



The Big Blue Box Ltd

Just In Time!

Timing – finding that moment when the coachee is ready to engage - and having the key that unlocks their potential, are critical elements in the successful coaching project. Once this moment is reached, then change happens, and it can be very rapid!.

There can be degrees of engagement. In this case the coachee had engaged previously – ‘intellectually’, but this time his genuine ‘emotional’ engagement was apparent.

The Background

I had coached T before, when he first achieved an operational Board directorship. He had subsequently moved on and had tentatively approached me again to support him in his new role.

We had met to discuss continuing the coaching relationship through his new employer. The new role hadn't been going to plan and he was finding himself in some difficulties, particularly around his relationships with his board colleagues. However, the coaching project didn't start.

Around 6 months later T again approached me. We had a further brief telephone conversation but this time he decided not to engage, believing that he could probably manage the situation himself.

T had always been very straightforward and honest, focused on doing a good job to the best of his considerable technical capability. He judged others by the same set of values. He worked hard, filled his diary with activity and was always seen to be active.

His blind spot was around people, his reputation, how others saw him and how he interacted with them. Politically he could be naïve, he would trust others assuming that his good work, results and behaviour would be sufficient.

The Process

My phone rang one Monday evening and it was T calling from his car. From his voice I could sense that something was not right.

T had just had his performance review with his MD. It had not gone well and T was clearly concerned. He reported fragments of the conversation to me as he had heard them. The message he had received, and presented to me seemed close to an ultimatum and the first steps in a renegotiation of his contract.

T reported that his boss had said to him:

‘You are a manager not a leader, you are too straight... I’ve not seen any improvement in your performance... from the 360 - your reports like you, but you don’t have the respect of your peers’.

A restructure of the senior management team was discussed and it appeared that T's role might change reporting lines. T was concerned that he was going to lose his job.

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In tears T pulled over and stopped the car. Perhaps for the first time in my coaching relationship with T I detected a genuine openness, a willingness to listen and try something new. In the past he had 'attended' the sessions, listened intellectually but not really engaged and adapted his behaviours.

Timing is everything; feedback will remain unheard unless the coachee is ready to be receptive. We had a frank conversation. With his permission I reflected back to T what I perceived of the situation. I found myself repeating some of the analysis and messages I had shared previously with T, but I sensed that he was now listening!

T's strategy –perhaps throughout his recent board-level career, was not working. He was not making the change from an Operational role to a Strategic one; he was using email – and volumes of emails – to communicate with his board colleagues, he was not talking to them. He was communicating with his team and reports 'face to face' but with his MD boss by email. He assumed that when his boss said he was too busy to meet that he really was too busy! He was unaware of the politics within the board group. He was shocked when a board colleague's promotion was announced in a surprise restructure – T had been unaware of his colleague's ambition. The rules that had served T well up to a certain point in his career no longer applied.

Reflecting on this 'feedback' T could see that a pattern was repeating itself, the need for change was clear!

We needed a survival strategy to manage the next few days and a new approach thereafter.

Key to his change would be to enhance T's understanding of himself and others, to enhance his emotional intelligence – his 'Self' and 'Other' awareness, and his ability to influence others. He was clearly not being effective in those areas.

As a complete contrast to his own personal style, I referred T back to our earlier coaching conversations around the book *The Art of War*. He hadn't previously understood the messages but now was the moment when he needed a new approach. We closed our conversation by envisaging how this different approach would impact upon T's behaviour in the immediate future.

He now began to understand his colleagues' behaviour towards him, his own position and the options that it presented, and how he needed to behave. He was able to consider and prepare his negotiating strategy.

The Outcome

T had a meeting with his MD to continue the discussion around his position and performance, the restructure and his future role.

The meeting concluded with T's appointment to a brand new role where he would be expected to report in to the MD and another Board colleague, but where he would have greater autonomy for the performance improvement of an underperforming but significant business unit.

T was delighted with the outcome, seeing it as a major opportunity to enhance his CV, whereas just a few days earlier he was fearing the worst!