

PHILIPPOS ARISTOTELOUS

Lunch with Gold

AFTER WORKING FOR 15 YEARS IN A LEADING LAW FIRM, PHILIPPOS ARISTOTELOUS GAVE IT ALL UP FOR SOME MUCH-MISSED PEACE OF MIND. ALTHOUGH HE HASN'T ABANDONED THE LEGAL PROFESSION ENTIRELY, HE IS MUCH CALMER AND HAPPIER AS A LEGAL BUSINESS CONSULTANT, COACH, AND SPEAKER. WHAT'S MORE, HE CAN NOW INFLUENCE PEOPLE IN A RANGE OF DIFFERENT WAYS THROUGH MENTORING, MUSIC AND... MAGIC.

By John Vickers

TO PANTOPOLEIO
38, Metochiou Street,
Nicosia

MOUSSAKA	€9.60
BEEF & VEGETABLES	€13.40
ORANGE CREAM	€5.20
COCA-COLA	€2.40
GLASS OF WINE	€5.00
MINERAL WATER	€2.30
COFFEE	€0.00
TOTAL	€37.90

The decision to give up one's job is never one that is taken lightly, especially after spending 15 years climbing the corporate ladder to become a partner in one of the country's biggest and most successful law firms. How many professionals are willing to risk everything when they have a wife and three children to provide for and no clear idea of where they want to go next? That is precisely what my lunchtime guest did and, as we greet each other at the Pantopoleio restaurant in Nicosia, he certainly doesn't look like a man who has come to regret his actions. Once we have ordered our main dishes

of moussaka (him) and beef & vegetables (me), Philippos Aristotelous tells me how he quit his job as a lawyer in 2018. By his own admission, he was "doing quite well" but, by then, the previous 15 years of accumulated stress and anxiety had begun to weigh heavily on him. "I was feeling really drained," he recalls, "and I no longer believed that what I was doing was really meaningful. After weighing the pros and the cons – and it wasn't an easy process, believe me – I decided that I had to leave my work to reclaim

my peace of mind.”

During the month that followed, he underwent a great deal of soul searching, wondering what exactly he should do: Set up his own firm? Work for a smaller, less busy firm? Go back and say that it had all been a big mistake?

“I had no idea,” he says, “but I suddenly realised that I didn’t mind if I stopped doing what I was doing. It hit me like a lightning bolt: I didn’t care if I never worked as a lawyer again! That was the spark that led to the ‘big bang’ and the new Philippos. Ever since then, I’ve been building my second career, piece-by-piece.”

In reality, he has not strayed too far from his old profession and his coaching, mentoring and consultancy work is primarily with lawyers and other professionals. “I’m still involved in the professional services industry – lawyers, accountants, etc. – because I feel that many of my strengths are there and I believe that such people can see the value in what I do for them,” he explains.

“Coaching is about helping unlock another person’s potential,” Aristotelous goes on, “so, essentially, I am facilitating conversations with questions, with a view to helping the person opposite me decide how to resolve a conflict or a deadlocked situation and how to move forward.”

He is quick to point out that he is neither a psychologist nor a psychotherapist but his own experience and personal understanding of what those involved in the often high-pressure environment of the legal profession and the broader professional services sector are going through has proved to be invaluable to others. From strictly one-to-one engagements, he then moved on to bigger audiences.

“There came a point when I recalled how much I enjoyed public speaking, addressing conferences, etc., especially when I had the opportunity to talk about things that mattered to me. I didn’t want to talk about tax matters ever again! But I would always be happy to discuss issues around human engagement and motivation, so I organised a small talk about business development, to which I invited some 30 lawyers. I have found that it’s always effective to use stories and analogies to drive



his comfort zone by presenting a broader theme (Motivation, Management and Leadership) to a bigger audience and, once again, adding a touch of magic, this time under the banner ‘Abracadabra’.

“Very soon I had sold over 150 tickets,” he remembers, “which was remarkable, given that no-one knew me outside the legal profession. Of course,” he confides, “I was quite tenacious and worked very hard to attract that audience.”

One thing led to another and soon Philippos Aristotelous found himself working on a book about employee engagement and motivation, combining everything he had learned from others with his own experience and the material he had used for his ‘Abracadabra’ presentation. He decided to call it *MAGIC* (using the word as an acronym for five key issues) and, in its first version, it ran to 65,000 words. Then came the first of two setbacks.

COACHING IS ABOUT HELPING UNLOCK ANOTHER PERSON'S POTENTIAL

the message home but, in this case, I wanted to do something different, so I incorporated some magic tricks – magic has been one of my

hobbies for many years – and it did quite well.”

The success of that event led Aristotelous to take a further step outside

“Like many first-time authors, I thought that I had come up with a potential best-selling Bible on the subject and then I gave it to

a professional editor, who was ready to butcher it!" he says with a smile. "I had been used to writing long, detailed legal texts but she told me bluntly that it was far too long and nobody would read it like that. Fortunately, she offered to halve her fee if I cut the book down by half and so I took her advice. It was actually a good exercise for me and helped me form a much more precise idea of exactly what it was that I wanted to say."

That should have led to Aristotelous' book, entitled *MAGIC*, finding its way onto Amazon but it was not to be.

"Just before submitting the final manuscript, I was looking at books on the same subject on Amazon one day and I discovered another one with almost the identical title! I was devastated!" he recalls. "At first I was convinced that somehow the writer had stolen my idea but then I saw that it had been published four years earlier. Not only that, but four of the five letters of the acronym *MAGIC* were identical to mine!" He felt he had no choice but to abandon the whole project.

"A few days later, a friend of ours asked me what was happening with the book and I told her the story and how I'd trashed the idea," he tells me. Our kids were playing with

some Marvel characters and she said, 'Why don't you change it to *MARVEL*?' It turned out to be a perfect solution. I made a few changes and got back on track." The book was published as *The MARVEL of Engagement: Turning Passive Employees into Active Ambassadors* and, says the author, "it's been attracting some interest."

I ask if there are any plans for

recordings for a fee. When he let the family hear it, his wife suggested that he send it to the Greek singer/songwriter Stephanos Korkolis for a professional opinion. "I didn't expect to receive an answer but Korkolis not only replied but he told me that I written 'a little diamond' and that I should continue to write."

Here is a good time to reveal that Philippos Aristotelous' mother-in-law was the late

rediscovering and rebuilding myself so I take one day at a time. If I can sum up how I view the new year, I want to keep creating, being well and pushing the boundaries of my comfort zone. I have faith that things will turn out surprisingly pleasant." As we prepare to leave, I mention that I had half-expected my dining companion to take a pack of cards from his pocket and show

I WANT TO KEEP CREATING, BEING WELL AND PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF MY COMFORT ZONE

a Greek-language version but I'm reminded that the acronym (referring to Meaning, Autonomy, Relatedness, Values, Experience and Learning) can't be translated. "Some people think that acronyms are corny but, to my mind, they help you concentrate and can be instrumental in motivating people, giving a clear, fixed structure," he says.

Philippos Aristotelous has another passion that he is keen to talk about: music. He didn't start playing piano until he was 23 but he taught himself enough to be able to play a song for his wife and their guests on their wedding day. After a long break, he returned to writing and playing in 2015 and wrote the music and lyrics for a song called *Shine*, which he then sent to a company in the US that produces more polished

and much-loved President of Europa Donna, Evi Papadopoulou and last year, she told him that she wanted to use *Shine* in the annual Europa Donna campaign. "Of course, we needed an even better recording of it so I got in touch with the Greek duo Stereo Soul, who had reached the finals of The X-Factor Greece in 2016," he tells me. "They agreed to do it, the Europa Donna board loved it and eventually it led to the song being used and heard by thousands of people. It was a great feeling." As we share the restaurant's signature orange cream dessert, I ask Aristotelous what his plans for 2020 look like. "I don't have any grandiose plans or goals," he admits. "I just want to apply myself creatively and usefully in any way I can on a day-to-day basis. I'm still in the process of

me a few tricks. He apologises for the lack of cards but proceeds to elicit the usual 'How did you do that?' question with a coin that mysteriously disappears from his hand even though I keep my eyes on it all the time. He then explains how he fooled me through a combination of misdirection and sleight of hand. "This is the whole essence of magic," he says. "It's the most innocent form of deception: you promise to deceive someone and you do so! It's also a nice way of provoking people. As adults we often think we know it all and through a magic trick I can say, 'You think you know everything? Well take a look at this!' It's an instrument for suspending people's sense of certainty and that's why I like it. I'm a joker!" And with that, dear reader, he disappeared! ☞

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