

Bottom Line Results through a Leadership Coaching Program

By Diane Foster, MCC

Even the best coaches wonder if they can make a difference when it matters. Recent research implies that improving the Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the one thing that will make a difference. If this is true, then what can we as executive coaches do to insure better EI in the leaders we coach? This article presents a case study of how Diane Foster, as an external mentor coach to an internal team at the US Department of Labor for two years, developed a program that achieved significant gains not only in the Emotional Intelligence of the targeted leaders, but also in bottom line business results. It presents evidence that, if the coaching program is organized as an organization development intervention, it will be much more successful.

Daniel Goleman's research on executives in hundreds of organizations has shown that the soft skills competencies associated with emotional intelligence are twice as important as any other factor in predicting outstanding performance in the workplace, accounting for more than 85% of star performance among leaders. Moreover, his research shows, emotional intelligence training and development for managers can double or triple employee productivity, reduce grievances, and increase employee satisfaction and retention.

Organizations often hire coaches to improve the EI of their leaders. As a coach I believe that if the managers and leaders I've worked with could become coaches they would experience an automatic increase in their self-awareness, social skills, empathy, and personal competence, and therefore be more emotionally intelligent.

Implementing a successful coaching program (or any program) that accomplishes these promised results is difficult. Even when a company recognizes the need for a leadership coaching program, it must hire a coach with experience in organization development issues as well as sound knowledge of how to support emotional intelligence to ensure that the program will affect the bottom line. In these difficult economic times, organizational leaders must understand that even though the program takes time away from actual work functioning it will get results.

Given my experience with the client group in the following case study and others cases, I believe that employing sound organization development principles is key to building emotional intelligence through coaching and getting bottom line results. The way the program is rolled out and the components involved make the difference.

I will outline the program that I supported in the US Department of Labor to illustrate this:

An Approach that Works

Several years ago leaders at the Office of Human Resources of the U.S. Department of Labor recognized that they needed a new approach as they struggled to put together a program that addressed the challenges they faced. An internal consultant looked at data he had collected on the need to shift that large hierarchical organization's culture to teaming for improvement in performance and morale. He also expressed the concern that over 70% of the top leaders would leave within ten years and no succession planning or leadership development existed to replace them. What would reinforce the effort enough to make a real difference? What were the leaders' true needs from a business standpoint?

Through further exploration the consultant discovered a core theme: the greater organization would benefit if any program could support these DOL leaders in developing the ability to manage themselves and better handle relationships. In other words, improving emotional intelligence would benefit them and improve business function.

The leaders lacked EI competencies, not the knowledge and skill needed to perform their jobs. The leaders needed to develop their EI skills if they were to lead the organization through its plans to implement better performance measures, to change its culture to work with business teams and to support development of new leadership.

In theory, making these gains would allow the leaders to change and enhance their roles in management and encourage those around them to make similar changes. The internal consultant needed the expertise of an external consultant/coach fluent in Emotional Intelligence and organization development. He sought my help.

I began by working with this project manager from the Office of Human Resources, his boss, and another manager. Soon I worked primarily with him and a trainer/consultant new to this office but not to the DOL. They acted as my internal partners throughout. As we worked to develop the right program for this culture, we became aware of other needs.

In particular, the leadership, which was restructuring the office and working with fewer resources, needed to have a greater strategic vision and needed to take a more flexible approach to change, capacities that had seen limited prior development. We believed EI coaching could support this need.

Moving the organizational structure from hierarchy to front-line for faster response and decision-making was necessary given the direct customer service needed. The restructuring had begun during the Clinton administration, but management agreed that success depended on having

leaders who would support a changing organization. We believed that coaching on EI could support these leaders as they became change managers.

There was also a need to support a teaming/collaborative organizational structure. The newest technology supports potential cross-global virtual teamwork. The leadership had already begun to implement programs to leverage this technology to create synergy and better delegation. However, the leadership had no previous experience in getting work accomplished through teams. I believed that coaching and growth in emotional intelligence would enable the leaders to develop teaming and understand how to promote team synergy.

And definitely there was a need to change the culture from one of Entitlement to one of Empowerment. Years of working in the government system can breed a sense of complacency and a feeling of retired on the job. Citizens do not want to see this attitude in a government agency. While I believed that coaching for growth in emotional intelligence could reinvigorate most of the leaders, I did not believe that it could turn every retired-on-the-job employee around and supported the internal team in this view whenever possible.

In addition to the graying workforce and the imminent loss of significant intellectual capital due to retirement, results from organizational assessments in recent years had suggested other serious management challenges, including:

- ◆ Labor Relations/Employee Relations office reports of significant increases in union grievances and EEO complaints with many complaints due to poor management practice.
- ◆ Focus groups and reports from managers throughout the agency expressing concern about management development and low employee morale.
- ◆ More than 50% of employees surveyed reported problems with communication.
- ◆ More than 60% of employees surveyed reported problems with trust and fairness from management.

We believed that if we introduced a *Coaching for High Performance with Emotional Intelligence* program that we could address all of these needs and ensure enough success that the department would implement the pilot across the greater organization, fulfilling our goal.

Potential Barriers to Implementing a Successful Coaching Program

We had to be artful about introducing any coaching program, especially one that presumed to make them more emotionally intelligent. Therefore I approached this project as a mentor-coach performing an

organization development intervention. Resistance developed as soon as we mentioned the program to engage the senior leadership in our efforts. Many of the division heads in the DOL had over 30 years experience and had backgrounds such as military service that promoted concepts of hierarchy and command leadership. Emotional Intelligence sounded like another airy-fairy program that psychologists who didn't understand business had dreamed up. The leaders saw little reason for leadership training when they had been leading their organizations or business units for years. What possible difference could it make?

Logistics were also an issue. Although we needed to ensure that the leaders in the national office were involved in becoming coaches, we also needed to focus the pilot on one local region since we needed to restrict the number of leaders involved to ensure success. Therefore the program had to reach from the national office in Washington D.C. through a regional office to district offices in that region.

Design for both mentoring the internal team and for the coaching program

We designed the EI coaching program to begin by coaching the internal consultants in coaching techniques. They would then coach the leaders in the national office and in one region, to take a coaching approach to their work and to build a coaching culture.

As mentor coach to the internal team, I supported them in designing the program implementation so that the pilot would get great results and support the team's follow-through with coaching.

Besides the organizational resistance already mentioned, key hurdles on which the internal team needed coaching included:

Getting the agency director and his direct reports to commit to the program.

Picking the right pilot group region. Again, we needed the commitment of the regional leadership and the right size and the right set of issues to ensure success.

Making certain that we involved the targeted agency in the design and implementation to get their buy-in. I suggested that a diagonal slice/cross-function group of representatives from the agency join the design team. We needed to select agency representatives who were real workers and who could also be influential managers and leaders in the organization. I coached the team to get information from and gain commitment by these agency representatives so we could ensure that the program was tied correctly to the bottom line.

Making certain that the program was delivered in a business smart and well-coached manner. The internal team had no previous background in coaching so they needed to learn to deliver a coaching program and become coaches themselves. Two project managers from the target organization were

selected, joined the internal coaches as they delivered the coaching program, and then became coaches to their own organization.

- Getting a commitment for the number of follow-up coaching sessions needed to change the behavior and performance of the targeted leaders.
- How to choose and implement the right assessment for the program, particularly giving a 360-degree assessment where no experience in using a tool of this type existed. We needed evidence of success. Therefore we needed to measure the results of the pilot. What, When? How?^[5]
- How to profile each leader to be coached and work with them to get their commitment to a development plan.

The Coaching for High Performance with EI program

We determined that the following measures would ensure success:

- ◆ Extensive orientation and communication with program participants.
- ◆ Assessment with the ECI^[6] (and other leadership competency assessment tools)
- ◆ Careful rollout of a well-designed Coaching for High Performance with Emotional Intelligence^[7] training.
- ◆ Twenty follow-on coaching sessions completed by new eager coaches trained for this work^[8]
- ◆ Profiling each leader and creating a development plan for performance improvement with their coach. (As much as possible we allowed each candidate to choose which of the four internal coaches they wanted to work with and made matches on this basis).
- ◆ Regular mentor coaching meetings (usually by teleconference) supported by coaching resources from the Mentor Coach^[9]
- ◆ Careful assessment of the feedback from the first 360-degree was used to recalibrate and improve the ECI 360, which was given again at the end of the program with the results measured against those used to produce each leader's development plan. We took an organizational climate survey in each the targeted leader's office to determine the impact of the leadership program. The external mentor coach held exit interviews with each of the 23 participants.
- ◆ A final graduation celebration and review of the results with all program participants, and leaders from across the organization in attendance.

Evaluation Proves Success

Careful measurement of the data gathered during this program confirmed that it addressed all critical success factors: the business goals of the targeted agency, the goals of introducing emotional intelligence as a

business solution, and introducing a coaching culture to a very hierarchical organization. *Coaching for High Performance with Emotional Intelligence* was a complete success.

Program development productivity in the targeted leaders' offices doubled in six months as measured against program production the previous year. This was significant because we conducted the pilot during several upheavals in the Department of Labor, including changing political administrations as the Bush appointees took over, continued restructuring and the tremendous impact of September 11th.

More specifically, it achieved:

Measurable improvement in the difficult-to-assess leadership competencies of Emotional Intelligence (please see graphs below derived from composite ECI results).

Measurable improvements on all of the identified success factors for the program^[10]

The organizational survey and exit interviews measured positive changes in the targeted leaders' behavior in the national and regional offices affected by the pilot.

A desire by the targeted region to ensure that the program become their way of doing business.

Numerous testimonials by program participants about the benefits of both personal and professional behavior changes they made assisted by coaching support. ^[11]

Following are a few of the many quotes collected during exit interviews. These cover the objective that the participants' direct reports would see improvement in the way that they were managed and how they performed in support of the mission:

- ◆ “Before the pilot, my colleagues and I would take on special assignments and bust ourselves to get them done alone. After receiving the model, we started using staff, involving them, and have backed off to let them do more. There is much more ability to delegate and trust and to coach them to do it.”
- ◆ “I definitely have better communication with the national office.”
- ◆ “I am more inclusive. I'm not avoiding a situation where it can lead to controversy. I've seen this with my boss and the regional administrator too.”
- ◆ “We have established our own coaching sessions for each other on top of those with our assigned coach. We use the coaching model for problem-solving, brainstorming new solutions, and supporting each other in our roles.”
- ◆ “The pilot has effectively improved our communication. We are stronger leaders because of this. I can now see we were not

communicating before. It definitely has improved the management of our region.”

- ◆ “This model has helped me better communicate with my direct reports, and to show that I value their opinion. Now I involve them in the solution and with coming up with the answer.”
- ◆ “By using the model of listening, discovery, and then recap, the process of making sure that what I said and what I heard back were the same, and then offering to help them to remove barriers, I was able to trust them more.”
- ◆ “I feel that our regional directors and the national office are more on the same wave length. I sense a greater alignment. We’re now all in accord. We dialogue and listen much better.”
- ◆ “There has been a significant reduction of employee complaints.
- ◆ “At a recent meeting in response to a crisis, the managers gave kudos to their bosses about how they handled the crisis (September 11th). They saw that these managers were starting to think about them as people.”

In summary, the DOL faced challenges and needs similar to those in many organizations today:

- ◆ Changing demographics of leadership: More than 80% of the senior leaders would soon be retiring.
- ◆ Fewer resources meant greater need for leadership to be strategic.
- ◆ Need to move the leadership paradigm from hierarchical to front-line for faster responses and decision-making given the direct customer service need.
- ◆ Need to support work getting accomplished through teams and a collaborative organizational structure to leverage potential for team synergy.
- ◆ Need to change the culture from that of entitlement to one of empowerment.

All indicators reveal high levels of success and satisfaction with the impact of a leadership coaching program focused on developing emotional intelligence. In our work, managers, as well as their direct reports, demonstrated significant gains in perceived levels of competence in crucial management skills such as listening, conflict management, team building and collaboration and reported improved productivity, communication, and employee satisfaction both in the national office and in the field.

However, I believe we would not have had these same results if we had presented this project as a training/coaching program. By tying it to their bottom line and their organizational issues we made it acceptable enough to make a difference. When coaches do this, our results strongly indicate that

coaching aimed at improving emotional intelligence competencies dramatically enhances leadership skills and performance and produces definitive business results.

Assessment data evaluation

In order to provide empirical data that would demonstrate the extent to which the *Coaching for High Performance with Emotional Intelligence* pilot participants' individual and group competency levels were developed through coaching, and in the process to test the hypothesis that coaching is an effective means for cultivating emotional intelligence, each participant completed the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI)^[12] at the beginning and end of the program. The first graph below shows results from that assessment from the national office pilot participants. The second two graphs show feedback for the regional leaders.

Tables

Regional Emotional Competency Summary		
Cluster/Competency	Need for Attention	
	Pre	Post
Self-Awareness		
Accurate Self Assessment	Important	Moderate
Social Awareness		
Organizational Awareness	Important	Moderate
Social Skills		
Influence	Important	Moderate
Communication	Important	Moderate

Pre/Post ECI Assessment		
By Percentage of Individuals	Pre	Post
Unlikely to reach Target Level (4+ Gaps)	38.5	46.2
Unlikely to reach Target Level (3 Gaps)	23.1	7.7
Below Target Level but can reach(2 Gaps)	7.7	0.0
At or above Target Level (1 Gap)	15.4	15.4
At or above Target Level (0 Gaps)	15.4	30.8

National Office Pre/Post ECI Assessment		
By Percentage of Individuals	Pre	Post
Unlikely to reach Target Level (4+ Gaps)	25	12.5
Unlikely to reach Target Level (3 Gaps)	12.5	12.5
Below Target Level but can reach(2 Gaps)	25	12.5
At or above Target Level (1 Gap)	25	25
At or above Target Level (0 Gaps)	12.5	37.5



Diane Foster, Master Certified Coach, MA Career Development, uses a systems approach to coach leaders and teams to high performance and mastery of communication, decision-making, role-clarification, and conflict management. She helps organizations find competitive advantage by enhancing their abilities to think strategically, creatively problem-solve and align cohesively toward a desired outcome. One of the most experienced coaches in the S.F. Bay Area, she has provided coaching and consultation on leadership and change to hundreds of individuals and a wide range of organizations for over 20 years.

Her many achievements have been built through her work as a career and organizational development coach with clients from Fortune 50 and the Public sectors, and her passion for working to support her clients in really executing their business models. Known as an expert on leadership, she supports the alignment of individuals and teams with organizational goals and initiatives. Diane's work has promoted the successful introduction and sustainability of "coaching cultures." These insure the "best fit" of all employees so that the human capital of organizations is best leveraged to achieve high performance, satisfying results, and return on investment.

Notes:

¹ "The capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships."

² In 1999, the Gallup Organization interviewed more than one million employees worldwide and identified 12 key areas that consistently related to employee retention, productivity, profitability, and customer loyalty across companies and across cultures. Two representative areas are captured by the following "workplace audit" statements:

There is someone at work who encourages my development.

This last year, I have had opportunities to learn.

³ Daniel Goleman provided the framework in his ground-breaking book, Emotional Intelligence, published in 1994, applied these ideas to the work place in Working with Emotional Intelligence, published in 1998 and continues to lead research in this arena.

⁵ Care was taken in the design of the program to build in both pre and post-measurements so that there could be some tangible proof of its viability. Multi-rater feedback tools were used to assess the chosen pilot participants' leadership competency and emotional intelligence. A climate survey of the organization was delivered to get feedback on how those working with the participants perceived the effect of their behaviors on the organization. And, I held "exit" interviews with all pilot participants to get their feedback on what they felt they had accomplished and how the program had actually worked.

⁶ The Emotional Competence Inventory. This assessment tool was developed by Hay McBer with the support of Daniel Goleman.

⁷ The Corporate Coaching Clinic was tailored by the coaches with material to specifically address Emotional Intelligence, and relate to key organizational issues. Over the 6 months studied in the pilot, there was a "Mid-Point Forum" where participants' understanding of coaching was discussed and reinforced.

⁸ To their great credit, the internal coaches embraced their new roles thoroughly and completely. They were marvelous partners and deserve most of the credit for the results obtained--- they coached these leaders.

⁹ Diane Foster's "Skill Kit for Leaders: Real-Time Tools for Developing Leadership Skills" was support material for building EI, but also other leadership competencies such as delegation, conflict management, time-management, performance management, etc.

¹⁰ These "success factors" included:

- Improved horizontal communication particularly in the targeted region, but also in the National Office
- Improved horizontal communication between State Directors
- Improved vertical communication between the National office and all State Directors
- Increased involvement/interaction between Regional Administrators and Regional Directors
- 80% of the participants believe they improved their management capabilities and as a result improved the organizations capability/mission.
- Participants' direct reports feel improvement in how they are managed and how they perform in support of the mission
- Developmental opportunities have improved
- Team members feel more engaged in team process & participation
- Demonstrated increased levels of EI, particularly greater self-awareness
- Team Leaders Feel Better Engaged and Integrated
- Increased levels of trust and respect
- Demonstrated increased performance levels

¹¹ These testimonials may be obtained by contacting the office of Diane Foster & Associates.

¹² 1999 Hay Group