

MS. MAXIMIZER

Meet an alumna whose idea of success is helping others reach their full potential

Certified executive coach **Monika Black (CSH PhD '12)** is the type of person who hears “yes” when others hear “no.” Where most people see obstacles, she sees opportunities and options. This fearless tenacity and optimism, not to mention a tough-as-nails work ethic, laid the foundation for Black’s entrepreneurial career path and gave her the gumption to achieve three advanced degrees. Black is the co-founder of TandemSpring, a consulting firm that helps organizations and their employees leverage their strengths, as well as chief strategy officer at DyMynd, which empowers women to become financially savvy. Both companies use strengths-based assessments to guide clients in meeting their personal and professional goals.

Black is a maximizer—it’s her primary strength, and it shows in everything she does. As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, she was discouraged from majoring in pre-med because she was a standout track star in the high jump. “They told me it was going to be really difficult for me to manage everything,” she remembers. Black didn’t even blink. Not only did she excel in her classes—including her favorite course, organic chemistry—but also she was a four-time All-American, three-time track-and-field captain and winner of the Big Ten Medal of Honor for excellence on and off the field. Black remembers fans complaining that she didn’t run a victory lap after winning her event at the Prefontaine Classic at the University of Oregon because, true to form, she was sitting on the track writing a paper.

“I love to work, and I love to work hard,” Black says. She regularly puts in 10- to 12-hour days, but it’s clear that this effort brings her joy, whether she’s leading a workshop, coaching a client



one on one or aligning an organization’s strategies with its stated goals. “Helping people reach their full potential in life—that’s what motivates me,” she says.

As a doctoral student in DePaul’s community psychology program, Black found the tools to articulate her vision: “I’m always trying to understand the research and the data, but I also want to know, ‘What do those numbers mean for the people actually living that experience?’” She uses this ecological framework to help her clients recognize the overlapping influence of personal, environmental and social factors on their dreams, abilities and achievements.

Listening is also key. Black strives to listen beyond the words to hear the emotional tenor or ellipses in her clients’ stories. As they share their experiences with Black, they often come to a moment of clarity. “One widow realized she’d been told that ‘money isn’t for women’ her entire life, and now that’s an emotional obstacle preventing her from managing her family’s money,” Black says. “Another woman said she prefers credit unions to traditional financial institutions because the latter have never taken her seriously as an individual of high net worth.”

Black stresses that women of any means have the capability to be the CEO or CFO of their own lives, in part, by aligning their values with their financial plan. “That doesn’t have to be something you put on hold until you make money,” Black notes. As a case in point, she serves on the advisory board for The Theatre School at DePaul and also teaches in both the psychology department and the peace, justice and conflict studies department. Unsurprisingly, she encourages her students to match their strengths to their passions. “We can’t keep telling our students, ‘not yet,’” she says. “I don’t think they should wait to start making an impact in areas that matter to them.”

Four Awesome Monika-isms

Keep Your Engine Fueled.

Many of us are taught to take care of others, and then we wonder why we burn out. Take care of yourself first so that you can be of further service to others.

Know That You Have Everything You Need.

You were enough yesterday, which is more than enough for today. Tomorrow you are certain to be nothing short of amazing. Know that, and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.

Keep It Simple.

The path to radical transformation is paved with simple truths.

Know What Game You Are Playing.

Your life should not be about climbing the corporate ladder; it should be about becoming your truest self. You will win at the game of life once you are truly successful at being you.