

CASE STUDY

High potential /
developmental
coaching

This Director was delivering great results but had conflicts with several staff due to an aggressive style. He had a tendency to hold others to account for tasks in an overly forceful manner resulting in questions about his future at the firm given the regular conflicts that arose



Executive Director - Major communications company

21st Century leadership requires empathy not confrontation

This Director had been with this company for 8 years and enjoyed considerable success in that time. He had risen from junior management roles to a position within the CEOs extended leadership team, making him one of the top 120 leaders in the organisation.

Whilst this Director was tagged as a high potential candidate, his immediate superior was concerned by the regular episodes of conflict with staff and reports from peers of an overly assertive attitude. In fact, this Director had started to develop such a poor reputation that some staff were asking not to work with him.

This Director's superior asked Ryk Bliszczyk to provide coaching to address the specific concerns of staff and peers and to maximise the Director's chances of further career progression, fulfilling his perceived high potential.

Coaching began with a deep examination of the concerns expressed about this Director from those around him. This detailed debrief with the Director revealed an overwhelming drive to succeed and a perfectionist streak. This led him to attack his role as manager with a singular focus on task com-

pletion, to the exclusion of considerations for people and process.

The challenge for this Director was to redefine his role as manager and to appropriately shift behaviour accordingly. This was complicated by the fact that, like many modern corporations, this firm operated within a complex matrix structure. Thus many of the conflicts this Director had were with staff reporting to others but working with his team on key projects.

The role redefinition occupied the first part of the coaching program with long sessions exploring what it means to be a manager and how that must include care for staff as well as getting the job done. This was achieved by examining episodes and scenarios in the Director's past experiences and exploring alternative strategies. Based on a different interpretation of the events at the time, those reimaginings built a view of the manager as guide and enabler of staff, supporting them to achieve in their best manner, rather than manager as expert and driver of tasks. The Director learnt that his role was to serve his staff not to badger them to do things his way.

The next step was to provide this manager with more insight into his behaviour and how that was working against him. Ryk conducted a 360° feedback process by interview, meeting with 15 of the Director's subordinates, peers and superiors to elicit detailed comment on his behaviour. Such specific feedback provided a powerful platform from which to, not only convince this Director of the need for change, but also provide specific examples and pointers to exactly which behaviours needed to change for him to succeed.

Importantly, most interviewees assessed this Director's chances of advancement as poor given his reputation and behaviour. 12 months later after ongoing coaching and a commitment to change by that Director, a follow-up set of 360° degree feedback interviews led to a completely different assessment, most interviewees this time noting a great deal of change and progress. Within a few short months later, this Director was promoted to an Executive Director position with responsibility for the most important function in the company and his career was described as "with-a-bullet".

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