

## THE USE OF CALIPER IN EXECUTIVE COACHING

### INTRODUCTION

Our client is an international healthcare provider with a presence in mainland Europe. They asked us if we could help to resolve a problem they had with a very senior manager, John Cooper, (not his real name) who had transferred on secondment from North America and for whom a recent change of responsibilities was causing major disruption. John's principle discipline had been that of financial management, but an organisation restructuring had resulted in the need to merge some critical support functions and John had been selected to take responsibility as the project manager, managing a team comprising representatives from all the stakeholder departments.

### THE PROBLEM

In his new role John needed to network with many new colleagues, some of equal seniority to himself, who reported to Directors of several parallel functions. Although John was in charge of the project, he had no direct control of these senior people and could not use the same management approach with them as had always worked for him in the past when he controlled his own immediate team. This is where John hit problems. He did not seem to be as effective at adopting the more consultative style needed in this new situation and his more directive approach was causing some extremely counter-productive in fighting. The project looked as if it was not going to be delivered on time, John's boss was constantly being dragged into trying to pour oil on troubled water and key business objectives were in jeopardy. Having discussed the situation extensively with John's boss and with John himself - who now recognised that he was facing the first major failure in his career - we agreed a way forward to try to get to the bottom of why John was causing relationship problems with his project peers and what was behind his failure to adopt a more conciliatory approach.

### THE APPROACH

We first gathered some 360-degree feedback from John's colleagues, peers, subordinates and from his direct boss. This was done via anonymous questionnaire sent out by John himself with the request that recipients should complete it and return it to us direct. We sent John a self-assessment questionnaire dealing with the same range of behavioural indicators that had been sent to his colleagues and we gave John a Caliper Profile to complete and return to us.

### THE KEY

When we analysed all of the data from these three instruments it became apparent that John saw himself in a very different light from the way others experienced him.

He prided himself in his thoroughness, accuracy, high standards and "right-first-time" competence; his colleagues experienced John as an authoritarian, opinionated, uncompromising bully! The Caliper Profile was further illuminating! John had depicted himself through his Caliper responses as a highly "driven", impatient perfectionist, who very interestingly also had extremely low self-esteem. This latter factor turned out to be the key to everything else.

When we sat down with John to go through the data we had collected, taking him through a very careful and thorough review of his previous life, both personal and professional, then jointly considered the implications of his Caliper Profile, John himself realised where the linkages were and what accounted for his enormous need to be better than everyone else and to be always "right". John had had a very exacting father who had constantly criticised John and, no matter how hard John had tried to please his father, he had never managed to win his father's unequivocal praise and endorsement. As a result John had grown up with a very low opinion of himself and a belief that he must always strive to correct his inadequacy and work to be better than others.

## THE SOLUTION

This realisation unlocked all the boxes for John and he was able to examine how these inner feelings drove the behaviours that so infuriated and antagonised his working colleagues. It had never been a problem in the past when he could tell his own team what to do and how to do it. (Although arguably he would have been a much more effective leader had he been able to draw out and encourage his peoples' own innate abilities rather than always imposing his own ways of doing everything). But now that he could no longer "tell" his colleagues what to do and how to do it, his approach became a major obstacle. He now recognised and appreciated how he had failed to consult, to suggest rather than tell, to persuade rather than prescribe. Having reached this point of self-realisation and self-awareness, we were able to move on to some productive coaching sessions with John which gave him some "tools" in his kit-bag of methods of interacting with others which he now consciously would try to use to be more effective in his current role.

## THE ROLE OF CALIPER

As a result of this work John was able to modify his behaviour and to mend the fences with his colleagues. He succeeded in his project management role and went on to a bigger job where the learning he experienced has been put to further and even more important uses. He also reported to us that he had also learned some important life skills and that he felt a more complete person, having been able to understand himself better than ever before

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