

COVER STORY WHY BUSINESS IS EMBRACING LIFE COACHING

# Expert push

**the point** A life coach can help you realise business and personal ambitions, from gaining a competitive edge on the corporate ladder to getting fit.

**By Ben Wyld**  
It's not often that Hollywood's vision of the future comes true. But a 1989 comedy, starring Roseanne (Barr, as she was known then), gave a glimpse of the latest phenomenon to sweep Australia's corporate landscape. In the movie *She-Devil*, Ruth (Barr), establishes the Vesa Rose Agency, a company designed to help people reach their full potential.

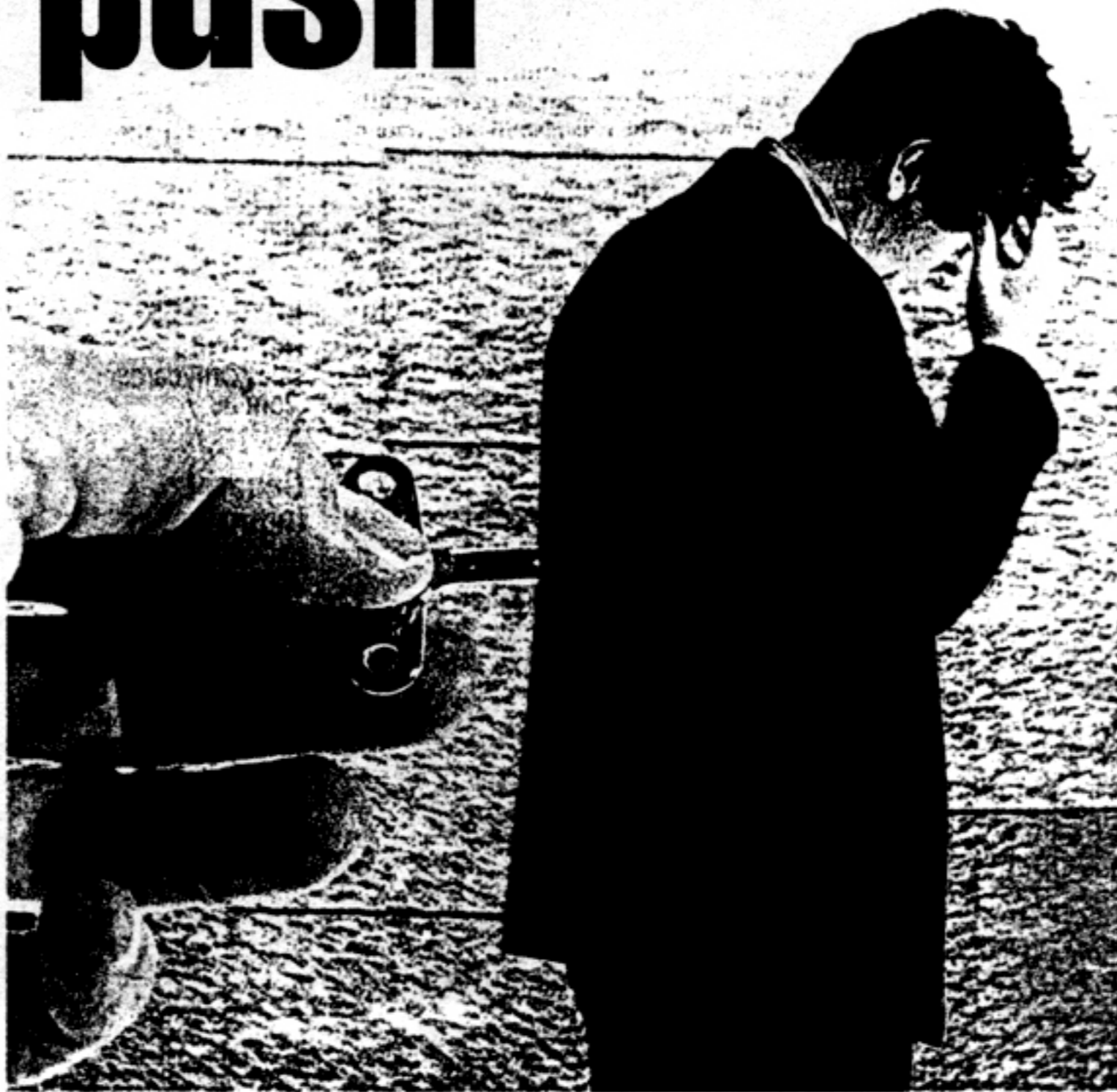
Fast forward to 2001 and, in this case, life has imitated art. Life coaching, as it is known in the industry, has become the secret weapon of executives desperate to maintain an edge over their competitors. A recent TMP Worldwide survey of 8,000 Australian employees, from a range of industries, indicated that demand for coaching services among respondents exceeded 74 per cent.

Richard Hewson, director and founder of Hewson's Australia, (formerly Hewson's & Associates), says that the industry is going through a boom period with some industry estimates indicating a 30-fold increase in the number of qualified coaches in Australia since 1996.

"People are time poor and they need results quickly," he says. "Businesses are running leaner and meaner and that's probably because of the competition."

"Companies are realising that this is a very cost-effective and time-effective way of retaining good people and giving them the coaching in the area of their blind spots and resolving those issues straight away."

Having established his executive coaching business eight years ago, Hewson says that Australian executives were at first reluctant to consider the benefits of coaching, relying instead on traditional avenues for encouragement such as family and peer support. Now, he says, clients who range from company CEOs to middle management recognise the value of working with an impartial coach. He also



**What it costs**

**Individual coaching** \$300-\$400 a month.  
**Corporate coaching** More than \$10,000 a month.

believes the trend in the US, where executives are asking for coaching as part of their remuneration package, will soon be seen in Australia.

"It can be lonely at the top and they can feel vulnerable. They can feel emotions just like everyone else and they don't have an outlet for them. They can't go to the competition, they may not be able to talk to the board about the issues, or staff, and they may have partners outside work who are too emotionally involved with the person to be objective," he says.

So what exactly is life coaching and what does it involve? After a consultation between client and coach, a three-hour strategy meeting is held to target business goals and what Hewson calls executive "blind spots".

"For the individual there are insights directly relevant to the awareness and the achievement of both career and personal goals and on the other hand for the business the benefits include having leaders who are in a better position to improve themselves, their management, communication, people handling, and team building skills as well as their contribution to the bottom line."

"The result of this meeting is that the client knows more clearly what they have to focus on and what they have to do ... to create stronger results focused on their business increasing revenues and reducing costs."

Hewson says the most common issues arising from strategy meetings involve a conflict between workplace practice and personal ethics, and business leaders not knowing how to demand performance without de-motivating staff. He admits that at times coaching can be a confronting process for the client.

"It has to be done in a supportive environment but not withholding what has to be said and telling them straight because sometimes they don't hear it and people don't tell them how it really is."

Following the strategy meeting, a tailor-made coaching program is established involving weekly consultation over a three-month period. The client's progress is then checked against a defined set of goals drafted during the strategy meeting stage.

Hewson says that the costs associated with his executive coaching program start from \$10,000, though the amount varies depending on the needs of the client that have been identified during the strategy meeting.

David Rock, who created Paddington-based Results Life Coaching in 1996, says that another factor in the exponential growth of life coaching is the increasing number of people branching out into small enterprise and the lack of appropriate support structures.

But Rock says life coaching is not just for the business sector. Individuals contemplating career change and people striving to improve their health comprise a large proportion of his clientele.

"People use a coach for lots of different things," he says. "Some people use a coach to get their masters ... some to stop

smoking. The role of coaches is a combination of a mentor to help set goals, a project manager to break those goals down into manageable bits, a personal trainer ... and a sports coach to give you feedback on how you are playing the game."

Rock says more than 2,000 people in Australia have undergone his life coaching program since its inception. Like Hewson's program, it is based on a three-month period.

"They say it takes three months to develop new habits and that's why we work in three-month blocks," he says.

"We set three goals at the start and measure the results at the end compared with those goals. We make sure that they are really specific, measurable and clear. The goals also need to be fairly challenging for people so it's not something that they would achieve on their own. We find that we are achieving over 85 per cent of those goals."

The growth in the life coaching industry has also seen an increase in the need for qualified coaches.

Over an 18-month period, Rock has established a training arm to his coaching business, with schools in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Auckland and London. The addition of a New York school this year underlines what Rock believes is a global calling for qualified life coaches.

**Training and accreditation**

The director of the Coaching Psychology Unit at the University of Sydney's psychology department, Anthony Grant, stresses the need to check the accreditation of life coach companies.

"There are lots of people setting themselves up as life coaches and we don't know how many of those people have clients or if they've been adequately trained. You can't really call it a profession because there are no barriers to entry," says Grant.

Grant says, along with increasing levels of work-related stress, the boom in life coaching can be attributed to the increase in acceptance of personal

development since the '60s. "There's also the whole growth of the self-help industry ... in the States, the self-help book market is worth \$US600 million a year."

The first of its kind in the world, the Coaching Psychology Unit offers postgraduate education in coaching and mentoring that is grounded in the study of behavioural science.

Grant says that within 12 months the unit will receive accreditation from the International Coach Federation, the primary international accreditation body for the industry.

For details, see [www.psychcoach.org](http://www.psychcoach.org)

**an investment worth making**

**Not-so-quiet achiever**

Before this year, exercise never featured prominently in Patricia Calleja's life. Nor did a love of goal-setting.

These are problematic issues for a forty-something sales director for IT company Key3Media Events.

"I started initially with doing the odd walk three times a week. I now go for a walk for about half an hour every day. Before [coaching] there's no way I could do that," she says.

Calleja says that a desire for career advancement, as well as the support of her managing director, who was receiving life coaching at the time, led to her initial meeting with life coach David Rock in April. She immediately signed up for a three-month course and said the results were worth the \$3,000 fee.

"At the end of it I walked out of there feeling like I wanted to jump in the air ... I'm now a different person. I'm a lot more positive, more of a go-getter," she says.

Having completed 10 life coaching sessions, Calleja says her weekly telephone consultations with Rock have allowed her to broaden the marketing strategies she



**Sales director Patricia Calleja (above) and managing director John Preston (right) have benefitted from life coaching in their careers.**  
Calleja photo: Quentin Jones

develops for her sales team. "We were talking about sales tools that my sales representatives have. They've got sales kits, a Web site and you think that it stops there. David made me see that from a sales tools point of view we've got about 10 to 12 different items that the reps have that they can use as a sales tool, not just one or two."

"I'm very happy to say that most of the things I wanted to achieve, I'm achieving."

**Confidence booster**

Just over a year ago, 37-year-old John Preston suffered a crisis of confidence.

A sudden promotion from media director to a managing director at advertising agency Whybin Lawrence TBWA bought with it increased job pressures and a need to broaden Preston's knowledge of an area that he had little experience in. As a result, Preston embarked on the Hewson training program in December.

"The biggest issue, particularly with an advertising agency, is that people are assets and also the element of the business that needs to be carefully managed. So a lot of it was about dealing with people and managing them effectively. The other component was managing my own time and delivery through effective delegation and time management."



Having completed 13 sessions at the cost of \$10,000, Preston says the program taught him the necessary philosophical tools on which to base moral and ethical decisions. "I'm more confident, more effective and I'm getting a lot more out of the job."

He says the coaching process, which can be confronting, can prove beneficial only if there is absolute honesty on the part of the client during the consultation setting.

"The more you put in as an individual the more the coach can help you."