

The Purpose of Executive Coaching (Part IV) **Behavioral Change – the Key to More Success**

By Charlie Lang, Executive Coach, Trainer and Founder of Progress-U Limited



**"I haven't conquered my procrastination problem
yet, but just you wait."**

Behavioral Change – the Key to More Success

Do you know of leaders who are successful but actually limit their full potential because of certain behavioral patterns? What would it take for them to change the patterns that have become habits over the years?

Matthew (not his real name) is the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of a large finance corporation. He is in his late 40s and reached his current position through good education, a lot of hard work and the willingness to continuously learn new competencies required to successfully master various challenges throughout his career.

His ultimate target is to become the CEO at his present company (or at a similar corporation). He has been the CFO for almost 5 years and their current CEO is due to retire in 2 years. However, even though Matthew's performance has been outstanding, he recently gathered that he was not even considered for the CEO position.

When I met Matthew for the first time, I was impressed with his level of self-organization and self-discipline. In addition, he seemed to use verbal and non-verbal communication effectively. Interestingly though, I felt a lack of connection between us, which gave me the first hint of the root cause of his "problem."

During our first session, he briefly told me the history of his education and career path, and quickly came to the point: "Why am I not one of the candidates for the CEO position? What do I need to do to become the first choice?"

Apparently he had some discussions with the current CEO and a couple of board members who gave him similar feedback: they truly appreciated his work as CFO and believed that he has the potential to become CEO in the future, but they felt that he was not yet ready at the present time. When he tried to get more concrete information, he received vague answers, such as "You still need to gain more experience" or "We think we need a more senior person in this position" – statements that were frustrating for Matthew because he felt that he couldn't pro-actively do anything to overcome these concerns.

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Let's briefly reflect on how managers usually get promoted. It is both a conscious and subconscious process. On the conscious level, higher management looks at the qualifications and experience needed for the position and then tries to find eligible candidates. On the subconscious level, people in charge may have a potential candidate in mind and then try to imagine how the person fits the bill. For instance, management may have a general idea of how a candidate would deal with possible challenging situations and different stakeholders, like employees, colleagues, superiors, customers, shareholders, etc. These subconscious thoughts play a huge part in ruling out ineligible people.

Actually, there is nothing wrong with this approach because it uses intuitive capabilities, which may be a better judge than the conscious mind. The only problem is that depending solely on intuition unnecessarily limits options.

In the case of Matthew, further discussions with colleagues and the CEO revealed that there was an unspoken fear that Matthew would not gain sufficient acceptance from the management team, the major shareholders and the media due to the way he unknowingly creates distance with the people he interacts with. As the role of CEO required a lot of public interaction, the board was worried that Matthew would be rejected and consequently damage the company's image and progress.

To help Matthew create better rapport with people, I tried to approach the problem from a different angle and use his strengths to make some headway. One of Matthew's strengths was his ability to stand by his commitments. His commendable level of self-discipline made him a role model for this desired behavior. I explained to him that his outstanding ability to carry out agreements might allow him to "risk" displaying more warmth and empathy towards the people he interacts with. I helped him realize that slightly changing his behavior would not endanger or lessen his strength, but would complement it instead. He agreed to give it a try.

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We also decided to create an internal support team consisting of people (two colleagues and one long-time customer) who would regularly remind him of his intended behavioral change and would give him positive feedback and encouragement.

Over the next 6 to 9 months, a real behavioral change became apparent. Matthew became more relaxed and he seemed to make more of a connection with his colleagues. He could even joke with colleagues from time to time without losing his self-discipline and resolve when it came to performing tasks.

As a result, the morale and engagement in his department further improved and the CEO indicated that the board of directors reconsidered Matthew for the CEO position.

Charlie Lang - Executive Coach, Trainer & Founder of Progress-U Limited



Charlie Lang works with senior executives who are already successful and want to make sure that they stay at the leading edge. They are often challenged by issues like:

- How to improve staff retention, especially how to keep top performers.
- How to achieve a corporate success culture that guarantees longterm success.
- How to create new levels of excellence through high employee engagement.

Charlie, an executive coach & trainer who is known for his innovative approaches towards leadership, change processes and sales, assists his clients in mastering these challenges. They achieve outstanding results through Charlie's unique application of latest findings in research combined with his own experience in international management and leadership.

Charlie's mission is to help Progress-U's clients deal with their interpersonal challenges in the most effective way for the benefit of all stakeholders. To achieve this, Charlie offers Executive Training and Coaching to middle and upper management. He also delivers public speeches, and is a passionate thinker and writer of articles on these topics. End of 2004 he started authoring "The Groupness Factor", a book on First-Class Leadership which was published in August 2005.

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