



By Luke Hargreaves

My iOpening experience: 3 years on

In 2017, I was Head of Renewables at Ofgem. I got a lot of satisfaction from my job, I liked my colleagues and the culture suited me. But I'd been in the organisation for 11 years and was aware that I was at risk of stagnating.

At around the same time, a few things happened in my personal life which made me realise that things weren't as balanced as they needed to be.

I know that it's pretty normal for people to try and treat their home and work lives as two distinct things but for me, they're totally interlinked. As hard as you might try to compartmentalise them, when you have a good day at work, your home life seems to run more smoothly. When you have a difficult day at home, you find it harder to concentrate at work. So when I heard about iOpening, I saw it as an opportunity which could help me with my whole life, not just one part of it.

I didn't have any anxieties ahead of attending. Even though I'd never done anything like it and this was a residential coaching experience, I felt that it was the right thing to do. I went into it with an open mind. I didn't know what to expect, but it didn't worry me.

Another huge draw for me was the opportunity to better understand other people's experiences. I'm a people person, so the programme, which offered coaching in a group setting – as well as small groups and one-to-ones – presented opportunity for me to develop in that area too.

Reflecting on it now, the diversity of the group was a real positive of the coaching experience for me. In my group there were people of all backgrounds in all stages of life: someone was entering into retirement, two or three were running their own businesses; others were preparing to move into new roles. Despite this, there was a commonality in that we'd all taken the step to attend and wanted to get the most out of the residential.

”

I saw it as an opportunity which could help me with my whole life

Coaching provides a safe, non-judgmental place where you can think about yourself, where you are heading and what matters to you. It seems like a treat on the surface, but I would argue that it is utterly essential.

There were a few significant moments of realisation during coaching. For example, there was an exercise where we were asked to mark out with counters the priorities in our lives and their proximity to us.

My kids were on top of me. My wife was further out

It became so clear to me that this needed to change. I needed to bring my better half much closer to me. That's not to say my kids stopped being important or that I needed to stop focussing on them - on the contrary - by prioritising my relationship with my wife and our partnership, I knew that my kids would benefit in turn. That's absolutely a tool you can use in a work context, too.

After the coaching, a few significant things happened

Firstly, when I got home, my wife, my mother and my kids all said that I looked like I'd been on holiday! It's incredible the extent to which things in our mind can manifest physically. My programme was residential, so there were no mobiles, no drinks, no late nights. Long walks between sessions. It was very restorative. But it was more than that. Coaching isn't therapy - but it did help to bring to the surface, in a very safe way, some issues that had been locked away. I felt lighter and more relaxed for having looked at them.

Secondly, I didn't start work on a grand master plan to overhaul my career, because there was a restructure at work. In time, I was promoted to Deputy Director of Compliance. Ofgem already ticked a number of boxes for me, I just needed the challenge of a new role.

With this promotion, the challenge was back, I now lead a large team covering a huge range of activities. I was also more able to identify ways that enabled me to continually develop in an organisation I liked, and help others.

I became a mentor and a mental health first aider, which has been invaluable during lockdown. I'm also a sponsor of the organisation's 'Culture Club', which looks to build on staff feedback, enable consistency and improve leadership visibility. Even today, I find myself drawing on the techniques I learned at iOpening, especially around change management. Following coaching, I have an enhanced self-awareness and carry with me a more rounded view and approach to engaging with others.

And as for my home life, things really did improve. The most significant 'take away' was the need for making time for yourself, for your own thoughts. You can do this in a structured way and see minimal impact on everyday life, but having that regular space to check in with yourself and be in the moment is so important.

I would urge anyone who has the opportunity to have a coaching experience to do it. Particularly now while the world is in flux. Regardless of what your work or home situation is, if you are given an opportunity to step back and talk to someone about what's going on for you and allow them to support you, you must take it.

A good coach is there to help you and will create an environment in which there is no judgement, no right or wrong answer. As long as you can be authentic to yourself and go in with an open mind, there are so many benefits to be had.



I became a
mentor and
a mental
health first
aider, which
has been
invaluable
during
lockdown