



Just Woman @ AsiaOne

She teaches execs how to beat burnout

Beating a fatigue syndrome inspired Samantha Keen to set up business teaching other stressed execs how to avoid burning out themselves. Shefali Srinivas reports.

Shefali Srinivas

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Chronic fatigue and burnout syndrome is an increasingly common condition among professionals in their 30s.

But financial journalist Samantha Keen was only in her 20s when the debilitating symptoms of exhaustion, insomnia and heavy flu surfaced.

She decided that a radical change in lifestyle was vital if she was to regain control of her life and her health.

Now 35, she has recovered fully and runs a company called Vital Switch with her partner Stefan Gorzkiewicz, 41, in London. It helps people in corporate setups use meditation as a way of becoming more focused and alert at work.

Ms Keen has also written a book about chronic fatigue and burnout syndrome.

While most meditation techniques are aimed purely at relaxation, MsKeen told Mind Your Body that the ones she has developed are focused more on waking up and channelling energy to the task at hand.

"Meditation gives people the ability to stand away from their ordinary busy state of mind. This ability to stand apart from the chaos of daily life is one major factor in actively increasing alertness," she said.

Ms Keen's aim is to help people strengthen their positive communication skills so that they can remain in control of their emotions when they face conflict or feel under pressure.

Her company takes ancient principles and remoulds them for today's corporate environment, showing people how to develop clarity and inner strength.

Stress at work is a major cause of workplace turnover. The United States (US) Bureau of National Affairs reports that 40per cent of job turnover is due to stress.

The United Kingdom's (UK) Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says work-related stress is a major occupational health issue and accounts for over a third of all new incidences of ill health, with each case leading to an average of 30.9 working days lost per year.

A total of 12.8million working days was lost to stress, depression and anxiety in the 2004/5 financial year in the UK, it said.

Ms Keen has trained at the Clairvision School of Meditation in Sydney which was set up by French psychiatrist Dr Samuel Sagan, who was heavily influenced by ancient eastern philosophies on meditation.

One of the central themes in this school of meditation is "qi" or life force and managing it to gain access to inner stillness and relief from the tension of the usual state of mind.

Ms Keen said that the most hard-nosed corporate types are usually sceptical of this concept, but tend to benefit after a few sessions.

It is not only a set of techniques that she teaches, but also ways of thinking and perceiving work situations. For instance, she describes a technique called "uplifting" that can be practised at the computer, or anywhere that people tend to feel tired and heavy for no apparent reason.

"This is an exercise that teaches people how to lift up heavy tiredness that comes with afternoon fatigue. (A mix of meditation techniques, stretches and posture exercises.)

"There are more exercises like this for communication, vitality management and creating focus and clarity," she said.

For the last four years, Ms Keen and MrGorzkiwicz have conducted meditation workshops in Europe, Australia, Singapore and the US for companies as well as individuals.

They were in Singapore recently to conduct a workshop at Saxon Financials, a company that provides training and support to traders in Singapore.

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