



**The Purpose of Executive Coaching (V)**

**Changing Corporate Culture – How a Coach Can Support the Leader in this Process**

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Corporate Culture was defined by Deal and Kennedy, the authors of “Corporate Cultures – The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life” as *...the way we do things around here*. This is a very simple yet concise definition of corporate culture.

Corporate culture is influenced on one hand by formal and informal rules, regulations and systems, and on the other hand by the behavior of corporate leaders, particularly the head of an organization.

In this article I will focus more on the leaders’ behaviors and how a coach can support the leader in the attempt to achieve a corporate success culture.

### **Strong Culture = Success Culture?**

The daughter company of one of my former clients, a Japanese technology company (system integrator), was founded during the early 1970’s. The founding president was a passionate engineer who instilled a strong culture in his organization. One of the core values he promoted was to be technologically skilled.

Being a man of high integrity – an ingredient that helps build a strong culture – he selected mostly employees and executives who were also very ‘technological’. Tolerated exceptions were for jobs like bookkeeping, etc. which didn’t require any technological skills.

During the 1970s and up to the late 1980s, this strong culture greatly supported the company’s goals and development. However, in the early 1990s, the business environment in Japan changed considerably. Cash flow among customers tightened, such that the ideal technical solution wasn’t affordable anymore. Customers were seeking a more economically viable solution.

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#### **Coaching Through Corporate Culture Change**

Unfortunately, when I was called in, the company had already suffered over 10 years of decline. It had also been taken over by another organization, which engaged me to help implement a culture change.

It soon became apparent that the current president, only a few years short of retirement and disappointed that he had been forced to sell his company, could not drive the necessary changes. Hence my client (the mother company) agreed to install a new manager to head this technology company.

In order to support the new president, we first made an assessment of the existing corporate culture. This assessment included the listing of all written rules, regulations and systems that influenced the organization's culture at that time. We also conducted interviews to identify informal (unwritten) rules and regulations.

### **Changing Cultures**

As a next step, I helped my client develop an image of an ideal corporate culture that would support the company in making its vision a reality. We discussed which values would need to be promoted, and which beliefs, attitudes and behaviors would best serve the company's goals.

Once we had developed a clear picture of the desired corporate success culture, we worked on a detailed implementation plan. During the development of this plan, I frequently challenged the new president by putting myself into the position of the employees and how they would be likely to respond to the suggested action items. This feedback and feed-forward process helped him develop a very solid vision, strategy and plan for the implementation of the

necessary actions.

Since it is key to get the buy-in from the key opinion makers within the executive team, I practiced with the president on how to coach these crucial people to make their buy-in most likely.

Finally we developed a communication strategy to get all employees to understand the new culture and what would be expected of them.

### **The Role of the Coach**

The greatest value a professional executive coach can add to a corporate culture change project is to help the top executives gain a better understanding of the human dynamics associated with change. The coach can help the leaders develop communication competence, coaching ability, and the necessary integrity which is particularly crucial in cultural change projects.

Furthermore, the coach can act as a sparring partner for the leader, i.e. the leader can first 'try out' her/his ideas with the coach before actually implementing them.

After the successful cultural change initiative, which was completely implemented over a period of 12 months, the Japanese technology company turned profitable. This happened towards the end of the change initiative. We made sure that the new culture would be sustainable and supportive of current goals. A periodical review process was installed to ensure that history wouldn't repeat itself.



Charlie Lang is an Executive Coach and Trainer who founded Progress-U Limited in 2002. His mission is to achieve a positive change of the image of sales. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Public Speaker and Author of articles related to leadership, change management and innovative sales.

In 2004, he initiated the Master Coach Alliance ( see <http://www.master-coach-alliance.com> ) in Hong Kong, a network of professional Life, Business and Corporate Coaches. End of 2004, he started authoring the book "The Groupness Factor" ( see <http://www.progressu.com.hk/Groupness-book.htm> ) which got published in August 2005.