

## Case Study: Executive Coaching for Leader Who is “Rough Around the Edges”

### Presenting Issue and Background Information

I received a coaching request from the V.P. of Operations of a large oil and gas organization in the U.S. The V.P. explained that one of their directors, we'll call him “Sam”, was in desperate need of executive coaching. He explained that Sam was a hard-worker, a retired military leader and had been with the company for five years. During that time, Sam was known to get results and could be counted on to make things happen no matter what obstacles might arise. Sam had an extraordinary depth and breadth of knowledge in the field. Because of his knowledge and experience he was highly respected in the industry and well liked at conferences where he often made presentations.

Biggest problem? His interpersonal skills were horrible. His manner of getting things done took precedence over treating people in a caring, respectful manner. The V.P. explained that some people had transferred out of the department specifically because of the way Sam treated them. Another fairly new employee—who was hired to fill a position that was open for two years—was also threatening to move on if something didn't change.

One of the assessments I conducted was a verbal 360-interview process. This involved me interviewing eight of Sam's key stakeholders (at various levels of the organization). I had a set of interview questions about Sam's strengths, weaknesses and leadership style.

Some of the most significant areas of concern included:

- Poor listening skills—insists on his own way of doing things
- “Command and control” style
- Slow to respond to questions or requests
- Arrogant
- Belittles people in meetings
- Uses email to “throw people under the bus”

I also administered a 360 written assessment that went out to ten key stakeholders in the organization. Not surprisingly, he scored at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile on “Dominant” and at the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile on “collaborative”.

## Approach

As mentioned above, I administered a series of assessments to Sam, including the 360 online written assessment as well as the 360 verbal interviews. Additionally, he completed the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the FIRO-B (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation—Behavior) assessment.

As the results came in, Sam and I met to review the reports. A lot of value comes when the “coachee” sees the interpretation in black and white. Little else can raise awareness like seeing a collection of assessment results revealing some common themes. These, of course, include strengths and areas to improve.

Sam took a couple of weeks to let the new insights sink in. He then created a development plan identifying the three main areas of focus. For each area he wrote a goal (in measurable terms), identified the benefits for achieving the goals, identified potential obstacles and how to overcome them and finally listed action steps with dates for completion.

## Client Outcome and Value

The entire coaching engagement spanned six months. By the end of the engagement Sam was showing significant improvement in his interpersonal communication and behavior.

He was much more aware of his tendencies in meetings as well as in his email communications. He read a couple of recommended books/articles on effective listening and practiced active listening skills daily, then made entries in his journal about his experiences at the end of each work day. He created a new habit of seeking input at meetings, where appropriate, and actually considering others' ideas rather than insisting on his own.

The V.P. who made the initial request told me that he received comments from other leaders in the organization about the changes that were taking place in Sam. At the conclusion of our six-month engagement, the three of us (the V.P., Sam and I) met for a closure meeting to discuss where we started, where we were then and where they needed to continue working for ongoing progress. This was an extremely satisfying executive coaching engagement!