



The Big Blue Box Ltd

A Style and Culture Clash

The Background

L's boss is avoiding her, he finds her insecure, brash, needy and demanding of his attention, he's tried several different approaches but nothing seems to work. L doesn't delegate effectively, works very long hours, her team reportedly find her difficult and there have been complaints from her clients. Yet she is highly 'results focused' and her division's results have improved substantially since she has been responsible. Despite her results, her behaviour is now seen as 'career limiting'.

The Process

We have an initial discussion on the phone and L is very keen to engage. In our first meeting L is tense; she walks me quickly to the nearby coffee shop and walking in front of me, leads me back to the office. She eats her breakfast as we sit down to begin our meeting. She wants to know how much the fees are for these sessions, and what was the brief I was given by HR.

A very clear and powerful 'first impression' is created. I give L some immediate feedback on how she has made me feel and react to her. I felt that she was rude and self-absorbed. This immediate challenging feedback seems to give her some pause for thought. We restart our conversation and move to discuss L's objectives.

'I want to be a better person, I know what I'm supposed to do – I just don't do it, I need to get into shape'.

L is now calmer, receptive, open but also emotional. We explore her career story and her family background. L has been brought up in a high-achieving international family. Her father set a powerful example of a particular work ethic. Hard and authoritarian bosses have shaped her leadership style. Her career experiences are powerful but limited in their scope and variety. L's style, modelled upon these examples appears limited and inflexible. Her rigid view of how things work conflicts with the UK culture and that of her employer.

'I focus on profitability at the end of the month...I'm money-focused....I'm not good at making small talk with people....I can't get people to work weekends...'

At its core is a belief that a focus on the task, measured by profitability is the key to her future success – the model that appeared to work for her father and her significant career bosses.

The Outcomes

A clear and very effective rapport has been established, with L being confronted with the impact of her behaviour. The key moment in this coaching session was the challenging and direct feedback given at the start of the conversation. It was the moment when the coachee had to decide whether to engage or not. Challenge and 'saying it as you find it' is an essential part of the coaching skill set.

Our first, emotional session concluded with L agreeing to some homework tasks before our next session. L left the session apparently determined to make substantial changes
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