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COACHING CASE STUDY

Senior corporate lawyer recruited as the first female Chief Legal Officer of a major global corporation

Background

Our client was a superbly accomplished corporate lawyer renowned for her intellect and integrity, and for her sensitive handling of complex issues. She rapidly found, to her dismay, that several of her new Executive Committee peers were making an assumption that her appointment had been made on the basis of 'ticking the gender box' rather than on talent. She felt in danger of being both patronized and marginalized.

Gap Analysis

Coming from a collaborative and collegiate culture, our client felt alienated by the (proudly) self-confessed 'Alpha Male' environment in which she now found herself.

The gap to close was a perception that our client was 'all velvet glove, no iron fist'.

Coaching Programme

As often, at heart the coaching programme addressed a dilemma: how to retain the authentic and formidable qualities of our client, at the same time as ensuring she established herself in an environment which undervalued those qualities.

The emphasis of the coaching was an exploration of how to simultaneously charm and show strength. We spent considerable time role playing different scenarios where our client's best response would be a firm No, backed with indisputable fact (rather than disputable judgment), and delivered with a warm smile.

Result

Alternating coaching sessions with the opportunity for our client to apply the coaching in practice, her credibility steadily rose to the point at which she found herself being listened to and deferred to for her authentic skills. She had shown her colleagues an iron fist beneath the velvet glove, and ultimately this gave her license to play to her authentic strengths.

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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