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By [Shelley Emling](#) International Herald Tribune

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About four years ago, Tim Smale's life wasn't going so well. He had been in the media business in London for 20 years, and his job had become horrendously stressful. Adding to that, both his young son and his mother were gravely ill.

When someone he met at a social function suggested that he try hypnosis to help him cope, Smale laughed.

"My perception of hypnosis was people with goatees and open-toed sandals," he said. "I believed it was rubbish."

Then he tried it and found that he felt happier and more focused than he had in a long time.

Smale started studying hypnotherapy evenings and weekends while keeping his day job at Clear Channel Entertainment. After a year, he became a certified hypnotherapist, which then led him to quit and start Mindworks, a London-based practice that specializes in what Smale calls "mind coaching."

"People know about life coaching and sports coaching," Smale said. "I wanted to get away from the term hypnosis since some people think of this as a weirdo idea."

Once used by the English as a way of easing pain before anaesthetics were developed, hypnosis today has a range of uses, from helping people to stop smoking to overcoming fear of flying and other phobias. As hypnotherapy has become more widespread, its uses have grown. Now, many people are using it to relieve stress and to improve their focus at work.

"Most people have performance issues and are wondering why they can't get to the next level," said Smale, who charges £150, or \$265, for an hour-long session.

The scientific community is generally supportive of the concept.

"There's pretty rock-solid evidence that the brain undergoes changes when you are hypnotized," said John Gruzelier, a professor in the Division of Neuroscience and Mental Health at Imperial College London. "It wouldn't surprise me that business people are benefiting from this."

Certified hypnotherapists must undergo at least 350 hours of training. In Britain, the Hypnotherapy Association lists hundreds of certified hypnotherapists, including 73 in London. The American Council of Hypnosis Examiners certifies 9,000 hypnotherapists worldwide.

Sessions with Smale take place at his office in central London. Clients sit in a reclining chair, close their eyes and "listen to my voice while I take them through guided visualization using safe places and favourite places and also people images to get them to relax," he said.

"Eventually," he said, "I bypass their conscious thinking and get them into a daydream state of subconscious relaxation."

"The client is totally in control and aware of what's going on," Smale said.

The experience, he added, "is like 'a few hours' worth of power napping."

He said the client usually could see some change after the first session, but specific change based on the client's needs typically kicked in after the second, which Smale records on a CD for use at home. The third, he said, "is generally about locking the new behaviour into place." He added that three sessions were usually enough.

Smale's big break came last year, when he signed up Alastair Campbell, a former director of communications for Prime Minister Tony Blair, as a client. Campbell hired Smale to help him train for the London Triathlon, which raises money for the Leukaemia Research Fund.

"He included plenty of references of specific points of anxiety relating to the training and the day itself," Campbell wrote in *The Times* in August 2004. "And he put in a few specific trigger words or phrases that he urged me to say to myself whenever I felt I was weakening or panicking. The one that lodged was 'better, faster, stronger.'"

Campbell finished the triathlon in 2 hours 43 minutes, far ahead of his expectations.

Smale's practice has since blossomed, with most clients coming from the business world.

"I left Tim's office a different man," said Steve Burns, chief executive of Totally, a media and communications group. "All the little things that had been stressing me out no longer seemed as important and, as a result, I was able to focus on the things that really matter."

Daren Rubins, business director at PHD, an advertising agency, said he had consulted Smale to help him get over his reticence to speak up in business meetings. "Tim instilled a new level of self-confidence that had always been there but was untapped," Rubins

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