



The Cascading ROI of Coaching: A Client's Account

by Janet Lyman

“Early in the coaching relationship, I saw benefits, not only...at work but also in my personal life.”

My own experience

Frankly, I was less than thrilled at the suggestion that I engage an executive coach. After all, I'd been a highly successful Principal for many years. By every objective measure, I had always been a high performer, driving myself and others to consistently excellent results. But in my performance review a couple of years ago, I was told that my strong results-orientation was getting in my way, that there was a cost on the people side. What had changed? Was I somehow behaving differently now, or had the Firm changed its expectations of me?

Amid my many questions and doubts, I set about to find a coach. I engaged Leslie Williams, and we began to work on the people side of my leadership. At first, I just wanted to “check the box” – to meet the firm’s expectation that I get a coach, without wasting too much of my time. I was also concerned that this might feel more like personal counseling than a strategy for achieving business results without bruises...

But early in the coaching relationship, I saw benefits - not only in my effectiveness at work but also in my personal life. I began to understand the bottom-line cost of focusing so single-mindedly on getting the work done. Once the cost was clear, my



motivation for change increased dramatically, and I became fully committed to developing the interpersonal facets of my leadership style. It became very clear to me that being a leader in a relationship business means attending to my internal relationships as skillfully as I attended to my customers. Leslie’s work with me drew heavily from the concepts and skills of “emotional intelligence (EI),” and I found them enormously helpful. My daughter, college bound at the time, was an early beneficiary of my EI work. She was struggling with the decision of whether to spend another year in a local community college or transfer to a distant university. To me, the “right” path for her was so clear, and I had often shared my “infinite wisdom” with her. Through coaching, I learned to back off and let her find her own way. My daughter still compliments me on how “well I’m doing” at not imposing my opinions on her.

After about six months, the formal coaching phase of my work with Leslie ended, although she continues to be a resource I draw upon to this day. The results have been more

with staff and clients. In addition, our entire senior staff has a common language and framework for addressing staff development needs. I firmly believe that it was the real-life exercises and reflection - the hallmarks of the coaching approach - that made this series so worthwhile for people.

A Bottom Line Impact

The gains in improved internal functioning were more than sufficient to warrant the investment we made in coaching. Yet the benefit did not end there; our coaching had a direct and dramatic impact on the bottom line.

As part of one of our brown bag sessions, we used a current real-life task negotiation as a case study. We were at risk of losing a major task with a long standing client and were scheduled to hold a crucial meeting with that client the next day. When we analyzed the negotiation process to date, we discovered that we had been approaching the client in a way that was not helping us build the kind of relationship we really wanted. Based on that session, we realized that we needed to radically rethink our approach. We called a meeting of our internal legal and contracts people, reworked our strategy for the negotiation, and met the next day with the client.



"I have renewed relationships, ... new associations... and was promoted to Partner."

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The outcome was dramatic. Rather than losing 50% of the task to a subcontractor, we retained the majority of the work, for an immediate gain of \$1M. Also, because of the positive relationship we had built during that negotiation, the client expanded that task. Today, we have a contract in place for \$7M per year for the next 3 years. Had our group coaching not occurred, that revenue - \$22M so far - would have been a most unlikely outcome.

Summary

This is a story of the powerful impact that coaching can make: first on a single leader, and outward on a team, a client and, ultimately, on the Firm's bottom line. It caused more good things to happen on more levels than this (once) skeptic could ever have imagined. Is executive coaching useful for everyone? I don't know. But I find myself increasingly recommending it for my direct reports and their staff. Instead of seeing coaching as just a "check-the-box" executive assignment, I see it now as a real gift to senior staff. And if my experience is any indication, it is a gift that can yield significant and cascading returns: to the individuals being coached, their families, staff, clients, and the organization overall.

About the author

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