

## Women on the edge



**Catherine Sandler and Kate Lanz work with executives on the borders of coachability. Some even have to be dragged to sessions. But shying away from a challenge just isn't in these coaches' joint nature, especially in such turbulent times, discovers *Liz Hall***

It's quickly apparent why Kate Lanz and Catherine Sandler work well together. Conversation flows easily, compliments fly and they're both bright, sparky and passionate about the power of a combined understanding of business and psychology.

Catherine first realised Kate was a "kindred spirit" when they were teaching on the same Insead programme. At the end Kate had demanded to know the action plan. "People aren't always so results-oriented, commercial-minded and crisp. I thought 'there's a connection here'," says Catherine.

Catherine had set up Sandler Consulting in 1997, following a landmark year in which she'd turned 40, had her third child and lost her father. She'd hand-picked a team of coaches she knew from London Business School (LBS).

When she set up the business she realised her unique selling proposition was an understanding business and organisations, drawing on a background in education, management, business and psychology.

"I felt I had a unique combination. At the time, nobody else was able to say that. There were coaches developed out of HR or business, and coaching was more about business advice or mentoring, or they were from therapy because the fee was higher but they had no business background."

### The same wavelength

Kate was "very much on the same wavelength" as Catherine in her belief that it is this business/psychology combination that helps coaches get beneath the surface of what's going on with clients.

"This is why Kate quickly came on board and became my number one. If she wasn't, I don't know if I'd be in the same position of leading a team. I feel very fortunate." "I feel the same", says Kate. "We have such fun and we really complement each other."

She continues: "Catherine had been in practice a long time. I was commuting from Holland, had two little boys and the long-term plan was to return to the UK. Catherine said she had more work than she could handle."

When they met the following week, Catherine "threw a great challenge at Kate". "Talk about a test – a firm about to go to tribunal, a chap being a bully and the only black member on the team. I remember thinking I should make sure my insurance was up to date," says Kate.

The client ended up giving a speech at the wedding of one of the female members of his team. "I was delighted and moved," says Kate. Catherine says she's "very fussy" about who she works with. But Kate passed the "test" with flying colours. And in 2004, they went into partnership as Sandler Lanz.

Although the pair have common values, they are very different, says Kate. "It's the EI thing. My dominant extrovert and Catherine's introverted intuition. The way these two dominants work in partnership is highly effective. For example, if we're preparing something we'll have an initial conversation, write it down and see if it's clear. I do the first brain dump. It sounds corny but it really is two plus two equals five," says Kate.

### Dynamic insight

Catherine, who first did the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) 15 years ago, is an INTJ (Introversion, iNtuition, Thinking, Judgment). "My dad called me Black & Decker: there is nothing that can't be improved. Many of our clients are perfectionists and self-critical and I know what it feels like to have that insight." Kate says: "I'm the only T in a family of Fs (Feeling). MBTI helped me understand why I felt different."

Catherine and Kate are equally enthusiastic about applying MBTI with clients as long as it's done in a sophisticated way. "We look at it as a way to understand innate temperament." says Catherine.

To illustrate the application of MBTI, Catherine shares the story of one client with a clear F preference. "She is wonderful with people but finds not being nice incredibly difficult. MBTI has helped her to understand her tendency to look for the harmony. She's now at the point where unless she's challenging, she'll stay where she is. I asked, 'Is there another side of you that's ambitious, because I sense there is'."

Coaching helped this client “rehabilitate to being tolerant of the bit of her that gets ambitious”. “By understanding both sides, she can take a logical approach. For example, she gave someone eight weeks’ notice, then made it two because they turned up 45 minutes late,” says Catherine.

### The Diamond model

During the economic downturn, Catherine has focused her practice on leading in turbulent times, and the psychological and emotional role of the leader in recession.

On 21 April, at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development’s HRD conference, she will present a session on identifying, developing and boosting behaviour that leaders need in turbulent times. She recommends leaders don’t deny a crisis, don’t fight it, stay focused and look after themselves.

Sandler Lanz developed the ‘Diamond model’ for leading in turbulent times:

- Four key leadership behaviours maximise morale and performance of the workforce during times of rapid change, loss and uncertainty.
- There are links between how leaders manage emotions and their abilities in these four behaviours.
- Participants can identify their ‘diamond profile’ and understand their stronger and weaker behaviours.
- Characteristic behaviours change under pressure. Learn how to identify stress triggers and develop strategies for managing emotions and behaviour as effectively and consistently as possible.

### Challenging behaviour

Many Sandler Lanz clients “are very bright and impatient, with mixed feelings about coaching”, says Kate. “Some are quite arrogant and we’re aware there is a test that must be passed. You have to get stuck into coaching and provide insights early on,” she says.

“We often work with those on the edge of coachability. Sometimes we’ve turned down people who are psychopathic because we risk colluding with them to fool people,” says Catherine.

Clients are dragged to coaching against their will. One glared at Catherine as if she were the enemy.

“The real challenge with one client was to make it clear there were behavioural issues that needed rectifying while helping her feel understood.” She had been “giving her all” for 18 years and was then hauled into coaching, says Catherine. “I fed back that she must feel humiliated, while not buying into her attempts to play down the bullying.”

She spoke to six of the client’s colleagues over the next six months to check on behavioural changes. Initially there was some “withdrawal” but the client was able to stop bullying. She went on to a people management role.

### The penny drops

Kate’s interest in what makes people tick was first piqued in the early 1990s. Between 1985 and 1996 she’d held commercial, marketing and management roles at drinks firm Diageo. She was sent to Hungary to launch the business with a senior male boss. “He was old enough to be my dad and had come out of a command and control economy. I was thinking, here I am, a young woman from London, but he and I got the show on the road. I can remember thinking there is something going on here that goes way beyond cultures and language.”

The seed was sown for a career change involving understanding people and organisations but the penny didn’t drop until later. She recalls sitting in a flat in Lima, Mexico in 1991 wondering what to do next. It was after she was awarded an MBA in 1994 that she decided to train as a clinical psychologist, gaining her BSc in Psychology from the Open University in 1997. And en route she decided she loved organisations and people.

She trained as an executive coach with Coaching Supervision Academy, setting up as a sole practitioner in Mexico City. “I found myself rushed off my feet.”

However, in 2000 her husband, who also worked at Diageo, was relocated to the Netherlands. She started coaching and tutoring at Insead’s Global Leadership Centre. She also coaches on the Executive MBA in Europe and Beijing, and on company-specific programmes in the US at Wharton University.

Her international background and four languages helped her build up expertise in cross-cultural issues and the performance coaching of virtual teams. Catherine took a very different route. She did a doctorate at Oxford University in modern history (1988), moving to Oxford where she lectured in the subject, focusing on development and adolescents.

“But I realised that wasn’t the life for me. I started looking for opportunities to practise external studies with adults at the university.”

She took a full-time job with the Workers' Education Association because it offered people a second chance to learn. "What got me was what makes the difference in keeping people engaged."

She moved back to London and in 1993 she was awarded a diploma in Counselling from Regent's College. She started working as an associate consultant for Tavistock. Until 1999, she also taught on Tavistock Clinic's Master's programme. From 1992 to 2004, Catherine also coached senior executives at LBS's Centre for Management Development.

When she set up Sandler Consulting, business was slow. "People weren't talking much about coaching then." Twelve years on, Sandler Lanz is thriving. It has a core of eight coaches and clients include Barclays Bank, BBC, BP, Diageo, Ernst & Young, IKEA, Save the Children UK and several NHS trusts.

- "Give me shelter", in Coaching at Work, vol 4, issue 3, 2009.

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