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GRETA LEE

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WALK THIS WAY

For those at a professional crossroads, Dr Claire Kaye has honed a method to find direction and clarity. She talks *Lydia Slater* through the steps to falling back in love with your career

IT WAS, IRONICALLY, BEING OFFERED A LONGED-FOR PROMOTION that prompted Dr Claire Kaye to reassess her career completely. 'On paper, it was everything I'd dreamt about,' she says. 'Yet whenever I thought about taking the job, I felt sick.'

Prior to this pivotal moment, Kaye had worked in the NHS for almost two decades, mostly as a successful GP. But for a couple of years, she had noticed that she was feeling less content with her work. 'I didn't get that buzzy feeling at the beginning of the week,'

she says. 'I knew it didn't feel right, but I was scared and stuck, full of self-doubt, with that negative voice in my head saying, "You can't do anything else." After all, if I wasn't a doctor, who was I?'

A fellow medic recommended she try career coaching to help resolve her doubts. 'I thought it sounded amazing,' she says. 'So, I decided to do something that I'd never really done before at work: listen to myself.' Instead of taking the big job, Kaye left medicine and retrained to become a coach herself. 'As a doctor,

I had spent most of my working life being a coach without realising it – putting people in their stories, understanding what they wanted and enabling them to get there,’ she explains.

Today, she advises women who find themselves in a similar position – whether after promotion or redundancy, when returning to work after maternity leave, coping with challenging life events such as perimenopause, divorce or bereavement, or simply having ceased to enjoy a once-loved job. ‘These are all points when we stop and think, “Do I want to stay on this track?”’ she says. ‘I think most of us remain in jobs far too long. When the question feels too big, we often don’t do anything at all; we just carry on, on the travelator of life.’

The situation is exacerbated when, as now, the economy is challenged and new posts are hard to come by. Little wonder many prefer to keep their heads down and stick with a job that no longer satisfies them or, at most, register protest by ‘quiet quitting’ – a Gen Z phenomenon in which you do the bare minimum to fulfil your contract, investing no extra time and effort in a role you dislike.

I turned to Kaye myself when, having recovered from an unexpected health scare, I found myself anxious and unhappy, and wondering whether I needed fundamentally to rethink my life to make it less stressful.

Over the course of six fascinating sessions on Zoom, pushed by Kaye’s gentle yet rigorous questioning and some thought-provoking exercises, we established exactly what I was looking for from my career, articulated my most deeply held values and explored how I could incorporate them more readily into daily life. (For instance, having understood for the first time how important encounters with nature are for my personal happiness, I have committed to a daily walk in the park, a regular fix that sustains me through an intense day of back-to-back meetings.)

The upshot for me was that I found myself falling back in love with my role, demanding as it is. According to Kaye, this happens to more than half of her clients, whom she equips with a toolkit of strategies to use if the going gets tough again. But if the process confirms that you have come to the end of the road professionally, it will help you move on and up with purpose and positivity. And

for all of us, disenchanted or not, now is the perfect moment to career coach yourself, when your out-of-office email is enabled and (hopefully) nothing more onerous awaits than reading a novel on the sun-lounger. Who knows – you might find yourself returning to a completely different desk...

drclairekaye.com



Dr Claire Kaye

DR KAYE'S SEVEN STEPS TO SUCCESS

1 STOP LONG ENOUGH TO HEAR YOURSELF THINK

Set a timer for 10 minutes and sit somewhere with no distractions. Write down everything that feels ‘off’. The aim is to take what has been circling in your head and put it somewhere you can see it.

2 TAKE STOCK OF WHAT IS WORKING AND WHAT IS NOT

Draw two columns. On one side, write: ‘What is giving me energy?’ On the other: ‘What is taking energy?’ Be specific about the moments, tasks and interactions that make up your day. Circle the ones that feel like a priority. These are the areas where change will have the greatest impact.

3 REMEMBER NOT EVERY CROSSROADS MEANS YOU NEED TO LEAVE

Draw a bell-shaped curve. On the left is the beginning of any chapter, when things appear new, stretching and energising. At the top is where you feel capable, challenged and fulfilled. Then, on the right, things shift. You may not be ready to leave, but the job is starting to give less or take more. Further down, it becomes clear that something new is needed. Mark where you are on the curve.

4 TAKE A LONGER VIEW BEFORE MAKING A SHORT-TERM DECISION

Write a short paragraph as if you were five years in the future, looking back on this point in your life. Begin with: ‘I am so glad I...’ Then continue: ‘I wish I hadn’t...’ Finish by asking, ‘If nothing changed over this time, how would that feel?’ This tends to reveal what matters.

5 SEPARATE YOUR OWN THOUGHTS FROM EVERYBODY ELSE'S NOISE

Take a blank page and divide it in two. Title one side: ‘What I want.’ Title the other: ‘What I think I should want.’ Write freely into both. Then go back and cross out anything in the second column that does not feel right for you.

6 SET ONE BOUNDARY THAT CREATES MORE SPACE

Identify an area that is consistently taking more than it gives. Choose one action: reduce it, delegate it or stop it altogether. One well-held boundary can shift far more than you expect.

7 TAKE A SMALL STEP, EVEN IF YOU DON'T FEEL READY

Write down three low-risk steps you could make towards something new. Choose one and act on it within the next 48 hours. Momentum builds trust in yourself. Often, that is the very thing that has been missing. □