



It's an ill wind...

IS IT JUST ME, or do recessions have a kind of Friends Reunited quality to them? Lots of old chums have made contact in the past few months – including one guy I last talked to in the three-day-week recession of the 1970s. Sadly, we didn't have much to say to one another.

Anyway, it was a delight to hear from Ali Ballantine, who I knew in the 1990s as marketing supremo at NB Real Estate in Sackville Street. Ali has set up a new company, based in Berkeley Street, called Helpsme. That's Help SME, rather than Helps Me – although I guess it works both ways.

Helpsme (www.helpsmeltd.com) is a new consultancy offering a range of services from marketing, PR and business development to HR, recruitment, training and coaching. Ali and her cohorts – including another old friend Duncan Lamb, formerly of *Estates Gazette* – are targeting small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs, geddit?) whose directors and partners should probably be focused on cash-flow right now rather than peripheral support services.

I mention Helpsme here because it's a fine example of partnering (between the various consultants) and a business actually born out of a recession. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, as the proverb says.

Jogging memories

I WAS JOGGING around the Serpentine on a brilliantly sunny day a few weeks back with my trainer Gillian Trozado, when we heard this squawking sound and the sky flashed fluorescent green as a flock of ring-necked parakeets flew overhead.

They're a common enough sight these days. The population of ring-necked parakeets in the south east is around 4,300 – most of which are descendants of birds that escaped in the 1970s. And they're an impressive sight in full sunshine.

The reason we were jogging around the Serpentine – and stop me if you've heard this – is that we're both in training for the Mayfair Park & Tower Race on June 17, a date that now looms perilously close.

Gillian and her kick-boxing fiancé Parag will be some way in front of me on the day, I guess – between them they probably weigh less than I do. So, they'll be up there with a bunch of Gladiators, the beautiful Olympic medallist Jo Fenn, several of Mayfair's other personal trainers,

Lee from Steps and a smattering of Michelin-starred chefs and catering industry superstars.

We'll all be racing around the Serpentine, under Park Lane and up all 28 floors of the Hilton by the back stairs to raise money for Galvin's Chance – a new charity project aimed at giving disadvantaged kids the opportunity to serve as apprentices in Park Lane hotels.

We need to raise £30,000 to get the pilot project off the ground. Go to www.justgiving.com/erikbrown if you're feeling generous, and you can join in without having to run a single step. Go on, you know you want to.

Is it my imagination, or does celebrity trainer Matt Roberts look just a tad overwhelmed by the Gladiators in the picture? He's the guy behind the blonde, who I think is the Goddess of Perilous Seduction, Siren. Oh, and Jo Fenn is the girl in front of Siren. That's an awful lot of muscle in one place. Lovely isn't it?

PRat!

THE QUALITY of PR consultancy available in London is variable. There are some very professional and proficient PRs out there, and some one might cross the road to avoid. One firm in particular annoyed me this past week or two. Following various clumsy attempts at manipulating coverage of quite a big news story, the PR responded to a formal request for a statement by sending us one headlined "Not for publication". We've filed it under 'P', for pointless waste of time.



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