I found myself thinking about the subject title for this article… ‘Success’ Story and I reflected that success is different to different people, and it can change as we go through life.

When I was little I used to look at the house behind my parents’ home and thought that success would be having a house like that…! As I grew older I wished that above anything I was a good wife and a good mum; however, 9 years of infertility and an eventual divorce flattened that one!! Then I met Steven and we are blessed with 2 wonderful daughters… I may not be the best mum in the world, but I am finally realising I am a good wife and a good mum…

As I sit here contemplating why I should be allowed to write about my business success I feel a bit of a fraud… we don’t own a £multi-million business and I still haven’t been able to afford a holiday to Disney for my girls… but even I recognise that I have a good business despite all the challenges of the last few years we have a really bright future and that is in itself a success.

In October 2009 I was a successful project manager working 3 days a week for a very comfortable package in a large corporate company, I had been in corporate most of my adult life. Then my working life turned upside down when one lunchtime I went on a personal development course where I was asked (my summary of the course) “If you could change one thing about your life what would it be…?” My answered flipped back: “I wouldn’t be here”…. Oooh I thought, there is a lot of truth in that – I had felt unfulfilled for a very long time and trying to juggle my job with my young family was proving near impossible.

The next question was “and so what do you want to do instead?” Again my answer flipped back: “I would be a business coach and a teacher”… oooh I had no idea where that had come from but my vision for my career had changed…

Two weeks later, along with the rest of my peer group of project managers, I was put under notice of redundancy… I had a 2-year-old, a 6-year-old, no family nearby and I really, really didn’t want to work full-time as I absolutely didn’t want my children to be in wraparound childcare… I loved the people who cared for my children but I didn’t want that for 5 days a week… I had taken 13 years to get my girls and I was really enjoying spending quality time with them…

My redundancy was effective 31 December 2009 at midnight… Suddenly, I had no company car, no BUPA, no company phone, no company laptop, no pension programme, no life assurance and no identity… I had 2 children, a vision for a company and a large mortgage… so I decided to use up all my redundancy and take 2 years off to spend with my girls!

Back when I was 15 my careers advisor at school said that I should be a tax inspector or a teacher… tax inspector really didn’t float my boat and in no way did I feel good enough to teach. Then 26 years later, in my post redundancy support, I answered a very long series of questions to help identify what my skills and personality suited… and the result which dropped out was ‘teacher’… I cried and when I explained my hankering to teach to my advisor she said “well about time you got on with it then!”

I called Hertfordshire’s Education Department and was told that sadly there was no way I could teach children as I don’t have a degree… I tried every which way but without that degree I couldn’t teach children… however, with a little help I realised that I could teach adults! In my first year ‘off’ I passed my formal adult training qualifications and threw myself into large community projects… I then realised I was working very long hours but without any pay and it was then that I realised I wasn’t the sort of person to be at home full-time… uhmmm!

Around the same time and a turning point for the company was when a good friend showed me a local community booklet where the local college was looking for adult evening trainers… at first I couldn’t understand why she was showing me and then I exclaimed “I can’t do that!” and she replied “why not?”. I felt so sick as I called the college and to my shock they really wanted to meet me… I wrote 4 course outlines and they accepted all 4 courses…

I realised I loved the idea of training adults and did my adult teacher training course. It was amazing and I had the most amazing tutor, Louise… she really knew what she was talking about and I learned so much – and much more importantly she boosted my confidence… While studying, I used to look at the staff passes and had a new ambition – that one day I would be good enough to have a staff teaching pass of my own…

A few months later I was asked to go for an interview as a business coach and was blessed to receive 3 days of training. I met some amazing people many of whom I am close to still today… One of them was an amazing coach, James Davey, who helped me to recognise my biggest issue was fear… fear of not being good enough and he untangled that I was petrified at the prospect of sending an invoice… During one of our ‘practice’ coaching sessions, he said something really special to me…. He said that once I had taken that leap of faith and got my first client that I would fly… I doubt James realised then how pivotal that moment was for me… how absolutely essential it was to me that he, who was already an experienced coach, believed in me… that he believed I would fly…

Within a few months came that scary moment…. I had my first client…. And no I didn’t feel good enough and yes I gave so much more than I was paid for…. And eventually I nervously sent my first invoice – and she paid! I still have the envelope she sent my cheque to me in…!

Slowly through seeing people and businesses grow and some amazing feedback, both my training and coaching confidence grew. I was honoured to be accepted on all government coaching programmes I applied for and began to be known within the local coaching and training community.

A very special moment for me was when I was appointed as a Consultant Lecturer for North Herts College – I had got my own college staff pass and I got my staff car parking pass… I really felt I had really achieved something. I loved working with the students at the college including delivering on a variety of programmes from apprenticeships, Peter Jones Enterprise Academy and then delivering an ILM programme… little did I know how key that ILM course was going to be!

About a year later we made the hugely brave decision to lose our only ‘guaranteed’ income and Steven joined the company. I am immensely proud of the fact we work so well together; we are very different characters and we both see this as a strength… without his steady, structured approach and his constant back-office support I wouldn’t have had the chance to focus on growing the business. Steven has a really great reputation as a process-minded, structured coach and an IT specialist. He has also become an amazing teacher of IT and really enjoys seeing people become more confident as they increase their skills. I am so delighted that he will soon be launching his own IT support company and I am looking forward to seeing him thrive doing work he loves.

The business has continued to grow and we are blessed to still have many clients from our early days of business… I genuinely really care about all of our clients. Writing this I reflect back to the early projects we worked on and they seem like a lifetime ago but infact it was only 4 years and I feel so fortunate to still be in contact with almost everyone we have worked with.

Over the past few years we have had some really wonderful business successes. We have achieved many accreditations and received some amazing testimonials… After a life-time of not feeling good enough to teach, being approved as an ILM training centre was a really pivotal moment… being told by Europe’s leading Leadership and Management Organisation that I was good enough was massive for me.

If I wrote all of the boulders and mountains we have had to overcome to get to where we have today I would write a book… running our own business is one of the hardest and yet one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. I have worked into the early hours far too many times and seen the sun rise more than I can count..! We have the most amazing team who never cease to amaze me with how great they are and without them and Steven the business would not succeed.

For the last three years I have been Business Person of the Year finalist for Hertfordshire… to receive finalist three years running is such an honour. I have enjoyed some really lovely successes including being keynote speaker at some really great events… receiving a Lifetime Fellowship of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs, our training company becoming an approved ILM centre and being approved by the Governments Skills Funding Agency to deliver funded programmes including apprenticeships, being on Cambridge TV…

Someone asked me what my key success is and I struggle to answer. I think success is like a never-ending jigsaw puzzle where lots of different pieces are needed… I am not sure I will ever say I have reached the success I want to achieve – as Steven says. I am always looking for something else to achieve… However, over the years I have learned to enjoy the pieces of success along the way… some successes have been overcoming my own fear of failure…. And more recently my own fear of success… Though it is easing, I am still fighting my own demons of not being good enough but I now feel comfortable that I am a Managing Director who has steered this company though some turbulent economic times and I have enjoyed evolving the business to the success that it is today.

Almost all of our clients are recommended, repeat clients, who come to us because of our reputation… which is extremely satisfying.

So what is success to me now…? It is about having time with my children for things like games night, to have weekends away camping, to have time with my husband, to see my clients happier and to see their businesses grow… Our team are completely amazing and so dedicated to our clients… We don’t take much money from the business instead we invest it in growth… but I have learned money really isn’t the key to happiness. I have learned that happiness comes from within…