

## **From the coach's bench: Growing to C-level**

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Martin, the regional HR director of a European multinational electronics company, is considered by his chief executive Jeffrey as one of his top performers in the Asia-Pacific region. Jeffrey told me he would like to make Martin his successor when he retired in a couple of years.

Recently, however, complaints about Martin's leadership style have been mounting from several HR managers who reported to him. They find Martin's style too pushy and as a result do not feel sufficiently respected.

I suggested to Jeffrey that it would be useful that I first talked to some HR managers to get a better understanding of what was going on before starting the coaching assignment with him.

What I learned from the feedback from Martin's direct reports was quite interesting. Some of the HR managers felt that Martin's communication style was very blunt and they often were not 100 per cent sure about Martin's expectations. Apparently there was also a language issue because some managers said Martin's English was often confusing. They were also unhappy with how Martin dealt with unmet expectations. Martin would resort to impolite language and frequently scream at them.

When I asked about what they appreciated in Martin, they responded that they liked his drive, honesty, commitment to the company and abundant energy.

When I met Martin he appeared to be a friendly and polite person. Also, I had no problems in communicating with him in English. I was not surprised about the contradiction between the reports from his subordinates and his behaviour towards me. It is quite common.

What it tells me is that Martin does not have a problem in communicating appropriately. It seemed to be more a question of his beliefs about what is useful when communicating with his direct reports.

This assumption was confirmed when I asked him about whether he felt that his communication style with his direct reports worked. He responded: "You know, I need to get the job done and I expect my direct reports to do their job at a high-quality level and within the given timelines. If they don't do that, they have to accept a rather rough response from me. It teaches them a lesson to be more careful next time. I understand that this doesn't make them happy, but my job is not to make them happy but to make sure we get results. If they can't take that, they are not ready for this kind of job."

It was obvious that Martin thought he did the right thing, and that his style of communication was one of the reasons for his success.

Martin's communication style and the fact that he is successful is a mere correlation, but Martin believes that his communication style leads to good results. It is not unusual that successful people mix up correlation with causality.

To address this, Martin first needed to understand what really made him successful. Eventually he realised that the main reasons for his success were his determination, his hard work and his high energy level. He understood that his communication style led to a limitation in his success because there was a high turnover rate in his team.

When Martin became aware of these dynamics, he was ready to rethink his attitude towards his direct reports and develop more empathy and respect

towards them. He was also ready to improve the clarity of his communication by asking more often if his expectations were clearly understood.

Martin actually had all the skills to communicate more successfully with his direct reports. Once his beliefs shifted, he started to develop a more appropriate attitude towards his team members.

----- **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.