

The Dance of Plans and Chance

By Mary B. Lucas

In June of 2005 having worked almost 25 years in the staffing industry I decided to put the brakes on my fast-paced corporate career and pause to consider a new chapter in life. It was during the time I'd lost my father (who also served as my coach and mentor), causing me to take stock of what was truly important.

To cope with my grief, I took pen to paper and wrote what was originally intended as a memoir about my father to be shared with my immediate family only. Fate had other plans. My little book was soon noticed by people within my social and business networking circles. Before long, the tribute I'd written had paved a new path in my life -- something I never expected but quickly embraced.

When opportunity knocks, I rarely complain about the noise. And in the months that followed, my writing created a great deal of noise. As the book circulated, I was asked to speak about my dad's wit and wisdom at professional meetings and civic events. That progressed to a much broader platform and I was invited to present in other cities across the country, and eventually in such locales as the United Kingdom, Spain and Ireland.

People who heard me speak about my father and the life lessons he taught me were inspired and many approached me after presentations to ask if I could coach them personally. While I was thrilled with the prospect of passing on my father's legacy in such a meaningful way, I realized that having the right coaching credentials was essential for me to feel confident and capable in this new role. That's when I enrolled in the coaching program at Fielding Graduate University. And in doing so, my eyes were opened to a wealth of information -- much more so than I had ever encountered on my way up the corporate ladder.

Eager to share what I learned, I set out to build my own coaching practice and again, fate stepped in. Three months

after completing my coaching certification I was offered a fulltime position with one of my corporate clients in a business I knew well -- the staffing industry -- and quickly realized that with my new coaching credentials I was far more marketable than before. I had both an inside and outside view of my industry. In fact, I had seen the light: I could never again be merely viewed as a boss or a manager to those I supervised. I was now a coach for those co-workers. I also knew I was granted a platform to practice my skills in an environment that embraced the very concepts that I knew to be true -- a great leader is a great coach.

Initially, I resisted the idea of returning to the corporate sector. After all, the very reason I sought my coaching certification was to launch my own practice. Why would I turn my back on my own carefully considered ambitions?

I don't view my decision to jump back into the corporate frying pan as selling out my own plans; I see it as pragmatic. With two sons in college, a steady income was an economic attraction for me to accept an outstanding opportunity at Staffmark. And it is an opportunity to practice what I believe to be true. According to the Harvard Business Review (1996), "The goal of coaching is the goal of good management: to make the most of an organization's valuable resources." I firmly support the Review's findings that establishing an element of coaching within an organization has a positive impact on business performance. Recent studies show organizations that embrace the coaching culture and encourage managers to become coaches to their employees see improved results by as much as 133%.

If there's a lesson here to share, it's this: Don't worry about building a practice. Instead, focus on expanding your network and sharing your expertise. I always preferred to coach those with whom I worked. Thanks to Fielding and the EBC Certification Program, I'm doing just that



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in my current corporate role and the results have been very rewarding. I found that with the coaching credential in hand, it was possible to walk through an unexpectedly opened door and do the work I love.

Will I ever build my own coaching practice? It's a likely possibility. In fact, I fully expect to have a thriving coaching practice. Some day. Today, Staffmark is where I need and want to be. It's the same corporate world, but viewed from very different eyes now that I have my coaching certification.

Opportunity will knock again, of that I am certain. And if the timing is right, you can bet that I'll walk confidently to the door.

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