

Life Coach

By Dante Harker

The guests entered the conference room, in singles and pairs.

Then a group of three arrived, which made Patrick smile. He desperately wanted a full house. This was his first "sampler" night, so he wouldn't make any money however many guests arrived.

The idea was to get as many of the attendees as possible to sign up for his course, and pay for the privilege, so the more attended tonight the more chance there was that this new venture wasn't going to be a complete disaster.

'Hello, come in, we'll be getting started very shortly,' Patrick said to a couple of ladies with matching shampoo and sets.

He pointed to where the free biscuits were and told them to be careful as the free coffee and tea were piping hot.

Another group arrived, this time a group of older gentlemen all wearing more layers of clothing than he thought an

evening like this required. And ties, too; that was odd.

Even odder was the average age of the group. So far, twenty people had arrived and not one looked younger than fifty.

Still, they were people after all.

Even if his online training course had led him to believe "Wealth Creation and Psychological Empowerment" would attract a young and diverse mix of people, Patrick was just happy that the room was nearly at capacity.

'The more minutes, guys,' Patrick yelled over the din in the room.

Everyone seemed to be talking so loudly and there was a queue for the tea and lots of moaning about the now empty biscuit plates.

'Guys, doesn't really suit this lot,' Patrick thought, if anything it seemed disrespectful and a little American, though his training was certified by The Los Angeles School for Personal Growth and Development so there was no wonder the course material was a little ill-matched in places.

Patrick flicked through his course manual one last time. He knew the stuff inside and out.

He'd even been awarded a distinction when he had completed the online exam and was sent a wonderful completion certificate. It was a printable one, of course, they couldn't be expected to send something out from the States but Patrick had still been very proud.

The huge discount they had offered for the next level of training was an added bonus that they only gave to those who achieved a distinction.

People started taking their seats, filling up the rows of chairs in front of him and, at the front a woman with thick make-up applied with a trowel, reminded him of his wife's supportive words when he had first suggested the career change.

'What do you mean you're giving up your job to become a life coach? What do you know about life? You've been on the buses for the last twenty years.'

Not that he saw working on the buses as a career, being sworn at when he said that he had no change, or having his plastic protective window vomited on when he was stuck driving the night bus; no that was no career at all.

`Will we be starting soon? I can't leave my dogs for too long, they won't talk to me for the rest of the evening if I do,' yelled a woman on the second row back after waving a huge handbag filled with so much stuff it sounded like a maraca.

`Just two more minutes,' Patrick said after checking the clock.

That would mean they would start right on time. And as the manual said, `punctuality is profitability'.

The woman dug into her handbag and pulled out a graying handkerchief, muttering to the woman at her side as she did; `ten minutes, two minutes, he should make up his mind. At this rate I'll be picking up my little darlings' poo bombs and you know how they always aim them at my best Axminster rug when they get upset?'

`Do not get bogged down in the swamp of negativity,' Patrick read from the "Tip Sheet" that he had placed on the desk at the front of the room.

He had underlined this tip several times. Post-it notes saying the same were dotted around his home, partly to encourage him but mostly to discourage his wife from her incessant naysaying.

After a month of moaning he had finally had to tell her that it was his father who had died, so it was his inheritance and he refused to spend it on a conservatory when he could finally give up the job he despised and do something for himself.

That hadn't gone down well but had meant a week of peace while she had gone to stay with her sister.

In the end, when the washing had piled up and he couldn't bear any more takeaways, he'd given in, sent flowers, apologised and, after promising her a new kitchen, normality returned.

And thankfully his wife shopping for a kitchen had given him the time to complete his course.

Patrick watched the second-hand tick around the old school-style white clock on the wall.

In thirty seconds his new life would begin.

His palms were sweaty, though thankfully nowhere else thanks to his persistence with the super-strong deodorant the course had recommended. What was a blistering rash and a few sleepless nights if it meant he would be free from sweat on his first outing?

The clock ticked closer to the start time of 7pm, his papers were ready, his opening remarks rehearsed to perfection, Patrick had spent hours ensuring that not only did he know what he was about to say, he could deliver his presentation with punchy intent and without a hint of trite glibness.

Tick, tick... Patrick watched the clock... it was time...

Patrick took a breath, a deep one from his diaphragm as he'd practiced and said... Well, he said nothing because before he could make his dramatic and timely opener a woman bounced through the doorway, her enthusiasm sending her countless pieces of heavy costume jewellery clattering back and forth.

'There you all are! We've been looking all over for you!' the woman said and then turning to Patrick added, 'I'm really sorry, there was some kind of mix up with the signposting. This lot are here for chair-obics: the council picks them up from round and about and brings them over here to get some exercise.'

The woman smiled at the group and seemed not to notice Patrick's spirit breaking.

He should have guessed; so much blue hair, Tweed perfume and that slight hint of urine.

His wife was right, Patrick thought, this was a stupid idea. Who in this day and age wanted to take a course on self-improvement?

`Right,' the woman bellowed, her slightly crazed, over-enthusiastic tone reminded Patrick of a Spaniel he'd once owned, a mental dog who liked to eat the cat's poo out of the litter box.

He should pack up and leave, go back to the buses and speak no more of this little misadventure.

The woman turned on Patrick and, after repeating the `right', added, `I think it's easier if I stay in here with this lot, and you take my room. It seems to make the most sense to me given that your lot are already waiting for you down there. It's the end of the corridor, third door on the right.'

Patrick wanted to ask if `your lot' meant one, two, seven, but that seemed a little needy.

Thankfully he didn't have to as the woman added.

`It looks like you're in for a fun evening, the room is packed and they look like an eager bunch.'

As Patrick walked down the corridor to his room, he only just resisted the urge to do a little skip.
