

Learning on the Run 25a: Job Transition Coaching

How to help a manager decide if their current position is right for them?

The Request. A Director of Labor Relations from a large city wanted one of his senior managers to focus more on big-picture thinking and build relationships and developmental goals with his direct reports. He requested the help of a coach to develop and implement a learning process to help the manager decide on the right role for success—Is his current role sustainable and is the Director, the individual he wants to be working for?

Larger Context. The Senior Manager was about to go through a 360° feedback process and this would help him look at strengths and needed competencies. That might provide the data for either a development plan or a transition to another position. The manager was an expert labor lawyer, smart, detailed and ambitiously driven with very high standards. He had provided blunt, hypercritical feedback to his direct reports and so had soured those relationships. The Director was concerned about giving the Senior Manager the decision authority that was being sought. The Senior Manager felt stuck in limbo, having accountability without direct control. He was not wanting to leave his current position as that would feel like an embarrassing failure.

Consulting Intervention. After an initial meeting with both the Director and Senior Manager to clarify expectations and milestones, several coaching sessions were scheduled. The coaching goal was for the Senior Manager to develop more internal awareness of his drivers and inhibitors to current patterns and help the manager decide the right role for his success either in his current position or in some other job. After an initial coaching meeting, it was clear that the manager was stuck. His high standards would not allow for “failure” which meant he had to succeed at any cost even if he didn’t like the work. In order to develop more compassion and loosen the grip of a self-assessed “failure,” the Senior Manager was given a pre-work assignment (1). He was asked to consider two basic questions: Who are the people that have helped you the most in your life and career? If this were 10 years from now and someone like your current self came to you with a similar dilemma, how might you respond to him?

Last line: For clients that might need to demonstrate more compassion, balance and clarity with their career purpose, it may be helpful to have them recall past experiences of caring individuals who have mentored them forward.

(1) Part of the Pre-work Assignment was an adaptation of an exercise from: Boyatzis, R and McKee, A. *Resonant Leadership*. Harvard Business School Press. 2005.