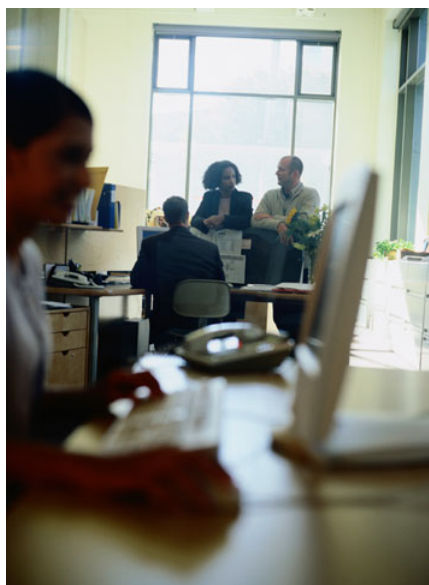


Raising the Bar through 'Coaching for High Performance'

With a change of leadership at the top, our client an FMCG manufacturer, had ambitious growth targets. To achieve them it needed to 'raise the bar' for all employees, boosting their performance and enabling them to give 110%. The board wanted all managers to drive performance improvement by helping their direct reports to reflect on their performance and find ways to improve how things were done. However, this would require a change in culture.

Line managers seized responsibility, solved problems and told people what to do



The prevailing management style was hierarchical, paternalistic and fairly directive. Line managers

seized responsibility, solved problems and told people what to do, feeling that they should 'know better' than their direct reports who, in turn, were reluctant to act without asking their boss what they should do. Everyone was doing the thinking and making decisions for the levels below them and managers spent most of their time in fire-fighting mode.

In the future, managers would need to delegate decision-making and generate a far greater sense of ownership, getting everyone to think through problems and implement solutions in their own area of the business.

However, our discussions teased out various obstacles that were getting in the way:

- After years of being told what to do, people weren't used to thinking for themselves and lacked the confidence to make their own decisions
- Managers didn't have the skills to help them solve problems in a structured way
- Managers at all levels believed that if they couldn't dive in and provide direct reports with quick answers they would lose respect from above and below.

The good news was that the workforce, many of whom had been with the business for many years, were well trained and had lots of experience. They were also very committed to the business and wanted it to succeed.

To achieve the required changes in management style would mean not only increasing managers' skills but also helping them to change their beliefs about their role and purpose within the business. To this end we designed an intensive workshop entitled 'Coaching for High Performance' which we ran with over 150 managers across all levels, from the board to first line management.

The workshop provided managers with a sophisticated toolkit of coaching and empowerment skills, woven into our straightforward and user-friendly 'Coaching Framework', which formed the core of the training. This toolkit was based on our own experience of successfully coaching managers over many years and drew heavily on our specialist knowledge of psychology - with the jargon taken out!

A particular favourite with participants was an in-depth look at the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, which captured their interest and enabled them to appreciate, often for the first time, the diversity of personal styles within their team.

Immediate feedback was extremely positive

Key to participants' learning was the opportunity to apply their new skills in specially designed small group simulations. These were very realistic and meaningful because they were based on

scenarios that regularly occur in the business. Trained facilitators not only gave lots of feedback, demonstration and coaching during these simulations but also gently (and sometimes not so gently!) challenged participants' beliefs when they were at odds with the desired future.

Workshop feedback was extremely positive. Participants felt they had learned many useful skills and had changed their beliefs about the role a manager should play in the business. A week after one of the early workshops, a first line manager with many years' experience e-mailed us to say how much he'd learned and how easily he was applying it, which reinforced that we were on the right track.

A few months into the programme, a series of short follow-up workshops evaluated application of the skills learned. We found that individuals had remembered and used the tools and techniques, with excellent results. So great was the level of interest generated by the programme that individuals who did not have management responsibility had asked if they could also be included in the programme. Even external contractors visiting the business commented on the frequency with which employees referred to tools introduced.

One year after the start of the programme we carried out a more rigorous evaluation of its impact, assessing the extent of both behavioural and belief change. Interviews with participants and their direct reports identified the following benefits:

- **Greater ownership:** Direct reports were increasingly thinking for themselves, solving problems and taking responsibility for carrying through solutions. They were also organising their own work more effectively.
- **Enhanced communication:** Participants' enhanced communication skills had enabled them to resolve conflict in the workplace in a sophisticated manner, and led to more skilful negotiations.
- **Greater appreciation of individual differences:** The MBTI was very popular and had enabled participants to predict the behaviour of members of their teams and adapt their approach to handle others more effectively.
- **Improved performance:** There were many examples of managers using the 'Coaching Framework' to enhance the performance of their direct reports, modify inappropriate behaviour and tackle difficult situations, which would previously have been 'brushed under the carpet'.
- **Speedy problem solving:** Following the training, participants were better able to predict the questions their managers might ask when discussing a work-based problem, so they met their managers better prepared, leading to more speedy problem resolution.
- **Creating space for more proactive management:** A very welcome benefit was to create a more self-directed workforce, freeing up managers' time. Participants were delegating and developing their direct reports more effectively, and this was freeing up additional time in their working week. With less requirement for direct supervision and day-to-day problem solving, managers

had more time for planning and project work, leading to smoother running departments, streamlined processes and other longer term improvements.

