



I thought this would be easy...

You are a great coach, so why is building your business such a struggle?

We all came to train in coaching in very different ways. I fell into it - not the way I would recommend to others, but that's how it was for me. I quickly signed up to study for a Diploma in Life Coaching and was really excited to learn about this "new" thing. At the first training weekend, my peers were so excited too. The training college seemed convinced that we would all be able to earn a rather significant salary with our new qualification, so the costs of the training paled into the background when I heard things like "£200 per hour" floating around.

I qualified and waited for the life coaching fairy to wave her magic wand saying "and there's another client paying £200 per hour" I would have been pleased if one client paid even £50 for the odd session at the start.

I found it really hard going – and so did many others on my course. (Some of you will have trained in NLP or have a range of other personal development qualifications and perhaps not call yourself a Life Coach, but I know that these challenges will also be familiar!)

But of course I had a plan... I'd had a lot coaching about that! Need a website, marketing and business plan. Must find a niche. Got to network everywhere. Must have perfected elevator speech.

On top of paying for my coaching course, I had now amassed another bill: Website at £900, Advertising at £300 a pop, networking club £600 a year, leaflets £250, display material £300. Actually I am playing it down – I really did go to town and as I watched the odd £50 trickling in I became really despondent. My husband actually started asking me whether this was a real job or just an "expensive hobby". You can imagine how that comment landed!

It seemed different for those working as an executive coach or corporate coach who were going back to their previous area of work but with their new role, but as I started to talk to others, especially self-employed life and business coaches, they seemed to be having similar challenges as me. These challenges fell into the following categories:

People don't understand what coaching is

I was a mum with young children when I trained as coach and I really fell in love with coaching – couldn't get enough of it, so when chatting to other mums in the playground, I was really shocked and surprised that no-one had a clue what I was talking about. "is it counselling?" or "it's something to do with training isn't it" "oh, you are a fitness coach" (which is funny as I sooo do not look at all fit!). This lack of understanding didn't end in with mums in the playground. I would talk to my husbands work colleagues and all sorts of people from different backgrounds – they didn't get it either.



If you want someone to consider buying a product, they really need to know what it is. It's like trying to sell a vacuum cleaner to an alien – it's quite tricky, but when they see it work, it's a bit easier! People genuinely don't know what coaching is, let alone the benefits it can bring.

The other challenges we have, is that the relationship between ourselves and our clients is so important. Getting to know someone, liking them, having an experience of coaching is key to increasing the likelihood of them wanting to work with us. That's why we offer free "chemistry" sessions isn't it?

But you have to connect with a lot of people to get that opportunity. And I have done so many "free" sessions, so many hours of building my hopes up, only for it to result in disappointment. (I now know that one of the problems was that I was doing a full coaching session in the consultation, helping them solve a big problem...they just got too much from it and had no reason to come back!)

My marketing doesn't work ... and you have to do so much of it!

In those first few years, I went to so many marketing seminars, webinars. I brought so many books and ebooks on marketing, it would take a small army to carry them. I can see them still now...on the book shelves, staring at me!

Don't get me wrong – they contain really good advice and plans usually, but it seemed like a constant, uphill struggle.

I had paid out for an expensive website too early on, without really knowing what I needed from a site or without understanding how a website fits into a marketing plan. I then had to pay every time I wanted to update the site or make changes. It sucked.

I had rushed out and keenly had leaflets printed about my business. I had two versions designed and had a 1000 printed as it was cheaper (I only recently dumped these leaflets...all 1790 of them -they were completely out of date and useless). I also realised how hopeless leaflets were as I noticed myself dumping other peoples beautifully crafted leaflets...they would soon be dumping mine too.

I tried advertising in magazine and papers too. Now that's a really costly game which can be really disappointing. It's anything from £200 upwards for an advert in even a small publication these days and I remember sitting and waiting for the phone to ring on the day my ad was due out. I even employed a virtual receptionist to deal with the deluge of enquires I expected – how naive of me!

And once you have advertised somewhere, it seems that you are fair game for all sorts of sales men to try and sell advertising to you...even "The Retired Policeman's Gazette" called me to sell me advertising space!

I perfected my elevator pitch....yes it is important but it doesn't open the golden gates to lots of customers, it just short cuts a conversation which could, quite frankly be much more interesting and worthwhile if you weren't pretending you were in an elevator. And everyone knows you've been practicing it for weeks, which I actually find a bit of a turn off!



I could go on for some time about marketing. As coaches we really need to rethink this and get creative. We also need to understand what people really want these days and what makes their ears prick up and take notice. Wouldn't it be nice to get paid whilst marketing ourselves?

People say they can't afford it

I'm finding this quite hard to write. It's making me remember the billion times that I have got excited about a potential client, wooed them into having a complimentary session, spent an hour on the phone or in a café with them, only for them to say "I can't afford it" or "let me think about it" or "perhaps after Christmas...". Uhhh... My heart sinks just thinking about it.

I have tried "not attaching to the outcome" (AKA "not getting your hopes up"), but it's really hard not to. I only offer 30 minute consultations now, which helps, but the same problem still arises – people just don't seem willing to pay for their own personal development.

It's really hard. We know that people will benefit from coaching many times over, but there is a perception that its only for people with rich husbands who have a disposable income and lots of free time, or those who gets coaching paid for by their employer. If you look at your social circle – how many people do you know who already pay for a regular coaching?

*People seem happy to pay for their hair to be done – they can see an immediate result.
People seem happy to pay for a gym membership they never use – it's noble to at least try
People seem happy to save up all year for a holiday which comes and go in a trice
People seem to pay for all sorts of things, but don't see personal development as important*

We also have an additional problem in coaching. What we do is very effective and often things change quite quickly. I have found that coaching is so profoundly powerful, that even if I managed to get a client to commit to 4 sessions, after the fourth session, they would vanish into the ether...dancing away, happy as Larry, as everything is working out so much better!

This is not counselling where people keep coming, month in month out, for years.

So as a business model which involves finding fresh clients all the time is tough going!

Networking is costing me so much time and money

This is part of marketing really but I often use networking to keep me sane and make sure I escape the office and meet with real people on a regular occasion.

Early on in my coaching career, I started to get invited to networking do's. I was flattered – how lovely to get invited out! And it is. Most of the time, people at networking do's are friendly and pleased to met you (unless you are a coach, but more about that in a minute). I have been to a couple of do's at which I felt really out of sorts. Mostly these were "business breakfasts" with everyone in suits. This is not an environment in which I flourish, but that might just be me 😊



I have now found a couple of networking groups that I go to regularly, that I love. One is Ladies That Latte, a women's group that is free and you just buy a coffee. Its lovely, its friendly and it's good value.

I have been to many other groups that I won't join, for three main reasons:

- 1) Many of these groups are costly. Usually £300 to join plus the cost of a meal or breakfast each month, making the yearly cost around £600 per year. That's a lot to cough up if your income is trickling in!
- 2) Most of them have a static membership, so you don't meet many new people. If the 15 people that regularly attend aren't interested in coaching (and we'll come to that) you are unlikely to get work from it. I know some business coaches that it works for, but not many.
- 3) I think that when you say you are a Life Coach, at these do's, people switch off. I am happy for you to challenge me about this, but this has been my experience time and time again. People want business from these meetings, not coaching and definitely not life coaching. These people, are lovely, business owners that yes, could probably do with some life coaching, but they are not often our target market. It's just not where we should be aiming our efforts.

Some weeks, I would tot up the time and costs each week that I was spending networking:

- Parking £10-15 per week
- Petrol: £5- £7
- Lunch or Breakfast: £25
- Cost of attending £10 plus
- Time each week, including travel time = 8 hours

Total cost each month = £160 (excluding the cost of your time!)

That's quite a lot, especially when added to all the other things to pay out for. An awful lot if you are struggling to bring in an income and an awful lot if it's on top of other marketing costs.

I'm fed up running workshops for 3 people

I love running workshops. I really do. I love meeting people face to face and getting to know them throughout the day. I get such a buzz, knowing that people have benefited from coming to a workshop.

It's great....but only if you have enough people coming along.

I lost count of the times when, after weeks of marketing, the cost of advertising and time spent tweeting and spreading the word, that my efforts amounted to just a small handful of people coming along....one or two of which were always paying a reduced rate.

Do you run workshops? I hope you have better success than I had in the past. I know it's not just me. I have attended workshops with only 3 or 4 people attending (and even the workshop run by a marketing lady, only had 4 people, so if she is struggling, no wonder we are!)



Ideally you need at least six people to make for a good workshop, but four people is OK if you haven't had to pay for a room or venue, which can be anything from £150 to £500 per day or a day rate of £45 plus per person (they usually require a minimum of 8) And then there is the cost of advertising, materials and food or refreshments. You can see how difficult it is to make a profit unless you have good numbers.

"They" tell me it's a numbers game. The person with the largest contact list wins. So you need a really big emailing list, to fill workshops. You need to build a meaningful email list, keep in contact with people and let them know what workshops you are running. So find a way to build a list!

Everyone else seems to be doing ok!

I have painted quite a dismal picture, but that's how it genuinely was for me for about 3 ½ years. I nearly gave up so many times, I have lost count.

I looked at my coaching colleagues, the ones who I went to coaching group meetings with. They all seemed to be doing OK. But I now know that many of them were struggling with the same things as me. We just think that others are doing OK.

If you work as an internal coach or coach within your existing job, then these problems may not be familiar to you – it's a different ball game. But if you are working alone, as a self-employed life or business coach, I imagine that much of this will resonate with you.

I started running Coaching Parties, to tackle the problems I described and 5 years later, Discovery Party was born. Discovery Party is designed to help coaches with the above problems and many more. It's a fun way of building a tribe, meeting real potential clients and fill your workshops whilst you earn money (instead of paying for marketing!).

I won't go on about Discovery Party, but if you want to find out more, you can see more information at www.discoveryparty.co.uk

You are an amazing coach and the world really needs your skills and talents right now. People are feeling very stressed and struggling with many aspects of their lives, so don't give up!

Here are some things which may help:

- 1) Have a menu of offerings ranging from free to small investment to fully paid coaching. For example I offer the following: free email newsletter/blog; free monthly group coaching call; low cost group pop-in sessions and Discovery Parties; up to paid individual coaching and other workshops. Give people an easy and cheap way to engage first!
- 2) If you provide a complimentary session, just make it 20 or 30 minutes. Identify the "BIG" goal and the obstacles and then stop. Don't start generating solutions. And then you must ask at the end "and when shall we start our coaching?". Practice saying this and become really comfortable with it. If people still don't want individual coaching, you have a range of other offerings you can give them. Over time, that will give you the greatest chance of converting them to a full paying client.



- 3) Scattergun marketing doesn't work and is very costly and takes a lot of time. Build strong individual relationships with people are your "real target market". And makes sure you know clearly, who your target market is! Be genuinely interested in others. If you hit people with your "elevator speech", it can be a real turn off.
- 4) If someone is trying to sell you advertising, it usually means people are not buying it automatically and they need to sell the space. Be bold and ask for a free advert or trial. Make sure you have some way of identifying whether it worked or not.
- 5) Build a meaningful, large email list. If you don't know how to do this, email me and I will send you some ideas☺ Follow sound email marketing advice – there is plenty of free advice online.
- 6) Build a group of coaches around you and support each other. Share ideas, find out what's working for them. Be willing to share your concerns and vulnerabilities – it will help us all.
- 7) Develop joint ventures with people. This way you share contacts and databases, share the work load, get some great new ideas and develop win-win situations all round. Joint ventures aren't formal business contracts but are collaborations designed to help each other out.

I hope that's useful. Coaching and personal development are really needed in the world right now, so do keep keep up the good work.

Please email if you would like more information about Discovery Party jen@discoveryparty.co.uk

www.discoveryparty.co.uk

www.jengash.co.uk

