



The Big Blue Box Ltd

'You Have Been An Absolute Monster!'

We all have sets of learned behaviours that may be rewarded, or have no apparent consequences for us and which we continue to repeat.

The coaching conversation, establishing trust, real 'listening', openness and challenge is often the only time in a person's experience where they are able to recognise these cycles and behaviours for themselves.

Coachees frequently comment:

'I wish I'd had this conversation years ago.'

In this case the damaging behaviour cycle has once again been repeated and conflict is likely.

When the right conversation takes place the cycle is broken and the long delayed transformation is rapid and life-changing.

The Background

The coachee R was a very senior leader within a substantial business, with a CV detailing periodic moves in and out of well-known organisations. He had been in this company for several years but once again his behaviour, reputation and performance had come under scrutiny at the highest level.

The HRD briefed me directly due to the sensitivity of the matter.

R was in a difficult situation, and coaching was being offered to support him through a transition – change was necessary and inevitable – it was only a matter of how expensive and painful it was going to be for all parties.

Coaching was seen as a 'last resort' to facilitate this change.

The Process

R was a difficult person, as he readily admitted early in our first meeting.

'I've been open, honest and transparent to my detriment... but people say I'm blunt and rude... I think my wife has come to terms with it.'

R was clearly angry at finding himself threatened and criticised. Winning R's trust was essential as we moved on to explore his story.

R described his background.

'Outsiders would say [my background] was odd... My father was 'Victorian', a brow beater... nothing was ever good enough... rare praise... there were arguments... so now I don't like arguments, initially I clammed up... using silence.'

'My mother was stubborn and obstinate... remarried soon after my father's death.'

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'This has made me drive hard and also beat myself up... I'm a star in the B team... I've worked for many different organisations and then moved on after about 3 or 4 years... I'm not going to jump through hoops.'

Over the years, R had received what he felt was contradictory guidance from various management and personal development initiatives, so we spent some time working through the feedback. He didn't trust it, and *'couldn't really make use of it'*, he said and as a result he had managed to dismiss it.

We agreed that before our next session, he would seek feedback directly from people whose judgement he respected, who knew him well and who were prepared to be honest.

R's task was to listen to that feedback, to question and challenge it until he felt he fully understood it and would trust it.

R returned for our second session with extensive notes from several conversations and was keen to talk them through in detail.

He recited the conversations from his notes. The comments were an expected mix of favourable and critical feedback. He felt that honest feedback had been given, that he had really listened and had *'taken the feedback on board.'*

He then revealed that he had also asked his wife for feedback. He reported his wife's opening remarks:

'I'm very pleased you have asked me... you have been an absolute monster for the last (several) years of our marriage ... I've wanted to tell you many times...'

There was a considerable amount of anger to vent.

This had caused R *'some real reflection about myself'*.

Having had some time to absorb his feedback before the session, our conversation enabled some objectivity.

Several threads came together for R. He had received criticism from his peers and leadership at work. Close and trusted friends had spoken honestly and at length.

He was stunned that his wife, who he thought had come to terms with his behaviour had simply become resigned to there being no likelihood of change.

He began to reconsider his story.

He could see his father's example in his own behaviour. Career moves had not always been at the time of his choosing.

He observed that his bluntness, inability to influence and poor interpersonal skills were common themes throughout.

Our second session concluded with R in a calm, reflective mood. His anger and 'blaming of others' had turned into a sense of responsibility.

We met again a few weeks later.

R reported that he had negotiated his exit from the company and was making changes in his life. It was going to be a tough period ahead for him and his wife and family but he was working hard. Both he and his wife had committed to making changes and had already taken the first steps.

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The Outcomes

I continued to work with R after he had left the company as a part of his severance negotiation.

His lifestyle changed considerably, partly because his employment changed and he started working closer to home, reducing his travelling and partly because he decided to make some changes for himself.

The HRD director, on reviewing the project at a later date, remarked that it had been *'the best HR investment he had ever made'*, saving time and cost in negotiations and effectively managing a potential crisis to achieve the right outcome for the coachee and the business.