



Money Hungry

A conversation with a life coach pays off. BY VALLEY HAGGARD

To some of us these days, money is a four-letter word. Or the central prop in a powerful magician's disappearing act — now you see it, now you don't. In any case, I've never identified so closely with the stories I hear on NPR or CNN (not that we have cable, but still). My husband and I are self-employed and things that we used to enjoy — such as eating out, the gym membership, cell phones and health insurance — hang in a precarious balance.

So as I struggle to balance my checkbook and my sanity I figure that this might be a good time to pay my first-ever visit to a certified life coach.

Before she became a life coach, 37-year-old Ingrid Schweickert worked in case management for an HMO in Northern Virginia. She found, however, that most of her clients were not pliant. "I learned very quickly that if someone doesn't want to be changed or fixed, I am banging my head against a brick wall," she says. "Now, I'm working with people who want to change their life, which is great."

After moving to Richmond in 2000 and before graduating from coach training in 2002, Ingrid worked at Henrico Doctors' Hospital in the educa-

tion department. She's the mother of three children younger than 6 and does most of her coaching over the phone on nights and weekends.

I start by explaining to coach Ingrid that all of the conversations my husband and I have about money these days are particularly loaded. Basically, I say, "You need to find a full-time job," and he says, "No, you need to find a full-time job," and then we both scour the want-ads on Craigslist and become convinced that our lives are ending. Because not only are we unqualified to be doctors of philosophy or anesthesiologists, there just aren't a lot of companies in our fields wildly enthusiastic about adding employees at the moment. Coach Ingrid gently points out that my husband and I need to get on the same team rather than lobbing fly balls at each other. She advises me to figure out what I'm willing to do and then later, to ask him to think about what he's willing to do — in a nonconfrontational way.

"Don't bombard him, don't overwhelm him," she says. "Set a time to talk about this, like next Friday night. Don't blindsides him, but be sure he knows to come to the table prepared. You're not saying these are the rules and this is what's going to happen."

Well, now isn't that interesting! Usually by the time I'm ready to talk about money, I'm already on both the attack and the defensive. This whole notion of owning my part, deciding what I'm willing to do and then approaching him about a future time to talk isn't half bad. It just might work. But what am I willing to do? Essentially a good part of me operates out of a starving-artist mentality and I see outcomes in extremes. Either I'm going to make it as an Oprah book club best seller or I'll be forced to return to my first job as a waitress at Waffle House.

When coach Ingrid rationally suggests that there might be a middle ground, say a two-year plan, where I take a part-time job outside of my comfort zone, I'm given pause for thought. And it makes my husband thoughtful too. The outcome of our planned conversation is, in fact, astounding. We don't instantly find jobs or discover a cure for cancer, but we don't bicker and point fingers either. I guess sometimes it takes a coach to convince me to start playing for my own team.

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