

DEVELOPMENT COACHING ON INFLUENCING

Jasmeet is the Head of Equality Strategy for a mid-sized UK organisation. Responsible for ensuring diversity is on the agenda of every aspect of her organisation in every region in the UK, this includes the members of the Board, of which she is not a member. When we met, she desired to learn corporate strategy and business skills so that she could present her agenda better.

We started by defining her coaching goals and writing the coaching plan. Next Jasmeet took the OPQ personality questionnaire. I gave her feedback on this which not only sparked a rich discussion about how she sees herself, and her outlook on work, but also yielded a quick bond of trust between us. I followed up this discussion with a written report summarising our findings. After this feedback we began our typical coaching sessions.

Throughout our coaching, Jasmeet was forthcoming, direct, and willing to explore her self-understanding to a depth she had not before. Her organisation was quite limited in the resources they had available for her coaching, and so we had to work together to utilise our time as efficiently as possible. I prepared questions and reflections for her for each session, along with a blend of business tools, depending on her current and upcoming challenges. All of this was framed within her pre-established goals. Jasmeet would come prepared with current situations at work, her reflections, and one or two topics to discuss with me involving her current situations that tied into her goals. Early in our sessions I was able to help her see that her core challenge lay in building not her technical business skills, but her influence skills.

She was a good communicator, but her desire to deliver her message more broadly and the clarity with which she could do it, had recently been impaired due to heavy political in-fighting and changes in the board. We discovered she was inclined to hold herself removed and adopt a formality and a "holier than thou" stance (her words) in dealing with these issues. This tactic had helped her in school, against taunts for her race, and at home, against limiting role expectations for a woman, but it was getting her nowhere at work, particularly with the white women she worked with who were public-school educated.

Together, Jasmeet and I created a Stakeholder Map of those she needed to influence, and I taught her some tools to evaluate the influence challenge for each person. I strengthened her active listening skills, and together we planned specific ways she could reach out to those who were hindering the progress on her strategic plan for diversity. We also made sure she stayed close to her strongest supporters.

At one point in coaching, she was particularly frustrated by some recent set-backs and another organisation approached her about coming to work for them. She pursued the interview process and was offered the job. However, by the time the offer came through, she had experienced enough success toward her coaching goals that she decided to stay in her current organisation, to prove that she could change things. She had won awards for her work there in the past and was not willing to give up so soon. Her efforts paid off. She brought the previously distant colleagues more closely to her, she sharpened her communications further afield, and the positive response she received gave her a tremendous amount of renewed energy. We concluded coaching with Jasmeet having learned better influence and stakeholder management skills, as well as having a sharper strategic view of what "achieving the diversity agenda" meant to her and her organisation. Not only were these business goals met through coaching, but Jasmeet also had learned how to identify the "triggers" that would elicit her previously ingrained (and ineffective) responses. She was now more free, happy, and felt able to achieve in new ways.

Several months after coaching ended, follow up with Jasmeet revealed that when the Board had later faced restructuring the organisation, Jasmeet was able to speak with greater confidence about the role that diversity does and needed to play. Her increased influence abilities had also resulted in her being included in more senior-level meetings and subsequently her knowledge of the business and her ability to recognise what was and was not within her control was more clear. She was also more observant of her relationships within Board meetings and how she responds in the moment. She feels the coaching has helped her significantly, and continues to be a foundation to her ongoing learning.