



WORKING RESOURCES

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Consulting Psychologist & Executive Coach
Trusted Advisor to Senior Leadership

Strategic Talent Management Solutions to Select and Develop Emotionally Intelligent Leaders

Career Coaching Case Study: Client Creates Work With Purpose and Passion

We are all trying to understand and cope with the enormous changes in our work and personal lives. Mostly we react in a positive and productive manner. However, many people are describing their lives as so busy, working so many hours, trying to balance work and personal lives that we often feel physically and emotionally exhausted.

I work as a consulting psychologist and executive/career coach specializing in helping leaders and lawyers with work-related problems. Let me tell you a brief story about a company leader I helped with a career transition.

Steve was the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at a San Francisco Bay Area financial institution. He was seen as a high potential during his initial years at the company. Steve was referred by the Director of Human Resources for career coaching. Several employees had given 360 degree feedback that Steve was arrogant and often condescending to others contributing to a negative work climate. Steve's behavior was causing a morale program at work. They described the CFO as being critical and demanding. The culture of the company valued openness and collaboration. The company truly valued Steve and wanted him to be happy whether at this job or whatever he might choose to pursue.

At our first coaching meeting, Steve appeared to be fatigued, de-moralized, dispirited, sleep-deprived, and burned out. He described himself poignantly... "My soul was asleep on the job". As we explored his situation, Steve related how the company had been through two mergers. There was the imminent possibility of another downsizing (euphemism for firing people). Steve as well as the other "survivors" was overloaded with work. He had resisted most of the changes, lacked motivation and his feelings were all "bottled up". Steve was frankly not fully engaged. As I got to know Steve better, it became apparent that he had some good leadership skills, but was unhappy in his work resulting in making coworkers miserable.

Steve's stated goal was to improve his emotional intelligence and discover work that he loved. The best way to build a healthy personality involves understanding yourself and your emotions. He wanted to become more engaged at work, but eventually to transition into a new career.

The client brainstormed various options on how he could achieve his goals. He asked if I could recommend an article on emotional intelligence and agreed to take the BarOn EQ-i emotional intelligence assessment. Steve scored low in self-awareness, happiness and stress tolerance. Our initial work focused on Steve discovering a better sense of self including his core values and identity.

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Our career coaching work together transitioned into Steve learning how to delegate and collaborate with others as a way of building relationships and establishing trust. Considering the work overload, Steve felt it was important for him to learn to prioritize work based on what was truly important. We began to talk about his values and interests and possible career options.

The client discussed the obstacles that might arise in terms of his resistance to change. We worked on Steve challenging his negative thinking about change which was the major obstacle getting in his way. I coached Steve by role playing how the obstacles, in this case negative thinking could be managed. He learned to challenge his limiting belief by asking himself "Is it true that I am stuck and have no options"? Steve learned to focus his energy on what he could control and to live in the present moment. I asked him what he would like to end (corporate job) and explored future possibilities. Most importantly we focused on Steve discovering a sense of purpose...what was truly important to him. Who am I and what are my core values? What is most meaningful in my life? What am I trying to do with my life? .Do I feel fulfilled in my life? Do I use my talents to the fullest extent? Am I realizing my dreams?

As I got to know Steve better, I discovered that Steve's real childhood love was art. And that he had gotten into finance in his 20's as a way of making a living when he first moved to the Bay Area.

Steve created the following homework exercises that would help him develop his emotional intelligence and create the self-insight needed for a career transition. He agreed to begin the following week.

1. Practice mindfulness meditation.
2. Write in my journal.
3. Read Victor Frankel's "Man's Search for Meaning", Po Bronson's "What Should I Do with My Life", and "Work With Passion" by Nancy Anderson.

After a few months of career coaching, the client had gained sufficient self-awareness and was more open to change. Steve decided to do something pretty dramatic. Steve told me he was taking a vacation and going to Costa Rica to surf! I was surprised that he was passionate about surfing as it seemed out of character. Upon his return, he told me how he had come upon the idea of starting a business designing surfboards! What wonderful synergy of taking action, tapping into his essence - the love of art and creating an entrepreneurial business of his own. Finally, he was leveraging his considerable strengths of resourcefulness, love of adventure and creativity.

Steve continued to work for the company, but with a new sense of commitment. He was much more positive and happy. 360-degree feedback from co-workers indicated that he had developed more collaborative work relationships. He continued to work part-time on his decorating surfboards business with the goal to transition into his own business in a couple of years and move to Costa Rica.

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