



Coaching: A Leader's Story

Problem

Ted was recently promoted to lead a large division that focused on scientific and technical research. Ted's supervisor had a degree of confidence that he would be well suited to his new position but had a few concerns as well. Ted was incredibly intelligent, quick, and knew how to be a star performer, but would he be able to make the transition to managing, nurturing, and bringing out the best in his new staff? Not only would Ted need to put his own scientific success on the back burner, but he would also need to slow down and make sure that his new staff were on board with his vision. Ted was often the first person in the building and the last to leave, taking on new projects and running from meeting to meeting. He would use his quick intelligence to make snap decisions with little or no discussion. He sought little input from others and became impatient with anyone who asked too many questions or seemed slow to understand his reasoning. As a result there were a number of misunderstandings that impacted productivity and staff morale.

Solution

After discussing her concerns, Ted's supervisor suggested that he contact Gilburg Leadership Institute and work with an executive coach. Although Ted was reluctant to admit that he might need help, he agreed because he was committed to succeeding in his new position. While most of the coaching time would be spent meeting or talking on the phone every other week for 6 months, the Coach initially asked Ted to set aside a full day to meet and discuss his goals and measurements of success. Once these were clarified, the Coach spent the remainder of the day helping Ted to better see and understand himself—his motivations, natural preferences, and unconscious beliefs.

Ted was able to see his natural strengths and limitations through the Deep Type[®] process. He acknowledged that he was frequently impatient with people if they didn't understand things as quickly as he did. While it was a strength to be able to rapidly assess and understand a situation, he would have to slow down and be more patient with others who learned differently. Ted also recognized that he would have to provide more information and seek greater input from his staff if he wanted them to buy into and support his ideas and goals.

Discussing the goal of becoming more of a mentor and less of a star performer, Ted became uneasy. Success and achievement in the scientific world were very important to him and he was naturally competitive. He didn't believe he could prioritize his own successes behind those of his employees, yet he agreed in the principle. The Coach led Ted through an exercise to uncover the unconscious beliefs that might be keeping him from achieving this goal. During this exercise, Ted learned that some part of him

believed he had to be perfect. The belief drove him to achieve, but it was never enough nor perfect enough, and so he would set his sights on another achievement. With the help of the Coach, Ted was able to redefine what perfect meant and create a definition that included supporting and mentoring others. His definition: “*the more others succeed, the more successful I am,*” would be used as a reminder to Ted in his new position.

The Coach helped Ted develop a few small yet high-leverage practices that addressed some of Ted’s goals. Ted committed to scheduling time twice a week, in either a meeting or one-on-one appointments. During this time, he was going to ask others what they thought, remembering to breathe and give others a chance to answer. After these encounters, Ted agreed to make notes on what he observed. His second practice was to print out his new definition for success and post it near his computer so that he could refer to it regularly. Lastly, Ted agreed to read a popular leadership/mentoring book by a successful NBA coach. Ted enjoyed sports, and this was a great way of introducing him to different aspects of his new role as a mentor.

Results

Changing habits is hard work and Ted knew that some of his habits were no longer useful if he wanted to succeed as a leader. With the help of the Coach, Ted began to observe himself taking over conversations and rarely asking for input or listening. At first he forgot to ask others what they thought, but slowly he began to catch himself. After his third coaching call, Ted agreed to reveal his goals to his team leaders. He asked them to remind him if he wasn’t listening or asking for input. At first they were reluctant, but when they realized he was serious, they began to remind him. Soon, it became a game and the staff felt comfortable ribbing him if he forgot.

During the first coaching call, Ted shared that he really enjoyed reading about the NBA coach and was beginning to get excited about the potential to have an even greater impact in the field of science by helping others succeed. He admitted that he still wanted to be the superstar and was having a hard time reconciling the difference. The Coach helped him see the importance of honoring and accepting the loss of being a superstar. In addition, she helped Ted see how some of his superstar qualities could be adapted to his leadership role.

After six months of working with a Coach, Ted had slowed down and was able to ask for ideas and listen more. Even though he was impatient on the inside, he knew his ideas and goals would be implemented much faster if others were included early on. He made a point of acknowledging others’ successes, whether it was a scientific breakthrough or an administrative project completed. In addition, Ted left work at 5:00 PM at least three times a week because he wanted to create more life balance for himself and model it for his staff.