



The Big Blue Box Ltd

'It's OK To Be Me!'

There is often a moment when the rules and methods of behaviour that have enabled progress to a certain level of achievement become inappropriate.

- Managers must become leaders,
- operations become strategy,
- emotional and 'political' intelligence are required.

Any transition is complicated by deeply embedded behaviours that may have been learned in early life and shaped by experiences. The transition can be associated with some considerable risk and discomfort.

The Background

E is highly regarded technically and professionally within his organisation, he manages a substantial operations team within a global brand. His boss is being drawn into conflict situations, which should not have been allowed to develop if E had managed them appropriately. He is likely to stumble at his next promotion opportunity due to his low self-confidence and interpersonal skills.

We initially spoke on the phone to set up our first meeting. E had many questions.

'I have doubts in my mind... will I be listened to... what is my purpose... where do I fit in... which side am I on?... I want to be valuable... to be more influential...'

When I arrived for our initial coaching session E came to the reception area to meet me.

First impressions were telling. Very casually dressed, E seemed to shrink in size, timidly diminishing his presence as he approached, his handshake was soft and weak, not confident, he seemed nervous and on edge. He escorted me to the meeting room where he had prepared a formal presentation.

The Process

The first challenge was to carefully balance the 'presentation' that I was going to be given with the 'real' story that I needed to understand. Trust and openness clearly needed to be established. Slowly the real story was revealed.

Despite a difficult childhood including sibling rivalry and parental divorce brought about by alcoholism, E excelled at school and higher education. He applied his energy in his early working life achieving higher education and professional qualifications. He excelled at logical tasks but was not accepted by colleagues. E changed job several times, each time achieving a promotion but his ability to relate to people seemed to be an issue.

He recalled:

'I would catastrophise... I was 'overworking'... putting pressure on myself... I didn't talk to other people... I just wanted to have my head in the right place and focus.'

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E was ready to explore his background in depth.

'It's all in my head... feelings of failure... sense of duty... I have had weight issues... I was teased by my father... loyalty to my mother... chose not to see my father after the divorce... not close to my [siblings].'

We explored what this meant to him in his current role and what he wanted to do about it.

'I'm nervous in front of others... I wonder what they are thinking... it has all knocked my confidence... I wonder if I am ready for the next position... I keep pushing myself ... I undermine myself ... I 'take the mickey' out of myself before anyone else does ... I avoid conflict.'

One of the most challenging situations that E struggled with was the bullying and aggressive behaviour of some peers, stakeholders and internal 'clients'.

'They are loud and aggressive... it makes me become childlike... I don't like conflict... I need to feel less inferior... to know how good I really am... I need clarity in my role.'

We had work to do to build E's self-awareness and his ability to influence others effectively. Enhancing E's Emotional Intelligence (EI or EQ) provided a route forward, his confidence would follow.

We revisited E's story and worked to build other interpretations - to 'reframe' his experiences and to find the 'positives' upon which he could build and to develop strategies for managing difficult situations. E accepted several 'homework' tasks.

The Outcomes

At the start of our second session about 3 to 4 weeks later we reviewed the outcomes from our first session.

'Unbelievable!... I'm on a high!... I'm making connections with the causes of some of my difficulties... I can make the links... I've changed my approach... even my posture is different... I'm reflecting... comparing... planning and considering.'

We looked at some of the details and the insights achieved within his homework exercises.

'I can see some of my strengths... and some of my weaknesses – selfish, defensive... I can see that my boss is the first boss I've had who is actually better than me...'

E's self-assessment was becoming much more realistic and he was becoming more open and adaptive, flexible, receptive and confident.

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We turned to evaluate this early impact across key dimensions using a simple self-assessment technique to measure percentage changes and direction of travel:

Score yourself on...	Self-assessment- percentage change or score out of 100
Comfortable being myself?	+20 %, maybe 25 % to 50%
Caring what others think?	90 down to 60 – <i>it's manageable now</i>
Self-assured?	60 up to 80%
Weight of 'baggage'?	80% down to 40% - <i>it's my decision!</i>
Confidence?	50% to 75%
Self-Worth?	60 to 70%
Self-Awareness	60 to 75%
Negative outlook?	85% down to 30%
Beating myself up?	50% down to 25%
Strategic thinking, being political?	40% up to 80%
Trust – of others?	80 to 60 %
Trust -- by others?	No change
Trust - of self?	75 – 90%
Clarity of Purpose?	50 to 75%
Able to achieve results?	60 to 80%- <i>it's my results, my plan!</i>
Re energised?	60 to 80% - <i>I'm motivated!</i>
Engagement – fitting in?	50 to 70%
Awareness of others?	75 to 90%
Ability to influence?	60 to 80%
Self-management?	<i>I'm planning, disciplined, thinking about things, thoughtful, proactive: 60 – 65%. Calm</i>

We had 2 further session to embed these changes.

In our final session E's manager was invited to join the conversation. Asked for his feedback and observations on the outcomes of the coaching sessions E's manager said:

'E has been buzzing...there's a new freshness...it's galvanised him'.

We agreed that E and I would catch up in about 3 months to see if progress had been maintained.