

Follow what you believe in

Ian Florance meets counselling psychologist **Michael Sinclair**

Perhaps the first question I asked Dr Michael Sinclair was intrusive. 'Given that you look so young, how do you do so much?'

Michael is a Chartered Counselling Psychologist and the Lead Consultant and Clinical Director of City Psychology Group, which offers psychological services predominantly to senior executives and occupational health



departments in blue chips. His path to that position takes several paragraphs on the group's website – and that's just a summary. He's worked in both the NHS and the private sector in schools, specialised mental health clinics, GPs' surgeries and hospitals.

He answered. 'I just keep going. I'm passionate about psychology and what I do, so I try to get as much experience as I can. In my view, basic psychological theory can be applied to many different areas and can often offer solutions to many practical problems. So, I jump at every opportunity. The research and application of psychology is about making a real difference to the successful future well-being of ourselves and of this planet. We look at ourselves in the mirror – some may say that's vain, but let's face it, we are fascinating creatures.'

Michael tells me the keys to his career to date have been 'compassion for and connectedness with clients, curiosity about people in general, accepting my limitations together with always delivering on my promises. That's not to say it's been an easy ride – it's involved hard work and scary risks, but I have always followed what I truly believe. Even when the road in front of you seems to be completely dug up, you persevere, don't give up and find an alternative route towards your goals and values. Work-life balance has been an issue, and I have had to rein

myself back! Along the way some fantastic colleagues have been invaluable when telling me it's time to take a break!'

A fundamental optimism

As well as his managerial and supervisory responsibilities, Michael spends most of his time in full-time private psychological therapy practice, working with people of all ages, couples and families. After some thought he can put his finger on why he first studied psychology. 'I liked the role of objective and empathic observer. I used to watch members of my family and wonder what motivated them. But the real catalyst was a book – Desmond Morris's *Manwatching*.' Morris trained as a zoologist and his approach, firmly based in zoology and ethology, was hugely influential in the 1960s and '70s. 'I became fascinated by that book.'

Once Michael had achieved graduate basis for registration, how did he decide which area of psychology to specialise in, given his many interests? 'I attended a brief course in counselling while at university and started reading a lot of books on therapy. I became particularly captivated by Carl Rogers and his book *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. That was it! I was hooked and knew that that's what I wanted to do'.

Michael describes his work in the Psychology Unit in HIV Medicine at The Royal Free Hospital as 'crucial experience. The department provided services to a very diverse population. It really brought home that I wasn't just dealing with health but with wider issues, including family and culture. And it also gave me a fundamental optimism: that people could move forward even in the face of such adversity. I think you need that basic belief.' Michael continues to be interested in health psychology and the psychological impact of illness and also medically unexplained physical symptoms; he has just recently published a related academic paper on his research in *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*.

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