

FORTUNE

TELLER



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IT'S TIME TO GET A LIFE (COACH)

A personal trainer and shrink won't cut it any more. *Laura Craik* discovers the new real-life gurus who will nurture your self-help obsession and bring out the best possible version of you

Once upon a time, if you had a problem you'd tell your best friend.



Or, if you were rich enough, you'd tell your therapist. I always wanted a therapist. It sounded so fabulous. 'I'm off to see my therapist,' I'd say, breezing out of the office to my imaginary appointment with Dr Melfi. For those who haven't seen *The Sopranos*, Dr Melfi is the ultimate shrink. You could tell her anything. Murdered someone in your lunch hour? No problem.

Whether you have a homicide issue or a hormone imbalance, these days there's a therapist for every modern-day malady. With so much pressure to be living your perfect life (thanks, Instagram), it's little wonder that more and more life coaches are springing up to help you do so. The term 'life coach' is, of course, a broad church – and getting broader. We've all heard of personal trainers, nutritionists, stylists, wealth-management gurus and healers. But cybernetic transposition coaches? Not so much. Apparently, they help eliminate the 'blockers that have been holding you back'. No word on whether they can get you another 100 likes.

Personally, I'd class myself as 'happy, but could be happier'. My stomach is more bloated than I'd like. I read too much pulp fiction. Do I need a lifestyle coach? Hell, who doesn't? In the quest for deep, fulfilling happiness, I'll give anything a try. Especially if it sounds a bit bonkers.



The gut therapist

I'M SITTING IN A RESTAURANT being told what to eat by a complete stranger. 'So, the reason I ordered us quinoa salad with sweet potato wedges and broccoli is so that we'll get fibre from the grains, dietary fibre from the plants, enough pro-

tein because of the quinoa, and probiotics from the yoghurt they'll drizzle on the sweet potato,' says Karen O'Donoghue. As founder of The Happy Tummy Co, O'Donoghue's mission is straightforward: to rid the world of IBS. She charges £100 to go through a client's diet, eating habits and fridge, and suggests short-term and long-term actions. That O'Donoghue hopes to cure IBS via what many sufferers would claim is their *bête noire* – bread – seems perverse, until you spend time with her: her zeal would put Jesus to shame.

'I can't stress enough how important fibre is,' she says. Her chia teff loaf was developed to deliver the perfect ratio of soluble and insoluble fibre to the gut. Its wonder ingredient is teff, a small, gluten-free grain grown in Ethiopia that's high in protein, calcium and iron. Acolytes claim that teff also helps to balance hormone levels, stimulate digestion and strengthen bones.

Delicious and nutritious as the lunch she's ordered is, realistically, O'Donoghue can't follow me around monitoring my fibre intake – but she does offer to send me a loaf 'until I've changed your stomach'. I don't like to tell her this might take forever. I am to eat it every morning. I cut a tentative slice. It's quite crumbly. I toast it, adding butter. Hmm. Tasty. Much nicer than most worthy, fibre-rich breads I've tried. It tastes vaguely of ginger, which clashes with my beloved cheese spread, but as the days wear on, I experiment with olive oil, peanut butter and – obviously – mashed avocado.

A week passes, and I meet with O'Donoghue again, this time at her house (she has cured people's IBS after they've lived with her for a week and eaten what she eats). I tell her that I've noticed a positive effect on – nope, sorry, I promised myself I'd never write about my own poo –

but that I'm still bloated; always have been and always will be. But when she tells me her bread has had a 99% success rate among people with IBS, I believe her. At £10 a loaf, it sure isn't cheap, but you can't put a price on good gut health. I'm going to stick with it.



The career psychic

THANKS TO GUCCI and Christian Dior, tarot is having a fashion moment. Not that this matters to Lady Lilac, who has been reading cards for 30 years from her central London base, charging £40 for 40 minutes. All her business comes from word of mouth, and she will advise on anything from career moves to love life. 'It's a cross between counselling and cards,' she says.

Some clients come every two to three weeks. 'A lot of that is reassurance, but also I think people need someone to talk to. They're a bit lonely and on a treadmill. Everyone needs counselling sometimes.'

Lady Lilac wears a lot of lilac. Her car is lilac, her phone is lilac and she deals the tarot cards with lilac nails. I pick 10 cards. My first shows I'm wary. 'Keep your energy open,' she instructs me. I try not to hunch my shoulders. The second is about property: spooky, as I'd just been looking at Zoopla while on the Tube ride here. The third is a work card. 'Your work might be changing,' she says. I've also picked a writers' card. 'The work is flowing,' she tells me. I've also picked a lot of destiny cards. 'You're under a lot of pressure, Laura, but your health can take it.' Phew.

Next up, a guy who fancies me! 'Looks quite sexy. Aries, Leo, Sagi... fire signs. No longevity in it,' she says. I tell her I never meet any men, ever, as I work from home. Undeterred, she says the cards are predicting another man, a compatible water sign. This one is 'a finance man. But there's no sexual connection. Various men fancy you,' she adds. I reiterate that there are no ▷

men in my life apart from my husband. 'Who are all these men, then?' she says, sharply. Is she sure they're not women? 'They're men!'

Lady Lilac is quite impressive on the name-guessing front. 'Is there a Lindsey? Izzy?' (My daughter is Eliza.) 'And an Iris?' (My other daughter is Violet.) 'Your dad's name... I've got a G. Is he Gordon?' (My father-in-law.) 'Your mum's mum... Margaret?' (She was.) 'And her husband,

reckons she has spent 50,000 hours in clinical practice, talking to women. 'I've heard everything. All I can say is that women are amazing.'

She classes herself as an integrated fertility specialist, adding: 'If you come to see me, you could leave with a referral for anyone from a surgeon to a shaman.' A big fan of Chinese medicine, her services include acupuncture, diagnosis and nutritional support (she charges £250 for 90 minutes).

'I leave my session feeling lighter, if a bit embarrassed about all the dreary crap I've told her about my life'

William?' (He was.) 'There's not someone called Steve, is there?' OMG, WE'RE ABOUT TO GET A PUPPY AND CALL IT STEVIE. Just as I'm beginning to believe in tarot, Lady Lilac's phone vibrates to denote that our 40 minutes are up. 'Anyway, that's you, I'm afraid,' she says. 'Sorry. It could have been a nicer story, but it is what it is.'



The hormone fairy

'I LOVE MY JOB,' says Emma Cannon, whose skill at rebalancing hormones and helping women get pregnant has led some devotees to swear she's 'part fairy'. I don't know about that, but she certainly has a way of making you open up. After 15 minutes in her Chelsea consulting rooms, I'm telling her my life story. I don't want to get pregnant, but my hormones have been out of whack. I'm now lying on a bed with needles sticking out of me, having divulged way more than I meant to.

Cannon grew up with four sisters ('there was always someone with a period or a broken heart'), has two daughters and

Women who want to preserve their fertility represent a growing number of Cannon's clients, but she's keen to stress that women need to think about their hormones their whole life. While her fees may be beyond the reach of most twentysomethings, she will soon launch a more affordable fertility programme online, to include a series of webinars where users can ask questions.

She certainly seems intuitive, and I leave my session feeling somehow lighter, if a bit embarrassed about all the dreary crap I've told her about my life. Sometimes, it's just nice to be listened to.



The book doula

MUCH LIKE A REGULAR DOULA, who supports women through pregnancy, book doula Ali Lawrence helps you 'birth' your own tome. 'I'm like a writing coach. Whatever the struggle a writer might be facing, I help them reach their book goals,' she explains via Skype (Lawrence lives in the US).

How fortuitous, I think. As it happens, and like almost every human on the planet,

I feel I have a book in me. Perhaps Lawrence can succeed where I, my husband, my mother and most of my friends have failed: perhaps she can persuade me to pen a book. 'I discovered how much fear there is with writing – it's almost like public speaking for some people. I help them break through barriers. I like to think my superpower is copy editing; really going into the work and taking it to the final draft.'

As for the birthing process, first, Lawrence 'meets' you for a 30-minute session, then creates a timeline of her likely editing schedule and a rough estimate of the delivery of the finished manuscript. Her services start at £477 a month, which typically includes two 75-minute calls, email support and copy editing.

What would her advice be to someone who has always wanted to write a book and thinks that maybe 2018 will be the year? 'The key is writing something that's going to be a sustainable process for you, something you can relate to, such as your own story or a story you know well.' Ali, if I ever get round to writing *My Recycling Bin Hell*, you will, I promise, be the first to know.



I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE WHO WOULDN'T BENEFIT FROM HAVING A LIFE COACH. They're the opposite of doctors, in that they don't make you feel guilty for being there, and don't hurry you out of the room when your 10 minutes are up. Apart from being given advice tailored specifically to you, everyone needs someone to listen to them now and again. The sad truth is that even good friends are busy these days, so sometimes you need to pay someone else to do it. This, I feel, is why life coaching is such a boom industry. Maybe people don't want to change their lives; they just want to be heard.

ELLE joins three life gurus to talk through how to be a better, healthier, more successful you in 2018. For details and tickets, visit hearstlive.co.uk/elle-life-coaches

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