

THE CHALLENGE

For leaders at a busy international agency, taking time out of the schedule for meaningful professional development seemed all but impossible – although executives agreed that the organization was in desperate need of a cultural change.

Although the agency had deep technical expertise and ability, a cluttered organizational structure tended to make managers much less effective than they might have been. Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, glacial promotion cycles (new assignments came every four years), limited networking opportunities, and a cultural aversion to self-promotion all served to make the agency a very sluggish machine.

On top of all this, the agency faced not only the usual constraints of a multi-layered bureaucracy, but a cultural clash between publicity-shunning local offices and a publicity-seeking headquarters. In the end, these limitations pushed most executives toward a “command and control” management style that led to micromanagement, lack of strategic thinking, and limited self-awareness.

LEARN, UNLEARN, RELEARN

Despite the shortage of time, MayCoach & Co. found a way, through individualized two-hour telephone debriefings, to give the executives tailored coaching and insight into their most pressing personal management challenges, even while aligning them more closely with their NGO’s goal of cultural revitalization.

A series of short sessions that leveraged confidential 360° feedback previously gathered by the agency looked like a way to help managers out of this institutional box. These sessions would give the manager the opportunity to reflect and discuss his or her colleagues’ feedback about their strengths and weaknesses as a leader, according to Vijay Naidoo of Westville, South Africa, a member of MayCoach & Co.’s core faculty.

“Three-sixties provide insight. As coaches, our role is to take this insight, share it with the coachees, understand their take on it, then turn it around and look at all the different facets it presents,” explains Rawan Albina, an experienced Dubai-based MayCoach & Co. faculty coach who led a significant number of the sessions.

Having access to 360° feedback collected by the agency not only gave the coaches a head start in knowing where they needed to concentrate the discussion, but the background information they needed to develop a customized toolkit for their coachees that gave them new tools and techniques to enhance their leadership abilities.

Such highly focused conversations are not always easy. “We need to be tough at times, say things as they are and even hold a mirror to our coachee’s face and help them see a reality they might be hiding from,” said Albina. “It is about creating awareness and moving from there to sparking motivation, to change, then action planning, and finally observing a behavioral impact on the ground.”

New Delhi-based Shalini Verma echoes this observation: “The 360° exercise has acted as a powerful tool in expanding self-awareness in the participants. As a Coach, my endeavor was to create a safe space for the participant to explore the possible dynamics which were instrumental in creating varying perceptions about them, in their ecosystem. Also, every participant took back at least two to three action steps, to work upon and thus evolve as a better individual and leader.”

SHORT BUT EFFECTIVE

Despite the difficulty of the engagement, most executives came to appreciate the feedback and advice. “Rawan helped me understand how my authentic leadership could be focused on steering the team and work program through this turbulent time,” said one executive.

Such a laser-focused coaching session can help managers:

- Understand what respondents’ comments mean. Answers may seem contradictory and it can be helpful to have an experienced person interpret them.
- Achieve deeper self-knowledge, with respect to their blind spots.
- Quickly change behaviors that limit their effectiveness.
- Learn to find and cultivate opportunities throughout the organization.

Despite their brevity, these kinds of short engagements can help leaders – particularly in VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environments – stabilize difficult situations quickly and give them the chance to pursue mid- to long-term goals. “It is about creating opportunities and positive thinking in conditions of global complexity and hierarchy, where managers often feel estranged from their peers,” concludes Susanne May, the CEO of MayCoach & Co.

MayCoach & Company is a globally operating consulting firm in the field of leadership development, cultural renewal, global coaching solutions and assessments with over 150 professionals in 42 countries and offices in Berlin (Germany) and Singapore. For further information, please visit our website www.maycoach.com or contact us at info@maycoach.com.

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