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September 2007

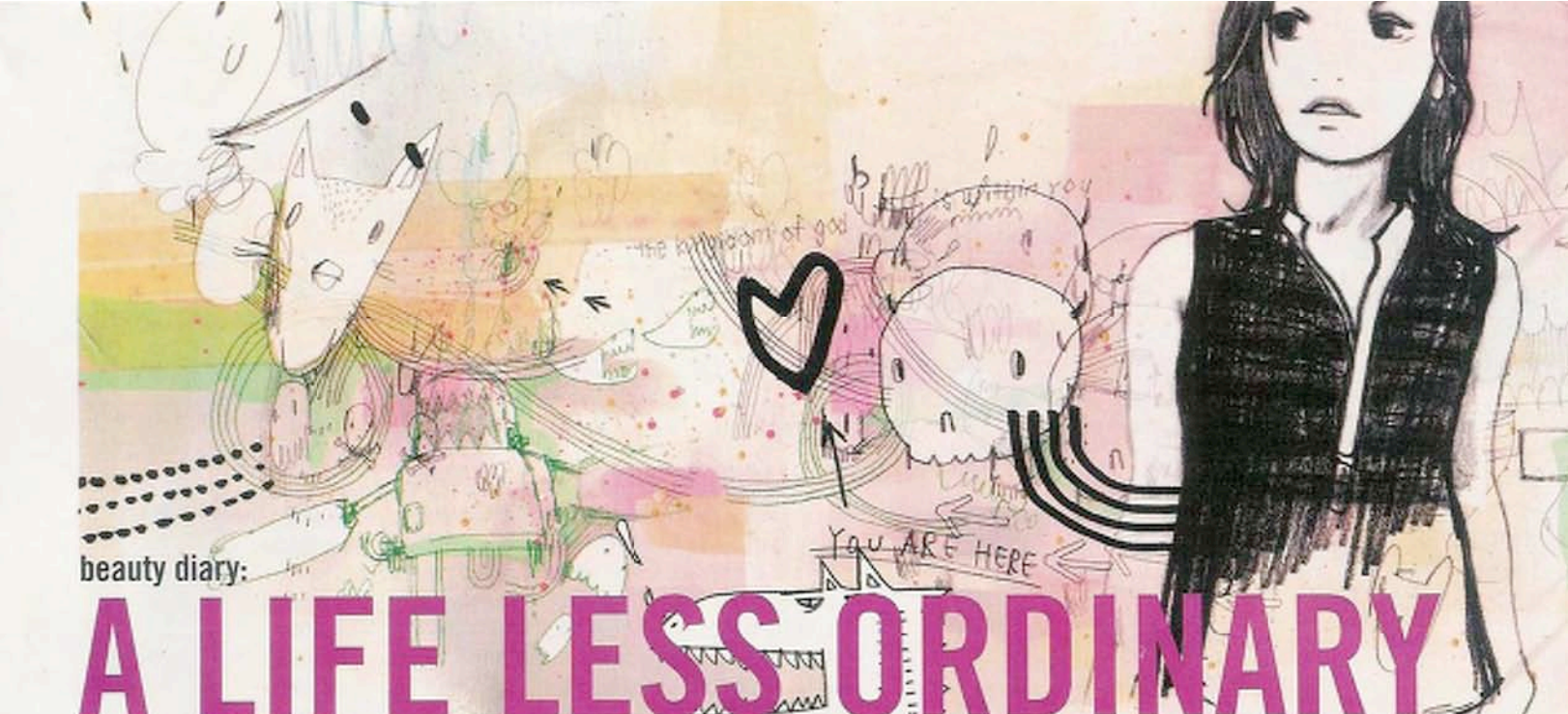
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beauty diary:

A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

BY KATE WILLIAMS. ILLUSTRATION BY OGI

Lifecoaching is a silly word. It conjures up visions of someone in polyester shorts and knee-socks, cheering you on as you move through the cereal aisle at the grocery store. "Go for the Cheerios! The Cheerios!" they might yell, whistle blowing shrilly in your ear, before rubbing your shoulders at the check-out and helping you stretch down in the parking lot.

But lately, lifecoaching has begun to be more than the punch line in a bad joke. There is the new Scott Baio VH1 show—which could be considered by some a bad joke—that revolves around a life coach, plus more and more articles, and people who speak openly about their coaches, depicting them as objective supporters, and dispensers of tough love and practical guidance. And though I want to think of myself as someone who can figure things out on her own, I'm also a bit of a self-improvement junkie. From my poor sleeping habits to procrastination problems and accumulated credit card debt (whoops), I can think of a laundry list of areas where I could do better. If a coach could help me tackle even one of these, then sign me up, ridiculous connotations and all.

I first heard of Sherri Ziff Lester in a newspaper article that talked about how lifecoaches were becoming popular amongst the Hollywood set in place of, or in addition

to, a therapist. And Lester, whose business is called RockYourLifeCoaching and who counts Bryce Dallas Howard as a client, is at the front of the pack. Most of her work is done over the phone—it's easier to schedule and she's found that clients are less distracted when they're not analyzing their coach's outfit and office—and prior to our first session, she had me fill out a three-page "client inventory." The inventory helps Lester suss out where to begin, and included a tally of my life goals, both short and long term, listed the key people in my life, and rated how satisfied I felt about everything from my relationships to my level of fame (huh?).

Lester talks to her clients anywhere from one to three times a week, usually for an hour, and in our first session, she laid out the basic tenets of lifecoaching. She'd help me set goals, and we'd focus on the areas where I wanted to make progress and move forward, rather than working on healing issues from the past, a common purpose of therapy. One of the biggest things I had to overcome when talking to Lester was learning how nonjudgmental she was with anything I said, and that I didn't have to worry about sounding silly or self-indulgent about saying things that I'm way too embarrassed to write here. Talking to her was like talking to a very positive, slightly new-agey friend. She was enthusiastic and offered frequent

encouragement without being overbearing, and I really liked her. She told me stories of people who were finally able to make moves that they'd been talking about for years, who taught themselves how to have fun, and who finished scripts in a matter of weeks after having been stalled for months. I could see how all of this is true, and how, for the right person, lifecoaching is lifechanging. In the end, though, I don't think I'm that person.

I've often felt that, in this modern life, our learned reliance on professionals for all our needs comes partly from the fact that so many of us put our personal relationships on the back burner. We're too busy to be there when our friends and family need us, and then we feel betrayed when they're not there when we need them. There are many things I've not been blessed with—height, money, boobs, the ability to multitask—but I somehow got lucky enough to have an abundance of patient, supportive people in my life. From family members who always set me straight to friends who know me better than I know myself, I have the relationships that a lot of people quite literally pay for. And if all lifecoaching did was help me realize that, then I definitely scored. Sherri Ziff Lester, rockyourlifecoaching.com; and the International Coach Federation, coachfederation.org.