

Finding happiness

Travelling psychologist helps people determine what they really want in life

By Oluatoyin Alleyne

Adrian McInman is a travelling psychologist who helps people to find “their happiness,” since according to him it is the one thing people want in their life more than anything else.

The Australian, who recently did work in Guyana, told *Sunday Stabroek* that he has a real passion for what he does because he wants to help determine what people really want in life and show them how to overcome their fears so that they achieve their dreams.

He has seven university qualifications, including two Masters degrees in Clinical Psychology and Human Movement, has written 25 research papers, boasts a black belt in kung-fu and an accent “corrupted” by living in New Zealand, Australia, and New York.

Not surprisingly his company is called Happier Horizons, and while in Guyana he did work with the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), the Phoenix Recovery Project, the Guyana Micro Projects Programme and the University of Guyana.

He is currently on a five-country tour; he has been to Trinidad doing work at the Rape Crisis Centre there, Mount St Benedict Drug Rehabilitation Centre and the T&T police force.

From Guyana he travelled to Antigua, and after a couple of weeks back in the US he will head to Ghana, where he plans to resettle, and will work with the Accra Psychiatric Hospital, among other institutions. After Ghana, McInman will spend five weeks in Botswana where interestingly he will be working with the country’s Olympic team, among others.

Prior to this five-country tour the psychologist visited six other countries, and has worked with some 56 organisations free of charge.

“I do it completely for free – pay for my own accommodation, my own airfare; I never charge for my time and I have been doing it ever since 2005,” McInman said.

And no, McInman is not a wealthy man who just wants to ‘give back’; rather, he said, during the last six years the recession in America had hit him hard and he was working for a meagre salary.

While it may not sound like a rational move to many, McInman said that he has “put every cent” into touring and giving his service to countries, and it is his way of making his business “more professional.” And while he did not actually say it, touring countries also helps McInman to make a name for himself.

“But personally speaking I am not a person who cares too much, because I am not taking my money with me when I leave this planet, and I honestly think I gain just as much if not more from my clients every time,” he said.

He likened what he does to doctors and professionals giving their services for free in various countries, stating that it “is very common for people all over the world to help other people... but when a psychologist does it, it sounds odd. But yet doctors donate their time and that is not seen as odd because they usually do it through a very organized way.”

The tours also see him meeting different people and learning different cultures and “all sorts of things happen to me that never would have happened if I didn’t do this.” He describes it as a “two way street,” as while he does good for people they are also doing good for him.

McInman runs group education sessions and when he does it in places like America where he spends more time, he does it three times a week for ten weeks, but when he



Adrian McInman

is overseas working with time constraints he does it five days in a row for three or four hours at a time.

“It is a programme on happiness,” he said, revealing that when you question the average person on the street about the one thing that they want in life more than anything else they would not say anger management or anxiety reduction or depression reduction, which is what typical psychologists focus on.

“They say they want to be happy and I say to myself, why focus on things that people don’t really care too much about, why not focus on something they want...” he said.

And when people say they want money or status McInman said it is because people feel that those would give them happiness.

“So I do three things: I provide a whole lot of facts based on research... I don’t give too much of my opinion because my opinion frankly is no better than anybody else’s... and then what my clients do with those facts is up to them. Second I teach a whole lot of skills techniques...”

Thirdly, the psychologist combines the fact and skills techniques with five-minute sessions in diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscular relaxation, meditation, mental imagery, thought stoppage, goal-setting, values clarification in addition to several sessions devoted to happiness and NOISE

(Neuroticism, Optimism, Internal Locus of Control, Self-esteem, Extroversion).

He said he teaches 60 second techniques that he knows will be easy for people to follow instead of longer routines which many persons would rather sit and watch on television than do. And in his sessions he always tries to make it “non-threatening,” and he never asks people about their pasts as according to him he does not need that to help people to change.

McInman said that the majority of people do not change because they have an in-built mechanism that says resist, because it is scary to do the unknown. He gave the unlikely example of women staying in abusive relationships because the abusive spouses and their actions are predictable, but to go off to a shelter and take the kids into the “unknown is very scary.”

“What I try to do is try to teach my clients to overcome their fears by developing more courage with techniques and by the information I provide,” he said.

‘A lot of very hard work’

But even though what he provides is free McInman said it is still very difficult for him to be allowed into organisations to conduct sessions. He told of one organisation in a Caribbean country where the employees thought he was there to spy on who might be facilitating drug trafficking.

“It is a lot of very hard work,” he said, adding that it is easier in the developed countries than the developing ones, where it is not only people who block him but sometimes the infrastructure, such as the internet and electricity, which also seem to work against him.

“You really have to want to do this; it really has to be in your heart,” he said.

In choosing his countries he looks for ones with cheap airfares and accommodation, while there may be others where he has friends who will assist him with accommodation. Guyana was chosen because McInman wants to be able to say he went to every continent and being the only English-speaking country in South America Guyana was an easy choice for him.

McInman, a researcher for 12 years before becoming a psychologist, was born in New Zealand where he spent 21 years and then he moved to Australia where he spent the same number of years, following which he moved to New York where he lived for six years. He and his wife – they have no children – will soon be making Ghana their home; in fact all his worldly possessions are on a ship headed to that country.

He calls himself an Australian even though he was born in New Zealand but he has citizenship of both countries.

Ten years in academia and another 12 in research McInman said one day he just became “fed-up of being treated like the lowest person on the ladder being told to do all the lousy work, and I want to get out of that.”

Because he was always interested in why people do some of the “dumb things they do and even the sensible things” it was a natural progression to do an honours degree in psychology and later two more years in clinical psychology. He was registered in Australia as a psychologist and later moved to America, where even though he had several degrees his qualifications were not accepted in that country, and as such his clients could not get insurance to see him. In the end he worked as a “personal trainer” for six years “and then I put all the money I made from there into doing this.”