

# The Telegraph

## The therapist the City bankers turn to.

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Damian Lewis, with Maggie Siff as therapist Wendy Rhoades in new TV series Billions Credit: Jeff Neuman/SHOWTIME

Sky series [Billions](#) has left viewers enthralled with its depiction of life at a top hedge fund – and in particular by the character of Wendy Rhoades, a performance coach who spends her days counselling stressed-out Wall Street executives. **Karin Peeters**, 38, is a life executive coach and psychotherapist with many high-level corporate workers among her clientele. Here she gives an insight into what she hears in her consulting room.



To most people in the outside world, the smartly-dressed young people sitting across from me would look like the epitome of success. What I hear them say, however, tells me the exact opposite. It's heart-breaking to hear that these very same people might cry in the toilet cubicle two minutes before they have to go to work.

"I've become so good at pretending all is fine," I often hear. At work they are thought of as some sort of superhero, but no one knows they are dying inside.

Therapist Karin Peeters Credit: Telegraph/Rii Schroer

My clients, many of whom work in finance or big corporates, vary in age – although most of them are in their thirties and forties, and earning six figure sums – but the themes are invariably the same. A lot of them tell me they ache everywhere, and are tired all the time – because wearing a façade is exhausting. In the office, they believe they have to be tough. They might laugh along at their boss’s jokes but inside they hate what they are doing.

Of course, I realise that some of you out there might find it hard to sympathise: you might be thinking that if these people are sobbing into their pillows at night then at least they are 400 thread count Egyptian cotton. Banker-bashing and suspicion of big corporates is pretty standard these days, to the extent that some of my clients feel ashamed to say out loud that they work for a bank. Others have removed their job title from internet-dating sites, and some have ducked the “what do you do?” question at parties as they can’t bear another judgmental lecture.

Yet I can tell you that the bankers who come to see me each week are not Gordon Gecko stereotypes but people just like you and me. They are real people with real vulnerabilities. None of them – or not the ones I see anyway – leave home in the morning thinking “hey, I’m going to screw someone over today”. But, like the characters in *Billions*, they work in an intense environment where performance is everything.



A scene from *Billions* Credit: Jeff Neumann/Showtime

Some of the highest achievers, who seem so cool and unflappable to their colleagues and friends, tell me they worry that they are going to be ‘found out’. That’s a phrase I hear a lot.

It’s a big misconception that these people are all about the money - they talk about the adrenaline, the challenge - but I do see individuals who determine their self-worth by external reassurances like promotions, bonuses and senior job titles.

The problem with this is that it’s not just disappointing when they don’t get the bonus they expected, it becomes about their personal worth. They believe it means they are not good enough. There’s also an element of golden handcuffs: they have become so accustomed to earning huge sums that they feel they won’t be able to manage without them. Some of the men worry that their wives will leave them if they take a pay cut. They wonder ‘does she love me, or the life I provide’? It’s another example of their lack of self-esteem, as in many cases their wives would prefer to have the funny guy they married back instead of having the big house.

*“It doesn’t matter if you feel you’re drowning in a public lido or in a private infinity pool. You are still drowning” ~ Karin Peeters*

Clients talk about their ‘corporate coat’, or ‘fake face’ that they wear as soon as they enter the workplace even though inside they are stressed and unhappy. They may disagree with the culture, the products they have to sell, the corporate strategy, but they sit through endless meetings with a smile glued on their face when inside they want to scream “get me out of here”.

I understand my clients when they tell me that most of the time they are play-acting at work.

I used to work in Sales and Marketing at Heineken. I loved working there and was very proud of the job they trusted me to do, but sometimes felt like I was drowning, especially when I was executing decisions I actually didn’t agree with.

My way out of that turned out to be my way into my new profession: after going to my boss aged 28 and saying I needed help, he gave me a coach. She really helped and ultimately I had the courage to quit.

I went travelling for a year, studied Buddhism and Eastern Philosophy, then moved to London in 2008 and trained as a coach and then for five years as a psychotherapist.

Unsurprisingly, my clients’ difficulties at work affect their relationships too.



Therapist Karin Peeters. Credit: Telegraph/ Rii Schroer

They work so hard and their adrenaline levels are so elevated that even when they walk out the building they remain in a high state of alert. Some male clients tell me their wives complain that they are not listening to them, and they know it’s true because their heads are literally too full. It causes arguments that they feel sad about but they haven’t got the energy to fix them. Some of the women, meanwhile, feel torn between their ambition and their desire for motherhood.

Part of the problem is that a lot of my clients believe their feelings are invalid. Some of them have worked their socks off to get where they are. Now they have got what they thought they’ve always wanted, but they’re not happy because they’re not living their own life, they’re living what they believe other people expect from them.

Then there's the guilt: they have the house, the status, the big fat pay-check, so why are they feeling panicked, exhausted, unfulfilled? One of the phrases I hear most is "my problems don't count, I should feel grateful".

But I would argue it doesn't matter if you feel you're drowning in a public lido or in a private infinity pool. You are still drowning. I support people to take off the mask. My job is to try and help clients to become truly themselves.

Happily, I think the corporate culture is changing, possibly because a new generation is stepping into the decision making role and they are less willing to give up their life for their work. Banks now hire me to train their staff in authentic leadership, transparency and mindfulness. It won't change overnight, but it's a start.

*Every effort has been taken to protect identity and confidentiality of clients.*

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