

“Most people’s Life Wheel looks like a Flintstone car at first,” Cathy explains with a smile, conjuring up an image of my lopsided wheel clunking down the road of life. It reminds me of a doll I once had who was supposed to ride in her own little remote-controlled car – her “bumper buggy” – only it was more bumper than buggy, the car traveling as if by radar toward the nearest wall or obstruction and getting stuck there, spinning and stopping and bumping, spinning and bumping and stopping, while the doll sat wide-eyed and helpless in the “driver’s seat”.

A life metaphor? For some, the bumper buggy gets stuck on career, for others

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it’s finances, or relationships, or health. We all have areas of our lives that aren’t quite as fulfilling as others. The coach’s job is to help us get “un-stuck” so we can move forward with a full wheel.

“Through skilled listening, questioning, challenging and supporting, the coach enables you to unlock the wisdom and personal knowledge within you of who you are and how you respond to your world,” explains Cathy. “Through coaching people discover and dust off skills, wisdom and knowledge that are immediately useful and applicable. They also discover beliefs and habits that no longer serve them – in fact get in their way of achieving what they want to do – and they realize what they need to learn in order to successfully move forward with ease. The ease is possible because they have aligned their values, their authentic self with what they are naturally capable of, their gifts – and this creates positive energy.”

Coaching is not for everyone – those not willing to be fully responsible for their actions or those with more serious psychological or emotional issues should seek out a psychotherapist. But for those who are in transition or who simply feel “stuck” and are motivated to make some conscious changes, coaching offers the opportunity to uncover a fuller, more satisfying life.

As for me, I’ve certainly seen the value in identifying my desired destination, putting myself firmly behind the wheel and moving full steam ahead toward the life of my dreams! ✦

The Georgian Coaches Alliance

Eight coaches throughout Southern Georgian Bay have formed an alliance to share tools and resources, refer clients and exchange ideas. For more information on the alliance, upcoming workshops and complete background on each of the coaches involved, visit www.georgiancoaches.com