

Integrity Coaching

CASE STUDY 2:

Coaching and bringing out the best in Head Teachers

Head Teacher Case Study

London's #1 Coaching company for Headteachers and Senior School Leaders



Recognised
Provider



Integrity

Coaching & Leadership Development



Background to Integrity Coaching

Integrity Coaching is London's number one coaching company for head teachers and senior school leaders.

We are experts in providing support for leaders in inner city schools where both the challenge to succeed and the stress levels are high.

We help school leaders to maximise their ability to impact on future generations, by providing services that enable them to successfully cope with the distinct pressures of their roles; so that their stress levels are reduced and their ability to;

- **Lead and inspire others**
- **Stay focused on their vision and**
- **Maximise the performance of both their staff and pupils is maintained**

Stress

and the life of a school leader

Senior school leaders, are in positions where their life, behaviours, words, actions and relationships are on constant public display and as a result they are under constant public scrutiny. This in itself brings a unique set of pressures. The school leader has to learn how to manage both their private and public personas; in a manner that enables them to maintain high levels of authenticity and a deep connection with their core values and what they stand for. When faced with challenging circumstances, which often arise on a daily basis, senior school leaders will normally respond automatically to these situations with perceived expertise and aplomb. Responding to stress, responding to crisis, small and large that are not a part of the planned daily routine, soon become an accepted part of a school leader's daily life. However, left unchecked, and without time to reflect on causes, impact and consequences of actions taken, these automatic behaviours can result in leaders becoming disconnected from themselves and in extreme cases disconnected at various levels with those that they lead.

And so the question arises, **'With whom can the senior school leader, have that conversation that simply allows him/her to breathe?'**; a conversation that will allow the individual to gain a deeper level of self awareness and personal understanding; a conversation that will allow the individual to marry both the personal and professional aspects of what it means to be a congruent and effective leader. This is not an area that school advisors, consultants etc are trained in, but **if we are to have effective schools, schools in which both children and staff fulfill their potential, then there have to be systems in place that facilitate school leaders being able to reflect in an open and honest manner on the inner struggles and triumphs of leadership.**

This is the premise from which Integrity Coaching works. Our work with school leaders takes an approach to coaching that is rooted in enabling individuals to develop heightened levels of self awareness and understanding, believing that increased understanding of self, leads to a heightened ability to effectively lead ones self and others. **A central tenant of the coaching relationship rests on the fact that the coach believes that if an individual can connect with his/her values and really understand the role that they play in their lives; how they determine their thoughts, actions, behaviours etc then they are more likely to experiences a deeper sense of congruence between their public and private selves and fulfillment in the role.**

Head teacher Case Study

The following case study provides an illustration of how coaching principles have been used to support the headteacher of an inner city primary school. The case study also serves to illustrate how coaching can enable individuals to enter the arena of deep/profound learning, where professional partnering and dialogue can lead to greater depths of personal discovery and understanding.

Context

COACHEE: Shona Garfield

POST: Primary Headteacher

SCHOOL:

Church of England Primary, North East London

NUMBER OF PUPILS ON ROLE:

222 pupils on roll

33 different ethnic groups

84 speakers of English as an additional language

52% Free School Meals

REASON FOR COACHING

Shona was in the fourteenth year of her career when the coaching relationship started. A very successful headteacher whose leadership skills and qualities were widely recognized by her colleagues and Local Authority, Shona had been asked to become the head of a soft federation.

‘A soft federation, or collaboration’ is a formal arrangement under section 26 of the Education Act 2002, by which two or more governing bodies share elements of governance or establish a joint strategic committee with delegated powers. Under these arrangements each school retains its individual governing body’

Shona had been asked to take on this role, as another local school, St John’s was not performing well and was without a headteacher. A soft federation with Shona’s school would mean that in addition to being head of her own school, Shona would invest time in working collaboratively with the governors and teachers of St John’s to help develop successful strategies for moving the school forward.

Creating a structure that facilitates this type of working arrangement obviously necessitates a great deal of change taking place; new working relationships and systems need to be trialed, reviewed and implemented. However, the support that Shona required through coaching was not related to the operational and structural changes that were required to make this initiative a success. Moreover, they were to do with the support required to help Shona make sense of the unexpected personal transitions that this change in role had brought about.

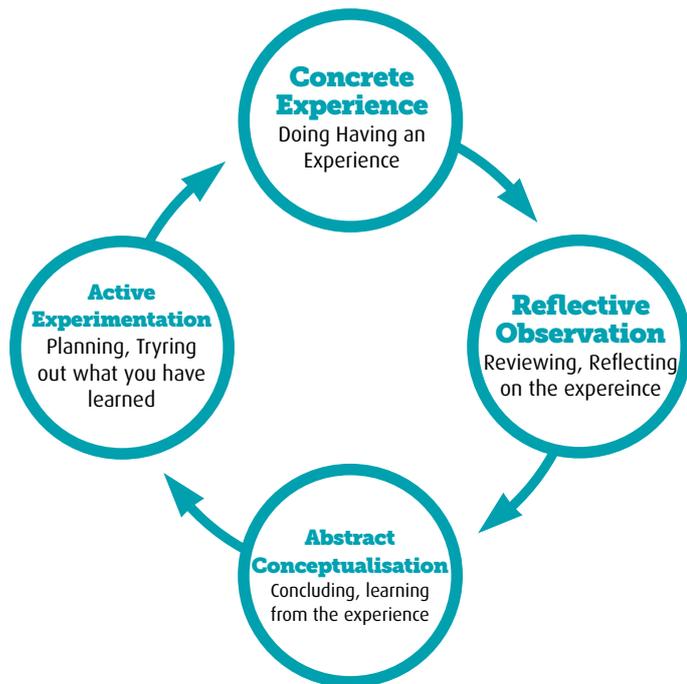
Thus the objectives of the coaching relationship within the context of managing personal change were to enable Shona to understand:

- **How to develop new ways of being in order to balance the personal and professional demands of her new role**
- **the change in professional relationships and perceptions of one’s self that occur with professional role change**

Approach

The coaching sessions followed the T [GROW] model, an approach which was also complemented by the coach's knowledge of Kolb's experiential learning cycle re fig 1

Fig 1: Kolb's Learning Cycle



The Kolb Cycle enables one to understand what happens when adults are engaged in learning and change, moreover it provides an explicit process for reflection, whereby an individual can be guided through stages that will enable him/her to;

- A** Gain a deeper understanding of new experiences within a specific situation /context.
- B** Extrapolate new meaning from their own personal reflections on the experience.
- C** Devise and experiment with new behaviours and ways of being to enhance future personal development and growth.

Stage 1: Concrete Experience:

Stage 1 of Kolb's cycle, where the individual is engaged in something which requires them to adopt specific behaviors, is normally the place where the reflective learning cycle begins.

In Shona's case the experience that formed the basis for reflection in the coaching sessions was that of being a head of a soft federation and managing the personal and professional transitions that arose as a result.

Stage 2: Reflective Observation:

When an individual is engaged in new learning, the experience will have an impact at both an emotional and a rational level, resulting in the individual being left with a range of feelings and thoughts about the experience. If left simply as this, a collection of emotions and 'head talk' it is unlikely that learning of any real depth will occur. Individuals need to be given opportunities to reflect on

what they have experienced to ensure that new and perhaps more desirable outcomes can be achieved, if the individual were to be placed in similar situation again.

Often, in the busy life of a headteacher, this does not happen and individuals not having had the time and space to reflect on the day to day, find themselves in a cycle where old behaviours continue to produce the same, sometimes disappointing results. At a subconscious level the individual knows something is not right. They experience a certain discomfort or disconnection from their role and others. In order to understand the internal commotion, the individual needs a quiet space to reflect and process what they are experiencing.

Reflective observation within Kolb's cycle allows for the individual to:

- A** To step outside of the situation and reflect as an observer on what they have experienced.
- A** To come to terms with their feelings about the event/situation

It is at this stage in the learning cycle, that a number of key coaching type questions come into play as the coach works with the head teacher to help/him her to gain a greater understanding and as complete a picture as possible about what they have experienced.



Thus in coaching Shona, it was integral to the process that questions were asked that enabled her to honestly think through her very current reality of managing two schools and what this had meant for her on a personal level.

The type of questions that were asked at this stage were;

- **What expectations did you have of your new role?**
- **How have your expectations changed?**
- **What has this experience meant for you?**
- **How have others responded to your change in role and how have you responded to them?**
- **What have you been the key areas of learning for you?**
- **What have you learnt about yourself personally?**
- **What impact has this change in role had upon you?**

Guided reflection, supported through questions such as these, enables the head teacher to achieve a higher level of discernment about their situation. It also enables them to view the experience through another lens; a lens that enables them to see events more clearly and plot a clearer pathway forward for achieving greater levels of both personal and professional success.

Stage 3: Abstract Conceptualization

This is the stage within Kolb's cycle where the learner is invited to draw conclusions from his/her reflections and identify what the experience has taught them. Where the experience has involved others they are encouraged to 'theorise' on not only what they have learnt about themselves, but also what they have learnt about others and how this new knowledge can be used to inform future decisions.

Within coaching this can often be the 'Aha!' or light bulb moment for the head teacher. It is the stage at which they come to realise that they did indeed have the answers to any issues/problems that they may have been facing. It is the stage at which they begin to realize that they can choose if they so wish and the desire is strong enough, to change their behaviours. They can indeed if they were to face the same scenario again, encounter it, with new knowledge and insight, which if acted upon could result in different/more favorable outcomes than before.

Stage 4: Active Experimentation:

Kolb's model is cyclical. Therefore once the individual moves to active experimentation and starts to try and test out new behaviours, then he or she moves once again into stage 1, the experiencing phase. Therefore leading to a continual process of reflection on the outcomes of new behaviours, adapting and making changes where necessary. Ultimately, as the individual experiences a number of iterations of the cycle, s/he becomes more open to change and the opportunities for self reflection and development that can be derived from being placed in new situations.



Coaching far exceeded my expectations. Somehow you managed to draw out of me answers to the questions that I had in my head.

Coachee Outcomes

'We do not receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves'

Marcel Proust [1871 – 1922] quoted in Leadership coaching [2003] Graham Lee

In seeking to understand;

- **How to develop new ways of being in order to balance the personal and professional demands of her new role**
- **the change in professional relationships and perceptions of one's self that occur with professional role change**

Coaching had enabled Shona to develop new ways of thinking, being and doing. It was the start of a journey that led to new and heightened levels of self discovery and awareness.

'Coaching far exceeded my expectations. Somehow you managed to draw out of me answers to the questions that I had in my head and I was able to rationalize what was going on across the two schools ... what you did was, you gave me time and space to find myself, I have come out a better person.'

The key coaching outcomes for Shona provide an acute illustration of the unique supporting role that coaching can have in helping the busy school leader maintain high levels of both personal and professional effectiveness.

The two key coaching outcomes for Shona related to:

1. Maintaining a healthy work life balance
2. Developing greater self awareness

Maintaining a healthy work life balance

‘Coaching came at a time when I was incredibly tired and made me think, how I use my energy. For years, I had been doing what I do, not looking after myself – mentally, emotionally and spiritually. I had learnt to ignore things that had had a negative impact upon me.’

Like many headteachers, Shona had got used to putting the needs of others first. She had become used to giving on a grand scale and putting her needs last, without paying due attention to the imbalance this was creating in her life as a whole. Coaching enabled Shona to see that investing time in herself, paying attention to the things that re-newed and re-energised her, was an essential part of her life’s journey, if she was to be fully effective and fulfilled in her role as a leader.



Coaching came at a time when I was incredibly tired and made me think, how I use my energy.

Developing Greater Self Awareness

On another level coaching also enabled Shona to understand herself better. She came to a greater understanding of her personal style of leadership and its impact upon herself and those that she managed. Developing a greater understanding of who she was as a leader, also enabled Shona to recognise which parts of her leadership repertoire were rooted in her childhood experiences and whether these vestiges of the past still served her well as adult.

Through discussion of this topic, Shona came up with the analogy of a suitcase for helping herself to understand the factors that had influenced her as a leader. She described the suitcase as being something of value that had been given to her by her parents when she was a child and which she had carried with her through into adulthood. However, it wasn't until the suitcase became too heavy to carry around, that Shona decided to take a look inside. Inspection of the suitcase's contents revealed that unbeknown to Shona, throughout her formative years, her parents had placed certain items in the suitcase. The purpose of some of these items had been to help Shona understand how to manage conflict and how to deal with others who present challenging behaviours. Up until now the suitcase and its contents had served Shona relatively well. But this new experience of leading two schools, now revealed to Shona, the shortcomings of some of the suitcase's contents. As part of growing and becoming the leader that she herself wanted to

be, Shona realized that she needed the 'courage to stop doubting' herself and to re-inspect the suitcase's contents and make a decision as to which aspects she wanted to keep and those of which she now wanted to throw away. In doing so, Shona heightened her self-awareness and stated that;

'Coaching helped me to see my role as a headteacher and to realise the areas of myself that I needed to develop I needed to become a bit more assertive at times'

Her reflections are an illustration of Daniel Goleman's writings on Self Aware leaders.

'Leaders with high self awareness typically know their limitations and strengths ... They exhibit a gracefulness in learning where they need to improve,'
[Goleman p254]

Combining the theory behind Kolb's learning cycle with the TGROW model, created a process that enabled Shona to effectively process her thoughts and feelings as she managed the personal and professional transitions that accompanied her new role. The process enabled her to understand beyond the operational and strategic, the often complex inter and intra personal dynamics that leaders are faced with when dealing with change. Coaching equipped her with the personal knowledge, skill and insight for maintaining resonant relationships with both herself and others.



You gave me time and space to find myself. I have come out a better person.

What Head Teachers need to Succeed

The profound level of learning that Shona experienced revealed that if coaches are to engage their head teachers in discussion and dialogue, that leads to greater levels of self awareness, then they must possess the personal attributes and tools that will enable their head teachers to feel both psychological and emotionally safe. It is not an easy task for any school leader to drop their public face and to reveal to another their hopes and triumphs, as well as their fears and insecurities.

Yet, if a coach is committed to helping an individual achieve their best, uncover blind spots and overcome personal barriers to success, then it is important that s/he recognizes that coaching is not a superficial relationship. In the context of support for school leaders, it is probably the most intimate relationship that a school leader will ever have with a fellow professional.

Thus the coach must be adept and building rapport and trust with their head teacher. They must understand that to judge or to criticize has no place within the coaching relationship. Quite simply the coach has to create a space for the head teacher that is not contaminated by the coach's expectations of who or what they believe their head teacher should be, as to do so would be to severely limit the head teacher's potential for change.

***'When a parent, spouse, boss or teacher tell us what we should be, they're giving us their version of our ideal self, an image that contributes to our ought self the person we think we should become. When we accept that ought self, it becomes a box within which we are trapped – what sociologist Max Webber called our 'iron cage' – moving around like a mime pressing against invisible walls'
[Goleman et al, p 2002]***

Thus it is one of the coach's prime tasks is to create a space where the individual knows endless possibilities can be explored and discussed, and the coach is the head teacher's trusted confidant.

As Shona said;

'If Trust hadn't been there, I wouldn't have opened up. I would have gone through the motions. The situation that I was in really took the rug from underneath me. I really needed to be able to open up, so that I could make sense of it all and learn to be myself'

References

- Goleman D, [1997] Working with Emotional Intelligence. London, Bloomsbury
- Lee G [2003] Leadership Coaching London CIPD



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How to contact us

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