

## PROFILE TONY QUINN

# The Svengali of Stoneybatter

Some think he is a dangerous charlatan, while others say he transformed their lives. What makes him so persuasive?

It's not a great recording but you can clearly hear Tony Quinn's Dublin accent as he works the crowd into a frenzy. He is instructing attendees at one of his "life-changing" seminars and it is clear they are in thrall to the "qualified" hypnotist.

Picture an "exotic island with a cave", he tells them, to hysterical shouts of "yes, oh yes" and "a cave, a cave".

"Go inside now and see this incredible treasure," he instructs. "Run your hand through all those jewels. And look as far as your eye can see, mountains of treasure. It's beautiful and it's all yours."

Quinn is doing what he does best. As Ireland's wealthiest "lifestyle guru" he has made an estimated €50m convincing people he holds the key to unlocking their dreams. Just give him two weeks and €18,500, and he'll give you Educo, a mind programme that supposedly helps people to achieve their goals, effortlessly. To his followers and himself, Quinn is a God-like genius, an extraordinary mind-trainer destined to bring about "great change" in the world. "I think I am meant to work with a large group of people, it could be millions," he once said.

But if he still believes this, he must have been disappointed when 600 people showed up at the RDS exhibition and convention centre, in Dublin, last week to hear the bearded, red-faced 62-year-old give a "free" seminar, but only for people who had previously attended one at full price.

Quinn, who despises negativity, must have also been annoyed to see a small group of protesters outside. Among them was Mike Garde, director of Dialogue Ireland, an organisation that monitors cults. "Quinn's organisation is cult-like and his seminars leave a trail of broken families, marriages and debt," Garde said. "We are trying to get this message across and if the penny drops for some people, maybe we can be of some help."

Garde says he has worked with 300 people who were dissatisfied with their experiences of Quinn. The Liveline radio show, presented by Joe Duffy, was inundated recently with unhappy callers, some concerned about family members caught up in Quinn's organisation.

Some people say Quinn simply runs a rather expensive life-coaching and fitness business, but others believe he oversees a money-grabbing, manipulative enterprise that misuses hypnosis and brainwashes some followers. Not everyone who goes on a Quinn seminar comes back unrecognisable to their families — some even achieve the success they were promised — but questions persist about Quinn's claims, qualifications and motives.

He is a taxi driver's son from Arbour Hill in Stoneybatter, Dublin. An only child, Quinn was doted on by both parents. He grew up as a fan of Charles Atlas, the "scrawny weakling" who became a muscleman and Quinn, an average kid, believed he too was destined for great things despite his limited education.

A one-time apprentice butcher, he developed an interest in fitness and body-building and in the 1970s began running yoga courses. He developed a spiritual lifestyle and messianic aura to go with the job. In houses in Kilbarack and Howth, Quinn set up communes where people could live in a yogic state of being. Joined by followers prepared to work relentlessly on his behalf, often on limited pay, he was an enigmatic character with powers of influence and persuasion.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Quinn the "lifestyle guru" began to emerge, and he distanced himself from some hippy associates. He began practising hypnotism and became a complete master of the technique. He then developed his Educo system, spreading his word through Blueprint for Successful Living, a newspaper delivered to homes and usually containing interviews with Quinn about his "insights".

His big break was on The Late Late Show, which showed footage of him hypnotising

people who then underwent surgery without feeling pain. Hypnotic anaesthesia is a well-known but little-used procedure, for obvious reasons. The stunt worked and Quinn went on to work with Steve Collins, the boxer, when he fought Chris Eubank in a world championship fight in 1995 and during a subsequent rematch.

Collins has since played down Quinn's role, suggesting he was simply spooking Eubank by claiming he could feel no pain once hypnotised. Quinn was, however, paid IRE£360,000 (€450,000) for his services.

He left Ireland in 1993 and moved to the Bahamas, where the profits from Human Potential Research Limited, his company, were tax-free. From here he began organising seminars in locations including Egypt, California and Capri. They attracted small numbers at first, but are held several times a year and can be attended by up to 50 people. It is estimated that up to 3,000 have been on a Quinn seminar. He also runs smaller "master classes" costing €62,000 and one-on-one coaching for more than €100,000. He promises to make people happy and successful, which in Quinn's world equates to having lots of money, a condominium, a sports car and a yacht.

While he claims his system works for true believers, he is the biggest beneficiary. Quinn owns a home on the well-to-do Hamhaugh Island, in Surrey, and has a Martello tower in Dublin, a property in Los Angeles and apartments on Paradise Island in the Bahamas, where Far Niente, his yacht, is moored. He likes watching James Bond movies and shares

his life with Eve, 23, a busty good-looking South African blonde.

He returns to Ireland sporadically and boasts about not reading any newspapers or media but it's unlikely that he has avoided all of the negative coverage of his organisation.

Quinn says he can tap into a person's "unconscious attention", delete the thought programmes holding them back and unlock new potential. "If you want something, believe that you have it without any inner doubt and it will come about," is one of his mantras. But experts dismiss his life lessons. "Simplistic in the extreme and without any acceptable research," is how Ciaran Benson, a psychology professor at University College Dublin, once referred to the Educo system.

Quinn operates a postal request service whereby followers write down a goal and post it with a cheque for about €30 and a photograph. It can be a new bike or a cure for a terminal illness. Quinn or his followers apply their minds to the request and if the person believes in this process enough, their goal will be achieved. If it doesn't, Quinn says, the problem is that they didn't believe enough. "I really do feel like a magician pouring that magic energy into those requests," he once said.

Quinn says that his Educo system can double revenues for companies which follow his teachings over three years, but in 2005 the Sunday Times revealed that his health retail empire in Ireland had losses of €1m.

In 2000, a director of a clothing shop in Limerick had to go to court to gain sole control over its finances after her husband became involved in Quinn's organisation. The court was told that the man was acting under an "external influence", and that he began behaving in an uncharacteristic manner after attending a Quinn seminar.

By operating gyms, health shops and yoga classes, Quinn's followers receive a steady supply of newcomers who can be convinced to go

on his seminars. One husband told a Sunday newspaper: "My wife went on a seminar and her whole life became dominated by Quinn. She spent every spare moment working for him at the expense of family and friends. We had money troubles because she was spending huge amounts on Tony Quinn-related things."

Quinn's followers have been known to sell his seminars quite aggressively, even advising would-be attendees to take out car loans to cover the cost. The pitch is that you will learn enough about success to make the money back.

The enthusiastic selling doesn't end if you agree to go. Quinn has told people under his influence that the way to achieve success is to convince others to attend a seminar.

There is even a scheme whereby devotees can make €2,000 for each new person they sign up. Quinn tells them it will result in their "financial freedom" and calls it "the selling system that never fails".

Clients are also given tapes or CDs to take home with them and are told to listen to them daily.

These recordings contain the same hard-sell message and some suspect Quinn uses them to reinforce his influence over listeners.

Quinn continues to be popular, despite the controversy. His supporters called Liveline to counter criticisms, and well-known business figures have attended seminars including John Boyle, the managing director of Boyle-sports, who credits Quinn with the success of his company.

"Here's the bottom line," Quinn said last week. "We are a small group of people who have made a vital difference to every man, woman and child in a whole country. Maybe even for future generations as well."

"Tell me who else can lay claim to that kind of achievement, to really be able to say they had made a difference."



## Man City just put us on the transfer list

PAUL ANTHONY McDERMOTT



When I heard talk on RTE last week of an important international organisation being brought in to run Ireland, I assumed that it was either the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or Manchester City football club.

My preferred choice initially was Man City on the basis that it is the wealthier of the two organisations, but when I rang the City of Manchester stadium they said they already had an Ireland on their books and didn't want another one. So I began to imagine what life might be like in an Ireland run by the IMF.

Presumably it would re-brand us, giving the republic a new name and national colour. At the moment my favourites are Fundaland and magenta, but I am open to suggestions. I assume that the IMF would want to close down some of our outlying subsidiaries, such as Donegal and Kerry, in order to focus on the core business in Dublin. Naturally those remaining counties would be replaced by cantons to increase administrative efficiency — and confuse the hell out of the GAA.

Given the worsening economic situation, the public is entitled to ask whether the law is reacting properly to what is happening. Three cases in recent days provide food for thought in this regard.

First, three former workers in a carpet factory were awarded five-figure sums for unfair dismissal by the Employment Appeals Tribunal, in spite of long-running irregularities involving the company's clocking-in system. Some of the workers were clocked in and paid while still at home, others improved their card skills,

and some simply lay down and snoozed on the carpets when they had completed a particular task.

Although the employees admitted that all this happened, they won damages because the company did not have proper procedures in place to deal with dismissals. Without knowing the full facts of the case it would be unfair to suggest that the employees were not entitled to their damages. But on reading reports of the case, I was intrigued by the concept that before you can fire someone who is sleeping at work, a set of procedures needs to be in place. Do you have to keep the music low and the lights dimmed as you gently wheel the sleeping employee on a chair to the exit? Do you have to whisper "you're fired!" in their ear in case they are startled and injure themselves when they wake up? Does the contract of employment have to expressly spell out the different and often mutually exclusive aims and purposes of a bed and a factory?

Presumably if the IMF were running the country, fair procedures would simply require that you administer one swift kick up a dozing employee's backside as you chuck him out. Surely one of the reasons that multinationals are packing their bags is because of daft over-regulation here. Oh to be a fly on the wall of a Polish or an Asian court adjudicating on a damages claim brought by a narcoleptic employee.

In another case, Judge Neilan dismissed charges against a Moate chipper which had employed a 16-year-old girl on certain days for longer than four hours and after 10pm in breach of the Protection of Young People Act 1996. It transpired that the girl and her mother were the two main breadwinners in the family. She had actively sought the extra work and was still employed at the fast-food shop. The judge wondered why the employer was being punished if in the current economic climate a young person wanted to help her family in a productive way. He said he would prefer his own children to work rather than hang around the streets.

The final case was one I witnessed in a district court in the west last week. A Czech man was charged with stealing a roast chicken from a large Irish supermarket chain. It was explained that he was homeless and hungry and simply unable to resist the temptation of the chicken. It was further explained that the supermarket had successfully regained possession of said chicken. No evidence was given as to whether the supermarket had succeeded in selling it on to a customer in possession of sufficient funds to purchase it.

The judge, as he was obliged to do, asked the man if he wished to exercise his right to trial by jury or if he was happy to have the theft charge dealt with in a summary manner in the District Court. I found myself secretly hoping that the man would plead not guilty and ask for a jury trial. I have a pretty good idea what any jury in Ireland would do if confronted with a large supermarket chain, a bewildered Czech, and a medium-sized sizzling €6 chicken (safely returned).

However, the Czech man, unlike many middle-class people charged with fraud offences, wanted to own up and account for his actions. He said that he did not require a jury and wanted to plead guilty.

The humane judge did not impose any penalty or even register a conviction but simply applied the Probation Act and let the man walk back out into the town. One wonders what the point of the prosecution was.

All three cases remind us that when people and companies are experiencing real hardship, it is imperative that the rule of law coincides with common sense.

'THEY ALREADY HAVE AN IRELAND AND DON'T WANT ANOTHER ONE'

## THINK TANK NEW IDEAS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

### It's time for schools to slip chains

Multidenominational secondary education is the way forward, writes David Limond

The chains that bind Irish schools into their current forms were forged in the 19th century. National and secondary schools have been de facto divided along denominational lines since the 1800s.

In the 1930s, Vocational Education Committees (VECs) were allowed to organise schools to do the work that the Catholic church did not deign to do, educating those who were deemed fit for certain sorts of more demanding work so long as it was understood that what the VECs offered was an inferior product.

In the 1970s the movement now known as Educate Together (ET) entered the scene, breaking the clerical monopoly on the provision of national schools. ET has thrived since. Its charter commitments to being multid denominational, co-educational, child-centred and democratic attract more and more parents.

Recently, with two colleagues in the School of Education at Trinity College, I co-authored a report on the feasibility of ET's move into the provision of

second-level schools in the near future. I hold no brief to speak on behalf of ET, but this is so obviously needed if Ireland is to mature as a society that I feel interested parents should lobby to make it a reality.

Our report assessed whether ET would be able to bring about this momentous change, perhaps the most significant reform of Irish schooling for a generation.

As I wrote, I had in mind my seven-year-old daughter, a pupil at an ET school in Dublin, who will have to leave a school that is multid denominational, co-educational, child-centred and democratically managed and attend one that would be none of these things.

In some respects, the existence of VEC schools and community colleges — the alternatives to religious schooling — are not the solution but the problem.

Their existence allows politicians and civil servants to hide behind the fiction of "parental choice". For as long as there are no second-level schools run by parents themselves there will be no true alternative to being saddled with the

baggage of the past: a past in which it was assumed that, despite the pieties of the constitution, parents should have little or no say in their children's education.

The principal findings of our report were that a majority of ET parents are supportive of such an initiative, and want a form of second-level schooling that is distinct to anything currently available.

They want schools in which their children receive a good academic education but are not encouraged to see learning as being measurable solely or primarily through "points" achieved.

They want schools in which their children would be exposed to diverse cultural influences and meaningfully equipped for participation in democracy through having the opportunity to practise it rather than by having its virtues preached to them.

They wanted these to be schools in which they would be seen as partners, and not excluded by teachers' professional culture and bureaucratic proceduralism. These parents declared themselves to be

willing to work towards the creation of such schools and there is no reason to doubt that this willingness is real, given the history of ET parents' activism.

We could see no legal or constitutional barrier to ET's involvement in the secondary sector and we are confident that, perhaps with philanthropic support to cover initial costs, there would be no technical problems that could not be overcome. An expert group of principals who advised us agreed that there were no insurmountable difficulties.

The report noted that: "Ireland has almost no tradition of direct parent democracy and active involvement in its second-level sector and the state may be reluctant to surrender control to a parents' group." But parents in Northern Ireland and Britain have had successes in establishing schools of the kind envisaged

here. ET has taken steps towards the establishment of its first secondary school, but despite reservations in our report as to the wisdom of it striking up any kind of relationship with the VECs, there are signs that if participation by ET in second-level schooling goes ahead it will be through an alliance with the VEC sector.

I would regret anything that would lead to the once-mercenary ET being shackled to the VEC behemoth in this way.

Let there be genuine innovation in second-level education, but let it come from the initiative of parents. Let's slip the chains that bind and move into the future with democratic schools, suited to the 21st and not the 19th or 20th centuries.

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Send your ideas on this week's think tank or submissions for future think tanks to: ireland@sunday-times.ie

