

Why Retrain as an Existential Psychotherapist?

Irena Trnka De Benedictis

I reached my early forties following a relatively straightforward trajectory: law degree at the University of Oxford followed by a career as a solicitor in the City of London with a lateral move into development banking, leading to a three year assignment in Eastern Europe. My career was my focus and took up most of my time, though I was in an up-and-down live-in relationship for eight years.

As I got to my late thirties, both my professional and private life appeared to drift without much purpose or direction. I started asking myself questions about how I saw my life in ten years time. I became interested in Philosophy and especially Existential Philosophy and its offshoot, Existential Psychotherapy with its focus on creating meaning and purpose to our existence. Perhaps this could help me clarify my next steps and might even lead to a change in career.

In fact my next step turned out to be a part-time Master's in Existential Psychotherapy at the University of Sheffield to learn more about this subject and investigate the possibility of changing careers. This postgraduate study married my interest in Philosophy with my wish to work with people with difficulties, but this time not legal difficulties, but psychological ones.

Existential Psychotherapy proved to be what I was looking for: a meaningful career working first for the NHS and then setting up my own private practice under the logo 'EmbracingOurChoices', which sums up the key focus of the Existential modality: viewing life through the lense of 'choice', including the multiplicity of choices we make at every instant of our day and then stepping forward with resilience and resoluteness to embrace our choices and allow them to invest our life with meaning and purpose.

These are the themes that I explore with my clients in therapy in order to help alleviate feelings of anxiety, depression, stress and lack of purpose. I enjoy both short term (six week) work and open ended work, though Existential therapy is best suited to long term work. I have worked with some of my clients for several years and find this most

rewarding. More details of my work can be found on my website www.EmbracingOurChoices.com.

I enjoy working both in English and in Czech as I am bilingual. My practice allows me to reach various segments of our diverse society and I find this most rewarding. ‘