

Coach and inspirational speaker, **Kiki Maurey**, has worked hard to promote diversity among black and ethnic minorities and women. An OBE was certainly a welcome surprise, but she had no intention of resting on her laurels. Liz Hall finds out why

I'M STILL STANDING

When a letter arrived last summer from Her Majesty's Government notifying Kiki Maurey that she was to be awarded an OBE, she thought it was a hoax.

"I read it and I thought, 'Yeah, right... if it's not Saga, it's a practical joke'. I laughed, then looked at the postmark and thought, 'Oh, my God!'"

The OBE was for "services to women and minority groups in business". It was certainly well deserved. Executive coach, mentor and motivational speaker, Maurey has worked tirelessly to promote diversity, presenting to women's and black & minority ethnic (BME) groups, working on bodies, including the national Ethnic Minority Business Task Force launched by Minister Margaret Hodge, set up to help foster

growth and boost economic participation among BME firms and entrepreneurs.

Her commitment to inclusivity has been fuelled, in part, by having suffered 'horrific' discrimination during her early years. This hasn't stopped her from pursuing a varied career that has included 23 years in policy and management consultancy, part-time senior roles, plus plenty of board experience, including being chair.

Once she had recovered from the shock, Maurey was decidedly over the moon about the OBE, enjoying the investiture at Windsor Castle enormously, taking along three client-friends and meeting one of her heroines, lesbian TV presenter Clare Balding: "I've got lots of gay and lesbian friends and I told her how much we love her."

However, despite basking in the glory, Maurey saw the accolade as a nudge to do even more.

"I work with lots of award-winning organisations and clients but I'm not someone that personally ever wins anything. So this was the icing on the cake, telling me that 'actually, you're on the right journey'. And saying, 'OK, but there's a responsibility here to continue to bring out the best in others, and also to continue my own spiritual journey.'"

She might not have seen the OBE coming, but unlike many others, she did predict the economic crisis, prompting her to make a strategic decision to move from management consultancy into executive coaching.

"For me, the mid-noughties boom was a real trigger (to train as a coach). I'd studied economics a few times and I thought, 'It won't last'. Sure enough, every single client in the public and private sector went up in smoke."

Like many, she says she had been coaching and mentoring informally for years before deciding to work professionally as a coach. "Because of my complex and unusual background, people would always approach me and ask how I changed my life. I'd end up being an informal

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mentor for people wanting to explore their challenges.”

Letting go

Maurey spent 15 years in care as a child. She became pregnant and got married at 16, working as an office cleaner until she was in her late twenties. “You wouldn’t believe what I’ve been through in terms of racism and hard times, but I’m still standing and it’s OK. I think that inspires confidence in my clients... that I’ve overcome some horrendous odds.

“So it’s not surprising that I’ve had a very non-traditional career. I worked hard at keeping the roof over our heads and it was a huge, huge struggle. Everything in my life that could go wrong has gone wrong so my starting point is that ‘life sucks’, but at the same time life can be magical and also rather funny. Resilience comes from the realisation that we can’t always control what happens to us, but we can learn that we have a choice over how we respond. People know a little of what I’ve been through so they trust me with their journey.”

In September 2008, Maurey embarked on OCM’s Advanced Diploma in Coach-Mentoring “all but chucking out of the window” everything she had done in consultancy. She earned a distinction. That year was the best year ever for her management consultancy business. “But I knew it would start to tip over.” And it did.

Coaching suits her: “I know I am completely unemployable. I now understand myself and what motivates me, and being a coach-speaker meets my needs for risk-taking, autonomy and creativity.”

More recently, Maurey split from her long-term partner. “That was a difficult thing to let unravel, but doing so has made space for amazing things to happen. I now

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support clients to explore what happens when you ‘let go’ and work with a different kind of energy.

“The idea that the coach can leave all of themselves and be totally objective is absolutely the opposite of what I believe in. I read lots on quantum philosophy and people like Danah Zohar” (co-author of *SQ: Connecting with Our Spiritual Intelligence, Bloomsbury, 2001*).

Significant journey

“I believe we are all connected, and understanding that gives us a responsibility as coaches to look at, work with and use the energy in the room, both in ourselves and in those with whom we work.

“All this experience feeds who I am philosophically... the fact that life sucks, but you don’t have to be a victim, you have the freedom to decide how you respond to certain challenges and disasters. And the fact that we are all utterly unique.”

When Maurey entered coaching, she had a sense she was embarking on a significant journey, but she didn’t realise it would be quite as

big. “(Doing the diploma) was a phenomenal experience.”

“(The programme) changed my life. It enabled me to take it all – my energy, philosophy and psychological approaches – into a model of me in a coaching context. I knew that would help me with my profile, presence and reputation at a time when so many people were becoming redundant and thinking they will become a coach. The professional pressure on a start-up coach is huge.”

She recalls a “wonderful session” with David Clutterbuck just before she decided to train with OCM: “He talked about ‘managed eclecticism’, and how we can have a number of tools and approaches, but when we start working at the top of our tree, we’re able to work through tools, but go with the flow. It seemed like a tall order, but now it’s in my coaching DNA and it’s magical.”

One framework that is Maurey’s bedrock is founder of OCM, Eric Parsloe’s Situational Continuum, particularly as she is a “systems-minded person”. However, she is trying to hold back from pinning down her coaching approach, despite being “very good” at creating models.

This is one area where I want to develop differently and I’m thinking, ‘What would happen if you didn’t have any need for constructs?’... just empty all that stuff out and see what happens. Be there in the moment.”

She acknowledges this can be





hard “because we want to professionalise the coaching profession”.

“When I started coaching, I was there struggling to apply the GROW model or Skilled Helper model. I was getting upset and unconfident; it felt idiotic and forced. Not long after, I would feel the pressure of an invisible hand on my shoulder urging me to ‘let go’ of the tools and try working differently.

“I think each of us has a strong pearl inside – our soul’s intelligence – and I think mine was trying to connect with me as an emergent coach. The pearl of wisdom is subsumed because we’re living in a world of ‘outside-in thinking’ due to our consumerist existence.”

She finds she is very able to tune into her clients: “I’m not sure if it’s a spiritual state, but it is one of watchfulness and awareness, which allows me to read skin tone, feelings and heart rate. People often say, ‘I don’t know how you knew that, nobody else knows that about me’. If we can get our egos and tools out of the way, this creates a space for us to connect with people in a very different, but deeply human way.”

Maurey may talk in spiritual terms, but she is highly grounded in the business world. She has run

business growth programmes for more than 7,000 small business owners, including for Barclays and Business Link, and was programme facilitator for the first cohort of Goldman Sachs’ 10,000 Small Businesses programme at Aston Business School.

She studied politics and sociology as a mature student, and has an MBA from Warwick Business School. Her current clients include: Langland Healthcare Advertising, Merrill Lynch, Nationwide, the Cabinet Office, the RBS Group, including Lombard and Coutts.

Finding fulfilment

Maurey says the saving grace of being in care was that she had access to a library and read everything she could, including about female heroines, such as Marie Curie and Helen Keller. “These strong, positive women really inspired me.”

Unsurprisingly, diversity is still very much on the agenda in much of her work. “I have a view on how important diversity and the integration of difference is on many levels, having been through some horrific discrimination, right up until the nineties. So I’m very committed to sharing that journey

with women and men who want change, not only for themselves, but for their children.

“Things have changed hugely in my lifetime. Corporates are keen to look at diversity more seriously. Growing up, I was very interested in US civil rights and Martin Luther King. As a very young black woman I even read tracts by leaders of the US Black Panthers. This was about civil and human rights.”

“But now there is a business case for more diversity on boards to reflect society at large and (to fight) the war for talent. We have to be proactive about how we support women to move up the pipeline, for example. Post-credit crunch and amid all the other financial scandals and mis-governance, a light is shining, showing that if you have a mixed board, better quality decision-making will result.”

Absolute best

Maurey is increasingly in demand from male clients. “I am weirdly finding that being a senior black woman is becoming an advantage, perhaps after Obama did the seemingly impossible.

“I’m not an ex-CEO or a psychologist, but I am developing a reputation for putting grit in people’s oysters and then having the pearl reveal itself.”

When she is not out with clients or in her loft office, Maurey tends to her garden or rides her horses in the New Forest. She had been in a children’s home in the New Forest when she was 12. “The home was horrible, but when I saw the ponies, I fell in love with the place. Horses are my spiritual token.”

She is now in her 60s and has “never been so fulfilled”. “This is the one profession where age and wisdom can add value... I’m opening up to be my absolute best – and still discovering what that is.” ■