

CASE STUDY:

Sue Manzi - Headteacher



I have been in my current role as a Head Teacher within a three-form entry Academy for three years now. I took over as the Head of the Junior School in the summer of 2013, having previously been the Head at the Infant School since 2003. At the time, the Junior School had sadly gone into special measures and the previous Head Teacher had retired that summer.

Biggest Challenges

I'd say that my biggest challenge was bringing the two schools together. I had to bring cohesion to two very diverse organisations. Emotionally, I had to deal with all the infant staff which thought that I'd abandoned them. Meanwhile, I also had the junior staff who didn't know me and felt that I'd made their life harder.

On top of this, because the Junior School was in special measures, there was huge pressure on me from the academy chain to rapidly improve. I tried to separate the pressures of the role and keep my daily focus on what really matters but it was becoming increasingly difficult to do so. As even when I thought that we were doing a good job, I had so many people telling me how they wanted things done.

I started to feel that this Academy Trust only cared about things on paper, rather than the children at the school. This was not for me. My health started to suffer and this took a serious toll on me personally and my life outside of school. I felt battered. I spent all my time thinking about my staff and children but I never properly considered what was happening to me, I'd just kept on putting on a brave face and forcing myself through it all.

That all changed when I read Viv Grant's article in the Guardian in which she talked about her experience as a Head Teacher, her struggles and the value of coaching. I was almost thrown off my chair when I read it! I suddenly realised this was completely what I needed!

I organised a meeting with core group of governors and presented them with the Guardian article and said, "it's do or die really." I told them that either we try this for the following year or they should start advertising for my replacement.

Coaching

I never had coaching before and I must admit at first, I was slightly apprehensive. I had the

perception that it was self-centred to spend an hour and a half to two hours just talking about yourself and how you feel. I was even slightly concerned I wouldn't have enough to say in that time.

My time with Integrity Coaching allowed me to be totally free, totally open and totally honest like I'd never properly had the chance to do so before. You feel like you can be completely yourself. It gave me the environment and the space to examine my motivations and my thoughts. It was just such a positive experience.

As before I'd bottled up so much up inside and felt I couldn't offload every doubt or concern to others. It was just such a wonderful relief to be able to speak absolutely honestly without being judged. Integrity Coaching helped me reflect on why I do the things that I do, in the way that I do them. In doing so, they were able to bring me back to what motivated me to do this job in the first place.

They showed me how if you can regain your confidence, it will impact on the rest of your school, from your SLT, the children to the governors. That was the first thing that we did together and it showed me how to get back in control, renew my purpose and zeal for my job.

Regaining Your Confidence

I quickly developed more confidence and self-belief. All that doubt which drained me so much when it came to making decisions, began to disappear. It was such a wonderful thing not just hoping, but knowing that you are doing the right thing.

When OFSTED arrived later that year, I felt I was able to lead the OFSTED team this time with confidence and form a very different relationship with them. As a result, we really took charge of the inspection, I showed everything to them in terms of "you need to see this", "you need to see that" and "let me show you how well we have done this".

Sure enough, that helped get us the "good" rating which I was so determined to achieve and the impact, For me, ultimately, I always think you have to consider the opposite of what would be the cost of not getting that support.

For me, I know that I wouldn't be still be in my role. If it wasn't for coaching, I would have really resigned. The cost of not doing it would have been a loss, not just for my leadership team but for the whole school community as well.



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