

## **From the coach's bench: Presentations**

*In the first of our 10 case studies on coaching for senior executives, coach Charlie Lang describes an experience he had with a recently promoted senior executive*

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The human resources director of a United States-based multinational hired me to coach Tim, a senior business development manager in charge of the firm's multimillion-dollar deals, and to help him make more positive and convincing presentations.

Before our coaching sessions, Tim was requested to complete a personality assessment. When I looked at the report I found an untypical pattern in business development managers. He scored low on "optimistic" and "risk-taking" but high on "analysing pitfalls". This suggested that Tim had a tendency to be skeptical and cautious.

This was not immediately apparent when I met him in our first coaching session, where he appeared to be friendly and happy.

However, his cautiousness and skepticism started to make sense as we talked about his career history.

Before assuming his present position about a year ago, Tim had been working for more than 16 years in finance and control. He got promoted to his present position because of his deep understanding of finance, an important asset when analysing and evaluating big deals. Cautiousness and skepticism were useful traits for his success in his past positions. When we talked about the presentations he frequently had to give to senior management, he said he preferred to underpromise and overdeliver.

**Tim:** I want to be different from my peers who seem to have no problem lying and promising deal volumes they almost never achieve. I prefer to be cautious and then consistently exceed my forecast figures.

**CL:** What was your mission in your previous jobs?

**Tim:** To protect my company.

**CL:** And what is your mission now?

**Tim:** To help my company grow.

**CL:** May I make a provocative statement?

**Tim:** Sure.

**CL:** Tim, you said that your peers often lie, but are you aware that you are lying too when you make these understatements?

I highlighted that his habit of providing figures that were lower than his actual estimates was as much a misrepresentation of facts as his colleagues quoting deal figures that were higher. Tim looked stunned. I believed at that point he realised that the way of thinking he adopted in his past role as financial controller was now a handicap for his success.

**CL:** Your present role is not primarily to protect the company, but to focus on growth, isn't it? What do you think you need to change in your presentations?

**Tim:** I guess I need to be a bit more optimistic and present figures that I truly believe are most likely to be achieved. I may include best and worst case scenarios to complete the picture.

This case highlighted three things I experience when coaching executives:

- The original reason for hiring a professional coach is rarely the underlying issue. In this case, I was hired to help Tim be more positive and convincing. But we realised as a result of coaching that this perceived lack of positive countenance was not the result of a personality trait, but because his new job demanded something different from the last one.
- Traits that made someone successful in the past may become obstacles in the future.
- Coaching is different from training or consulting - the solution for the necessary change is ultimately mostly discovered by the person being coached rather than the coach. As a result, those on the receiving end of coaching tend to be considerably more committed to the changes they discover.

----- **End of Article as published in SCMP** -----



Charlie Lang is an Executive Coach and Trainer who founded Progress-U Limited in 2002. His mission is to assist his clients in becoming excellent leaders for the benefit of all stakeholders. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Public Speaker and Author of over 100 articles related to leadership, change management and innovative sales.

End of 2004, he started authoring the book "The Groupness Factor" ( see <http://www.progressu.com.hk/Groupness-book.htm> ) which got published in August 2005. Charlie's articles got printed in publications like Human Resources, FZ Magazine, Banking Today, SCMP, Effective Executive and CareerTimes.

Charlie is a founding member and President (2007/08) of the Hong Kong International Coaching Community.