



The Big Blue Box Ltd

I Wish We'd Had This 5 Years Ago!

Sometimes, in the safety of the coaching conversation, longstanding, deeply embedded barriers to success can be revealed and overcome – rapidly.

In this case, career limiting behaviours and beliefs were recognised and initial solutions implemented within the first session.

Background

E is an operation management professional. The coaching brief, in preparation for a further international posting, was: to help E improve his interpersonal skills, which could compromise his leadership potential, and to investigate an impression that he may have some insecurity issues.

The Process

Despite a relatively reserved and formal start to E's first experience of coaching we passed the 'chemistry test' and engaged in the conversation.

E explored the impact of his family's breakup in his early teens and the loss of his father's influence *'I stopped trying at home and school'*. Having left school at 13 he returned to education as a mature student. He developed a powerful work ethic, operational management and engineering skills which rewarded him as he soon gained international postings rising quickly to Managing Director.

Career changes, ups and downs led him to his current role.

'I don't do politics, I just get the results... I'm not patient... little things will send me over the edge, silly little things... I'm instructive and directive... I have high expectations, I get on with things, I'm practical... I'm trying to keep the client happy. I get pretty intolerant of other people's inability, sorting out other people's messes!

And yet there was growing contradiction that appeared as we continued to talk.

'I feel that there is a build up of stress and tension... I really doubt myself... I want to be as near perfect as I can be at all times... I really aim to try to do things... I just want to feel more confident in what I can deliver'

'I really struggle with the interview question about what are my strengths and weaknesses – I just can't answer it!'

Taking the opportunity to explore this need, we did a simple exercise to determine some of E's key strengths and behaviours as seen through other people's eyes, including his wife and children. The plan was also to raise his self awareness, honesty and openness.

As an outcome, contrasting styles were revealed, dependent upon different situations together with a more realistic self assessment, and some significant opportunities for him to practice and flex his style.

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Then came the moment of insight.

'I can see I need to be much more self aware and be aware of other people... different behaviour... even the directly opposite behaviour isn't harmful, it just gives you more, and better options... I've got to be more open, and be prepared to share.'

In an instant E could see the impact and importance of this.

'I wish I'd had this conversation 2 years ago – No!... 5 years ago!'

As if to practice his growing awareness, between our first and second sessions E confronted an important issue and made a decision.

We explored the way in which he had changed his behaviour. He had taken note of the way he had behaved previously in such circumstances and had made an effort to behave differently this time.

'My approach would have been direct, there would have been an argument... no diplomacy.... Instead, I've taking a step back. I've been more restrained in my approach this time... and ... I got the right outcome... [The alternative] would have been a huge mistake'.

The Outcome

The confidentiality of the coaching process, and the objectivity and independence of the coach quickly established trust, enabling openness, reflection and 'challenge' within a safe environment.

The opportunity had been created, in our first conversation for some significant personal insights. E was able to reflect on his behaviour, going back over several years. The subsequent coaching sessions in the series were able to build upon this.