



KAY CANNON

CASE STUDY: INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE COACHING; GOVERNMENT SECTOR

(Chief Financial Officer for an aeronautical agency)

The Challenge: This senior executive was charged with leading significant institutional change and overseeing a budget of \$3+ billion within an organization that employed over 8000 individuals. In addition, her job was structured so that she reported to two different bosses who had competing agendas. When offered an opportunity to work with Kay Cannon she was very skeptical that there would be anything of value. After all, she had participated in extensive executive leadership development initiatives over her 30 year career and was at the top of her game. What more could she learn? She was also working 70+ hours a week and felt like she simply didn't have time to waste in executive coaching. Furthermore, she was also reluctant to speak with someone who was also working with many of her executive co-workers. Once she was assured of confidentiality, this self-professed Type A++ executive agreed to give executive coaching a brief trial run though she remained skeptical of its benefits.

The Assignment: Previous to taking on her current assignment, this individual spent over 20 years as an executive leader in a hard-driving, blunt-talking military organization. She was used to barking orders and having everyone fall into line. She was also used to leading a work force who thought working 24/7 was normal and to be expected. Now, she found herself with a triple challenge. She was responsible for leading enormous organizational change in an environment that was nothing like her previous workplace and for two bosses who had competing agendas. In this new, highly political environment, barking orders was met with resistance and people went home at 5 p.m. even though there was still work to be done. In typical Type A fashion, determined to succeed in her mission to transform the organization, she responded to these workplace obstacles by becoming even more demanding and blunt in her leadership style. Frustrated, irritated and angry, she was going to force everyone to comply with her directives or else.

At the beginning of her executive coaching, a performance analysis revealed that while she was viewed as a very competent executive leader she was also viewed as someone who bulldozed over others, who was too abrupt and who didn't listen to others or include them in the decision-making process. She was also perceived as valuing results more than the people who worked with her. In her conversation with Kay, this executive also confessed that she felt

exhausted, stressed out and was unable to sleep because she kept thinking about work. Often she would get up in the middle of the night to send work-related emails. She once even drove into work at 3 a.m. but came back home before everyone else got to work because she didn't want them to know she had been working in her office instead of sleeping. She even confessed to being so desperate for time to work uninterrupted that she had, on occasion, locked herself in the ladies room with her laptop. In addition, she was troubled by the fact that she had very little time to spend with her husband, son and grand-daughter. She was causing collateral damage all around herself and she was unable to see it.

Kay Cannon worked with this executive to:

- Stop the collateral damage by identifying the trigger events and unconscious mindsets that were causing her to become too demanding, cynical and blunt in her leadership style.
- Help her adopt a more effective, collaborative leadership style that aligned, engaged and inspired her direct reports to take action.
- Become masterful at leading major organizational change so she could minimize resistance and accelerate the rate of the change without causing collateral damage.
- Increase the level of personal commitment and accountability amongst her direct reports so more work got done in less time.
- Expand her perspective and problem-solving skills to be more innovative and creative in her leadership.
- Improve her ability to work through politically sensitive challenges without alienating key stakeholders.
- Influence and persuade key stakeholders within the organization to embrace the necessary changes.
- Control her stress level and reduce her feelings of frustration.
- Increase her productivity by more effectively dealing with workplace interruptions.
- Carve out more time for family, friends and fun.

The Result:

Even though she was initially skeptical, this executive leader fully invested in working with Kay Cannon. After ten executive coaching sessions, she admitted that coaching was much more valuable than she had thought it would be. During the course of this coaching assignment, the executive worked closely with Kay to transform her leadership, empower her staff, accelerate organizational change and smooth the political rough waters. Her staff became highly engaged and productive and her political influence expanded throughout the organization. Furthermore, her stress level plummeted, her sleeping improved, her health became much better and she resumed a much loved hobby of painting. During her work with Kay, this Type A executive also came to the important recognition that there is more to a fulfilling life than work. When she became eligible for early retirement, she decided to take it even though she was only in her early 50's. She had built a strong department and had a solid successor in place so she felt like her work

could continue without her. It was time for her to pursue her own consulting business and have more time for herself and for her husband, son and granddaughter.

Testimonial: In the executive's own words:

"I had regular sessions with Kay. Kay told me it's the work that you do in your coaching, not your coach that changes your life. But it changed my life. The fact that I had her [Kay], the kind of coach that she is, to look at what's going on... I was in a totally different organization than ever before, at a very high level in my career, different from anything I'd ever experienced, and it was very difficult for me. AND, I'm VERY Type A!

I was frustrated and it showed. People got off at a certain time every day. I came from a very hard-driving organization where people worked all the time and I thought that was normal. And I'm sure I frustrated people as much as they frustrated me. It didn't seem normal to me that people would just leave to go home at a certain time every day. The culture was different. My irritation would show. I would say things that were cynical and it was not always accepted. Again, I came from a place where I could say what you think.

Working with Kay, I had an 'aha' moment when I recognized that everything is not work. There are other things in the world.

As a result of my work with Kay and becoming more self-aware, I retired as quickly as I could. I'm not sure I would have done that if I hadn't had the experience with Kay. Now, I'm happy, confident, relaxed, and enjoying my life!"