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COACHING CASE STUDY

Group Financial Controller, FTSE 100 multinational group

Background

Our client was in many ways a typical financial controller: obsessed with detail, driving for results, impatient with uncertainty. She was extremely good at all the technical aspects of her very demanding role. When identified in succession planning as a potential member of the group Executive Committee, questions about the breadth and style of her impact were raised. Similar questions, it turned out, had already been raised in relation to aspects of her leadership of her functional team.

Gap Analysis

Our client was being held back on several fronts by a number of unhelpful perceptions. She was seen as reactive and even defensive by her peers and the level above her, jumping to answer every point with minute detail based on her deep factual knowledge rather than standing back and giving a sense of context and the bigger picture. By her own team she was seen as a hard and uninspiring boss, engaging with them only to issue rapid-fire instructions or to criticize their work.

The gap was, on the one hand, a perceived 'strategic deficit', and, on the other hand, an 'emotional intelligence deficit'.

Coaching Programme:

We worked with our client to close this gap by focusing primarily on how to stand back, breathe deep, and approach situations from a perspective of positive and open questioning rather than always having to control the answers. This was challenging as our client, while recognizing the value of opening up this new approach, felt that in doing so she was in danger of losing track of her authentic personality and strengths. We found the best way to overcome this natural concern was to encourage our client to think of herself as helping others excel, rather than putting the pressure on herself to always be perfect

Result

Given that the internal succession path was a medium term horizon, we encouraged and supported our client in requesting and managing stand-alone projects with a more strategic and leadership-based dimension alongside her financial controller 'day job', and supported her in finding and establishing herself in her first external NED role. These opportunities created real stretch for her, and she was able to put the coaching programme to good use in these new contexts. She is now viewed as a fully deserving candidate for the top tier of the business.

The Newman Partnership offers confidential personal coaching for leaders and their teams, with UK and international clients across the worlds of business, politics and sport. Based in London, we also have representation in Tokyo and Beijing.

Martin Newman, who heads the partnership, is also Director of The Leadership Council (www.theleadershipcouncil.co.uk), a nonprofit UK based network of senior leaders which regularly researches and publishes on topical issues around leadership.

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