



# **What makes me successful today might not work tomorrow**

## **The Purpose of Executive Coaching [Part II]**

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In Part I of this series, I elaborated that the success factors that help people perform well in their current position might not make them successful when they get promoted to a higher position.

Luckily, some executives and/or their employers are aware of this potential problem and therefore want to make sure that they are properly prepared before taking on a new assignment.

Peter (not his real name) worked for the Hong Kong subsidiary of a large international apparel company as a sales and marketing manager. He was responsible for the development of the Hong Kong market and was quite successful in expanding the market share over the past 3 years. As a consequence, the management decided to consider a promotion to Director of Sales and Marketing for the Asia-Pacific region. He would succeed his current boss who was supposed to be transferred to Europe within the next 6 to 12 months.

Although the current Sales and Marketing Director and the HR director supported Peter's promotion, they were also aware that Peter was not quite ready to take on the position for the following reasons:

- a) They were concerned that other local marketing managers (e.g., in Australia, Korea, etc.) would not accept Peter; they were worried about his assertiveness.
- b) Peter did not have much international experience and the new position required open-mindedness and cross-cultural sensitivity. As these values were not as relevant in Peter's current position, they were not quite sure about his capacity to acquire the necessary traits.
- c) Peter was a fairly good presenter and clients usually really liked and appreciated him. However, during the few times he had to make presentations to senior management, he seemed quite nervous and didn't make as good an impression as he could have. As he would become part of the senior management team, his current boss wanted to make sure that he gets sufficient and immediate acceptance and respect in that circle of colleagues.

To assure Peter's suitability for the director's position, the HR director suggested engaging an executive coach to fast-track Peter's development.

When I met Peter for the first time, he seemed to feel OK about having a coach, but was initially slightly resistant, perhaps because he first wanted to figure out what coaching was all about and whether I would be able to assist him in his development. Also, he seemed to be worried about confidentiality issues.

Like most of my clients, Peter had never been professionally coached so I was quite familiar with his initial attitude. In the first session I clarified my approach with him and showed him the confidentiality section of the Coaching Agreement that I established with the HR director. It clearly stated that I would not disclose anything discussed during the coaching sessions without prior approval from Peter. I noticed from his body language that after 20 to 30 minutes into the first session, he started to become more relaxed and opened up accordingly.

We used the Harrison Assessment Paradox report to cross-check the concerns raised by the management, especially in terms of openness and assertiveness. We found that in the "Power Paradox" (*assertive vs helpful*), his score for *assertiveness* was 5.3 on a scale of 0 to 10 and for *helpful*, 8.9. That means that his normal behavior is in a range from being mutually helpful (desired for this position) to self-sacrificing (less desired). However, when under severe stress, Peter tends to be dominating, which creates occasional conflicts with his colleagues.

In terms of *openness*, Peter scored quite high (9.2). This behavior was balanced with an 8.6 in *being certain*. When both traits of a paradox (*assertive/helpful* or *open/certain*) are balanced, we notice a relatively stable behavior without any "shadows." If the traits of a paradox are imbalanced, a behavior opposite to the normal behavior (shadow) surfaces during times of considerable stress.

We agreed on a coaching schedule with three coaching sessions per month over a period of 5 months. During this time period, we developed his assertiveness and worked on his self-acceptance, which also scored quite low. We repeated the assessment at the end of our coaching assignment as a way to measure the effectiveness of coaching. We found that his assertiveness improved from 5.3 to 7.1, and his self-acceptance from 4.8 to 7.4.

We also developed his cross-cultural skills by exposing him more to different cultures through three short business trips to culturally challenging countries and through participation in some cultural events in Hong Kong (Korean theater, etc.). I also encouraged him to pick up some relevant literature to further his intercultural understanding.

During one double session, we practiced an actual presentation for senior management. I took the perspective of the audience and provided Peter with likely feed-forward from senior managers. Also, I helped him further improve his presentation skills through some changes that are relatively easy to implement. Nevertheless, I suggested to Peter and his management that he should attend at least one good professional presentation course, which takes around 1 to 2 days.

Peter got promoted at the end of the fourth month (sooner than planned) because the current director had to urgently relocate to Europe. Despite the fact that Peter did not seem to be 100% ready at the time, his HR director and his immediate boss saw Peter's considerable progress and trusted that he would reach the desired competency level within a short time after taking over the new position. In fact, Peter asked his management to extend the coaching assignment by another 2 months to assure a successful start-up in the critical first 3 months. His wish was granted.

***In Part III, you learn how professional coaching can fast-track you from being a manager to being a leader.***

**Purpose Statement:** The basic purpose of executive coaching is to help the coachee further improve his performance and make better decisions to maximize his success and, subsequently, the success of his organization.