Coaching Works

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A wide range of individual and organisational challenges can be addressed effectively using coaching. It can enable good talent to grow into great talent, helping leaders to meet and defeat the icebergs and optimise opportunities. Cass CCE Consultants summarise some recent experience.

Sometimes, individual and/or team coaching can really impact both problem solving and opportunity taking in highly pressured and time critical situations. Over a long-term coaching partnership, many issues will emerge, as both individual and organisation develop. Historically, most of our coaching and mentoring assignments have been with Chief Executives but increasingly we are seeing requests for collaborative coaching with Chief Executives and their Chairs and Trustees as they lead their organisations through deeply troubled times and ongoing uncertainty.

Leadership - A staff survey identified that the Leadership in the organisation needed to be more effective. The initial assessment led to a facilitated event, with the management team, to identify ways to strengthen leadership; the Chief Executive requested coaching.

The first coaching session enabled the CE to identify that increased personal effectiveness and better planned use of her time would positively affect the organisation. Coming from a technical background with a strong interest in the task in hand, the CE instinctively looked first to ‘where are we now’ and how to increase her personal effectiveness in current time.

As the coaching relationship has progressed, it has moved from problem based to opportunity based. The organisation now has a clear strategy which is bought into by stakeholders. The previously very task-focussed CE is able to creatively explore multiple alternatives, amongst them how to maximise the organisation’s impact at a key conference this summer.

Organisational benefits from the Chief Executive’s coaching within a broader range of interventions are clear:

- The leadership team has put in place a well thought through and well bought into strategy; the coach had a minor direct input.
- There is a new senior leadership structure and practice, which among other things gives the CE greater support
- The coaching support is clearly helping the CE to be more personally effective
- The CE is looking for goals which now stretch and develop the organisation further

Decision making - A Chief Executive planned to involve her senior management team, for the first time, in creating a business plan. It was proving difficult to decide the best way to get their input.

Using the coach as a sounding board the idea emerged to go through the ten big decisions facing the organisation.
At the business planning meeting these ten issues were listed and for each one the boundaries of decision-making were indicated e.g. decision no. 3 is one I will make alone; decision no. 6 will be opened up through a brainstorm; decision no. 8 will be made by the Finance Director, and so on.

This worked very well and it was the first crucial step in a long-term process of confidence-building for the SMT.

**Relationships** - A Chief Executive of a charity self-referred. He had worked for the organisation for almost twenty-five years and had been CEO for the last ten. He wanted someone to acting as a listening and sounding board, both on addressing corporate issues and on testing his own strategic skills and awareness. The charity operates in an environment where both client expectations and regulatory controls are changing, with a high powered board of trustees that hadn’t initially accepted the need for change, and where there were problems within the senior management team.

Over a two year coaching and mentoring relationship, sessions ( normally an hour or so every four - six weeks ) have covered a wide range of topics, from immediate short term issues to longer term strategic problems. These have included:

- the dynamics in a variety of working relationships, using models from Transaction Analysis and NLP;
- relations with a bullying subordinate in the context of the CE’s preferred style of leadership;
- how to support the previous chair in developing an exit strategy and how to induct and build effective working relations with a new chair who had a very different personality and working style;
- managing turnover within the senior management team, reorganizing responsibilities and structures;
- ways of focusing the trustees’ attention on governance issues and of improving their involvement with the charity

It is clear that this Chief Executive’s confidence and clarity about his objectives have improved immeasurably; the coach has had the privilege of working with a very capable manager who is now much closer to fulfilling his potential as a leader.

Our thanks to **Lesley Pugh, George Levvy** and **Peter Ginnings** for providing these examples of their coaching work for this article.

One of the recurring themes we run across, particularly for first time Chief Executives, is dealing with a founder’s legacy. This is a crucial but also particularly sensitive area of our coaching and mentoring work which we will illustrate in a planned future article.