Hamilton-Chase Consulting

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applying
behavioral science
to enhance
executive and
organizational
performance

Case Study: Executive Coaching

Background (details modified to ensure client confidentiality)

Steve was a 38-year-old manager of an IT department at a large engineering firm with offices worldwide. Steve's supervisor viewed him as a very talented employee with significant potential to advance - if only he could raise his profile on management's radar screen. Steve was extraordinarily competent in most aspects of his job but he performed in such a quiet, efficient, no-nonsense way that he blended into the corporate atmosphere rather than standing out.

Steve was eager to learn more about himself and make modifications that might help him succeed. The coaching began with 3 hours of in-depth interviewing, business-based psychological testing, and qualitative 360-degree feedback. We examined this data line by line so that Steve could see himself in ways he hadn't before.

The findings were organized into three areas: Observations regarding Steve's problem-solving style, his interpersonal style, and his management style (see excerpt below). We turned to these findings frequently during the nine months that we worked together.

Problem-Solving Style

- Your attention to detail helps you strive for excellence yet too much attention to detail can be counter-productive, slowing you down. Remember that just because you notice a detail doesn't mean that you need to address it.

- Your practical, logical, tough-minded approach allows for quick problem solving although you run the risk of being viewed by some people as insensitive. Be careful to balance your factual approach to problem solving with an appreciation for peoples' feelings.

- Your critical thinking skills are very strong. This is generally an asset particularly when it comes to problem solving. You do need to watch that you not get too far out in front of others, because you end up irritated if they don't seem as interested in problem-solving as you are.

- Your hands-on approach is helpful, but you need to watch that you don't get pulled into tasks that ought to be delegated to others.

Interpersonal Style

- You typically try to influence people using facts, but in some situations you could get even better results by augmenting your explanation with some emotion.

- Your neutrality might cause people to falsely conclude that you're not willing to get involved and take a stand.

- Your duties could easily confine you to the IT department if you let them, but in order to become more visible you need to initiate contact with colleagues throughout your organization.

- Others might misperceive your introverted nature as disinterest. Let's discuss ways for you to comfortably engage more with coworkers.

Management Style

- You tend to be so focused on being effective that you don't take time to involve others in your decision-making process. When people come to you with a question or a problem, you're quick to offer them a solution but you need to probe further to explore their concerns so that they feel heard. And if you take the time to explain your thinking, they will be better positioned to address the matter themselves in the future.

- When dealing with your staff you need to find a balance between being firm yet fair, direct yet kind, dominant but not domineering. You must also balance your desire to trust others with the need to verify and oversee their work.

The Outcome

Steve took a number of steps to address these findings over the course of the nine months we worked together. He examined which of his behaviors were counter-productive, came up with alternatives, and he pushed himself beyond his comfort zone. Steve made great use of coaching and within a year he was promoted to a significantly larger role within his firm.