

# Need a career reboot? CALL HARRY'S HELPER!

The genius behind Prince Harry's favourite charities, businesswoman KEDGE MARTIN (below), has always been brilliant at forging connections and now she is using her know-how to help others fulfil their dreams. *Catherine O'Brien* meets the fairy godmother of reinvention

**L**owri Tan was a model student. Bright, hard-working and focused, she excelled at sciences and achieved a master's in biochemical engineering. A blue-chip career followed, first at BP, then at Cadbury and Kraft Foods, for whom she travelled the world. 'I was well-paid and successful but not fulfilled,' she says. 'I couldn't believe this was going to be my life for the next 40 years – but I couldn't see the alternative either.'

As her 30th birthday approached, no lightning bolt of inspiration had presented itself, so Lowri decided on a high-risk strategy and quit. 'Some people said I was brave, but others thought I was naive,' she recalls. For a couple of years, as she eked out her savings, her prospects seemed wobbly.

Today, however, at the age of 35, Lowri has rediscovered her purpose. Her working days are spent not in state-of-the-art factories or laboratories but in her small London studio where she has reinvented herself as a silk artist with a signature scarf business. 'I've learnt that sometimes you have to take a step back to move forwards,' she says.

Lowri is a millennial, a generation frequently dismissed as entitled, self-absorbed and lazy. Having spent time talking to her, I can vouch that she is none of these things. And Kedge Martin, the woman who helped Lowri achieve her career turnaround, agrees: 'All of us, no matter how successful, go through bouts of confusion – and doubt – about what we are doing,' she says. 'And the best thing we can do is start talking about it.'

Kedge is not someone you will necessarily have heard of, but you may know something of her work. Back in the early 2000s, she created the charity WellChild out of what was then



Kedge with Prince Harry and with Rod Stewart

cumbrously known as the Children's Nationwide Medical Research Fund. Under Kedge's stewardship, WellChild launched a pioneering nursing programme to support chronically ill children and secured Prince Harry as its patron. Every year since then, the prince meets WellChild children at the awards ceremony Kedge created, and which is featured exclusively in YOU.

After WellChild Kedge went on to run Sentebale, the charity co-founded by Prince Harry to help orphans and vulnerable children affected by the HIV/Aids epidemic in Lesotho, Southern Africa. For almost three years, she was Harry's guiding hand at the charity, travelling alongside him to the impoverished, landlocked country. In a recent ITV documentary, Harry declared that his experience with Sentebale had been

transformative in helping him understand how to 'make something' of his life.

While Harry's work with Sentebale continues, Kedge's new focus is to help everyone 'make something' of themselves. 'I've always enjoyed mentoring people. All my life I've been driven by wanting to make a difference and I decided it was time to formalise that,' she says.

Last year – together with a varied mix of professionals that includes neuroscientists, psychologists, educationalists, business executives and those who have worked in the Armed Services, public service and the voluntary sector – Kedge formed Longbow, a coaching organisation for everyone from school leavers to mid-lifers and even the occasional reluctant retiree. 'I took on someone the other day who is 80,' she says. 'He'd had his own business and sold it. And now he is asking, "What shall I do next?" How cool is that?'

Those seeking Longbow's services are much more likely to be young people at a career crossroads such as Lowri, or those struggling to get started in the first place.

Few decisions matter more when you're young than choosing how to earn a living. With unemployment rates currently at record lows – around five per cent – and educational attainment at record highs – 38 per cent of the UK population are now graduates, compared to 17 per cent 25 years ago – you might imagine that those emerging into the jobs market are spoilt for choice. But the combined impact of globalisation and new technologies means that the ►

A Longbow course helped Lowri Tan swap careers from chemical engineer to scarf designer

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◀ employment landscape is changing rapidly, with many traditional professions being replaced by automation or outsourced to emerging economies. Meanwhile, careers advice in schools and universities is lamentably under-resourced and job-hopping is rife. A recent survey by Gallup showed that millennials are the least engaged generation in the workplace with 60 per cent open to new job opportunities.



**Kedge with Prince William at the Sentebale Polo Cup in 2011**

If you are a parent of a vacillating millennial this all may sound depressingly familiar. But as a parent herself – to 22-year-old daughter Venetia and son Guy, 20 – Kedge’s sympathies remain firmly with young people. ‘It is harder out there than it was a generation ago and one reason for that is we have had two decades of pushy yet indulgent parenting,’ she says. ‘We wanted to show our children that they are loved and valued – but we have overdone it. Yes, we have been more engaged and supportive than previous generations, but we have also told them they can be anything they want to be. Now they are thrust into the real world only to discover that there are no special favours and several years of hard grind ahead if they want to be successful.’

Factor in an unfamiliarity with delayed gratification – ‘no one waits for anything any more because you can have almost everything you want instantaneously with a few clicks on your smartphone’ – and the pressing need to be ‘making an impact’ and posting details of your fabulously successful life on social media and you end up with a misconception that everyone else but you has it all figured out. ‘Scratch the surface of many young people and you’ll find a woeful lack of self-esteem and resilience,’ says Kedge. (A 2015 study defining ‘Facebook depression syndrome’ – a condition in which spending a lot of time comparing oneself to others on Facebook goes hand in hand with feelings of inadequacy – would seem to endorse her theory.)

As you would expect, Kedge has coaching qualifications but it is her life experience that truly equips her to help others maximise their career potential. Now aged 50, she has a background that sounds posh and privileged, but Kedge has also had her fair share of turmoil. Her mother is of Anglo-Irish aristocratic descent and her father was an Army officer turned stockbroker ‘who lost a lot of money and ended

up a sad alcoholic with a superficially jolly mask’. Kedge (the name is a fusion of Kerry-Jane, which she hates) was aged nine and her brother David II when their parents divorced. David was enrolled at Eton and went on to university before becoming a successful filmmaker – he now runs his own TV production company in Ireland.

Kedge, meanwhile, became a rebellious teenager who endured a chequered education and was expelled from her convent school – ‘I kicked up

because that is what you do if you are an unhappy child’ – and was eventually packed off to secretarial college by her exasperated mother. Kedge credits an innate sunny disposition and a deep faith with seeing her through. ‘I know what rock bottom looks like,’ she says. ‘And I know what it is like to feel lost. But I also learned early on that when you are going through hell, the best thing is to keep going, because things generally work out fine in the end.’

Kedge’s first job was as a PA and researcher to an MEP. ‘I wanted to fight injustice, save the world and become prime minister, so it seemed like a good start.’ But by the time she met her future husband Stephen three years later, she had become disenchanted with the murky culture surrounding politics. This was the early 1990s and when Stephen, then a management consultant, was made redundant, they decided to escape the recession and set up a laundry business in Poland. ‘We got the idea while travelling around Europe. It sounds crackers but Poland back then was like Britain in the 1950s and people didn’t have washing machines at home.’ In six years they built up a business with 16 outlets and 60 staff, ‘and it was a huge learning curve – I think if you have the stamina and tenacity to create and run a business in Poland directly after the fall of Communism, you can probably run one anywhere’.

In 1998, parenthood brought them back to the UK where Kedge began her third career – this time in the charity sector as the London regional campaign manager for the NSPCC’s Full Stop appeal. Her connections helped: ‘It was pure nepotism, I knew one of the trustees,’ she says candidly. But those who have worked with Kedge describe her as a dynamic, can-do entrepreneur who invigorates any team she works with.

Kedge’s first encounter with coaching came during her time at WellChild. ‘I’m lucky, I can



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## KEDGE’S COACHING COUNSEL

- Life can sometimes feel uncomfortable, painful and difficult. But nothing is for ever and no experience is wasted. Everything that happens gives you the opportunity to learn and grow.
- Don’t sweat the small stuff. Roll with the punches and don’t waste time being angry or upset by people or situations.
- Remember, you can’t always control your circumstances but you can control your thoughts and responses.
- Always give a little more. Say yes to opportunities and get involved in activities that interest you. Offer to help – and smile.
- Have someone in your life who will challenge and support you, with no agenda other than getting the best out of you. This is best achieved through professional coaching.
- Use your network: you almost certainly know someone who knows someone that can help you. Most people are deeply flattered to be asked and appreciate the opportunity to give.
- Try to listen to yourself in all circumstances – whether as a young adult you feel pressurised to do something you’re unsure about, or as someone more mature you’re not feeling right in the work you’re in. It’s your life.

conceptualise and bring huge enthusiasm to whatever I’m doing. But I’m also a bit of an overzealous steamroller and that can lead to clashes,’ she concedes. When she struggled to get others on board with her vision for change within the charity, her chairman suggested some coaching sessions – and they were a revelation. ‘We all need help in seeing ourselves as others see us – and we all need feedback if we’re going to get better at what we are doing.’

The essence of Longbow, Kedge explains, is to address the critical human skills – self-awareness, emotional intelligence and confidence – that are often bypassed by mainstream education. On two programmes – Youngbow for those aged 18 to 30, and Longbow Future for those already established in a career but wanting to transition – participants undergo psychometric testing to establish their strengths, weaknesses and core values. Through follow-up workshops they then explore what sort of working environment is going to suit their motivations and temperament.

Lowri, who took part in a pilot Longbow programme in 2015, describes the experience as ‘mind-blowing’. The daughter of a businessman father and the middle child in a high-achieving family (her elder brother is an accountant and her younger brother is a doctor), she came to realise that she had pursued a scientific path at the ▶

# CONFIDENCE, CLARITY AND A NEW CAREER

## Bimpe Nkontchou, 51

I'm from Nigeria but was partly educated in the UK and my parents' expectation was that I would seek a profession. I worked in Nigeria to begin with and then, after marrying in 1995, moved to London to be with my husband (he works in the City). When we started our family – we have a daughter aged 17 and 16-year-old twin boys – I set up my legal practice which focused on cross-border work between West Africa and the UK. Being in charge of my own business meant I had the flexibility to juggle work and motherhood but after 15 years I was restless. My working day had become increasingly bogged down in tedious problems that revolved around managing the business rather than using my expertise. I needed a change but couldn't see a way forward.

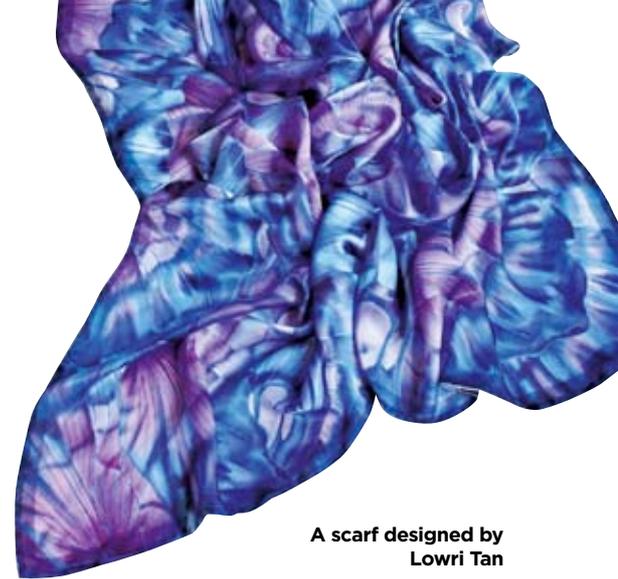
I'd heard about coaching,



but always dismissed it as something for weak people, so I was sceptical when someone suggested I try Longbow. From the start, it was an eye-opener. I did some sessions which exposed my strengths, but also some areas of concern. I can be bossy and

forthright, which are good attributes for a lawyer dealing with clients but can be a weakness as a manager if you don't stop to think about things from another person's perspective. I also have a strong perfectionist streak which was holding me back. Part of the Longbow course involved mindfulness sessions with neuroscientist Dr Tara Swart. Her techniques helped me become more optimistic about my outlook.

For years as a lawyer I helped high-net-worth clients move between Africa and the UK and advised on property, children's education and forward planning. Longbow helped me realise I had the right network and experience to set up W8 Advisory, my new business in wealth management strategy. Rather than heading for retirement, my work life is the most fulfilling it's ever been.



A scarf designed by Lowri Tan

◀ expense of her creativity. She had always painted for relaxation and, after moving to Singapore, she rekindled her love of silk painting in her spare time. 'I enjoyed lots of things about engineering and I liked managing projects – but painting was my real passion,' she says. 'I had toyed with the thought of how fantastic it would be to make a career out of it, but dismissed it as an impossible dream.' Once back in the UK, she invested in some expensive silk-painting equipment and began producing individual artworks. Then a friend suggested the Longbow course. 'I learned that being diligent and always finishing what I started had made me successful as a chemical engineer; but that you don't have to follow a set path all your life. It gave me the courage to dare to do something different,' she says. Lowri has since set up a partnership with an artisan silk company in Italy which takes the designs she creates in London and prints and finishes them on luxury silk. She is selling the scarves through her website ([lowritan.com](http://lowritan.com)) and is currently negotiating a contract with a leading department store.

'A lot of people stumble at the idea of change – they cling to what they know for fear of failure,' says Kedge. She remembers a conversation with her father shortly before he died of cancer five years ago.

'He'd spent most of his life working in the City, keeping up appearances – superficially "having everything". But that life wasn't the real him and one of the reasons he drank far too much was probably to fill a void. The day before he died, he sat at the dining room table and muttered, "I wish I'd been an engineer". Every day those words ring in my head. He'd always been good with his hands and if he'd followed his passion, maybe he would have been a better husband and father and a happier man.

'We only have one life – which goes so quickly. That's why we have to find out who we are and what feels right for us, rather than be the person everyone else expects us to be.' ■

■ [longbowfuture.com](http://longbowfuture.com); [youngbow.com](http://youngbow.com)

## Thomas Hamilton, 25

I graduated three years ago from Exeter University with a degree in modern languages and not a clue what I was going to do next. I considered the Army, thought about insurance and then went travelling for a bit. When I came back, I had coffee with lots of people to talk to them about their jobs, hoping inspiration would strike. My parents are farmers, so I helped them out while I was treading water. And, of course, I was too stubborn to listen to their advice. In the end, I had to admit that I was running around like a headless

chicken and going nowhere.

By the time I enrolled at Longbow I was in a state of paralysis. The psychometric tests showed that one of my key stumbling blocks was indecision. The course made me take a long hard look at my qualifications, my personality and the environment that would suit me best.

I like working with people and am naturally curious. I was also keen to use my languages and find a job with an international dimension. Gradually, as I sorted through my options, I homed in on the

field of business intelligence – a role within companies that specialises in researching information and analysing risk. I did four internships before being offered a position and have been with my current firm for just over a year. I use my languages every day; I'm expected to write reports on geopolitics, which I find fascinating, and I'm working with a great bunch of like-minded people. Coaching didn't secure me a job but it gave me the clarity and confidence to identify what I wanted to do, and to get my career on the right track.