

## The Good, the Bad and the Fabulous! By Dee Coxon



As a former hairdresser and beauty therapist and having been self-employed all of my working life, I've never worked in a corporate or public sector environment and until fairly recently hadn't realised how lucky I was to be in that position.

Being self-employed has many obvious benefits, although I couldn't have known that having the time and space to manage menopause would be a key benefit.

I say fairly recently because, although it's a few years since menopause first entered my life at 43, it's only since making a mid-life career change that I've met women from the corporate and public sector whose meno - journey has been entirely different from mine and certainly made more difficult by the fact they didn't have the freedom within the workplace to manage their own menopause transition.

In my case, and once I knew what was happening to me, I was able to put things in place that not only made me more comfortable both physically and mentally, but made those around me more comfortable too, and I didn't have to seek permission or have difficult conversations in order to achieve that.

At work I had an all-female team which made things easier and at home my husband was beyond understanding.

Yes, I was unlucky in that, in the beginning I did have a lot of adverse symptoms (thankfully not every woman does). These symptoms were incredibly debilitating, embarrassing and at times very distressing for all involved. However, what I didn't have to do was remain in an environment that elevated my symptoms simply because I was contractually obliged to be there and couldn't escape.

During this early phase I was able to take time off work and spend it in the gym or walking. I walked a lot, in fact for miles, because I'd begun talking to myself and walking allowed me to have long uninterrupted conversations with me, which strangely enough I enjoyed, along with the fogging and mental vacating, so long as I was alone.

Once I returned to work and, being in the hair and beauty business at that time, my appearance was key. Unfortunately, my flushes often occurred between six and eight am so it wasn't unusual for me to have to shower and do my hair and makeup three times before I eventually got out the door... it was exhausting and making me repeatedly late for work.

So I moved to flexible working hours, because while an episode would absolutely wipe me out, once it eventually passed I was good to go and able to meet my obligations; rather than lose full days, or take sick leave, flexibility was the answer and served me, my team and my business well. These flexible hours didn't just help me past the flushes. There were times when anxiety and a feeling of complete helplessness overtook me and to be able to remain at home while this presented was again a powerful tool in my menopause transition.

I had no history of anxiety pre menopause and none since but while in the grip... it was all consuming. I can't imagine what it must feel like to have to remain at work while your mind is in 'lala land', your body is in meltdown, and your confidence is through the floor and all at the

same time... and even worse, your colleagues are either amused, irritated or beyond embarrassed by your symptoms and uncharacteristic behaviour, which at the end of the day are the result of a naturally occurring phenomenon and out of your control.

On a never-ending crusade to fix things, it was during a conversation with my husband and biggest supporter, that we realised and eventually accepted we had no alternative but to wait this thing out. This came on the back of a two week onslaught of heightened symptoms, when in a moment of desperation because he, like me, was absolutely exhausted, he said to me, "Just tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it... anything to make this stop. To which I defeatedly and tearfully replied, "There's nothing... because what I wanted ten seconds ago, is not what I want now and what I want now, won't be what I want in ten seconds time."

And that was the reality of the situation; we had no control over how, when and what symptoms occurred or what the outcome would be on any given day. All we could do was wait, knowing it would eventually pass... until the next time.

I continued to do all I could in terms of self-care, including adding meditation and relaxation techniques to my day, not least because I'd made an early decision not to go for HRT. Slowly but surely my symptoms subsided over time and with that my intelligence and confidence were restored along with my skills and competence. They hadn't deserted me; they'd just been on a very long break.

Peace and sanity also restored, I could feel a different kind of change taking place as I began to experience a personal freedom I'd never known before and one that moved me to reflect on all the things I still wanted to accomplish in my life.

This led me to realise I'd entered a phase of reinvention and contribution so far as my life and career goals were concerned. No longer was my job about mortgage payments and school fees or being that person others wanted me to be. In fact, I'd become so courageous and laser focused on what I wanted, that I was able to pivot and combine my intuitive skills with my business knowledge and life experience so as to create a different kind of business. A business that would serve other women like me who were ready to navigate a career change. A business that would give me the time and money I needed to embrace and enjoy a life that so far and like many women, I'd missed out on. The best part of this transition meant that for the first time in my life I could decide when, where and how I worked and for me that was gold.

By now I'd also been given the gift of two grandchildren and their very existence was a huge incentive to up my game, go after what I wanted and stand in my true value. My focus and priorities have dramatically shifted since they came along, meaning time and flexibility really are at the top of my agenda. I want to be available to these incredible children and happily my new found lifestyle friendly business lets me do that along with lots of other things like lazy lunches, completing an MA, taking extended holidays and enjoying quality time with my husband; things that had eluded me for years. Now I could do all of that while working on my own terms.

And by drawing upon my experience of adopting flexible working hours during menopause, I've been able to take what I've learned and apply that same flexibility to my business which means that during those hours I am at work, I'm committed, focused, happy and extremely productive.

Coming out the other side of menopause has been a freeing experience for me and it's true... we do survive the journey, so I hope that instead of seeing menopause as a time for winding down, women get to experience it as a time for revving up and an opportunity to

begin living their life by design as opposed to a default setting.

With menopause there is light at the end of the tunnel and in my case a light so bright, it was like discovering I owned a big sparkling diamond that up until that point, I didn't know was mine to own. I even went on to write a book about my experience, warts and all, and while the book (Polish The Diamond In Your Heart) is not about menopause, it is about how I changed careers in mid-life and what that journey entailed.

Speaking of diamonds it can be said that every woman is in fact a true diamond, the toughest substance in existence regardless of her behaviour or outward appearance. Like the diamond you too have your own precious potential. Revealing the many facets within you will eventually allow your diamond to emerge with unprecedented brilliance and fire.

**Dee Coxon MA MD MCFI**