



SJ Berwin Lawyer Tames Tigers For New Career



Jim Lawless gave up his career as a corporate lawyer to become a professional motivation speaker. His journey from his desk at SJ Berwin to drama student to change consultant to competing jockey has been a long and winding one. He now works with some of the globe's leading organizations delivering motivational speeches based around his ten rules on achieving positive life -changes: 'Taming Tigers'. His forthcoming book 'Taming Tigers' is on sale in January 2009. www.tamingtigers.com

Can you run us through your legal background?

I graduated from Manchester University 1990 with a law degree and qualified into a commercial role with S J Berwin in 1994. After a great traineeship there, I moved via Manches in Oxford (whom I now instruct – a great team) to an international role in-house with ICL (now part of Fujitsu) with responsibility for Central and Eastern Europe – a dream legal job doing business in the newly opened former communist states. We were all feeling our way – even the lawyers we instructed in-country.

You gave up law and became a motivational speaker, why?

I left the law because I didn't have enough passion for it and I eventually decided working life is too long a time to be spent passionless!

I was married to a brilliant tax lawyer at the time of my decision to stop practising law. She would be devouring her know-how on a Sunday and I would be reading adverts for cooking utensils in the Sunday supplements to avoid mine. That didn't seem right. After the decision, however, I was completely lost, so I went to drama school for a 9 month "sabbatical". Every lawyer should go - I had to rely on myself and not my expertise. Terrifying!



From there, in 1999 I established a communications company called "Optimise" (now Taming Tigers Group) delivering training and change consultancy very successfully, and that led to me being invited to give speeches. In 2003 I was invited to give a "motivational" speech. I turned down the invitation three times before being persuaded to give it a try. I thought that delivering a "motivational" speech would be the very height of arrogance. It went terribly, but one member of the audience, amazingly, asked me to repeat it and Taming Tigers was born.

Your 'Taming Tigers' dogmas were challenged when you were asked to prove that you could become a jockey riding in a televised race in one year - how did you do it?

By following the Ten Rules for Taming Tigers. I went to a big comprehensive school in South London so I had no history with horses and no contacts in racing. I had bills to pay also so there was no option of taking unpaid leave to do it. Rule one is to take a bold action today - because time is limited. The bolder I acted, the greater the result until finally I had Gee Armytage, one of the most successful female jockeys in the history of the game, as my coach. With friends like that things start to happen. Within a month my life was completely different - I was riding out every day and had moved from London to Lambourn in Berkshire. You don't want to know about the diet - I had a quarter of my body weight to lose...

I personally wouldn't use the word dogma to describe the Ten Rules as for me, that implies rigidity and a lack of proof. I think that the great thing about the Ten Rules for Taming Tigers is that they have been proved. It's not just my story - overweight ex-lawyer becomes jockey - that proves they work. There are lots of other case studies from people who found themselves in a Taming Tigers presentation and have done great things as a result of using the rules. We've collected a number for the book and for the Hall of Fame on our Facebook page. And the Rules aren't rigid, or sequential. People use them to find ways around their Tiger that work for them. It is not about a "guru" who can "make you thin/rich". It's about giving people a hand to see that they can do that all by themselves – and some more interesting things besides.

In a nutshell, how can Taming Tigers help an individual to achieve what they consider the unachievable?

It helps them to identify that 90% of the time the barrier is in their head and is within their control. That gives people the keys. Once they have the keys, they can either accept that they simply don't have the stomach to try the thing and move on from it, or they can give it a go. But there's no place to hide anymore; nobody else to blame. To most people, rather than finding that intimidating, they find it energising, inspiring and very exciting. We use no short cuts, no mantras, no "re-programming" of anyone's head. Just simple common sense.

You've worked with some big names in the corporate business world – when you make your speeches what are your key aims?

Over 70,000 people have seen a Taming Tigers presentation and I have had the privilege of working globally with many stimulating and challenging people and organisations. The brief the client gives me will always dictate my key aims in the room. However on a personal level, and this supports every brief, I want to leave each person in the room feeling five times as excited about the fact that they are alive and have great talents, frustrated that they have been holding back all this time and burning to get out there and do the thing they need to do.

Any law firms amongst them?

Yes, a good number. I've worked with *Linklaters*, *Olswang* and *BLG*, and addressed a number of global in-house team meetings from *Astra Zeneca* to *Cable and Wireless*.

It's great working with lawyers – I think that only a fellow lawyer can understand the unique challenges that the job and the legal culture present to creating change and challenging norms. Audiences don't expect that level of empathy from an "outsider" so it means that we can make friends faster. That, in turn, means that I can be more challenging and we can get to the real work quickly. It riles me that other professions populate more boardroom seats than we do – I think that that is a product of the legal mindset and not of talent. A Tiger, if you will. If I can play a part in exposing that particular Tiger, I'll be very happy.

What has been your most memorable story throughout your journey with 'Taming Tigers'?

There are so many. To achieve the goal of becoming a jockey in a year meant constantly being outside of the safety zone, constantly pushing the boundaries of my new abilities before I had time to consolidate them.



Sometimes, I got that wrong. I had only been riding for around six weeks when I went to ride out at Henry Daly's yard in Ludlow where Gee's fiancé, Mark Bradburne, was the stable's jockey. It was my first trip to a large racing yard. As we approached the gallop (a strip of land which is used for exercising racehorses), after warming the horses up, Mark told me to stay eight lengths from him and to come no closer..

I kept the mare eight lengths off Mark and was beginning to relax and enjoy the ride when I heard a shriek of "Look out - coming through!" - the shriek of a rider who is being run away with

and is warning you that they are about to fly past you – inevitably causing your horse to want to take off with you. Off went the mare under me like a flash. I am now alongside Mark calling, "What do I do?" But I don't hear his answer as the mare and I disappear into the mist ahead of him. We weave through the other horses until, in the mist ahead, I begin to make out a dreadful sight - seven or eight of Mr Daly's finest chasers taking a turn at the top of the gallop. And a worse sight - Henry Daly in peaked cap and wellies standing beside his four wheel drive, watching the adventure unfold with a steely glare.

And the most inspirational?

Receiving emails from people, sometimes many years after a presentation, quite out of the blue on some rainy afternoon, telling me that they have tamed a Tiger, big or small, and have moved onto a new level of confidence in all aspects of their lives as a result. You can read a few of those stories on our facebook page and in the book.

What is your typical day like now and before, when you practiced as a lawyer?

There are more similarities than you might think. I have to quickly get to grips with a client's personality and problems, and their organisation's personality and problems - and then help them to solve them. As a speaker, I have to make people laugh more - but maybe I should have done that as a lawyer too! The biggest practical differences are that I am rarely in the same location two days running and that I devour my "know-how" these days. I do certainly miss the camaraderie of my legal days, though, and the teamwork on a big deal.

Finally, what sentence would you advise anyone to repeat to themselves when they wake up on a rainy, wet Monday morning with stack loads of paperwork to do?

I don't really do "mantras". I guess in this situation the sentence would have to be a question: "do I know why I am doing this - how this little chore fits into the brilliant story of my life that I want to look back on from the nursing home in many years time?" If so, brew up the coffee and get cracking with a smile. If not, tame that Tiger urgently – time is limited!

Interview with Vanessa Wozniak