



By Brian Dubrie

My iOpening experience: 3 years on

At various points in my life, I have asked myself the question: what do you want your life to be like? In July 2017, I considered the question more seriously than ever before.

I had been in government for 36 years. During that time, I'd worked with a huge number of excellent people in a range of different departments, mainly in security and defence sectors. From starting as an apprentice, I climbed the ladder and reached the highest grade.

All those years of experience meant that I understood the culture, the processes, how the organisation worked. I'd been in many restructures before – in fact I led some of my teams through them. But when a restructure was announced that year, it was different. This time, my path forward wasn't clear.

It was at that point that I asked myself the question: what do you want your life to be like?

I wondered what it would be like to leave a familiar environment that had shaped me after almost four decades. I thought deeply about how it would feel to not be in a leadership position, which was something I really enjoyed. I wondered what it would be like to set up a consultancy, to go it alone. I thought of the risks and the benefits, how I could still honour my responsibilities to my family.

I recognised that I was in a period of significant transition, and could benefit from coaching support. I'm a huge advocate of coaching. I have had the benefit of executive coaching a number of times before and I have coached people throughout my career, so I really understand how impactful it can be. It's something you can always learn from. So I took the opportunity to go on the iOpening residential programme in the October of 2017.

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When I arrived, one of the iOpening team, Jolene, said we must try to be as open and honest about our feelings as we could be. I'm a pretty reserved sort of person and being encouraged to talk about feelings isn't something that happens a lot in the security and defence sector!

Nevertheless, I quickly felt comfortable enough to share openly. I realised that I was amongst a group of people who were going through the same sorts of things as I was. Some were further along in their journey, others were just starting out. The coaches and the others on the programme wanted to hear what I had to say, they wouldn't betray my confidence or pass judgement and I felt the same way. That was a huge benefit of the programme - the reassurance and validation there is in shared experience, despite our different backgrounds.

Another fantastic thing about the programme (which offered individual and group coaching) is the feedback I got. Feedback is a gift, it gets you out of your echo chamber, it can be confidence-building, reassuring and can give you the challenge you need to reconsider any ideas you have about yourself that you believed were 'set'.

It gave me a real opportunity to think. I was given and reminded of the tools and techniques that you can use for life.

The transition journey was explained which was hugely helpful in understanding why you're feeling like you're feeling. People can feel really low during transition and that's understandable, the future is uncertain, but with support you realise that all those feelings you've got are really natural and normal.

Before the programme, I found it hard to support myself in a coaching sense - when I talked to others going through transition I knew what to say, how to support them. I was unable to translate what I was saying to them to myself. It's a bit like a surgeon who knows how to operate but the surgeon can't exactly operate on themselves. A particularly poignant moment for me was a session on letting go. It was a really, really useful and unique exercise, particularly as my departure from my role wasn't as smooth as it should've been.

Crucially, it gave me the confidence and clarity I needed to enter the next phase of transition.

Immediately after the course I reached for my journal. The first thing I did was have confident conversations with peers. I was much clearer in my own mind of the questions I wanted to ask people. Since attending the programme, I set up my own consultancy. I consult on technology and transforming organisations in the space of complex delivery. I work with industry and government departments and lead major project reviews.

I've kept in touch with my group too, it's brilliant to be in contact with people who I just wouldn't have met if I hadn't been on the programme. We get together every so often to talk about where we're at. Someone on my programme was an actor. We all met and did some improvisation, work on projecting and presentation skills. I wouldn't have done that unless it had been for iOpening.

My wife has noticed that I am less stressed these days. Before, I was working 60-70 hours a week and I spent my Sunday evenings looking at my Blackberry. It was pretty intense. Now my lifestyle is significantly different, better, in many ways. I work 3 days a week. Somehow, I have managed to achieve a better standard of living. Reflecting on it now, many of the things I set out to achieve, I have achieved.

The answer to the question of "what do I want my life to be like? Is something I'm sure I'll revisit, I hope often because it's good to reflect. However, I have learnt so much going through the experience and I've been able to share what I've learned with others. I feel much richer in wisdom - but could be just age!

With support, you can find your way out of limbo and uncertainty and go onto better, brighter things - **take the plunge!**



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