



The Big Blue Box Ltd

Distracted By Details

Personal effectiveness, good decision making, organisation and planning are basic skills for anyone in organisational life. As people struggle with the growing volumes of information, communication and time pressures these skills are tested. The stress that it causes is visible across management and leadership roles and has impact throughout the organisation's performance.

Background

S is a senior manager with a significant team providing a core service to their clients. S has high level technical and professional skills but the brief for the coaching project indicated some issues

'He's not himself ... lacking confidence ... needs to 'influence'... target fixation ...team member challenges...tries to be nice in order to motivate people...has a short fuse ... thinks things will fall apart if he isn't there ...'

The Process

In our first meeting S explained:

'I believe in being thoroughly prepared ... I want to get things right first time, if a job is worth doing it's worth doing well ... success is getting something 100% right'.

As the conversation progressed so the reality became clear.

I find myself getting distracted by the details, I get distracted from key tasks, I'm not being strategic but I'm remaining tactical, I see decision making as too many choices, I want it to be perfect ... so I don't decide.'

Approaching our second session S sent a message indicating that pressures at work would prevent him attending our meeting. We arranged a new date.

Postponing a coaching session is an indicator that the individual is putting their personal development secondary to other pressures, in this case, to the management of an 'urgent task'. Whilst this is acceptable for a genuine crisis, it is indicative that the person is not planning or making good decisions, is stressed, and reacting unpredictably.

At our next meeting we explored the issues that had prevented S's attendance. All the issues were about the volume of detail and the fear of making wrong decisions which had created more 'pressure' for S personally. S was faced with a growing volume of detailed decisions where he required each answer to be perfect.

We worked to build his understanding of 'Why' he behaved like this. There were many causes in his background. Over the next period in our coaching, S was encouraged to explore his life story in detail and to discover where some of the influences and models for his behaviour could be found.

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Once S understood some of the causes and his responses we then went on to explore his everyday decision making process.

The Outcome

'Tell me about your email in box'. (Which was a substantial cause of S's stress and a powerful example of his failing decision making process causing him significant stress).

'I have hundreds of emails in my Inbox...I mark all those I have to action as 'Unread''.

'How do you tell the action items from the new emails?'

'I don't... I just keep scanning through my inbox (constantly)'.

'Do you sort them, categorise them or 'flag' them?'

'Er...no...I just come in early in the morning and work on them throughout the day to keep on top of them! At the moment we are short of headcount because I haven't decided on what we need'.

'OK, this is about decision making and being organised, about time management and prioritising your time to do the right things at the right time!'

As an example of decision making, and because it would directly benefit S, I explained exactly how I manage the decision making process for managing my emails to achieve a 'Zero Inbox'.

S went away to set up a decision making process for his emails.

A few days later he called to leave feedback. He'd implemented a decision structure for his emails and it had freed him up immeasurably. He was thrilled with his progress. His family had noticed the difference in his mood and he'd made several of the significant decisions at work that he had been delaying.