

Coaching at Work

“The fast train”

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A portrait of Anne Scoular, a woman with long brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a black jacket and a gold earring. She is looking slightly to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background shows a window with a view of a city and a body of water.

THE FAST TRAIN

Fast-thinking, fast-speaking and entertaining Anne Scoular certainly is, but the Meyler Campbell co-founder and world-class coach trainer has been a reluctant interviewee in the past. But now she has a book to sell, she tells **Liz Hall**

For years, Anne Scoular would agree to an interview only if it was with her faculty colleagues at Meyler

Campbell, the coach training business she co-founded with Jane Meyler. Then, hey presto, she has her first book to promote and she's suddenly available, she jokes.

"I wanted to fly a flag of protest – it's not fair as it should be the 12 of us [being interviewed], but look at me, one book to flog and I cave in instantly. Principles schminciples."

She was approached by Financial Times Prentice Hall senior editor Liz Gooster to write the book after being described as one of the world's leading coach trainers in the *Harvard Business Review's* special issue on coaching in 2009.

The book, *The Financial Times Guide to Business Coaching*, was published this February and Scoular is very proud of it: "It really was like giving birth. The book had been on the tip of my tongue for years and I loved writing it." Already the book is a bestseller.

We talk about lots of other things besides the book, as those who know Scoular can well imagine. Fast-thinking, fast-speaking and entertaining, Scoular makes all sorts of connections as she speaks, sometimes going off on delightful tangents. She describes herself as an "archetypal" ENTP in Myers-Briggs terms – she is a huge fan of MBTI in coaching – and her preferences are very much in evidence.

“Our mantra is, we don't care what your point of view is, but we do care that you have a point of view”

Scoular was a diplomat, then an international banker, before finally settling as an organisational psychologist, coach and coach trainer. She first came across coaching in the early 90s. She was coached (though it wasn't called coaching then) by a female psychologist colleague who "helped me understand what I wanted to do". Later Scoular would help the 'coach' build her business: "There's a bit of an old girls' network theme along the way."

Real excellence

At the time, she headed up business development at Psychology at Work, the (then) commercial arm of the Department of Psychology at the Institute of Psychiatry Maudsley Hospital, helping it raise funds for the hospital and bridging the gap between academia and business.

"I was trying to persuade a person who wore sandals to wear shoes to a very important business meeting, for example. He wore the shoes and won a massive contract."

Her interest in coaching piqued, she was introduced to executive coach Terry Bates, who advised her to read psychology if she was serious: "Thanks to Terry, I did. As I

mention in the book, everyone needs a rock on which to stand. For me, it's psychology."

Scoular was one of the guinea pigs on the School of Coaching's (SoC)'s coach training programme and was then invited by SoC founder Myles Downey to join its faculty. At the same time she was studying for her psychology degree, having now "got absolutely clear about what I wanted to do".

She was made redundant just after discovering her father was very ill and despite having just won a massive contract for Psychology at Work to offer counselling to the British Medical Association. The following year her father died and the year after, her first husband. "Had I had proper advice, I would have hidden out for a few years, getting a salary and just recovering. Instead, I went out on my own, offering business development to psychologists and coaches."

Nevertheless, having spotted a gap in the market for high quality coach training delivered to senior people one-to-one, she went on to set up Meyler Campbell in 1999 with Meyler, who brought a passion for working one-to-one while Scoular's was for "real excellence".

"We didn't take on any debts, we

worked really hard and had no reward for a long time. It grew through word of mouth. Nobody has ever heard of it, which is a key part of our strategy.

“Our first line of defence is our graduates, who won’t recommend anyone who will bring us into disrepute. Someone once asked me what our niche is and I blurted out: “We train a tiny, tiny fraction of high achieving people in the City, who are also nice.”

The typical graduate is someone who is serious, of substance and who, as one graduate said, is happy to “check their ego at the door”, she says. Around a third are CEOs or at board director level.



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At first, the programme was delivered one-to-one until London Business School’s John Stopford told Scoular that “he could see a great programme but one not making any money”.

He suggested adopting the Oxbridge tutorial approach in 2004, an optimum learning ratio of one-to-three. Participants now have a choice: one-to-three costs £11,250 plus VAT, while one-to-one, which is much less popular, costs £17,500 plus VAT. Around 40 per cent of applicants are accepted.

The programme is accredited by the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches and has

Association for Coaching recognition.

The course content is highly eclectic: “Our mantra is, we don’t care what your point of view is, but we do care that you have a point of view. People come out very different, which I love.”

There have been 250 graduates over the past decade, while 30 businesses have grown through the community. These include ATTAIN Partners, Peer Professional Development and Møller PSF Group Cambridge.

Meyler Campbell graduates tend to earn well – 60 per cent more than the average coach in 2008

and 100 per cent more in 2009, according to its research.

Scoular does some coaching herself but says she is not great.

“I am not lit up by the doing of it, but by training coaches, by creating the conditions for others to do it, to be the best in the world. As my supervisor, Carol Kaufman, pointed out, I coach the coaches.”

Meyler programme participants are typically highly accustomed to being directive. Here they learn how to be non-directive: “It becomes a fantastically powerful package.

“In traditional training and mentoring, you put in advice, skills,

“We have robust discussions and laugh a lot in faculty meetings. It really is a partnership; they are my tribe”

guidance, context. In coaching, you pull out the capability people have within. Coaches are very rare in creating an environment in which people can flourish and in believing the client is powerful.

“Of course, business coaches do have to toss something else in too, but what is different is this ability to pull out potential.”

The big five

Non-directiveness is one of the ‘big five’ highlights in Scoular’s book as being the bedrock of decent business coaching. These also include contracting – commercial, psychological and during the work itself; the GROW model; listening to understand (rather than to respond); and questioning. However, she writes, “if the contracting is thorough, the GROW clear and tough, and the listening profound, they [questions] needn’t be more than a touch on the rudder.”

One of the hallmarks of Meyler Campbell is the strength and dynamism of its communities, the Business Coach community and the wider Meyler Campbell community of a few thousand:

“The community is very important for people in organisations because they are largely thought leaders and often the one person fighting for coaching. It is important as a haven and a home as a coach, for ongoing learning and good marketing.

“The community is also part of the selection process. There have been occasions when a

member has shared that somebody has behaved inappropriately. It’s a living, breathing organisation and hugely dynamic.”

Scoular is very proud of the Meyler Campbell faculty – nine people at present, with another three about to join.

“We have robust discussions and laugh a lot in faculty meetings. It really is a partnership; they are my tribe. Everyone brings incredible difference and learning and they are all consummate professionals.”

Scoular is well-known for her excellent networking abilities: “I don’t think of it as networking. It’s seeing how I can be helpful or how someone can be helpful to someone else. And things do go round.”

Scoular has come to realise she has always been interested in reducing misery at work. In her late parents she’d seen two people who failed to find fruitful work: “My mum was a natural manager while my father loved to read books and was too gentle to survive at work.”

She says she inherited her love of people from her mother and her love of history – she is a keen

genealogist – from her father’s mother, as well as a love of beautiful things, particularly portraits and busts, where the three loves converge. “I love fine character, resilience, generosity. I’m also interested in psychopathy.

“Although I am an archetypal ENTP, Jung said in the second half of our lives we bring out the other to make ourselves whole.”

She suggests this is why she now finds history “addictively absorbing” and has developed interests in gardening and coaching – the F preference balancing out the T.

A force for good

She says although she had an idyllic childhood in Dunedin, New Zealand, she felt she was living in the wrong country: “I grew up reading about the UK behind the sofa. I’m a total throwback.”

But although some “awful things” happened to her, her “inner core was safe, secure, loved and not under pressure”.

“I’m not driven; I haven’t got that emptiness.”

She is currently hatching a plan to raise funds for those affected by the Christchurch earthquake, which wiped out 30,000 businesses, including that of a friend. Coaching for Christchurch would see coaches each donate four sessions to help rebuild the local economy.

“There will inevitably be some bad coaching press and we need people to understand that coaching is, on the whole, a force for good.” ■

