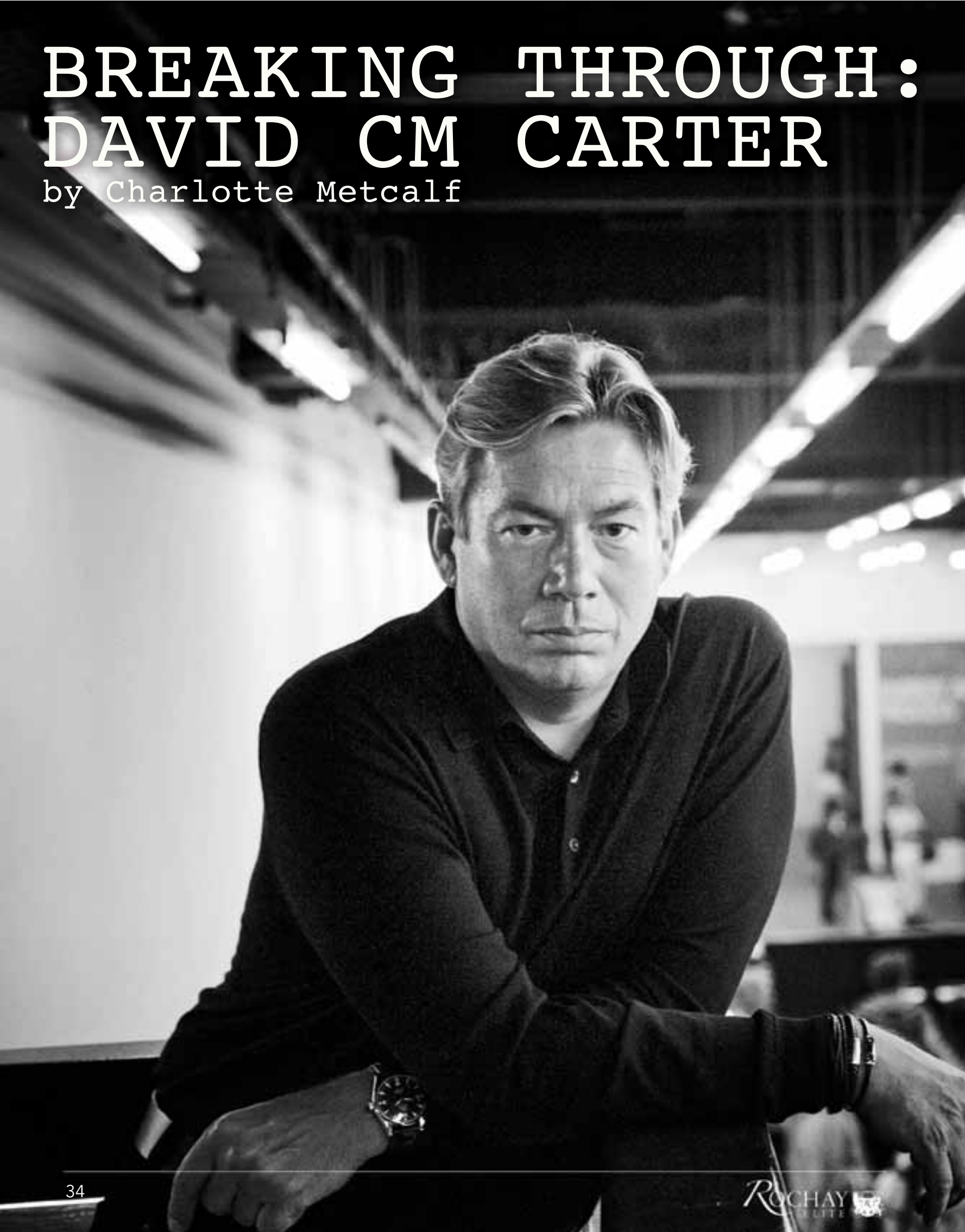



BREAKING THROUGH: DAVID CM CARTER

by Charlotte Metcalf





"I mentor only ten highly successful, carefully chosen clients at any one time. They include CEOs, business leaders and entrepreneurs, plus celebrities, philanthropists and a small handful of other interesting successful 'movers, shakers and shapers' who want to be and become the very best versions of themselves."





On first meeting, anyone might be forgiven for mistaking David CM Carter's ambition as over-reaching and arrogant. Carter is on a bold mission to help create a tier of global leadership capable of inspiring positive change. He believes that the world lacks motivational leaders because they have not been guided or inspired to be the very best version of themselves. His credo is that he can do this by teaching the difference between being successful and making a difference. Such is his faith in his track record that he styles himself The Mentor - rather than merely a mentor - because he is certain he is the one person who can arm good leaders with the tools they need to become great. 'Leadership is in crisis,' he insists. 'Recent surveys have shown that 75% of employees don't find their bosses inspirational, while 75% of CEO's say they would have a mentor or coach if they could find the right one. That's where I come in.' Indeed, a McKinsey report issued this January found that nearly a third of US companies admit that they have failed to exploit international business opportunities fully because they lack enough leaders with the right capabilities.

Carter mentors entrepreneurs and CEO's across a range of industries and countries, from mining to fashion, from LA, New York and London to Denmark, Moscow and Johannesburg. He has mentored national leaders, philanthropists, artists and celebrities. All tend to be in transition to the very top tier of their professions and such is the intensity of his approach that he handpicks a maximum of ten clients at a time.

I meet Carter at his South Kensington flat. The contemporary décor is deliberately neutral and bereft of clutter with few possessions that betray his tastes or interests. 'I keep my life simple,' he explains. 'I am the only mentor to offer three-day retreats and I conduct them here. My house is a sanctuary where my clients can hang up their holster, switch off their phone and put their feet up. They need a serene environment in which we can unload the jigsaw pieces of their life and start putting them back together again in a more meaningful way.'

He seems affable as he chats about being Chairman of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's Development Board and delivers a barista-style cappuccino from a gleaming kitchen. I was expecting a sleekly sinister practitioner of Dark Arts but Carter is casually dressed in a baggy T-shirt and his hair is floppy. The 'best-laundered urban hippy' as one of his clients teases him. He laughs readily and talks in everyday English about what he does, telling me how to make a goals poster and explaining a few simple exercises that can kick-start everyone on the path towards self-improvement and breakthrough.

The basis of his success seems to be that he straddles the business and personal aspects of his clients' lives, as able to sort out their balance sheet as their emotional crisis. He is disarmingly open about his own failures - he is three marriages down and at the beginning of a new relationship: 'I've had sublime successes, a few failures, and one or two near disasters,

including a narrowly avoided personal bankruptcy,' he says.

In 1997, following the collapse of his first marriage and £250,000 in debt, Carter founded Merryck & Co. that, over the next 14 years, became the world's leading CEO mentoring company, with offices in the USA, Europe and Australia. 'There's nothing about being a CEO that I don't understand so I speak my clients' language,' says Carter. 'But it's more than just business that has contributed to my arsenal of skills.' Carter's first wife left him with a son and daughter aged 3 and 7. 'Raising two children, almost single-handedly, taught me the gift of unconditional love and loyalty. This, along with near bankruptcy, taught me how to remain calm and centred when hurricanes of anxiety and uncertainty swirled all around me. In the ten years it took me to claw my way back to zero, I learned the value of perseverance. The wisdom I've accumulated has enabled me to continue to lead a fulfilling, purposeful and fun life ... no matter what.'

Though I find his positive breeziness more of a shiny carapace than a conduit to his inner self, it's impossible not to like him for his openness about his complicated personal life and for the fact that his approach seems grounded in everyday experience. He puts much of his success down to this openness and he has made a point of being generous, approachable and trustworthy. 'The Chatham Rule applies here at all times,' he says. 'My clients know that nothing they say to me will be repeated. Likewise, I often choose to reveal things about myself that may shed light on their predicaments and I expect them to respect my privacy as much as I respect theirs.'

Grinning cheerfully, he gives me a copy of his book 'Breakthrough', a surprisingly easy and compelling read with lots of simple exercises (write down 100 things that make you happy, for example). It's sold over 10,000 copies already in the UK, America and in eleven other territories. He's also working on his own television channel that will launch later this year by broadcasting twenty hours of interviews, conducted by him, entitled 'Attitude Determines Altitude'. Carter has already signed up 20 impressive CEO's including Greg Dyke, Chairman of the FA, Dianne Thomson, CEO of The Lottery and Mike Wilson CBE, Founder and Life President of St. James's Place Wealth Management. Without a shadow of self-doubt, it does not occur to him that he could fail.

Carter points out that his method is as likely to help a rock-star as a business leader - it is fundamentally democratic. He even offers to mentor me so I can better understand the process, despite the fact that, as a journalist, film-maker and mother, I am clearly not his typical client. 'So what?' he shrugs. 'It doesn't mean you're incapable of achieving a breakthrough in your own life.'

I accept but first there is homework. There are questionnaires to complete and I send one to 30 people I have worked with.

My first appointment during my retreat is not just with Carter but with also with Joan Shafer in Hawaii via Skype. Joan trains consultants in values-based assessments and strength-based methodologies around the world. She has analysed the responses to the questionnaires and now we talk through her findings. Joan's session is crucial to Carter's process because, however much a client may balk at being told certain truths, he has the back-up of Joan's assessments. Being able to grasp the reality of how others see you is crucial, particularly for CEO's in charge of thousands of employees, if breakthrough is to be achieved.

Next I meet Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner Joy Le Fevre, who adds an extra holistic dimension to Carter's approach. She diagnoses my 'elemental type' as a tree (trees have roots and so a tendency to be stuck in ruts) and gives me acupuncture to 'unblock' me. This is really to soften me up so I have a more receptive attitude towards the truths and advice that will follow.

The acupuncture certainly makes me feel tired and vulnerable and I now face a bracing session with Carter during which he grills me about my inability to monetize my skills. With ruthless clarity, he dismisses various career options that I am considering until I am left with no option other than to confront what I need to do to survive financially.

With that sorted, Day Two tackles the patterns in my behaviour that prevent me from achieving my full potential on every level. I have an early morning Skype session with Sydney-based Jennifer Moalem, to whom Carter refers as his 'secret weapon'. I am told only that she is a specialist in 'transformational change' and 'energy psychology'.

At first I am none the wiser as Jennifer talks about 'feeling my energy'. I start to feel resentful and irritable when she repeatedly says I am not 'resonating'. Then she suddenly asks me a question about my childhood. To my own surprise I reveal something I have not told anyone for 30 years. Over the next two hours Jennifer penetrates my defenses and, during a 'creative visualization', we both weep. At the end of it I am apparently resonating fully, though I feel nauseous and faint. I also feel different, as if an enormous weight has been lifted from my shoulders. 'You've had a breakthrough,' grins Carter.

It would be inappropriate to judge Carter's efficacy by what he did for me because I am not his target clientele. So I turned to his list of mentees. His website boasts an impressive list of testimonials from people like Chris Griffith, CEO of Anglo American Platinum, the largest producer of platinum group metals in the world with more than 60,000 employees, Alexander Nikolaev, Managing Director of Valartis Group, one of Moscow's leading property companies and Danish IT entrepreneur, Jacob Tackmann Thomsen, founder and CEO of global bank payment company INPAY. Anirudh Misra, founder and CEO of international mining and trading group IMR, said: 'If you want an easy ride, David is not for you. He makes you stretch out of any standard set of conventional thinking. He is

fearless in asking tough questions and saying what needs to be said. He has a world-class commercial mind and this gives me confidence in his judgement. This distinguishes a mentor to me from a coach.'

I talked to Shalini Khemka, founder of E2Exchange that helps entrepreneurs create high growth companies and access finance. She described her own mini-retreat as 'brilliant'. 'What I learnt in that one day could have taken many months to realize,' she told me. 'David got straight to the heart of things and helped me clarify and articulate my objectives. David's seriously expensive compared with other mentors but worth the money.'

I also talked to Tony Manwaring, CEO of business think tank, Tomorrows Company, who had found Jennifer's session as mysteriously effective as I had. 'Much of our work with City leaders and others focuses on the business value created or lost because of 'soft' factors - values, cultures and behaviours. Jennifer's genius is to enable the personal transformation, which unlocks this soft value. She recognises the power of the patterns that limit us and the new ones that will enable us to realise more fully who we are and what we can be. And brilliantly she supports people to make the change. How she does this is hard to describe. There's wisdom, empathy and finely honed practice, but there are just some things you have to experience.'

Tony introduced Carter to Paul Feeney, CEO of Old Mutual Wealth, who said, 'David is a maverick and quirky (he wears red shoes!) but very business savvy. He cares about people and business and its purpose. His network is phenomenal and he is generous in sharing everything he has access to help me succeed.'

Though some of what happens on his retreats is beyond rational explanation, David's method is not so much about the Dark Art of Spin as about a combination of hard-hitting straight talk and focused hand-holding. Leadership can be a lonely business and David is, above all, supportive, which is why his clients return to him again and again for 'top-up' mentoring sessions.

Life coaching, life skills and mentoring are now big business as firms try out everything from mindfulness to neuroscience games to improve leadership skills. It's a wishy-washy business and hard to quantify results so it's perhaps no surprise that Carter remains head and shoulders above his competitors. He offers the ultimate package, offering his tough-talking, savvy business acumen alongside those 'softer' skills of Jennifer, Joan and Joy. What I had originally perceived to be big-headed bluster proved to be justifiable confidence in his unrivalled ability to help his clients identify and then break through to the zenith of their game. When I ask how he defines that zenith, he says, 'I'm not interested in people who don't want to make a difference to the world. I teach the difference between being successful and being significant.' ■



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A handwritten signature of David McArthur in white ink on a red background. The signature is stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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