



KAY CANNON

CASE STUDY: INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE COACHING; GOVERNMENT SECTOR

(Deputy Director, Engineering Directorate of aeronautical agency)

The Challenge: With executive accountability for all engineering projects, 3000 civil servants and contractors, and a multi-billion dollar budget, this well-respected Type A aerospace engineer was viewed as a critical contributor to strategic success. He was also struggling as a leader. His initial 360 assessment scores placed him the bottom quintile of all leaders. Most of his direct reports were terrified of him. They viewed him as a bulldozing, ‘my way or the highway’ kind of leader who was prone to egoistical tirades and unwilling to listen to other people. He, however, believed he was doing an excellent job. When he was asked to work with Kay Cannon, he was very skeptical and displayed obvious disdain for what he called the ‘touchy feely crap’. He was a hard-core results kind of leader that kept his eye on the hard metrics and deliverables. After speaking with Kay at length, he finally acknowledge he wasn’t pleased with being in the bottom quintile of all leaders and agreed – grudgingly – to give executive coaching a trial run though he made it very clear he thought it was a bunch of hogwash and a waste of his time.

The Assignment: Kay worked in a collaborative partnership with him to:

- Expand self-awareness as a leader.
- Establish clear and measurable objectives for his leadership improvement.
- Create a specific leadership development action plan which included regular executive coaching sessions, as well as new skills, mindsets and behaviors for him to implement on the job and new leadership tools to use so he could be successful without bulldozing others.
- Design a reporting and accountability system to help him successfully and easily implement the action plan and make the desired changes even when he was under tremendous time pressures and had enormous responsibilities.
- Determine the intervals for re-evaluation.

With this executive coaching process in place, he quickly began to experience unexpected ‘wins’. The unexpected successes opened the door for him to shift from a skeptical participant to a highly engaged one. This direct, high-energy Type A executive began to learn how to control the energy he brought to each situation. Kay helped him to understand his triggers, explore the

interpersonal relationships with his peers, establish more work/life balance, learn how to control his environment, and always treat others with respect.

He continued his executive coaching for two years with 360 assessments done every six months.

The Result: This Type A executive moved from being ranked in the bottom quintile of leaders to consistently ranking in the top quintile of all leaders. Toward the end of the coaching assignment, the executive truly mastered how to effectively use his power as a leader and manager. The concept of ‘power over’ others vs. ‘power with’ others was a very helpful mental image that he kept in mind all the time. It was a very simple concept, but it helped him maintain perspective in every situation and avoid becoming a bulldozer. In fact, the executive coaching process so profoundly changed him as a leader and as a person that he now ‘pays it forward’ by making time in his busy executive schedule to teach leadership workshops to other engineers. During the course of this coaching assignment, the executive likened the experience to being one of going from a childhood leader to an adult leader by learning to control his reactions and not let his triggers run him into a ditch.

Testimonial: In the executive’s own words:

“There was a giant sucking sound pulling me to the top and I was not able to perform as well as I wanted to. Kay and I had conversations about what I was doing wrong. I’m a direct, high-energy person. Those two things don’t fit well in the Southern culture.

Kay told me the flowers are delicate, and learn to use a sprinkler, instead of a fire hose. She was tenacious in not letting me slack off. She asked me the hard questions and would not let me get away with ‘it’s too hard, I don’t want to answer it’. She pushed you to do this heavy lifting as an individual. She can also encourage you in a way that you know you’ve got to go do the heavy lifting.

To this day, years later, I still go back and look at the notes from my coaching sessions with Kay. I made a lot of progress during my work with Kay and I was able to get off my blood pressure medication. The frustration dropped and I could bring my whole self into the business.

You can simplify it into everyone wants to be treated with respect. Even if you need better performance from someone, that doesn’t mean you don’t use respect to get it.”