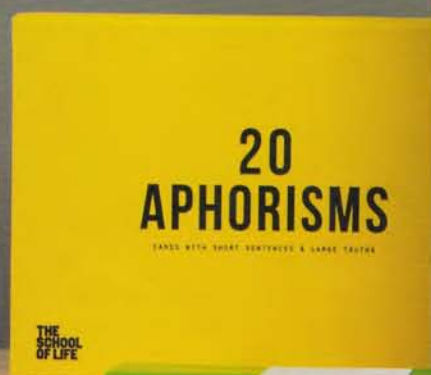


THE SCHOOL OF LIFE OF LIFE

WISE UP ON LITERATURE, LOVE AND LIFE IN GENERAL AT THIS CULTURAL HUB FOR ADULT LEARNING



'EVEN PEOPLE WITH FULFILLING CAREERS CAN FALL IN AND OUT OF LOVE WITH THEM'

Is it possible to package up ideas and sell them? The School of Life believes so. This shop and cultural center in London's Bloomsbury area is a mecca for people who are considering life's big questions, such as how does one lead a fulfilling life? Is it ok not to fit in with the crowd? Does love have to last a lifetime? Why is work often unfulfilling, and is being cool something you can learn?

The School of Life was started up in 2008 by a group of artists, writers and educators, which included the philosopher, author and television presenter Alain de Botton. Their mission was to challenge the traditional university model through a series of bite sized courses, aiming to integrate culture and wisdom into our everyday lives. From the outside, The School of Life looks like an average upmarket high street shop. Morgwn Rimel, director of The School of Life, explains that making the school look like a shop was a conscious decision as 'people understand the language of the shop, browsing and purchasing items. Engaging with ideas in that format was quite new and a different way of making learning accessible.'

The shop aims to be a 'chemist for the mind' with a range of literature that is separated

into the big themes of life, such as work, relationships, family, politics and play. Morgwn thinks that 'less is more when it comes to choosing a book. It is better to have a few well-chosen books that can impact your life, than 30 books that don't really answer your questions.'

The centre also runs a series of short courses the most popular of which is how to find a fulfilling career. Morgwn explains that 'the economic crisis has had a big impact with the redundancies and people are reconsidering their working life. We are seeing a lot of people who wish not only to make money, but also to have a job that helps them grow as a person, which is a challenge. A lot of what we talk about in the course is being able to balance work with other parts of your life. If you have to do a certain job to make ends meet, ask yourself if there are other ways to realize your potential, such as through your relationships or engaging with the community?' She feels that we often expect our careers to be the font of our happiness and we need to address the balance in our lives. 'We now have such huge expectations about what our jobs should be. Even people with fulfilling careers can fall in and out of love with them. We ask people to think about their



expectations and what they really need from their job. The course also recommends a 'portfolio' approach to your career, where you don't necessarily have a job for life but try multiple careers, in sequence or in tandem'.

The School of Life's second most popular course focuses on how to make love last and maintain a healthy relationship. 'We start with the recognition that your partner is not the

sole focus of your life, without this becoming a tragedy' she explains. The center also runs monthly 'Sunday Sermons' where a high profile speaker will deliver a passionate and persuasive argument on the values they feel we should live by. Past speakers have included Alain de Botton arguing the merits of pessimism, and the artist Grayson Perry discussing the joys of kinky sex. The average School of Life attendee

is aged between 25 and 45 and is generally an urban professional. 'We have an even mix of males and females, but if the topic of the talk is about love then we do find that more women attend' says Morgwn.

The strength of The School of Life is their ability to take an intellectual theme and give it an engaging and contemporary slant. For example, their 'How to be Cool' event is a fun but very philosophical take on what it is to be cool. 'We talk a lot about Aristotle in that class. It is about how being virtuous, brave and knowing yourself is actually the essence of being cool. It is not about having the right trainers, as truly cool people have a timelessness about them' says Morgwn.

The School of Life is an interesting destination for people who want to explore the topics of great importance, but feel they are too vague or overwhelming to approach on their own. With prices starting from £15 for a sermon and £20 for an evening talk, it is also an affordable way to feed the mind. This unassuming little shop in London is carving out a niche, as a playful and sociable venue for considering some of life's big questions.

www.theschooloflife.com

