

Business cards

Spirituality has gone luxe, with CEOs and HNWs seeking out guides for help in making big decisions. *Daisy Dunn* finds out more

Illustration **Paul Collicutt**

I'm waiting for Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and war, to tell me what I need to do to marry the right man. Being inexperienced in communicating with divinities myself, I have called upon the services of Su Guillory, an 'intuitive business coach' and reader of oracular messages, who is admittedly more used to working with CEOs and other HNWs than starry-eyed authors like me.

Guillory is speaking via video-link from a sunny terrace in Calabria, southern Italy, where she will shortly relocate from San Diego to pursue her new business. While she sits in the shade of an enormous olive tree – appropriate, given Athena's associations – I am in my London flat, wondering whether I ought to have asked the goddess for financial advice as well.

For Guillory is one of a number of spiritual guides who have lately seen a surge in clients from the upper reaches of the financial sector. As reported in this magazine earlier this year, hedge fund manager Sir Chris Hohn and Dr Kylie Richardson, CEO of educational platform LightEn, put their money behind a retreat led by 78-year-old spiritualist Zulma Reyó in Mallorca. Popular with business leaders, the Zulma Reyó School of Consciousness was established with the modest mission 'to transform a human being and

give them the tools of self-transformation so that they can connect with greater wisdom and change this world'.

Other practitioners of a similarly spiritual bent report an uptick in interest from people working in law and banking in particular.

'I know partners at Goldman Sachs and big law firms – Freshfields, Herbert Smith – and big investment banks – JP Morgan – who actually have personal shamans and numerologists,' confides Andrew Wallas, a former psychotherapist who now offers private clients and businesses 'an alternative strategy' for achieving more of their potential. 'A lot of them seek some quite far-out alternative help... Over the last ten years I've known tons of very successful men and women who've used astrology – all sorts of different things.'

Gone are the days when doing a bit of yoga or meditation seemed the height of hippydom. Today's CEOs would sooner switch on by delving deep into their inner beings than switch off by floating away on a cloud of their own breath. Spiritual guidance, feng shui, tarot, healing crystals, psychedelic drugs and something called 'future life progression' (where you enter a hypnotic state to picture yourself decades down the line) are all on the menu for those seeking new meaning in their lives – or even a helping hand in decision-making over investments, mergers

and acquisitions. As Guillory puts it to me, 'It's no longer taboo to be "woo".'

Dressed in a sleeveless black top, her dark hair cut in a neat bob, Guillory looks a million miles from the archetypal clairvoyant. No headscarves, no pearls, no peculiar babble. She seems – how to put it? – completely normal and immediately likeable.

For 16 years she worked as a content writer for financial tech companies, specialising in software and small businesses. But in 2021, prompted by the pandemic, she established her own business after enrolling on a 'Priestess Programme' to develop her interest in oracle card-reading. Similar to tarot but not limited to a set number of cards, her deck is populated by goddesses from across the world's religions. For each sitting Guillory will select a card at random, go on a meditative journey with the chosen goddess, and provide her client with an attractively presented report of her reading. As Guillory has left her cards in the US, however, for me, she must enter a meditative state unprompted and see 'who turns up'. As a classicist, naturally, I'm delighted it's Athena.

While I await her revelations, I can't help but wonder why it is that professionals, traditionally known for their rational thinking, are now looking to such unexpected quarters for advice. Every guru I speak to reports fresh >>

« interest in the past few years, driven, at least in part, by the pandemic. Those who desire to make a new start do not always have a clear vision of what that start should be. The thought that they might be prepared to entrust a huge life decision to a stranger and their intuition must, nevertheless, strike many as extraordinary.

Londoner Annabelle Mitzman has worked as a tarot reader and tarot teacher for nearly four decades and counts 'accountants, lawyers, CEOs and people in positions of enormous power' among her clients. 'People will be talking about trading, buying, selling,' she tells me. 'I often ask them not to name names or say the numbers they're dealing with, because if I was to know it would be quite scary. Occasionally, they let them slip, and I'm frightened that maybe on a turn of a card we're looking at things in the millions.'

Mitzman tells me of a client who was married to a man who worked for the 'very large company' that 'virtually brought the world down in 2008'. Shortly prior to the crash, says Mitzman, 'we were pulling cards on people within that company' which threw up fears about 'some of the ways it was being managed and run, and an exposure'. While



London-based Annabelle Mitzman does tarot reading for 'people in positions of enormous power'

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the cards seemed to advise the client's husband to take up a job for which he'd been headhunted elsewhere, he urgently wanted more assurance, so Mitzman said, based on the card Four of Swords, that he would receive his answer in the night. Some hours later, in the early morning, he received a phone call from his daughter, who asked him whether he wanted to work for a company or head one. He took the leap just in time.

Not all HNWs who seek alternative guidance are prepared to put their faith in cards. Belgian-born Raf Adams, who lives in Barcelona, swapped a lucrative job in international shipping for a new life as 'the Suited Monk'. His idea was to guide executives to become more in touch with who they are beneath their professional armour. His clients are typically seeking two things: 'They are successful but they lack something and don't know what they're lacking; they want clarity on the next step in their life and career. The second thing is they are often not connected enough with their emotions.'

Like the other gurus I speak to, Adams is keen to respect the confidentiality of people he works with, but he says most of his individual

clients (he also works with companies) are men aged 40 to 55. Many come to him after reading his books and will pay between €12,000 and €18,000 for a year-long coaching package, attending sessions once a week for the first six months and fortnightly thereafter. The Suited Monk website carries glowing testimonials from a senior VP of the InterContinental Hotels Group, the CEO of WANDA Sports Group and employees of Apple.

Adams describes himself as possessing the gift of foresight – in the figurative rather than the literal sense: 'I'm not a clairvoyant myself per se... My gift is when a person tells his or her story in different blocks, I can see the big picture and foresee their next step. I don't know how, but intuitively it comes to me.'

Clients often approach him for specific advice. One executive wanted to know whether he should open a winery in Italy. Adams's technique is not to give direct answers, but to help clients 'to realise and reflect by themselves' through his questioning. Wallas also uses conversation to help his clients make adjustments to their lives to set them on new pathways. 'Sometimes we need someone to reflect back what we're thinking,' says Guillory.



Hedge funder Sir Chris Hohn provides financial backing for a spiritualist retreat

With some guides, however, conversation can segue into something more. Adams has been known to help people find their 'true life path' by having them meet clairvoyants or use ayahuasca, a South American plant-based drug known for its psychedelic and emotion-releasing properties. Adams, who recommends ayahuasca to about two out of ten of his clients, realises it's controversial and stresses that he is careful to see it taken in a safe environment.

All this may sound pretty 'out there', but this is hardly the first time in history that HNWs have turned to outsiders for guidance. As Adams points out, in the past presidents and kings surrounded themselves with philosophers to help them make better decisions. Many gurus today consciously combine the old with the new. Practitioners working in the orbit of the Chopra Foundation, for example, which has been promoting spiritual pathways since the 1990s, combine the ancient Indian purification process of Ayurveda with modern techniques of healing.

The Chinese discipline of feng shui, meanwhile, has long attracted interest from bankers, few more so than John McFarlane, former chairman of Barclays. In his earlier role at Standard Chartered, McFarlane drew heavily on the advice of renowned feng shui master Patrick Wong to rearrange not only his offices, but the Hong Kong headquarters themselves. Such was his faith in the power of the interventions – which included mounting a crystal ball in the basement – that McFarlane recently told the *FT* that they were responsible for StanChart's soaring profits.

Wong remains in demand. Fellow feng shui experts Raymond Lo (a Hong Kong 'grand master' in the field), and Manhattan-based Pun-Yin have almost cult-like followings, as do various vastu gurus the world over.

What's changed in recent years is the adventurousness with which some now approach spiritual guidance. It's no longer a case of embracing something like feng shui because it's fashionable. Today's professionals are much more likely to push the boundaries of their beliefs and experiment with arcane processes – the kind that might still raise the odd eyebrow – in the hope of genuinely achieving deeper self-knowledge.

'I truly believe we are moving away from doing business from a place of pure logic and moving toward inviting intuition into the mix,' says Guillory. 'When we learn to trust that voice – perhaps with the help of a spiritually savvy business coach – we learn to make decisions from a more conscious place.'

Concomitant with these leaps of faith is, in many cases, a greater desire for privacy. As Wallas says of the executives, 'They don't talk about it because it's not really acceptable – the traditional approach would think they're slightly wobbly or have a screw loose.' Indeed, many are more comfortable entering into the spiritual world if it is beneath a veil of propriety. Wallas tells me that his own clients are more open to scientific-sounding concepts, such as 'the quantum field', than spirituality per se. Adams likewise avoids using 'spiritual language with executives who are not yet exposed to spirituality'.

Suffering no such qualms, I receive my goddess reading from Guillory, and read it aloud to myself. 'She should not discount the experiences ahead of her as being less important than love,' Athena pronounces of me. 'She cannot rush the timeline.' The reading is surprisingly intuitive. Perhaps there's something in this after all. The goddess then holds up a lapis lazuli crystal. 'Daisy must be assertive and speak up for what she wants. It will not be handed to her without her asking for it, but the work she has done has been noticed.' That's me told. So, dear publisher, where's that royalty cheque? ❌



Former Barclays chairman John McFarlane has faith in feng shui



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