

## Why Coaching Works

*By Charlie Lang, Managing Partner of Progress-U Asia*



“Charlie, do you do presentation coaching? Our Director of Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A), Jane, makes depressing presentations to the top management team. She needs to improve her presentation skills,” Kelvin inquired by phone. Kelvin is the regional VP Human Resources of a large multinational technology company specializing in building automation.

“Uhm, yes, I can do that, but may I ask why you would want to engage a coach for this purpose instead of sending her to a presentation skills course? This will be cheaper and faster.”

“We did that already, it didn’t help much.” Kelvin replied.

“Hmm, OK, how about we ask Jane to give me a sample of a presentation she recently gave so that I can get an idea if coaching would be a good option.”

Kelvin liked the idea and we set the sample presentation. Her presentation was indeed depressing. But not particularly because of poor presentation skills - in fact her presentation skills were quite OK - it was actually the content of her presentation that was depressing.

As Director of M&A, Jane travels around China to find and evaluate possible acquisition targets. Then, every quarter, she presents her findings to the company’s top management so that they can make decisions on possible acquisitions. Jane’s presentation contained about 95% possible downsides and risks and 5% on opportunities. It was of course, a depressing presentation.

So I asked Jane, who took over this role about nine months earlier:

“May I ask what was your role before you got promoted to Director of M&A?”

“I was Financial Controller,” she replied.

I asked: “What was your mission as Financial Controller?”

Her response was instant: “To protect the company from financial risk and give financial guidance to the top management.”

“What is your mission in your current role as Director of M&A?”

Jane was not able to answer immediately and needed to think about it. After a few seconds she replied: “Also to protect the company from undue financial risks when investing in any other company. But more than that, to help the company grow.”

“If you look at your presentation content, which mission were you pursuing?,” I asked.

It was obvious that subconsciously she was still pursuing the mission of her previous role.

Problem solved?

Far from it.

It turned out that Jane was so concerned about missing any risks or hidden issues in the companies she researched that she would wake up every night and stay awake for several hours worrying.

It might become increasingly obvious to you that training was not suited to sort out these issues.

Now, you might be thinking that training is not the right solution to sort out these issues. Could therapy be needed in this case?

Well, that possibility should not be excluded, but how would we know?

Our approach in such cases is to give it a shot with coaching and see if we can get the coachee to transform and move beyond these issues. If that doesn't work despite best efforts, then it would mean that there are more deep-rooted causes that require a different approach. However, we usually work with pretty successful executives and found that most of them have the capacity to overcome such issues without therapy and move on.

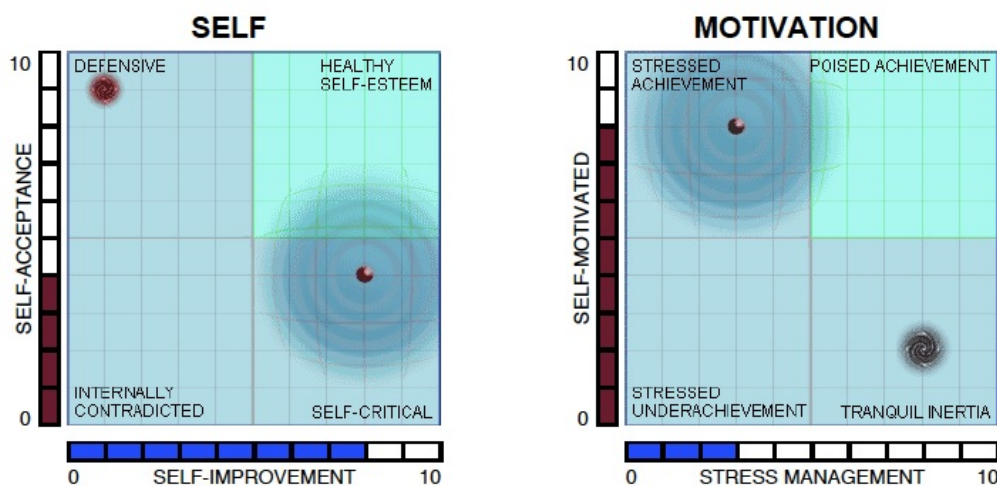
So how to address the challenges that Jane faced via coaching?

We found it immensely helpful to ensure there is a solid assessment phase at the beginning of each coaching assignment, which may include a choice of these interventions:

- Harrison Assessments - a very accurate assessment tool that provides deeper insights into the behavioral tendencies of the coachee
- Tailor-made 360 Degree Assessments - either via online assessment or in-person assessment
- Shadowing of the coachee - observing coachee in real-life situations
- Interviews of key stakeholders/triangulation meetings (between coachee, stakeholders and coach)
- Other assessments/inventories, as needed

In Jane’s case, we arranged the observation of a sample presentation and conducted Harrison Assessments.

Harrison Assessments, particularly the Paradox Report, gave us some very useful insights into the underlying tendencies of this coachee:



As you can tell from these two paradoxical patterns, Jane’s main tendency was to be self-critical and to achieve results under significant stress. The so-called ‘shadows’ (‘Defensive’ in the SELF paradox and ‘Tranquil Inertia’ in the MOTIVATION paradox) indicate how the coachee tends to behave when experiencing strong negative emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, stress, etc. Since Jane was putting a lot of pressure on

herself, chances for her to 'flip' into shadow behaviors were quite high. It seemed to happen when her environment (e.g. her boss) added to her already high internal pressure.

We developed a highly effective, logic-based 3-way process (Past/Present/Future or PPF) that helps coachees with a more or less strong self-critical tendency to develop a higher level of self-esteem in a rather short time.

In Jane's case, PPF worked so well, that the night following this process, Jane would still wake up, but was able to bring herself back to sleep within about 15 minutes. The next night, she went back to sleep within five minutes of waking up. The third and subsequent nights, Jane actually didn't wake up in the middle of the night anymore. The PPF may not always work as successfully as it did with Jane, but the overall success rate is above 95%. It just may take a few more sessions until the coachee is completely able to integrate the new thinking and insights.

So what are some of the reasons that make highly proficient coaching work?

- It is future oriented. We recognize that we can't change the past, at best we can learn from it.
- The 'ownership' (what to do / how to do it) lies 100% with the coachee which enhances commitment.
- Coaching is not a one-off event, but a multi-session process, which has the benefit that commitment on following through with actions tends to be much higher. Also, if the coachee faced difficulties in implementing the action plan, the coach can offer support and encourage the coachee to give it another try.
- Use of highly effective tools before and during the sessions can significantly improve the coach's effectiveness and efficiency.
- The coach's ability to engage in transformational coaching ensures that the coachee experiences the most meaningful development that will help the coachee not only with current challenges but also in the longer run.

Jane's transformation turned out to be so successful that about six months into the coaching she actually became a bit too relaxed and we had to work on finding new challenges for her to maintain a high motivation level.

Let's keep progressing with purpose!

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