



## The Big Blue Box Ltd

### Digging Deep

For most coachees, the impact of coaching can be very rapid. But sometimes, despite a need and a willingness to change, the coachee finds it very difficult. Sometimes the roots are buried very deep, and the coachee is protective of their inner self. In this case it took several different approaches before we began to make any significant progress.

#### The Background

B had been promoted several times, from a modest position in the IT team to managing the strategic development of the territory. The global leadership team valued his extraordinary technical expertise and wanted to extend his remit. But there were concerns arising as B's role expanded. Whilst he could provide the technical guidance, his impact and performance were reducing as the complexity and demands increased.

The coaching brief was to support B, to enable him to rise to the challenge, but also to help him address some difficult behaviour. The briefing included phrases such as:

*'Cynical, ...defensive behaviour,... suspicious,... territorial, ...a need for diplomacy,... he may need to be more guarded – is he not aware, or is it that he doesn't care? ...some things are not implemented, sometimes over years!'*

#### The Process

We met and began to explore B's life and career up to the present moment. This was an immediately emotional conversation.

*'I'm missing guidance from my boss, ...I just need feedback, ...I have been blocked, ...I wasn't consulted, ...I get the feeling I harp on too much, ...I'm not confident with my [communication], ... I know I behave in a different way [outside work], ...my function is always on the back foot, ...I don't get respect, ...I'm frustrated.'*

A 360 survey had been undertaken and fed back to B. Alongside the expected 'strengths' and capabilities (technical and market knowledge, strategic thinking, accountability, work ethic) were several significant observations about his effectiveness, (work life balance, time management, tact and sensitivity to others, and communication).

Discussing the results in our second session, B found that they correlated with his own self assessment and his own values.

He clearly struggled with 'politics'. B had very different behaviours dependent upon circumstances. Relationships with senior management were often difficult. His peers and reports had greater respect for him and his challenges than he had expected, they understood many of the issues with which he was struggling. This interpretation was clearly impactful.

This insight provided a small increase in confidence at a key moment. B began to see some scope for alternative interpretations, to see things in a slightly different way, to challenge his own beliefs and behaviours, and to be more open and flexible.

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*'I can see that if you stand in the shadows long enough you become part of the furniture – I've been told I'm not listening to the business!... I want to help, I believe IT can help ...I've been sitting here being a 'do-er'! – I've stopped talking to people ...I need to be more organised ...I need to be more [diligent] about 'actions'- and [stop] watching emails!'*

But change didn't come easily to B. Despite the insights and efforts to do things differently over time he failed to make progress. The continuing challenges from his 'clients' and senior leadership reduced his confidence. There was a serious conversation with his boss in which the message could not have been clearer! B was not stepping up and making the necessary changes!

Even in our coaching session I could see that B was not behaving as someone who was engaged in their own development, he didn't complete the homework tasks we agreed and he wasn't taking notes in our conversations – there were other things on his mind! He was still working late and not spending time with his family, he wasn't taking his holidays, allowing work commitments to take priority.

For our next session I changed style, we explored his background more deeply. Digging deep, and with a renewed urgency, this eventually revealed some formative 'family' experiences. B was strongly encouraged to share this and his '360' with those in his family that knew him best.

At our next session B reported.

*'I shared it with my wife and my mother, they both laid into me saying "This is all family history!! We all know about this, it's not new, ...you need to deal with it, ...why are you working late ...who are you trying to please?"'*

This prompted more exploration and reflection by B and in these revealing insights many of his fears and deep 'drivers' became clear. He recognised his own behaviour and its impact on others.

There were tears.

For our next session B brought his wife to join us, showing real commitment to change. B began to clarify all the actions he could now see were possible and necessary, both at home and at work. It appeared that B had begun to find a new style and purpose and some courage to see it through.

Later B reported

*'There really have been some big changes for me, ...I'm calmer, ...I've got a sense of humour'.*

### The Outcomes

B was resistant to change and protected his inner self, so much so that he was unaware of his own deeply hidden 'rules'. Hopefully by reducing his need to protect himself, by helping him to see himself and some of the areas of his life less suspiciously we could reduce his defensiveness. But building that trust with all the 'actors' in his life would probably take longer, and require a wider scope of influence than the coaching series would allow. We discussed ways to involve and influence the wider leadership team and how he could renegotiate his 'contract' at home.