

COACHING CASE A MANGERS STORY

We worked with one manager who had problems relating to her staff. She had been hired from outside the organization. The organization was a tight group of people who had been there for a number of years. It was a small division of a larger company and had more small company values (we all go on break together, we are friends, we help each other, we meet socially after work, etc). Coming from one of the larger divisions, the manager was having great difficulty assimilating into a culture that was markedly different from her own experience (emotional detachment, rigid personal and professional boundaries). After about a month on the job, she fired a well-liked employee. After that, she was isolated, and soon, she made fewer and fewer attempts at getting along with the staff working for her. Pictures and nasty slogans were found attached to her computer screen. One day, she got into a verbal confrontation with one of her people, which resulted in her walking out on the employee. Her manager and VP of human resources then sent her to us.

We talked to her for a long time. But we sensed a lack of transition. She displaced blame on the employees and took on minimal responsibility for her own actions, even when confronted with her behavior directly. We then discussed the results of her DISC profile and showed her the results. She agreed with the profile, which said she was very dominant and aggressive, had little concern for people, did not like people to know anything about her personally, and could be perceived as aloof and impersonal. This helped us move forward. Finally, she could see how she was being perceived. As we have mentioned before, real or not, perceptions control the individual which influences the entire company. A corporate culture is really shared perceptions. If we want to change the culture, we have to change the way people think. We helped her develop an action plan to change the way people perceived her, without compromising who she was.

Some assessments can be very helpful in breaking the ice with the person being coached.

As in the above example, assessments can help a person transition. Just like groups experience transition when mediation is used, transition must happen on the interpersonal level if coaching is to be successful. In action planning, a document is produced detailing what the client agrees to do in order to reach their goals. This may contain a code of conduct, which would speak to what he is going to do, and/or an action plan that would detail how he is to interact more effectively with others to achieve optimum group performance. We have the client write her own action plan and will review it with her, making any recommendations deemed necessary. Follow-up sessions to reinforce the changes need to be on an as-needed basis. Certain coaching models suggest follow-up sessions need to occur on a regular basis.

The following action plan was developed by the client in our last example:

ACTION PLAN

1. Read the book, "Harnessing the Power of Conflict; Leading, Living, Learning." Incorporate applicable strategies and communication styles in an effort to promote change and motivation within my department.
(To be finished by 12/16)
2. Make it part of my daily routine to take about 15-20 minutes to wander and socialize a bit with fellow employees. It is important to notice personal things about them and make an effort to comment positively on things such as new hairdos, clothes, family pictures displayed. Be willing to reveal personal things about myself in an effort to form two-way conversations. (Have initiated immediately)
3. Hold an initial "clear the air" meeting. Use diplomatic tools to convey to the department that it is recognized there are communication problems and take ownership of any of the issues specific to me. Have an open forum so anyone else can vent or offer suggestions for improvement.
(Meeting will be scheduled Week of 12/20)
4. Have regularly scheduled staff meetings and make them more "participative" in nature. Spend only 15 minutes on the information-sharing portion of the meeting and then leave the room, allowing the rest of the department about 30 to 45 minutes to review issues and basically take over

the meeting to work on issues or resolutions to current problems. Have one team member keep notes of the meeting so that I can review and offer input, if needed. If they struggle to come up with any issues, approach an ally and ask him to come up with a topic for the next meeting and develop an agenda. Continue to leave the meeting so that they can handle the agenda. (First meeting will be held week of January 6. Meetings will be weekly.)

5. Make it a point to recognize positive accomplishments, no matter how small, and give positive feedback to the employees. Accentuate the positive more than the negative. (On going)

6. Develop a thicker skin during the next two months or so understanding that there will be repercussions at first. It is likely to get worse before it gets better. (On going)

As you can readily see, this action plan is not a cradle-to-grave revamping of an entire personality. We believe that most people just need help getting unstuck. Most people just lack certain skills and some self-insight needed to move to the next level.