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Time for a personal change? A NW coach points the path

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It's 26 days till New Year's. Do you know where your resolution is?

Marilyn Mitchell, a "personal change coach," has a whole list of options — or, perhaps more accurately, one big one.

With training in yoga, Pilates, the Alexander Technique, Reiki and nutrition, Mitchell said she seeks to weave these complementary strategies into one practice, aimed at helping people relax and release.

"I fuse all those things together in a very simplified form for the client to do in their home," she said.

Mitchell has lived and worked in Northwest Washington for 30 years. She calls D.C. "a conservative environment," but she thinks that environment is changing. After all, she pointed out in an interview, everywhere you turn, there's another twentysomething with a yoga mat strapped to her back. Plus, with so many people fighting and surviving



Bill Petros/The Current

Marilyn Mitchell is a "personal change coach."

natural curves of the spine," Mitchell said as she lay down on her back, demonstrating an exercise in which she puts a book under her head and focuses on breathing. The point "is

cancer, Washingtonians are increasingly interested in alternative wellness strategies. For the longtime Northwest resident, this is good news.

Her philosophy? Keep it simple. In fact, for many of her lessons, all you need are the three Bs: ball, breath and book.

"These exercises support

to bring the body and mind back to a neutral position."

Sometimes, she uses gemstones. Occasionally, she and her clients talk about auras. But most of the time, Mitchell preaches the basics of healthier living.

"It all starts with whether they have visited doctors. You would be astonished how many executives don't go to doctors," she said, explaining that most of her clients are high-powered professionals.

Then comes diet (no caffeine), exercise ("fun and simple" ways to relax), work schedules (Mitchell favors "timeouts") and breathing.

Mitchell doesn't formally advertise (though she does have a Web site, atthecorecoach.com). In fact, some of her clients like to keep mum about their coaching ("It's not something they gab about," she said). But teaching people to relax is a full-time job. Her clientele is almost entirely referral-based — people who seek her out when

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they are in "crisis" mode. "They're tired, dragging, sick," she said. Sometimes, they come to her before switching jobs or after losing a loved one.

Most of them are women, who begin with six to eight introductory classes end up scheduling regular sessions — 75 minutes approximately once a month — to stay on top of the tools they've learned.

In the sessions, Mitchell uses a pared-down set of props: a plastic

ball to ease hip and shoulder joints and increase the spine's flexibility ("The spine can age up to 20 years faster than you actually age," she noted). She shows clients how to use a book to center their nervous systems. And just breathing, she said, can remove up to 70 percent of the body's daily toxins.

Mitchell acknowledges that, at first blush, these basic exercises might seem silly, but, to a certain extent, that's the point. "They're fun, simple and very effective," she said.

Still, much of the challenge of working with clients is to get them

"out of their heads," away from doubt and self-consciousness. Once those obstacles are out of the way, she said, "change happens."

"For me, a personal change coach means that I teach the client specific tools to let go, release tension and center themselves. That way, they make their own changes."

A change can be specific, like gathering the courage to quit a job or change careers. Or it can be general, like setting boundaries and creating time for oneself.

"Women feel very guilty about taking time for themselves. ... It's a simple letting-go process."

Marilyn A. Mitchell

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