

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: CASE STUDY 1

Alan P
Illinois
USA

“To whom it may concern,

The work we did together has had a major impact on my development and can be directly attributed to my career progression over the last 5 years. If at any time you, or someone in your organization would like to discuss this experience in more detail I would be more than happy to do so.

Context

I am 35 years old, my current job is Vice President for Research and Development on the board of an \$800 million turnover business based in the USA. Six years ago I was a manager in a business in the UK when Chris started coaching me.

The three years of coaching were critical to my personal and professional development. Without the coaching it is unlikely I would have been capable of taking on such a significant role at this relatively early stage of my career.

Leadership Coaching

The leadership coaching I received was very different to the traditional line management I had received from my various managers or bosses up until that time (and since for that matter). The key difference was the conversations we had were focused on the “**HOW**” rather than the “**WHAT**” with regards to my performance i.e.

how I was interacting with people,

how I was influencing the business

how I was achieving results,

as opposed to previously :

what I was achieving or delivering.

The leadership coaching I received can be broken down into **5 key elements**. These became the *critical success factors* to our coaching relationship and are the success factors I now look for in anyone who I am looking to work with as a coach in future.

1. The Goal

Before Chris could start to coach me, or indeed me to be able to accept coaching, we needed to have a shared vision of where I wanted to be in future. I worked on a relatively short-term basis with a view of:

“ .. in 5-7 years I would like to be in this kind of role, job etc ...”

This sounds obvious, however it was the critical starting point. Chris challenged me to really visualize what success would look like for me in this future, he also greatly helped this process by bringing his perspective of what my potential was. Through this we both came to a clear vision of what the goal was.

2. The commitment

Once we had a clearly defined goal of what success for me would look like it was critical that we both were committed to achieving this goal.

My commitment

I needed to have strong personal commitment to my success and development. Without this I would have never really stretched or pushed myself out of my comfort zone.

Coaches commitment

Equally important I needed to be very clear Chris was equally committed to helping me get to my goal. This commitment was essential in providing the space in the coaching relationship to discuss the really difficult issues with respect to my leadership style and performance. Without this strong sense of shared commitment the coaching sessions could have been received by me as criticism or personal attacks and then would have been very destructive and ultimately would have ceased.

3. The Safe Environment

To get to the goal I was going to need to do some things differently to what I had done in the past. In a business situation this can be very uncomfortable. My success up until we started the coaching had been based on doing things a certain way and now Chris was challenging me to do things differently. I had the typical fears of:

“..will I fail ” or “ .. what will people think” or “ .. will this effect my career opportunities”.

To overcome this Chris provided a safe environment for me to experiment. This was done in a number of ways:

- Starting small, trying things within my immediate team, then department to develop the new ways of working before trying in a wider sphere of influence.
- Ensuring senior management knew I was on a development journey so they could expect a different Alan.
- Supporting me when things did go awry or when I did screw up.

- Providing constant feedback, discussing the HOW and not focusing on the WHAT in the coaching discussions.

4. The “Tools”

For me to do things differently I needed to develop new management “muscles”. The focus here as I have said was on the how. Together we worked on my key leadership skills of:

- **Influencing:** how I strategically influenced juniors, my peers or senior people.
- **Leading Others:** how engaged/enrolled people in what I was trying to achieve or deliver.
- **Delivering through others:** how I held people accountable and inspired them to deliver.
- **Personal Awareness:** understanding the impact I was having on people so I could continually learn when a certain approach worked or when it was not working.

Through the coaching I managed to develop an array of different approaches or styles, which over time has made me a more powerful business leader than I was before. This has resulted in a far greater delivery of results to the business than I had achieved to date.

5. Practice

The final success factor was being able to practice the new approaches discussed with my coach. The theory is great however the skills are truly honed via practice. Chris steered me towards a number of projects or opportunities for me to try the new skills I had developed. This was all done within the safe environment so the experience was very positive. Over time the new skills became second nature so the need for the safety net was diminished. However the need for someone to constantly hold up the mirror to show me what is working in my leadership and what is not will always be there, in essence the need for a coach will always be there during my career.

Summary

In summary the coaching has had a major impact on my development as a business leader. It has, at an early stage of my career, set me up with a robust set of leadership skills which will stand me in good stead as I progress my career further over the coming years.

It has also made me understand that as a business leader the need for a coach is essential. This becomes more important the higher you climb up a business hierarchy as you encounter the paradigm that leaders in business only ever get feedback on their results and are usually devoid of feedback from peers or subordinates on the impact their leadership style is having on the organization.

Alan”