

Coaching at Work

“p21 Three Minutes”

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This is the fourth in a new series of columns on our role in tackling the complicated economic, environmental and social challenges we face. It will be a place to question, offer, share, explore, challenge, dissent, celebrate, reflect, learn and enjoy

WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD? WE'RE LISTENING...



“ Why don't they just 'get it'?! ”
Have you ever felt this frustration?
Have your clients?

Cassandra, a figure in Greek mythology, was blessed with the power of prophecy, but cursed to not be believed. It's a heavy burden. Matthew Taylor, CEO of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts (RSA), spoke recently of feeling this way. He passionately and intelligently advocates a more enlightened way of looking at ourselves in relation to our world, each other and the work we do.

We know how that feels. We know that when we write about 'doing something useful to help make the world a better place', many readers immediately switch off and move on.

Yet if you're still reading, you're not alone. There are coaches around the world who care. Indeed, the International Coach Federation (ICF) ran a long, "I care about..." campaign. And we've been speaking with two such inspirational coaches – Josie McLean and Kara Exner.

Josie, in Australia, cares deeply about "a global future that is sustaining for all".

Having helped co-create the 2009 ICF Australasia conference, which was devoted to the exploration of sustainability, she is now working with groups in organisations and communities, taking what she has learned in coaching to help them, in a facilitative way, deal with change in their complicated, adaptive systems.

In Canada, Kara has got "really clear and brave" about a personal value "that we all have a responsibility to leave our world in better shape than how we found it". Using her natural curiosity, and no small amount of commitment, she has reached out and interviewed 50 people who are successfully changing the world, or their bit of it. And now she is enjoying writing regular articles and blogs about the themes and findings.

These coaches are not just talking about things; they are doing them – setting out into the unknown with vulnerability and courage.

There are frustrations, of course. Josie speaks of "the apparent invincibility of the ruling way of doing things". And it is proving difficult to find the language that describes the systemic, responsible ways of thinking and doing, without alienating people or talking jargon.

And there are big questions: As Kara asks of herself: "How can I muster the courage to follow the work that resonates with me? It's not generating revenue yet... how to balance with business, family and volunteer roles? How can I best share what I have learned? How to fit everything in?"

But there are also many joys. As Kara describes, "I am always surprised with how my zany research project resonates. When I first announced to my entire email contact list that I was setting out to interview 100 changemakers and I needed referrals, my inbox was absolutely flooded. Now, when I tell

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people about my project, they ask when they can read the book. I didn't start my project with a grand plan... I just had an idea and started."

There are people saying it can't be done. People saying it's not up to us. And there are people getting on and doing it. If you feel the urge, perhaps a calling, to explore how you and your coaching and mentoring skills can help make the world a better place, then you may feel lonely. But you are not alone. ■

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