

Learning on the Run 25b: Job Transition Coaching (Part 2)

How to help a leader understand their unproductive patterns that may keep them stuck?

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 to 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?

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 additional 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; the coaching goal was for the Senior Manager to develop more internal awareness of his current situation. This might provide the manager with enough information to decide if he was going to be more successful either in his current position or in some other job. The manager felt 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 awareness about his particular unproductive pattern, the Senior Manager was given a pre-work assignment. He was asked to consider a short summary of a few basic “facts” gathered from prior coaching sessions: His wants, experience, feelings and possible assumptions and beliefs that might be at play. He was asked to write about any repeating thoughts that added to his current feeling and the positive feedback loop that may be keeping him stuck. Finally, he was asked to complete the sentence, “If I were to fail, I would....” After that session, the Manager took another managerial line position in another organization.

Last line: For clients that might need help understanding what is keeping them stuck, it may be useful to have them review their current pattern, including all the drivers that may be at play. (1)

(1) Unproductive patterns are discussed at length in: O’Neill, Mary Beth. *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco. 2000.