

Turn your life around in 8 days

Exhausted and anxious, Crystal Lim Leahy wanted a positive change in her attitude. She shares how she found it – fast!



Crystal says the life skills she learnt on her retreat now help her be a better parent to her kids, Sean, 12, Finn, three, and one-year-old daughter Dylan.

As I looked at the 18 strangers sitting in a circle with me, I freaked out! I had just travelled all the way from Singapore to Australia, for an eight-day workshop called The Hoffman Quadrinity Process – touted to be the “Rolls Royce” of non-religious personal development retreats.

But my fellow participants were shocking – a poor-little-rich-girl, an ageing hipster and a tattooed punk, among others...

I had heard of this retreat from friends who had tried it. Many of them had been hard hit by various types of financial and personal crises. But after a couple of months of finishing this Process, some of them went on to make life-changing decisions. One quit his influential role for a more flexible position so he could spend more time with his son. Another transformed from a mousy, tired housewife into an energetic Pilates teacher with many admirers. “Whatever they are having, I want some of that too!” I thought.

I was exhausted. I’d had two babies in two years, while also trying to forge a career in the tricky financial markets. I felt like a mad balloon: Sometimes stretched to the breaking point, at other times, deflated and empty. I had become irritable, judgemental and negative – and knew something had to change. So I researched the Hoffman Institute and found the Process is endorsed by Harvard’s world-renowned Kennedy School of Government, which had sent 40 graduate participants along as part of a leadership study. They concluded it significantly improved your leadership capabilities and personal life. Another study by the University of California shows 17 percent of Hoffman Quadrinity Process graduates relapse into depressive behaviour, compared to an average of over 50 percent for most conventional anti-depressant therapies.

Apparently the central idea is that in order to achieve true happiness and love, we have to free ourselves from the “Negative Love Syndrome”. Basically, the theory is we all come into this world as clean slates, and then learn patterns of behaviour from our parents.

PHOTOS: THOMAS MARGIER

As children, we all want attention and love from our parents. To get these, we imitate their behaviours, moods and attitudes. These become “patterns” we carry with us for the rest of our lives.

At first, I was very sceptical as I felt I was nothing like my parents! For example, my mother was very critical of me as a child. She would compare my exam results with those of her friends’ children and pit me against my siblings in terms of intelligence and so on. I had vowed never to be like her!

So I made it a point never to criticise my kids. Yet if I accidentally compared my son to another, I would feel very guilty. I would also attack my husband if he criticised the kids. So, in a way, my mother’s attitude was still having quite a negative effect on me and my family.

To break such negative patterns, the Hoffman Quadrinity Process involves confronting them head-on. In my case, it turned out that most of my own negative traits were forms of rebellion against my mother.

Although I love her dearly, her tendency to control relationships through “smother-love” and dramatic displays of tears and drama has always driven me crazy. When they happened, I rebelled by becoming cold and withdrawn, just like my father.

Next, after identifying our worst

patterns, we had to “bash” them away – we literally wrote down each negative trait like “cold” or “control freak” on cards, placed them on pillows and used a baseball bat to bash each card into pulp! I admit, it sounds crazy.

I found the idea quite juvenile and had “Asian-style” hang-ups about expressing myself in such a dramatic way. But the trainer explained beating helps us break the compulsion that makes us repeat certain behaviours over and over again. “Whatever...” I thought dismissively. And then I realised “being dismissive” is another of my negative patterns. So I wrote “dismissive” on a card and bashed it – to see what would happen. Initially I felt stupid... but after a while, I did feel liberated.

I also used to be a sucker for the *Jerry Maguire* romantic idea of ‘You complete me’. But I learnt that while we may be lucky enough to have meaningful relationships, our most important relationship is with ourselves. So it is essential to be comfortable with that without fearing or avoiding it.

Yes, this retreat costs money, but instead of buying handbags or having cosmetic surgery to feel pretty and successful, I feel we need to invest in learning how to let go of our toxic emotional baggage. What I’ve learned has been more beautifying for me than any fashion or cosmetic surgery. **W**

What Makes You Tick?

Before, Asians tended to see self-knowledge courses as more for Westerners, but times are changing. Maybe we have more confidence to try new methods now, or perhaps the rapid pace of life in Asia is pushing us to change our mindsets. That’s why self-development courses are becoming more popular here. The Hoffman Quadrinity Process is an eight-week programme with an eight-day retreat offered by the Hoffman Institute Foundation, a non-profit organisation based in the US. The goal is to help people develop healthier relationships, self-knowledge and emotional freedom. The closest courses to Singapore are in Australia, in Melbourne and outside Brisbane. It costs A\$4,540 (S\$5,600) per person for tuition, accommodation, meals and follow-up meetings and phone coaching. For more details, visit www.hoffmanprocess.com.au or call 6735 3072.