

CASE STUDY

Targeted behavioural coaching

Transition from a senior corporate position to leadership of a business school with a traditional academic culture created, for this Executive Director, a situation of antagonism never confronted before. Successful guidance resulted in successful growth of the school.



Executive Director - University graduate business school

Leading change requires emotional strength and confidence

From a corporate-professional background this Director had worked hard over the previous 2 years to accelerate the development and growth of what was then a fledgling but increasingly successful business school.

He was supported by a typically conservative faculty and an Advisory Board comprised of representatives from the corporate community.

This Director's challenge arose from the speed with which he needed to develop the school in order to capture emerging growth opportunities. The school needed to grow to a sustainable and economically viable size. Given the explosion in the number of business schools and graduate schools of management around Australia over recent years there was palpable urgency to capture emerging opportunities.

An analysis of the current situation revealed that there was lack of buy-in from the Advisory Board, which was providing only guarded support for the Director's plans delaying any significant fundraising efforts amongst the Australian corporate community. Similarly, the Faculty lacked confidence in and commitment to the

Director's vision, continuously raising objections to details of the growth plans.

This Director had not had his leadership so directly challenged before, and was struggling to find a path forward. He became uncertain and defensive about his vision. He saw any attempt to incorporate legitimate refinements to his vision as personal attacks on himself, exposing his lack of experience outside the corporate sphere and his emotional fragility in the face of perceived hostility.

The first issue to address was this emotional fragility which was expressed as self-doubts and declining self-confidence. The Director's self-image had been severely battered and this had begun to affect his ability to perform.

To address this in detail with long term benefit would have required a long series of counselling sessions, aimed at resolving deep-seated issues of identity and personality rooted in his past.

The circumstances were inappropriate for such intensive intervention and the Director was not ready for this at this time. Instead, a more tactical approach was adopted and over a period of three months we worked to rebuild the

Director's self-esteem and then to map out a strategy to gain the commitment of both Faculty and the Advisory Board.

Sessions focussed initially on identifying and exploring the precursors of the Director's emotional response to the challenge he experienced. Key elements included:

- Providing the Director with insight into his emotional state to enable him to understand how this was limiting his leadership ability;
- Working with him to redefine a path forward to be inclusive of the Faculty's and Advisory Board's issues.

As with many high achieving individuals this Director was unaware of the impact that his emotional responses were having on his ability to lead. After breaking through these issues developing and implementing a new path forward was very simple.

As a result the Director regained control of the change agenda, not as an autocrat but as a facilitator of the aspirations of the key stakeholders.

The business school continues to thrive and grow, building on the great start that this Director was able to achieve.

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