

CASE STUDY:

Martin Scarborough - Headteacher



I'm in my third year in my role as a Head Teacher of a one and a half form entry Primary School in north London. We currently have around 330 children with 22 teaching staff and 25 support staff. My predecessor had been here for 19 years and had done a fantastic job. Many of the staff were here even longer than that.

Biggest Challenges

My greatest challenge was having to manage the transition to a new type of leadership. It was a very successful school but it soon came clear to me that it was in need of change. I had to balance the need to make important changes that the school required, whilst ensuring that I did not disturb the special nature of the school; the things which everyone thought worth keeping.

However, in trying to bring about changes that were necessary to take my school forward, I began to find some of my behaviour began to conflict with the person that I wanted to be. I found myself becoming addicted to the drama of school life, moaning and getting worked up about the problems I came across. Worst of all, I felt like I was losing some of my humanity, which was supposed to be one of my greatest strengths as a leader.

It wasn't just the dealings with my staff that were impacted, my relationships also began to suffer. The role had made me feel quite lonely, so I needed someone to unload with but when I did so, I was doing it with my partner who didn't know how to deal with what I was saying and in patterns and rhythms that weren't necessarily healthy.

Once in the post, it suddenly didn't seem very appropriate to discuss the emotional issues I was experiencing with my professional colleagues. If and when I did reach out, the best advice some gave me was: "I know, it is like that," nobody ever said to me "Don't worry, it will get better." They just acknowledge that it is really difficult and it's difficult for them too. Everyone's going through something different. This was all slowly damaging both my personal well-being and health.

Fortunately, I have a very supportive governing body. From the outset, they were aware that I may need some support due to my lack of experience and the quite significant changes the school needed. They also had a clear understanding of the difficulty of the role, so they asked me what help they could offer me. My school improvement manager had suggested that I seek coaching and so I contacted Integrity Coaching. It was the face-to-face aspect of their approach that really sold it to me, as building a relationship with somebody was important to me.

Coaching

It had to work for me, so the coach had to be somebody I could speak to with complete confidentiality, with whom I could be open enough to allow an emotional response to come forth. With Integrity, there was immediately the expectation and unspoken acceptance that I could be completely myself, and if I were to get emotional, that could happen and that it was completely OK.

I think it is absolutely key to have that chance to meaningfully explore your vision, experiences and values openly and honestly and I don't think any other methods can provide that. They didn't tell me what to do but instead empowered me to bring about meaningful change for myself and my school. What I learnt was that the job may not get any easier but what changes is your ability to deal with it and that's how Integrity Coaching has helped me. It has meant that now when I deal with the stresses of school leadership, I do so far more successfully, particularly when other people are involved.

Outcomes

It helped me become a nicer person to be around in school and they've really noticed the difference. I am now always endeavouring to be positive. I'm also just so much more efficient after coaching, you can just get so much more out of me now. I think that's played a significant role in contributing to my school's performance – we've really nailed it this year.

The staff have been doing some amazing things in terms of fulfilling their role, the teaching has really reached a great quality. I also now feel confident knowing that I am doing a great job for the kids and that these kids are getting a good deal. God knows what would have happened to me if I hadn't had coaching, I could have struggled, got really ill and the school would have definitely suffered as a result I think this is such an important point – you have to consider the alternative. What's the impact of you not being as efficient as you could be?

The way you hold yourself, the manner in which you approach, the job, these things really require you to be in a good place. I know without Integrity Coaching I would not be here in post today. It just goes to show that schools do not need to hire a vastly experienced Head Teacher, but can benefit hugely from growing and supporting a new Head to become the leader a school really needs.



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