



Working Rhythm

by **Chris J. Magyar**

Kathy Loh helps people reinvent their lives.
Can her methods reinvent business as well?

What if business contained the same delightful buzz as a first kiss? What if work contained the same power as the ringing note of a soprano in a concert hall? How would life change if the things you do for money felt like the things you do for fun? The divide made between business and pleasure is illusory, once one realizes that life is all made of the same energy. Energy is Kathy Loh's business and her pleasure. She has taken the old pursuit of happiness and amplified it. She follows bliss.

Loh is a life and relationship coach. A cursory glance at that job title might lead the more serious-minded among us to wonder what that has to do with work, with business, with the ordeal of making a living? But that, in all seriousness, is precisely what Loh offers: help in making a living. As she puts it, "Coaching is about reinventing your life."

When it comes to business, Loh coaches teams the same way she might coach a personal relationship: by treating the relationship—or the group's dynamic—as an entity that is reinventing itself constantly. This requires each member of the team to direct the usual techniques of self-awareness toward the energy of the shared consciousness of the group. This certainly doesn't sound like 'business,' but don't let the language fool you. As philosopher Ken Wilber once said, "We are moving out of the information age and into the storytelling age."

This notion is backed up by the work of eminent sociologist Charles Tilly, whose recent book "Why?" introduced his theory of social interaction to the general public. In short, the Columbia University professor has delineated, through his work, five types of communication that humans engage in, especially when dealing with problems. Two are quite basic: convention uses clichés and common wisdom to overcome an obstacle (in response to a car accident: "he came out of nowhere"), and ritualistic interpretation does a similar thing while placing more emphasis on a greater force ("God kept you safe in the crash"). Two require specialized language: technical explanations come from intensive study (a mechanical explanation of the brake failure that led to the accident), and coded explanations come from the structures of governmental organization (the police officer testifying in court that one driver ran a red light). The fifth type is storytelling, and this is the type Tilly believes holds the key to many reasons for human behavior. The narratives of the drivers in the accident are likely to be the explanation we'd turn to for the "truth" about what happened.

Here's where this notion merges with the business world, and with the model of coaching Loh espouses. Business has expanded primarily on advances in the areas of technical and coded

communication for quite some time. The industrial age and the information age can be described as the propagation and refinement of technical knowledge (expansion of higher education, creation of machinery, spread of instant communication) and coded knowledge (government regulation of business, codification of stock market, stabilization of currency as a commodity to itself). In other words, from where we sit today, technical knowledge and coded knowledge are cheaper than ever before. The answers to the most arcane problems are at our fingertips. With these efficiencies achieved, what is the next level business can go to?

Maximizing the effectiveness of the relationship entity every company, division and team create; by turning to storytelling. Tilly describes the storytelling type of communication as the process of giving reasons, putting people and motives into play in a way that no other type does. He does not imply there is a hierarchy to the five types—each type has its time and place of usefulness. It is apparent, however, that storytelling is undervalued and underestimated in the world of business.

Group dynamics are discovered and reinvented largely by storytelling. "[In a business setting] I'm not coaching any one person individually," says Loh. "I'm coaching the entity



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which is the group. There is something that the team needs, and it might show up in you one moment, and it might show up in someone else the next. So when we work with teams, we make sure every voice is heard.

“Every member of the team is contributing something to the energy,” she adds.

Energizer

Loh knows energy. She practically exudes it, but not in the sense that a hard-charging salesperson or a

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gregarious preacher exudes energy. She has sharply defined facial features and expressive pale eyes, and a way of sitting that creates space for her small frame to move about in. When she leans forward, to make a point or to listen closely, she brings her space with her.

She is a certified master in the Usui method of Reiki, a Japanese tradition of spiritual healing that deals in the manipulation of the way energy flows through the body. Loh claims to practice Reiki on herself every night without fail in order to remain as centered and present as she can. She has also deeply studied Shamanism and Vipassana meditation. She will be embarking soon upon a study, in New Mexico, of the White Eagle Medicine Wheel, a healing tradition based on Native American beliefs.

Not that the energy Loh talks about is all as esoteric as that. “If you think about it, this table is energy,” she says, placing her hands flat upon the surface. “We know that,

scientifically. The molecules are just more tightly packed than the ones in the air above it. But it’s all energy. Everything is vibration. Everything is vibrating all the time.

“Money is an exchange of energy, not just a perk,” she adds. One of her main goals is to teach artists and healers that their services deserve payment, something other business-people take for granted. “Artists and healers are an integral part of culture and society,” she says.

Loh’s own experiences as an artist and teacher form an important part of her coaching methodology. She studied music at the University of California Santa Barbara, eventually earning a master’s degree in music theory, and her compositions for voice, chamber orchestra, and strings have all been performed, with one string quartet piece winning the top award from the Music Teacher’s Association of California. She taught piano, voice and composition for 16 years from her self-run music studio, and has also had a hand in such

diverse artistic disciplines as dance choreography, photography, creative writing and theater.

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Her work in music and the performance arts has also taught her the value of physical movement as a learning tool. “When I work with people, we don’t just work here,” she says, pointing to her temple. “We move around. The body learns faster than the mind does.”

Indeed, Loh’s advice is intended to create action rather than talk, despite the fact that the majority of her coaching is done via telephone. Even the talking is phrased in terms of “co-activity,” or the idea that conversation is more like dance than mere dialogue. The push and pull of co-active coaching creates its own energy. “Co-activity is based on four basic rules,” Loh says. “First, the client is a naturally creative and whole person. Second, nobody gets to be wrong ... there’s 5 percent truth in everything. Third, the agenda always comes from the client. And fourth, the relationship is a designed alliance.” On that last point, she adds that a coach is only a small part of the change a client decides to undertake.

The client-driven nature of the co-active process may be part of the reason coaching hasn’t yet gained widespread renown as a valuable service. “It’s taking the world a while to understand the value of coaching,” Loh admits. She also admits that just about anyone can hang out a shingle and claim to be a life coach. While there are regulatory bodies that

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train and maintain standards for coaches—such as the umbrella organization the International Coach Federation and the Coaches Training Institute, both of which Loh has been certified by—a good amount of coaching expertise comes from a person's life experiences and intuition.

For her part, Loh has pursued a life of curious wandering. In 2004, she jumped in her van and drove on a journey, alone, trusting in the universe to provide what she might need. As a number of mysterious coincidences kept her going—including a hiker who happened to have a spare memory card for her camera when it became full at Crater Lake, and a gas station attendant who happened to have the correct plug adapter for her RV's electrical generator—she began to realize anew that knowing *how* needs are met is not nearly as necessary as knowing *what* is needed.

She tells another story of a scavenger hunt, in which one stranger on the streets happened to be able to provide the two most difficult items on her group's list: an owl feather and a voided traffic violation. "I like to be at the beck and call of spirit," she says. "When I feel my whole being aligning in a certain direction, I take it." This is what she means by following her bliss.

Loh has always been interested in helping others, and briefly considered becoming a psychiatrist before realizing, as she puts it with tongue in cheek, "I really wanted to work with people who were well." The difference between coaching and therapy is key, actually. While the line can sometimes be blurry, and some coaches will offer both, Loh asserts that there is still a significant difference. "A person who walks through a therapist's door sees themselves as essentially sick. A person who walks through a coach's door does not."

That's not to say that people who seek the aid of coaches don't have serious stumbling blocks to overcome. Loh is particularly interested in helping people let go of their inner victim. This is another area where storytelling is particularly valuable. "When people are sitting around in a circle and telling their stories," she says, "you can hear all the victim and martyr archetypes coming out. But once you look at the people who have hurt you as your teachers, you can begin to let go of the victim."

Trusting that needs will be met, concentrating on shared consciousness, storytelling, letting go—these are not the typical priorities of business. But if these concepts can help heal ourselves and our personal relationships, why couldn't they be beneficial in a professional setting as well? The keys to bliss are an integral part of life, all of it, and there are coaches who hold them. Kathy Loh puts her hands flat on the surface of the table again and says, her pale eyes steady, "Energy is never stuck."

Kathy Loh will be speaking at the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce Women in Business Conference, May 17, on the topic of "Business Strategies for Artists, Creative Types, and Healers." For more information about her Visionary Spirit coaching services, visit www.coachkathy.com or call 423-3306.



Editor's note: GT looks at the life of businesswoman Colleen Crosby of Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Company (pictured right, with daughter Sarah).

Colleen Crosby

1950–2006

“I believe in dignity,” she said, in a video played at the memorial service last Sunday, May 7. The overwhelmed parish hall of Our Lady Star of the Sea was hushed, each member of her circle of friends and family eager to hear these words. “When people see economic misery, they react with fear. Just as they react with fear when they enter a cancer ward. But it is not with fear that we must interact with others. It is with an awareness of their dignity.”

Colleen Crosby, co-founder of the Santa Cruz Coffee Roasting Company and international advocate for fair trade, will be remembered for her unflagging effort to treat everyone she met with dignity and an infatuating smile. In the course of her business, she travelled the globe to foster personal relationships with impoverished coffee farmers in Colombia, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, and elsewhere. She was a pioneer and early architect of the fair trade network, which seeks to pay sustainable wages to workers in countries where the vagaries of the commodities market have destroyed the value of their crops. In 2002, she testified before Congress about the necessity of fair trade practices with Colombian coffee farmers, who were under increasing pressure to cultivate cocaine in order to make ends meet, though that devil’s bargain would mean sacrificing their sons to the drug lord armies.

When Crosby made her trips—more than a dozen in all—she didn’t go to meet politicians and dignitaries alone; she always gravitated toward the people most affected by her business, making indelible connections along the way. A series of photo collages lined the walls of the parish hall, showing Crosby making connections around the world with people of every background and hue. One photo even showed her posing with a group of Somali warlords, who happened to be staying at a hotel in Kenya at the same time as her. The topic of their conversation? Peace.

Friends remembered the way she used classes on coffee tasting to teach not just technique, but to have a fiery passion for coffee. Fire and warmth were constant touchstones in every speech and letter. A Nicaraguan farmer named Fatima sent a letter to the memorial, which was read in Spanish and translated into English. In it, Fatima told of the departed Crosby, “Distance means nothing when sending the warmth of friendship.” In another letter, Harry Belafonte remembered the sparkle in her smile.

In a typical stand of dignity, she turned the pain of her cancer diagnosis on its head, calling it “a hard gift to receive.” Though her life was cut tragically short, it will be measured by the many livelihoods—and lives—she influenced. She made the most noble stand a businessperson in this economy can make: she refused to exploit her suppliers. As she stated in the video, “Accomplishments don’t come from isolated actions. Achievements come from the interactions and relationships we have with each other.”

People often say that life isn’t fair. Colleen Crosby lived hers as if it were. Her passing is a hard gift to receive for her loved ones and this community, but she left something in trade: the magnificent idea that, maybe, life should be fair. **I CJM**