



The Big Blue Box Ltd

'I'm Sitting By The Exit!'

At senior levels, success is not about the 'professional skills' but is often about the soft skills of self awareness, confidence, influencing, resilience and political astuteness. In this case K is highly effective operationally, but believes that his lack of a professional qualification – in a clearly professional organisation – will always hold him back. His self assessment is inaccurate and confidence is low.

The Background

K found himself invited to join the senior leadership team within a substantial business.

K had put his hand up during the Senior Management Team meetings when support for individual development was offered. In our initial discussion he explained his reasons:

'I want to ensure that I have as much advice, confidence and professionalism in my working life and to be the best person I can be.'

The briefing from HR was short but specific:

'To work on the priorities for K's new role...to establish how he could build his confidence when dealing with the senior managers in the business... how he could stick to his agenda and not be diverted by others.'

The Process

Our first session, held in a meeting room, established the 'chemistry' and reviewed K's story. Putting no gloss or judgement on it, K described his father's career as '*on the tools*' and his mother as '*a housewife*', whilst an uncle's first job as '*a teaboy*' saw that career progress to considerable wealth and status. His own education he described as '*not awe inspiring ... I didn't do myself justice*'. Despite working hard to supplement this by part time higher education he didn't achieve the qualifications he wanted. Employer and career training he described as '*fend for yourself*'.

Relying on a solid performance at work eventually got K 'head hunted' to his current employer...'*but I'm not professionally qualified*'.

This was clearly an issue so we explored it further.

'I'm not confident speaking to groups... I don't think I'm any good at team leadership... I keep myself to myself...I'm low on the radar...I wouldn't say I've provided much leadership... I've felt abused by clients...I'm not hugely [expert] but...'

We looked at some of the successes that K could recall.

'I'm not saying I don't have my faults but... I got stuck in when the project wasn't going well for a demanding client... I reduced the staff turnover and won £xm of further work from them... I now have a [substantial] house and [prestige car] and I'm providing an education for my children... I just want to help out – to unblock... I'm not sure where I want to be.'

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There was a significant difference between his perception of himself and the reality. K is clearly successful yet does not recognise it. His 'homework' was to talk to 'honest friends' and identify further success stories.

For our second session we met in his office. K's body language was revealing. In a glass walled office, in close proximity to his teams, K chose the smallest desk, in the corner of a room. He specifically avoided using the main desk, with its computer access, meeting space and telephones despite his sole occupancy of the room. Yet he was now a member of the business's senior leadership team.

We both noted this use of space.

We discussed K's views of some of his colleagues and their qualities; he listed:

'...ambition, drive, vision, focus, hard work, clear expectations'.

Considering those qualities, what about you?

I think I've been too safe, too modest. I've been listening- looking after the business...I've been 'Old School'.

I can see that the othersare positioning... being political... influencing... managing their reputations... visibility...'

'Perhaps I haven't fully understood... I haven't had the time to reflect...'

So, tell me about this office and the layout. What signal does this give?

'I'm sitting by the exit!'

And the insights began to flow. Our next sessions focused upon supporting a new approach, belief and behaviours, founded upon this increasing self awareness.

The Outcomes

Asked what he was going to do differently, immediately as a result of the conversations, K reported he was going to:

'...become a better leader... in a positive light... Able to lead by example... Have more confidence at all levels of the organisation and being more positive about myself. [I'll] understand situations/discussions where you are the Parent/Adult/Child [in an] interaction.

Evaluation

Later, asked to reflect upon the process K reported:

Chris is clearly a versatile individual whom is able to get to understand individuals circumstances, their drivers and motivations through careful dissection of you as an individual.

He builds a DNA profile of you as a person and puts you back together as a stronger individual.

I have learnt things about myself that I had not always appreciated were so evident to others.

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And his HR Sponsor reported:

I asked him how he is working with what he discovered during the sessions.

He feels more confident in himself and from my perspective he appears more self aware and crucially not so hard on himself.

I think this in itself has raised his confidence as I don't think he 'beats himself up' over issues that aren't easy to solve.

Several months later, we met to review the project outcomes with the benefit of hindsight.

K had taken over the office space, shaping the office to suit his working method. He was dressed in a smart suit, exuding calm confidence and certainty.

It had just been announced that following a restructure K had been promoted and achieved a significant salary increase.