

Review – Rutger Koopmans, *Your Life Your Rules*

by Clive Wilson

Rutger Koopmans was born into a banking family in Holland, so it was almost predestined that he would follow in his father's footsteps and become a banker. He worked in banking from 1982, rising through the ranks to become a senior executive with ING. He married a fellow banker. He was highly successful, well-regarded by his clients and his colleagues, and enjoyed both his work and the fruits of his labours. The banking world, he writes, was his home.

Then on 1 July 2008, he walked away – resigning from the bank on good terms, and leaving his corporate career to explore new avenues and take a different professional path.

Part One of this book explains why the author took this step, and what happened next – the things that went right, things that went wrong, and the lessons he learned along the way. As well as being an engaging read, it establishes the author's credentials for presenting what follows in Part Two – a highly practical model for driving major change in one's working life.

So what was behind the author's decision to take such a drastic step? In short, a growing disquiet with the way the banking world was developing, and the realisation that he no longer wanted to be a part of the banking 'machine'.

In the book, he recounts the early stages of his journey as a free agent in a world of corporate players. The author's long relationship with the late football star Johan Cruyff (as his banker, then business manager) features prominently. It's an interesting story told well, and without self-indulgence. There are mistakes and missed opportunities as well as satisfying successes in these pages.

One of the strong points of the book is its unflinching honesty. The author doesn't over-sell the benefits of abandoning the corporate world to go one's own way, nor does he downplay the possible risks or claim that if he can make it work, so can the reader. As he writes, the book "is not a self-help method or a cure for misery".

A key theme is that walking away from a professional life lived within the structure and safety of an organisation isn't for everyone. We may feel that life would be more fulfilling if we could only change our course to one that suited us better; if we had full control of our destinies. But what does that mean in practice, and what are its implications – for us, and our dependants? How can we tell whether it is actually a good idea?

In Part Two of the book, the author leads the reader through a series of 'important questions' they should reflect upon and address to their own satisfaction before they act. They are drawn from his experiences 'going it alone', and collectively form a toolkit for understanding an inner desire for change, and assessing one's ability to deal with the possible consequences.

Some are seemingly straightforward – how much money do you need; how much are you worth? – but others require clear-eyed soul-searching. What is your intrinsic motivation? Who do you care for? How do you deal with setbacks? In each case, the author uses examples drawn from his experiences to illustrate the question's relevance and importance.

If the reader engages with Part Two, they will gain a better understanding of their professional needs, their drivers, and (crucially) their capabilities.

This book is refreshing and informative. It doesn't claim to give you all the answers, but it does something perhaps more important. It introduces you to the right questions – the answers are up to you.

Your Life Your Rules is published by Brandt Publishers, Amsterdam, in both English translation and the original Dutch. It is available online from bol.com, in hard copy and E-book formats.

Disclosure: By chance I discovered a reference to this book online. It drew my attention because a family member was contemplating leaving a long-term career. When I emailed Mr Koopmans to ask where I could buy the English translation of his book, he kindly sent me a review copy.
