Liberation Labs

Case Study: Leadership Team Coaching

Our client organization was undergoing significant change and taking on new equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives. Through analysis and assessment, we found a need to improve management practices and relationships between leaders and frontline staff. The 22-person group of managers and supervisors was not working in full alignment or yet living EDI values. Survey results indicated a significant lack of trust and communication between leaders and frontline workers.

Executive coaching offered the opportunity to pinpoint the particular needs of each individual and to create customized interventions that work toward the big-picture change they wanted to see. That big-picture change included: more robust communication and trust among all staff, improved manager/supervisor relationships, commitment to EDI improvement, and a sense of alignment that everyone was working toward the same vision.

Organization's Goals

We designed a 6-month coaching program that included all managers and supervisors centered around these desired outcomes:

- People managers and leaders (clients) experience individual learning and growth that helps them improve their working relationships with the entire staff
- Clients connect individual values and actions to the organization's big-picture values
- Clients try new practices to advance these components of organizational health:
    - Power dynamics and psychological safety
    - Trust and transparency
    - Giving and receiving feedback (especially across levels of seniority)
    - Space to fail
    - Transformational leadership

> "Accountability was my favorite component—we're an org that held accountability to a high standard, and it needed to be fine-tuned, so I'm glad we have returned to that since we've gotten away from it."
>
> *—coaching client*

Program Design

Throughout the program, each client completed:

- **A written profile** about their professional life
- **Three** point-in-time self-assessments about their professional satisfaction and coaching goals
- **Six** individual and confidential coaching sessions with Michael Gregor
- **Action items** in between each coaching session
- **Twelve** group coaching sessions centered on the following leadership topics:

Coaching Topics—Small Group Cohorts		Coaching Topics—Large Group Cohorts	
Psychological Safety	*March*	Interpersonal Feedback (part 1)	*June*
Meeting with Purpose	*March*	Interpersonal Feedback (part 2)	*June*
How Trust Works	*April*	Manual for Working with Me	*July*
Repairing Trust	*May*	Strategic Decision Making	*August*
Get to know the Inner Judge	*May*	The Art of Facilitation	*August*
Get to know the Inner Sage	*June*	Closing Activities + Intentions for the Future	*August*

Throughout the program, we sent email updates to clients about upcoming work together, information relevant to our group coaching topics, summaries of individual conversations, and reminders to take action. In group sessions, we used various online tools to capture live notes and action items.

The graphic to the right represents many of the topics that surfaced in individual and group conversations during this program.

Results

The self-assessment included eight categories that leaders reflected on at three different points during the program: Recognition, Creative Self-Expression, Satisfaction, Results Relationships, Career Development, Communication, and Climate and Culture.

The final data indicated that average overall satisfaction increased in *all* areas of the assessment during the course of this program. Responses to open-ended questions revealed the many positive impacts that clients experienced through coaching.

The primary purpose of this self-assessment tool was to aid in self-reflection and help clients understand their own growth journey. We did not use this tool to compare individuals to one another.

Below are the average ratings across the entire team for each point-in-time self-assessment.

Assessment Area	March		June		August	% change from March to August
1. Recognition	6.9	+	7.8	+	8.1	17%
2. Creative Self-Expression	7.6	+	8.1	+	8.5	12%
3. Satisfaction	6.6	+	7.1	+	7.7	17%
4. Results	7.9	+	8.1	+	8.5	8%
5. Relationships	8.0	+	8.1	+	8.6	7%
6. Career Development	7.5		7.5	+	8.2	9%
7. Communication	8.0	+	8.1	+	8.6	7%
8. Climate & Culture	7.8	+	8.0	+	8.6	10%
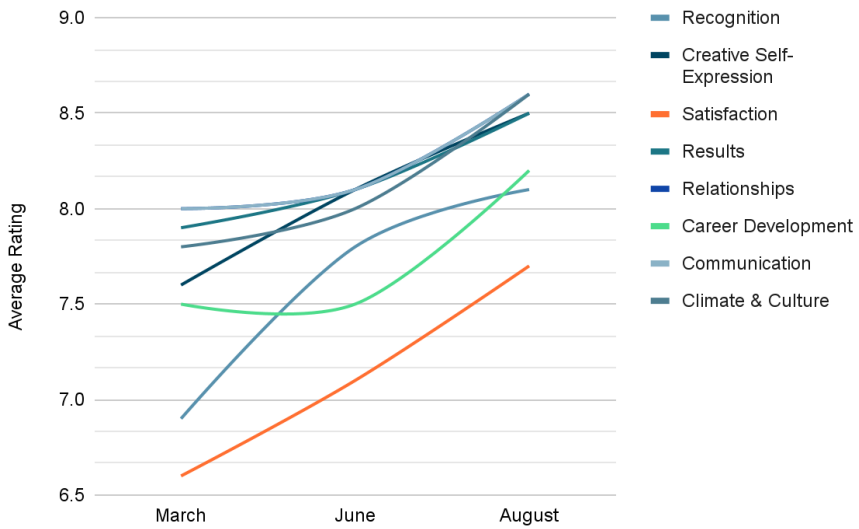
At the end of the program, this team was headed in the right direction, and it was exciting to see a positive change across *every* area measured. It remains important for the organization to sustain what's working well and continually improve the culture, practices, and processes that make an impact across these areas. A self-assessment like this helps focus interventions and supports in the right areas.

"This coaching has revolutionized the way I feel about this work. I'm in a different place than I was when we started this a few months ago."

—coaching client

Throughout the program, we asked about what clients experienced both in individual coaching and group coaching. A selection of representative responses is below:

What has been most valuable about this coaching program? *(Asked in June)*

- "I think the insights about trust were in some ways the most needed and the most helpful. A lot of valuable insights and a lot of our teams' inability to discuss, share and synergize seem rooted in a lack of trust. The four areas of trust are enlightening - there are many reasons you might not trust a person or an institution."
- "Listening to my colleagues in the group sessions."
- "Facilitating more meaningful meetings."
- "I have really enjoyed working on my personal development again without concern that it conflicts with my work priorities."
- "Taking time to think and reflect. That kind of time is likely not something I would have allowed myself to "find time" for otherwise."
- "The time for reflection and the opportunity to discuss those reflections."
- "Tools to recognize and quiet the inner judge."
- "Taking time to reflect on my own work and goals and learning new tools."

What are your goals for the next two months of coaching? *(Asked in June)*

- "To continue to hone my people skills, ask thoughtful questions, be more of a critical thinker."
- "Continue to find ways to improve my listening and communication as well as my self-care. We are headed into more exciting and stressful times."
- "Continue to work on ways to slow down where possible and reflect, which I hope will open up new ways to create and innovate going forward."
- "Continue to develop strategies that will improve my supervisorial skills."

What are you taking with you from this coaching experience? *(Asked in August)*

- "I am the creator and owner of my career and personal growth and success. I need the help of others around me both personally and professionally and have to take the time to build and maintain those relationships and ask for support when I need it. I am also the one in control of how I spend my personal time and must continue to set boundaries and stick to them."
- "There are many ways to develop and support work relationships, to use those tools differently depending on the situation and personalities involved."
- "Mindfulness in what I do; daily reflection on successes; confidence in my evolving role."
- "A better understanding of how to talk about trust. A framework for offering feedback."
- "Increased self-confidence and direction for the future of my work."
- "Being more transparent in my decision-making; continue listening for understanding."
- "I have developed new skills that have improved my work as a supervisor. I feel more successful in my work and feel like I have improved relationships with my direct reports."
- "The knowledge and confidence that I have the ability to listen, ask relevant questions to get to the root, discussion options to resolve issues, and celebrate successes."
- "The need to be very deliberate in building trust and communication."

Evidence-Based Practice

Executive coach Michael Gregor employed coaching techniques that are congruent with a vast body of research in positive psychology and coaching. His coaching is built on the Co-Active Coaching model, which uses values and purpose to help clients find meaning and create a compelling vision for the future. Research shows that this contributes to an overall increased sense of well-being and reduction of stress. He also employed mindfulness techniques that are shown to reduce stress and increase happiness.

Science has revealed that when the brain is influenced by the chemicals associated with stress, it is less creative and less able to think of long-term solutions. Because there is no judgment or evaluation in Co-Active coaching, the client remains open to input and is much more able to access their own unique creativity.

Research also shows that the process of having "collaborative, contingent conversations" that are emotionally attuned and non-directive builds positive neural connections in the brain. In other words, connected conversation with a present and open coach cannot help but have a positive impact on the brain, which in turn leads to improved relationships and a greater capacity to show up more powerfully in the world.

"It's very valuable to recognize my own struggles, and knowing it is imperative that I move forward, not remain stagnant."

—coaching client