



*bodymatters*

# The *crunch* bunch

Financial professionals are playing a high-risk game – with their health. **Deirdre Mulrooney** hears how they can shape up

**W**HILE we are all affected by the current global economic crisis, those in the finance sector are undoubtedly at its coalface.

Getting the blame for it mustn't be fun either. In a recent letter to the *Financial Times*, "Investment Banker, 42" shared that he felt he may as well say he's a paedophile for all the venom he encounters from fellow diners when he admits his profession. "Next time... should I lie and say I am a librarian?" he wrote.

Based on Dublin's Lower Baggot Street, personal trainer Laura Gibson, of Fix My Body, also finds herself inadvertently in the eye of the financial storm by association with her clientele, who are largely "in banking, money

markets, trading, with high-profile jobs dealing in the day-to-day markets".

"They are under a lot of stress," she confides. "One guy did throw up. Once he started to exercise, his endorphins kicked in; he was starting to relax. One minute, he felt fine, the next..."

Another of her clients, Steve McGovern, chief money trader in a Dublin-based international treasury operation, is holding it together just fine however. He attributes that to the customised personal training sessions he has been taking for the past year.

"The big difference I found very shortly after starting with Laura was in my energy levels," he says. "I was waking up in the morning buzzed up, and then that fed into work. We work a 10-hour

day, and at the end of a day I'd usually be absolutely whacked, and just want to fall into bed. With the training, I just had energy, I was able to go to the gym, I didn't find it a chore. I've never looked back. My only regret was that I didn't do this 10 years ago."

It was good preparation for where he finds himself today. "It is armageddon," he says. "I've been in this business for 20 years and I've never seen anything like it. But this time I'm thinking straight, I'm communicating well. My mind is in much better shape, and I can definitely deal with stressful situations."

"People need to realise how stressed they are," says Gibson. "A lot of people are masking their stress." She notices many of her clients craving sugary foods and eating burgers for lunch, "which they should never do. They are reaching for chocolate muffins and sugary lattes instead of the usual americano."

"When stressed they head for alcohol and high-fat foods. Instead of going to the gym, or coming to see me after work, they go down to the pub, smoke 20 cigarettes, stay out all night, have a hangover, and then come in the next morning to face an even more stressful day at work."

Gibson feels that in the current crisis, "If people aren't turning to the gym and exercise, they are turning to drink and drugs... I get them back on to the correct eating patterns. They are getting slow-release food into their bodies, and exercise. That helps them keep their weight and their stress down. They keep a food diary of what they are eating, and are being monitored."

"There is a direct correlation between the negativity of the mind, and the negativity of the body," offers Dr Tom Moriarty, a specialist in corporate pressure, and convener of 'The Corporate Athlete: Managing Pressure More Effectively' at Dublin County Stress Clinic. Highlighting the phrase "I was worried sick", he

explains "the throwing up is indicative of the level of anxiety they have on board. The body will do what the mind tells it. If the mind is positive, the body behaves positively, and vice versa."

Gibson has observed this in her studio too. "Training-wise, people are tiring out much quicker. You can see in their eyes that they are tired. People will say they are fine, but by looking at them, putting the heart-rate monitor on them, and talking to them, you get the real story."

"Psychological fatigue would be very common at the moment," agrees Moriarty. "Psychic energy comes from the experience of enjoyment and achievement, otherwise known as the buzz factor," he elaborates. "That buzz gives you the psychic energy to cope with whatever the demands are on a daily, weekly, monthly basis. The people in our financial services sector got a great buzz out of life for a number of years during the Celtic Tiger. That gave them the momentum to keep going. That buzz is now absent, and it's the negativity that's dominant."

"Because their work area is now a big drain on their psychic energy, they need to look outside their work environment to replenish their psychic energy levels," he says. "You need somebody to rearrange your priorities, to point you in the direction of where you can replenish your energy sources."

"The more pressure you are under the bigger the drain on the psychic energy, so the more you have to focus on replenishing it. Variety is the spice of life, and if ever there was a time that phrase was relevant to people in the corporate sector, that time is now."

"When people are under significant pressure they stop doing the things that are necessary for them to cope – such as exercise, family activities, social and recreational activities. This is the moment when these activities are crucial. Yes, they must take exercise. Going to a personal trainer for that is good."

Moriarty also advises his clients to "have a pleasant event schedule for the week or the month, because if you don't plan it, it won't happen". He



## **'My only regret is that I didn't do this 10 years ago'**

warns against succumbing to "catastrophic thinking", which "burns up energy at an alarming rate".

After the initial market shocks however, Gibson is noticing a change. "I find people are wanting more appointments, because they don't want to be going to the pub," she says. "They did that for a week or so when it got really bad in the bank, and they felt really dreadful, they put on weight. So some of them are asking me for four sessions a week, saying, 'I need to relieve my tension, keep to a healthy diet, to be in work on time. I need the energy to keep going.'"

"At the optimum level," Moriarty explains, "people have 'psychological robustness' – the capacity to take the hits and bounce back. If ever there was a time when the hits were coming fast, it's now."

"Those who will survive, and indeed flourish in the current climate, coming out the other end in good shape with all their attributes intact, will be people who are psychologically robust, because they have managed to keep the balance right during this period."

"A dealing room is a very heated environment," confides McGovern, who is as good an exponent of

psychological robustness as any. "I was around in the late '90s crisis, and I'm definitely a lot calmer and more restrained. My thinking is a lot clearer. So I've seen massive benefit from going to a personal trainer."

As for the concrete physical results, despite the fact that he is "eating twice as much as before going to Laura", McGovern has shed almost two stone. "It's all about getting your metabolism up I guess. After about two months I got to a base weight that we were happy with. Then it was just working on fitness and toning and muscles."

At the outset, he envisaged just going for 10 weeks, but soon realised "I wouldn't work as intensely in a gym as I would with Laura. It's very hard to push yourself without somebody to crack the whip. Maybe it's the person beside you knowing what your threshold is. Also it's one on one. When you go to a gym, you have to queue for a machine, or you are distracted."

Meanwhile, Gibson cautions: "It's coming up to Christmas. If you are carrying a few extra pounds now, it's going to be even worse come January. Personal training just keeps you on track of things, watches your health, your weight, and keeps you motivated. A lot of people sign up for the gym, but they don't go. It's also about knowing which exercises to do for your body."

"You just feel so much better", attests McGovern. "It gives you energy. Loads of energy. You wake up in the morning more refreshed, your thinking is clearer, it gets you through the day."

"Moving aerobically," says Gibson, "you are getting fresh oxygen into the brain, and fresh blood-flow into the body's organs. It opens up the mind, like a walk in the countryside – new ideas come up."

Considering that the World Health Organisation recommends 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity five days per week, it sounds like just what the doctor ordered.

For more info on personal training sessions, visit: [www.fixmybody.eu](http://www.fixmybody.eu) (Laura Gibson, NCEHS); [www.personaltrainerireland.com](http://www.personaltrainerireland.com)