

## From diplomat to director

Ian Florance talks to **Anne Scoular** about her late blossoming career in business coaching

I met Anne Scoular in the lounge of the Royal Society of Medicine, where she is a member, a rare honour for a non-medic. She retrained as a psychologist in her 40s and, in her new book *Business Coaching*, describes it as 'one of the most profoundly satisfying things I've done'. And that's saying something, given her extraordinarily varied career, huge range of interests and wide knowledge – during our conversation we touch on the development of the Korean language, themes from art history, Adam Smith and behavioural economics, and a biography of a clerical ancestor she is writing. Anne's

coaching book, published by *Financial Times Guides*, has some fascinating and sometimes critical insights into the role of psychologists and status of psychology. So, slightly intimidated by the hallowed surroundings and Anne's huge range of references, I start by investigating her unusual route into psychology.

### A childhood lived behind the sofa

'I was born in Dunedin, New Zealand. It was really a pre-war upbringing because Dunedin still had that culture. My family were passionate about books and education. Although my mum was a typical New Zealander, always chasing me out of the front door to get fresh air and exercise, a few moments later I'd be slipping in by the back door to read English pre-war children's books, where snow always fell in the winter and small cottages nestled in nooks between rolling downs.' Anne took a degree in history ('in the process becoming a world-class expert in the history of rabbits – don't ask!'), achieving a first, before joining the New Zealand diplomatic service at the age of 21. 'As far as I remember, I decided to join the diplomatic service because of a scene in a 1950s film in which a gorgeously dressed lady US ambassador swept down a staircase into a waiting car. I wanted to be that person.'

### 'I finally decided what to do when I'd grown up'

Anne worked in Singapore and Malaysia but says she 'wasn't a natural bureaucrat.

I was headhunted by the Bank of New Zealand and set up trade services in Australia, Singapore, Tokyo and on the West Coast of the USA. My husband was posted to Korea and, by good fortune there was an opportunity to set up a representative office of the bank in Seoul.'

In 1987 Anne was in the old city of Kyongju on a tour hosted by the Korean Development Bank when the stock market crashed. 'There was only one phone and we were running round like mad things. The Bank of New Zealand handled 60 per cent of the country's economy and it nearly went under.' Anne moved back to New Zealand to work with the new CEO, in absolute secrecy, on a survival plan for the bank. 'We were working all hours with a variety of different suppliers and experts. But that was where my interest in psychology started, I think. It was my first real exposure to change management. The approach to the recapitalisation and restructuring of the bank was in typical "1980s McKinsey" style – based on organograms – and it seemed to leave people out of the picture.'

For a while Anne lived a peripatetic life: in Canada; on a three-month project for the UN ('I went to the opera every night'); and working for a small financial PR start-up company in Singapore, which 'grew from zero to a million turnover in eight months'.

Anne came to England in 1993. 'When I was a diplomat I used to come here on holiday all the time. A lot of us did. It felt like home. And now it is home.'

Anne worked for Jeffrey Gray at the Institute of Psychiatry in the commercial arm of Psychology at Work. 'It pretty soon became clear that I wanted to start working in psychology rather than working for psychologists so I took a conversion course at London Guildhall University – great teaching, terrible facilities – then did my MSc as a sort of gap year, though I was still working. By then I had set up my business. If you are thinking of going it alone, get your timing



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right. I came to a new country in 1993 when, for various reasons I was broke. My mother died in '93, my father in '96, my first husband died in '97 and I was made redundant by Psychology at Work in '96. It was madness to go out on my own in 1996, but I did, and scraped through, building back up to the point where I was able to co-found Meyler Campbell in 1999.'

Does your role as a psychologist build on your earlier experiences? 'You could say my career has been a perfect downward graph from international diplomat to business coach. But another way of looking at it is that I found out what I was interested in later in life than other people. Putting people and business together in business coaching suddenly seemed an obvious thing to do. So, I think it was actually the start of my real career.'

### Psychology is just one among many types of experience

Anne is Managing Director of Meyler Campbell ([www.meylercambell.com](http://www.meylercambell.com)), a company I knew a bit about before I interviewed her. They regularly send e-mails about events, including a prestigious series of annual lectures covering issues ranging from positive psychology to groupthink. The company trains senior people to coach through an accredited programme, then provides CPD, learning and networking opportunities as well as undertaking research. 'Business coaching is only about 25 years old. It's going to be a long time before we have a really solid research base for the activity so we're trying to contribute to it. We tend to work in a very Oxford tutorial style: that might be wish-fulfillment because I never went there! The alumni/CPD programme takes up 40–60 per cent of my time and is hugely important as it provides a real opportunity for like-minded people to get together and learn from each other. The field is changing quickly and it enables them to keep up with ideas.'

I ask whether this draws on the ways psychologists use CPD. 'I think one of the things all coaches can learn from psychology is its emphasis on a professional ethos. Psychologists seem to imbibe that approach, often without realising it, through training, supervision and CPD. They don't over claim, they know their boundaries. They are good at the "contract" stage of working with a client. They meta-think: they analyse their own approach and come up with thoughtful hypotheses. And they're very aware of certain aspects of human

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relations that others might be less aware of, like not accepting what's said at face value. Coaches, leaders and managers tend to know less about social psychology than, say, psychometrics and there are hugely important insights here: there needs to be more widespread training in organisational, group, team and organisational dynamics.' So, I suggest tentatively, psychologists are well-equipped to coach in business. Anne smiles. 'You have to remember that the people who we train come from many different backgrounds – leadership, HR, directorships – with a rich heritage of experience, sometimes built up over decades. Psychology is just one among those many areas of specialist knowledge. The fundamental difference is that other people want to be trained and psychologists sometimes think they don't have to be. Psychologists, like everyone

else, have to learn the skills and craft of coaching and, in my experience, they don't get that on their psychology qualifying courses. In the first four to five months of our Business Coach Programme we put people's experiences to one side and focus on being non-directive, because this is where we can make the most difference. After that's achieved, and it's tough work, there's a wonderful period where people reintegrate what they know and everyone becomes a different sort of coach. We don't have a house style or approach to coaching – as we say, "We don't care which point of view you have, but we do care that you have a point of view". Psychologists are no different from any other experienced profession when they come to us.'

'Look at it another way, psychology is one of the two major source disciplines in

business coaching. The other is – as it says on the tin – business. Even if you know a lot about one of them you have to learn about the other... and then train to apply the knowledge ethically and effectively in a service which is still investigating itself, innovating and researching. Even if you know a lot about therapy or counselling in other contexts you're going to meet very different clients in business coaching – they'll be more prone to challenge, more hierarchical. You'll need to learn to deal with this.'

### 'I wish they'd called it functional psychology'

Anne's book consistently references areas of psychology – from social and occupational to neuroscience – and its contribution to her area of expertise. It sometimes seems that coaching is one application where all types of psychology

meet. It's impossible to do justice to Anne's views on this area – time was getting on. But we managed to cover some areas. 'Social psychology is as important as cognitive/developmental psychology and much less known. A lot of the textbooks are rather off-putting. We need to rectify that. I tend to think developmental psychology needs to move out of the nought to two age range even more and come up with models and theories for lifelong development. We need them badly. Given increased pressures in business and more intensive work in personality theory, clinical psychology has a contribution to make in business. One of our annual lectures was on psychopaths in the workplace.'

Anne describes psychometrics as 'invaluable', but says 'it's a very narrow technique. It leaves out a lot, maybe most, of what is important in coaching. And while neuroscience is impacting our understanding of what coaching actually

does, among many other things, it also represents the threat of reifying concepts and processes. Those wonderful full-colour pictures and complex diagrams tempt to certainty when there is only a hypothesis. Positive psychology is gaining ground and has a contribution to make, but the name is rather fluffy for us cynical Europeans. I wish they'd called it functional psychology.'

As Anne gets up to leave, the person at the next table hands me his card. He works in experimental psychology at Cambridge University and while listening to our discussion, has been working on a proposal about factor structure for a test. It seems you find psychologists everywhere, even in the bastion of medical professionals! Anne suggests a rich two-way dialogue between coaching and psychology. She also evidences that psychology can grab you later in life... even if you've been an international diplomat.

## The realities of a part-time PhD

David S. Smith, a part-time PhD student at the University of Aberdeen, shares his experiences

It is not often that I find myself identifying with a serial killer. Should there be a list of all the potential people I could imagine sharing common ground with, Stephen Griffiths (aka 'The Crossbow Cannibal') would surely be towards the bottom. Yet upon browsing an article about him I was surprised to learn that he is also a part-time PhD student. One of the first things I wondered, as I read this, was if he got the same reaction as me when he told people about his research: the hushed respect when one says they are embarking on a PhD, coupled with that pitied reference to the dilapidated job market when a graduate says they work in customer services. Indeed, the thought of doing a PhD part-time, whilst earning enough money to make a comfortable living, is a prospect so daunting a self-help book has been published on the matter (Bourner & Race, 1990), along with personal accounts (e.g. Caroline Gatrell's – see [tinyurl.com/parttimephd](http://tinyurl.com/parttimephd) – and

Wood & Payne, 2010).

According to a recent review (Kulej & Park, 2008, cited in Hooley et al., 2009) 32 per cent of full-time PhD students are below the age of 25 while just 5 per cent of part-time students are. This statistic shows that amongst graduates the latter option is highly unpopular, and I am part of a very small minority. Worryingly, this same survey showed that 73 per cent of full-time PhD students achieve their doctorate vs. only 48 per cent of their part-time counterparts. Given this statistic, who would want to be a part-time PhD student? Nevertheless, amidst the biggest UK financial cuts in generations, the amount of graduates considering the self-funded part-time route is likely to increase in the face of slashed departmental budgets. With psychology being such a prominent degree, and so many people wanting to take it to a career level, it seems likely that a substantial number of scholars are going to pursue

their science in whatever way they can.

For potential graduates thinking about embarking on a part-time PhD I think there are four key issues to consider. First and foremost is the cost, and on a second closely related point the work/life balance that the primary concern is likely to disrupt. Even researching part-time the fees are not cheap. Part-time fees at my university are £1800 per year, although that may be subject to change. Even at this relatively low cost, that is still £150 each month to fund the course. On top of that, part-time students also have to cover rent (in my case £245 per month) and bills (around £35 per month) from the same pay packet. In addition they will also have council tax to think about (typically around £120 per month); something that full-time students need not worry about. Factor in sustenance, general living costs and a few understandable luxuries, prospective students will be looking for a job that pays a minimum of £850 per month to break even.

While most jobs will pay more than £850 per month, part-time postgraduates seeking employment will presumably be aiming to devote as much time as possible to their research. As such, jobs that require more than four days a week are not going to be suitable. Likewise, nor are jobs that can only offer hours on weekdays, as access to university facilities is not so readily available during weekends. To fulfil this fairly limited job criterion I have taken up a menial job in a mobile phone shop along with teaching and marking work in the department. However, given the demands that these jobs have on my time (around 33 hours per week) inevitably my role as a researcher is not always given priority. Furthermore, in a discipline where the bulk of work has to be done inside the lab, rather than home, time management can become particularly difficult. Typically I will devote around 20 hours per week to my research if possible. This means I have frequently found