

“Provides a real insight into the variety of paths people have taken to become successful coaches ... each coach's story demonstrates both the importance of learning from failure and being grateful for life's opportunities.”

*Amechi Udo, Author of **Choosing A Coaching Course That's Right For You** and **Inspired To Coach***

a Coach's Story

**REVEALING INSIGHTS INTO
LIFE AS A PROFESSIONAL COACH**

Gerard O'Donovan 

A Coach's Story

**“Don't ask yourself what the world needs.
Ask yourself what makes you come alive,
and go do that...
because what the world needs is
people who come alive!”**

— Dr. Howard Thurman

Finding Your Nirvana through Helping Others

Arvind Devalia

Have you ever wondered how you might make the world a better place? How you can somehow make a difference to the people around you and at the same time have a fabulous life yourself? I have been asking myself this question all of my life. Some time ago, I realized it was up to me... up to all of us... to make it happen.

From my childhood days in Kenya, when I used to give away my pencils to poor African children, to the many weeks I spent helping at a charity school in South India, I felt called to do something for others. Call it destiny or fate - it seems I was born to contribute and make a difference to others – and coaching allows me to do just that.

My family immigrated to England in the seventies. At school, I got into playing badminton and squash and reached quite a high standard. However, I quite often ended up coaching my opponents about where they were going wrong. Eventually, some of them even beat me, much to my chagrin. But I didn't mind really. I was always the one people confided in and asked for advice. I was seen as the wise one. Little did they know!

It was only years later, when I came across the concept of life coaching, that it became my profession. I finally began to formally apply all those latent skills.

It all began so unexpectedly. I was a hyperactive, driven guy working in the dot com boom era around the late 90's. Helping others was the furthest thing from my mind. In the late eighties and early nineties, I worked in a bank where the prevailing culture was "greed is king". I was well versed in that philosophy.

So where did it all change and how did I go on to become a coach and a best-selling author, with books and a blog that have inspired thousands?

Journey to Nirvana

My journey into coaching began in South India, thanks to the kindness of one man who completely changed my life. As often happens, people show us great kindness and yet are not even aware of the impact they have as a result of their kind deed.

Mr. Roy, a driver working for a hotel in Chennai, South India, is one such person who made a huge difference to my life and that of many others by his dedication to duty and sheer perseverance in getting me to my destination.

Many years ago, well before I was on the life path I am now, I visited Nirvana School in Pondicherry for the first time. From Chennai, this is around eighty miles and, on a good day, the journey takes about two hours by road.

We flew into Chennai from North India and somehow got caught up in the heaviest rainfall I have ever experienced. Our planned stay at a beach hotel for a few days was curtailed and we decided to return to North India after just a couple of days. I had been told about this remarkable charity, the Nirvana School in Pondicherry, opened by a Gujarati lady from the UK, Mrs. Samani. It seemed like a good opportunity to go and visit despite the heavy rain.

So we set off early the next morning. Mr. Roy, our driver, was a jovial, wiry and diminutive man, in his splendid white attire befitting a top hotel chauffeur. We had already phoned Mrs. Samani at the school about our planned visit and she was expecting us for lunch well before mid-day. She planned to show us the school and some of the local sights around Pondicherry.

Little did we know what adventures awaited us along the eighty mile journey!

Soon after leaving Chennai, the rain got heavier and, at times, we could hardly see the road in front of us. There was brown, muddy water everywhere and it seemed like the heavens were releasing some pent up fury as the rain lashed down all around us with equally ferocious streaks of lightening. Yet Mr. Roy was completely unflappable and drove along just like it was another day's work for him - which indeed it was. I marveled at his driving confidence and awareness about the road ahead. Or, maybe it was foolhardiness.

As we drove along, the water in the road must have been about a foot deep and yet, our white Maruti car cut through the pools and lakes rapidly sprouting up all around us. Three hours into our journey, it seemed we could go no further. However, Mr. Roy calmly turned off the main highway and soon got us back on track via umpteen short cuts and diversions. This went on for a while and it felt as if we had hardly even left Chennai yet. Maybe Pondicherry was not in our kismet this time round.

At this point, we suggested to Mr. Roy that perhaps we should turn back and plan the trip for another day, or stop and take refuge in a temple in one of the picturesque villages. But he simply smiled and assured us he would get us to Nirvana School. He already knew how important it was for us to get to Pondicherry. Looking back now, it was almost as if he had a sense of destiny about that trip.

Over the next three hours, Mr. Roy drove us through many more angry walls of rainfall, muddy lakes and sodden villages. It was nature's fury unleashed, and wading through it all was this smiling, white clad man who just kept going and going. His persistence and faith in getting us there was reassuring and awe inspiring.

We eventually arrived in Pondicherry, over six hours after setting out from Chennai. Almost magically, the sun came out when we finally found Nirvana School. It was just like the movies, when the sun comes out at the end and all is well.

Alas, the heavy rainfall and resulting flooding over the previous twenty-four hours had meant very few children were actually attending school that day. We had a very brief tour of the school followed by a hasty lunch as we had to get back on the road to Chennai before it got too dark. I promised Mrs. Samani that one day I would visit the school and stay longer than ninety minutes. A few years later, I did just that. It really was a pre-destined visit.

Mr. Roy, replenished after a light lunch and an even lighter snooze in the Maruti, assured us the rain was subsiding and the journey back home would be much quicker and smoother. He chose to take a slightly different route back, along a coastal road rather than the main highway, which he had conquered in the morning. The scenery in the dusk was incredibly beautiful and reminded me of the many paintings my father painted years before. This was rural India at its best and I will always remember the

images of villagers in the distance returning home with their pots, firewood and pouches on their head.

The journey home back to Chennai was indeed much smoother and quicker as the rain subsided and the night drew in. We arrived back in time for dinner and Mr. Roy was still buzzing and unflappable till the end. As he said, it was nothing... all in a day's work. We could not thank him enough for taking us to Nirvana school and for what he had done for us, as who knew when we would be able to return to that part of the world again?

I didn't see Mr. Roy again on that visit to Chennai, as the next morning we left for Bangalore. Yet the impact of his kindness did not simply end with his absence. Nor did it impact only us who visited Nirvana School on that fateful day.

Mr. Roy's contribution to my life is even bigger than simply introducing me to Nirvana School. As a result of my time at the school, I was drawn to working more directly with people and first came across the concept of life coaching as a career.

This new vocation took me away from the world of IT and led me to publish four books. I began writing on the Internet about topics to "make it happen" in the world and in your life, thereby spreading the ripple effect of Mr. Roy's kindness even further.

Roll on a couple of years after that initial trip with Mr. Roy. My life situation allowed me to visit India for two months and I was able to fulfil my pledge to Mrs. Samani and visit Nirvana School for a much longer period. In fact, I stayed with her in Pondicherry for a month.

My journey from a hyperactive, stressed out, self centered guy suffering all sorts of stress-related ailments to a chilled out, laid back, worldly wise man was almost complete during that month.

The month at Nirvana School indeed felt like a month in Nirvana. I became a different person. Working with children and people seemed like my true vocation. I left heavy hearted when it was time to leave, but clear that one day I wanted to do more of this type of work of service.

I also knew I would return to Nirvana School many more times. My commitment to the school has become my own way of returning the kindness shown to me by so many others in my life and, of course, Mr. Roy.

Experiencing Unconditional Love for the First Time

During that month at Nirvana School, there was one particular experience that changed my life and my career forever. I spent that time simply being amongst the school children and the local people. It proved to be a most fulfilling time and ultimately paved the way for a new career in life coaching.

A friend back in London had donated some money to feed sweets to orphans, and so I ended up in this orphanage in Pondicherry within a Catholic-run hospital. We took large Indian sweets called laddoo and were taken by the sister in charge to visit six orphan kids who were watching TV on what seemed like a massive sofa. They instantly jumped up and gave us their rapt attention. The sister who accompanied us simply handed over the laddoo whilst, in my western naivety, I searched around for bowls and spoons!

I almost felt foolish as the kids looked at us with grateful eyes. I was convinced they were mocking me and my western garb. I was wearing far too many clothes for the steamy weather and I probably looked quite strange to them in my western trainers and sunhat. Soon the laddoos were gone and the sister explained how two of the children were brother and sister, and how they had been found abandoned outside the hospital main entrance several years earlier. Instinctively, I picked up the little girl and placed her on a chair and began playing with her. She gurgled and her mischievous eyes seemed to twinkle with delight.

At that moment, time seemed to come to a standstill. Nothing else mattered except this little girl. I was lost in her presence. After a few seconds that seemed an eternity, I instinctively looked up. And there, right in front of me, was the catholic sister, looking back at me with sheer joy and love on her face. Our eyes locked and melted together into an ocean of compassion. The look in the sister's all-knowing eyes reassured me it was okay to feel what I was feeling...it was safe and perfectly okay to be openly loving and kind.

In those few moments, I learnt what it meant to be human. I learnt what it felt like to truly show compassion, love and kindness.

That was probably my first experience of unconditional love towards a total stranger. That little, innocent, helpless, orphan girl had captured my heart just like that.

As tears streamed from my eyes, I knew then I had found my calling and my path. My journey of contribution and service began in those few amazing moments of bliss, love and joy.

Life was never the same for me again after that. Looking back to that magical day, everything else pales in insignificance. I returned to London and underwent major life changes very quickly.

The rest is history, as they say. I have been involved with Nirvana School for almost ten years now and it has been an immensely fulfilling experience for me. So many people have visited the school as volunteers after being enrolled and have been inspired by my passion for the school. Others have been equally passionate and very generous with their financial support.

In Life, Always Go the Extra Mile, Like Mr. Roy

It is not just the children of Nirvana School that benefitted in the long term from Mr. Roy's kindness that fateful day. It is indeed the whole community and many other people in my life who have been impacted as a result of my own involvement in the school. It is the classic ripple effect of a single act of kindness affecting so many lives over many years in a positive way.

And whatever happened to kind Mr. Roy?

Well, the last time I visited Pondicherry, I stayed in the same hotel in Chennai prior to returning to London. Alas, Mr. Roy no longer worked there, but somehow the hotel staff traced him for me. Fortunately, he remembered me from many years before and it was really good to see him again.

Mr. Roy looked just the same and it was touching how he brought along the letter of thanks we had sent him from England after that life-changing trip to Pondicherry. This time around, I made sure I got a photograph of the two of us as a permanent reminder of the man who so unknowingly changed my life and impacted the lives of so many others.

So there we are – my own incredible journey to Nirvana. And I am sure there are many more adventures along the way. All thanks to Mr. Roy's kindness in getting me started in the first place, well beyond the call of duty. He certainly went the extra mile for us.

As I always say to everyone, next time you have a chance to show some kindness or go the extra mile, do so without any hesitation. You just don't know what impact your actions will make and how many lives you will change for the better. And of course, remember – there are no traffic jams on the extra mile!

Coaching and Writing – Tools of Empowerment

Two years after my exquisite experience of unconditional love, I came across the concept of life coaching and realised it was just what I had been searching for as a vehicle for helping others. Even finding out about coaching was accidental, as I stumbled across some exhibition booths advertising coaching schools.

Since I began coaching, I have written and published three books, as well as writing a newspaper column and running a major online blog. I realised that, through my coaching, I could only reach so many people. But through my books and my blogging, I could change many more lives. My second book, *Get the Life You Love and Live it*, became a real labour of love as I poured my heart and soul into writing it. This book is like a life manual about living a life with purpose, commitment and making a difference to yourself and others in whatever way works for you.

Coaching is indeed a powerful tool for empowering change - – and passionate, inspired writing can truly help people find and follow their passion. Through serving and helping others, you yourself ultimately become more fulfilled, joyous and happy.

I am passionate about people and making a difference to others whilst of course at the same time having a great life myself - I am committed to a life of contribution, connection and celebration. And I am convinced that, ultimately, we all want the same.

My Own Coaching Insights

Often, we take the best path needed for our own development. Through coaching others and seeing what holds people back -- and more importantly, what brings them alive -- I have had many of my own insights.

Whilst participating in my initial training as a coach, I found the training to be so much fun and insightful. For the first time in my life, training of any sort did not feel like work! It really felt like I had arrived. In the last few years, I have learnt so much about people and human nature – we really are fascinating beings if only we take the time to take a back seat and let people simply ‘be’.

For me, the most profound and powerful learning from coaching has been that it is okay for me and others to let their light shine. We all hold back so much, and yet we have so much to offer the world. If only more people around the world could allow their own light to shine and be the best they can be. What a different world we could create!

I have also learnt that our journey through life is to gain greater awareness and ultimately discover there is nothing that needs fixing. Coming from a place of nothing is wrong, opens up a whole new world that we can create as we wish. At the same time, it is okay; in fact, acceptable, to strive to be the best we can.

What I Believe In

Through coaching, I have developed a specific set of beliefs:

- 1. We can all have abundant, peaceful and happy lives.*
- 2. We are here to make the most of what we have and leave the world a better place than we found it. This includes creating financial abundance for ourselves, living healthy lives and having loving relationships.*
- 3. Everyone has a right to live with dignity and respect.*
- 4. There is no limit to our ingenuity in improving the lives of our fellow human beings – we just need the will and desire to do so.*
- 5. Ultimately, we all want to live peaceful lives of contribution and make a difference to others in some way.*
- 6. We are here for a short time on the earth and it is up to each one of us to create a lasting legacy for those who will follow us.*
- 7. Though we may face challenging (and at times, seemingly impossible) odds, we will ultimately prevail and the world will be a better, more just and safer place!*

My coaching and my writing are focussed on putting the above beliefs into practice and helping many more people. What can you do with your life to do the same for others?

Leaving the World a Better Place

I now know that all of us have the same desire and calling to leave the world better. At the same time, we all wish to grow in our own lives and make the most of our time here.

Coaching allows you to do just that – and if, through coaching, I can help at least one person live a better, more meaningful life, then I will have succeeded with my own mission.

My ultimate aim is for all of us to lead happy, fulfilling lives whilst we all do the best we can without harming those around us and the environment. At the same time, I believe that, by being the best we can, we fulfill our destiny on earth and leave the world a better place.

Surely that is not too much to ask for?!

Some Final Words

Remember that your life counts – and make it count.

You are unique – there is no one like you on this planet

Never has been and never will be.

Do not sell your self short.

Do not sell the world short.

This is your life – love it, live it.

One life, one chance – grab it.

Get the life you love – and live it.