

Gerardo Segat

“From a mental disorder to a strangely-wrapped gift”

Gerardo Segat is an independent professional life coach, soul trainer and shadow coach to international private clients. He was the Founder and Chairman of a leading multi-family office with more than 350 employees and more than 10 offices worldwide. Gerardo has been a guest lecturer at the London School of Economics and a member of the YPO (Young Presidents' Organization) since 2013 and its Change Makers Club since 2017. He studied at Bocconi University in Milan, HEC in Paris and LSE in London. He speaks four languages, has two wonderful daughters and loves cooking and skiing.



In today's fast-moving, demanding and stressful culture, we live in a contradictory situation of little or no care and attention to the engine which is our mind. Nowadays, we are experiencing in many ways a long-overdue shift of attention from physical fitness to mental health such as the introduction of mental health education in schools, mindfulness and meditation courses and mobile apps are flourishing, it is the top trend in the luxury travel and wellness industry and coaching is booming. Mental wellness is considered to be longer lasting.

Despite this, mental disorders are still a taboo, which are little spoken about or accepted and are often hidden.

Hi Gerardo, can you tell us a little bit about your personal story?

As a child I suffered many traumas which impacted me tremendously. I lost my loved ones, my belongings.

In order of disappearance: my dad, my house, my school, my friends, my mum, my sister, my wealth, my wishes, my dreams, my childhood. I was left with my brother up until I married. The day I left him to begin a life with my wife, feelings of emptiness and fear set in. It was horrendous. To protect myself and my mind something deep inside triggered which resulted in daily compulsive messages to check each and every belonging to make sure they were safe and in order: car, house windows and doors, rucksack, purse, mobile, PC, clothes, body, etc. At the most severe times this compulsive checking consumed up to five hours a day. It was exhausting.

The day I was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), I sat alone, in my room and cried. With the fall of my tears came the rise of my soul. I said: basta! (with a “b”, not a “p”) ENOUGH! with this monster and I started to build the life I wanted.

What challenges did you face because of your disorder?

The first hurdle was time pressure: my OCD practices reduced my day by 5 hours, hundreds of thousands of minutes and seconds! This affected every aspect of my life: partner, kids, work, friends, fitness, holidays, hobbies, sleep. You name it. Then came anxiety, stress, shame, low self-esteem, fear, poor concentration and scattered attention. In addition, I was insecure, felt lost and lonely, and was full of self-pity. More specific to work, I exhibited poor presence and availability, excessive delegation, superficial decision-making, people pleasing and blaming, wrong expectations and judgmental attitude.

Overall, the biggest challenge in living with OCD was the resulting isolation and self-involvement.

What were your key learnings?

Experiencing an anxiety mental disorder has become a journey of hard work and invaluable and considerable learning, a gift, a blessing. It is my legacy to my future generations and one way to inspire others.

In broad terms, turning my biggest weakness into my greatest strength has taught me empathy. I see more and better now and that is of tremendous value also to my current job as a coach. More specifically, the most

invaluable lessons were about the functioning of the mind and the approach to a personal monster.

We have a mind— we are not our mind. It is like a puppy, you need to train it to do what you want it to do. The mind is fragile, often filling itself with bad thoughts and overprotectiveness. By comfortably resisting mind compulsions, I learned how to educate and change the mind and how to divert the attention from our inner voice – the consciousness of thoughts and feelings – our seventh sense.

What about the approach to a personal monster?

With common personal monsters such as disorders, fears, obsessions, addictions and traumas, we tend to immediately jump into trying to resolve or delete. Instead, we need to take time to look at them, acknowledge and accept our consequent feelings and then store them and decide appropriate action.

We have to learn to love our monsters. By being compassionate, accepting peacefully and understanding the reasons. They have helped us be who we are, where we are and they deserve our gratitude. We should get them out, share them as soon as possible and then, face them with determination and resilience. They will go away, as will the side effects. Acting gently and smoothly, with no hard pushing. Finally, finding a way to turn our weakness into our strength and make it, what I call, a strangely-wrapped gift.

So, what is inside your strangely-wrapped gift?

Inspiration and coaching. The YPO is the premier leadership organisation worldwide: 25.000 members in 130 countries. By being a selected member of its Change Makers Club, I am invited to talk to chapters worldwide or at international events and inspire entrepreneurs and top executives by sharing my story. It's called influencing the influencers. I changed to professional coaching because I wanted more human element and more alignment with my personal core values, identity and mission and my contribution to the successful negotiations for the sale of AC Milan football club in 2015 further convinced me. Mario De Andrade, one of the founders of Brazilian modernism, explains it in his poem 'My Soul Has a Hat' and here is a small extract for you and your readers:

“I want to live next to humans, who know to laugh at their mistakes, who are not inflated by their own triumphs. I want to surround myself with people who know how to touch the hearts of those whom hard strokes of life have learned to grow with sweet touches of the soul”.

What is the impact of this remarkable personal experience on your coaching activity?

OCD has made me learn about the mind on the field: today, as a coach, it is like being a football manager

having been an excellent player before. Lots of precious insights for me and my clients. Furthermore, OCD has made my coaching offering more complete through Soul Training Services. It has also affected my style: care and sensitivity can move mountains. And a strong focus on the negative/weaknesses (OCD) in the past, has pushed me towards a strong focus on the positive/strengths (coaching) in the present and future. Finally, thanks to OCD, I have maximised the skill of an unusual attention to detail that makes the difference in shadow coaching. To summarise, my OCD experience has built my competitive advantage as a coach today.

What is Shadow Coaching?

Noticing details/symptoms, in relation to specific agreed objectives, during a temporary and silent accompaniment over the course of one or more client's work days, meetings (ie board, negotiation, etc.) or performances, in the field, and after feedback, one-to-one coaching sessions. We all know that the difference between failure and success, good and excellent is often details. Shadow coaching is a tailored mix between consultancy and coaching that stimulates continuous improvement and it is how I capitalise on my past entrepreneurial experience.

“We have to learn to love our monsters. By being compassionate, accepting peacefully and understanding the reasons.”

What are your plans for the near future?

Professional coaching brings self-awareness, authenticity and success, inspires change, maximises potential and makes people feel good. The term “coaching” is professionally overused, often inappropriately, and this creates confusion and skepticism. I want proper professional coaching to have more visibility and public exposure so I am currently working on bringing coaching into public debates moderation and on a media format suitable for licensing at an international level. I also want to divulge it in the luxury hospitality industry, a perfect and ideal scenario for coaching, and within the celebrity community. They set an example for others and are amongst the ones who can benefit the most from coaching, considering their kind of life full of ups and downs, sensitivity and public exposure.

www.gerardosegat.com