

Mirror for the Boss

Market challenges force businessmen to change. How do you change your approach to business? In the fight with ineffective performance a coach may come in helpful.

Viewing yourself in a mirror.

To begin with – a metaphor – a technique often used in coaching. Sometimes an important message reaches us better, if we refer to a symbolic representation. It allows your mind to start processing in the desired direction, leaving out a whole bunch of thoughts made up of hindering beliefs.

Why do we look in a mirror? We want to improve our appearance and see if we are happy with it. We do it regularly as we know that, in different situations our appearance is subject to change, and we also change with age. I need a mirror to see my reflection in an external object and make the corrections myself. Unfortunately, in a mirror you won't see your inside – all that makes you react in a certain way that is typical only of you. So what happens in a situation when we feel we need an adjustment here too? That we want to make a change because our performance to date has been unsatisfactory? Many people think they make the changes all by themselves. That is good, because it is an evidence of their sense of inner strength and competence, and a good communication with your inner self. On the other hand – who of us does not have some frustrating experience with failed New Year's resolutions, breaking bad habits or attempts to change your lifestyle...

Of course, introducing a permanent change in your behaviour all by yourself is possible, yet sometimes may prove too painful and can be unfortunate. Imagine the face of a man who shaved without a mirror. A coach may become the mirror for the Client's inside. Naturally, it is the Client who determines what effect is desired, decides whether s/he wants to make any changes at all, and makes the adjustments.

The need for change and a clearly formulated goal

The need for change is a prerequisite; admitting that: *"I have a problem with this and that, and I don't want it to be this way"*. There are two directions in motivation for change: *"from" and "to"*. The *"from" type of motivation shows e.g. by stating: „I don't want to get anxious during a disciplinary discussion with a difficult employee."*, *"I don't want to blush during public speaking"*. The *"to" motivation type is expressed by: "I want to be more confident in discussions with business partners" or e.g.: "I feel I could engage my employees better, but I don't know how to do it"*. The task of the coach is to, first, help the Client determine the so-called clearly formulated goal. And it turns out it is not quite that easy, even for managers who know different techniques of determining business objectives e.g. SMART. It is easier for us to say that we do not want something than to define what we really want. A manager says to a coach: *"When I have to have a conversation with a difficult employee, it really gets to me. During the discussion I lose confidence in my arguments. The conversation often ends with me and the employee being upset. I am not certain at all, if they are going to change their attitude"*. The coach will ask: *"You don't want to feel unsure and you don't want to get so anxious, is that right? So what is it that you want instead? How do you want to feel and behave during the conversation with your employee? How do you tell you have achieved your goal? Do you know anyone who is a role model for you in terms of behaving in a given situation? We are looking for parameters of the anticipated change. It happens that the process of determining the goal takes a few sessions, and after completing this exercise the Client says: "I finally understood what I was really looking for, now I can take action"*. And they begin to perform without any further assistance. The role of the coach was to provoke precise answers with adequate questions, and to *"keep an eye on" the Client "not to escape" into the well-known ways of thinking about the undesirable situation.*

Leveraging change

The next task of the coach is to help the Client define the so-called change lever. It is common

knowledge, that finding the right fulcrum allows to move even the biggest weights. How do we look for it? I will use Robert Dilts' neurological levels model. Dilts identified 6 levels at which human functioning can be described. They are the levels of environment, behaviour, capabilities, beliefs and values, identity and mission, as well as spirit. The coaching session will look differently dependent on where the core of the problem is and thus the lever of change. When the Client says: *"Actually, the most stressful is the fact that I have to talk to my employee in my room, which is very small. Sitting opposite, I have to look in their eyes at close range and it discourages me"*. From what they say it may seem the problem lies at the level of the environment. The coach may ask: *"What can you do to have the conversation with the employee in a place that will give you the desired distance?"*.

The magic of questions

Dependent on the neurological level, the coach may ask different questions.

Client: *When I am running a conversation with a difficult employee, my voice is quavering, I begin to stumble, and I don't feel sure about my judgement or arguments (behavioural level).*

Coach: *What is the behaviour you would like to present? What should your voice sound like?*

Client: *I simply don't know how it should be done. (capabilities level).*

Coach: *What is it exactly you have the biggest problem with? What skills do you need?*

Client: *A conversation with a difficult employee is always an ordeal. They will always perceive it as an unfair, negative assessment (beliefs level).*

Coach: *Have you always believed in that? And - in your opinion - what purposes should such a conversation meet?*

Client: *I would like to be a boss who always respects his subordinates and creates a pleasant atmosphere, and such discussions ruin our relationships (values level).*

Coach: *What other values are important to you at work? Is there anything more important than these values?*

Client: *I feel I'm not a good boss. I don't think I'm cut out for this role (identity level).*

Coach: *What kind of boss would you like to be? How important is the role of the boss to you?*

Client: *I have always wanted to show the right direction to my employees. I wanted to teach them how to work, and now, I can't even reprimand them (mission level).*

Coach: *What does teaching others give you? What can you teach others when you do not reprimand them?*

The change

Once the Client discovers what could be the "change lever" for them, the coach offers a technique supporting the change process at a particular level. For instance, in the case of conflict between two values - a nice working atmosphere with a simultaneous lack of tolerance for being late - the coaching work may focus on finding the superior value, from which the solution will follow for the Client. The Client could say: *"The most important thing at work for me is honesty. So I have the right to consistently discipline an employee who is being late, because otherwise I would not have been honest with myself and others."* This new conviction gives him confidence in interacting with the

notoriously late employee. He may further creatively work on what he should take care of in a situation of conversation in order to consequently fight being late, while at the same time remembering about maintaining the good relationship. By reaching the heart of the problem and finding in oneself the resources to solve it, the Client makes a permanent change in his/her behaviour.

Return on investment

Coaching becomes increasingly popular. Some say - "Some time ago we didn't have it and we somehow got by". Today the amount of information we process is much greater than 15-20 years ago. The market and business challenges do not allow bosses to rely on their habitual ways of doing things. They exact continuous change and force you to leave the so-called comfort zone. According to research, once our mind hears a question, it will not rest until it finds the answer. The coach externalises the important questions. S/he provokes the Client's mind to search for answers; sometimes at a conscious and sometimes at an unconscious level.

At the top of the company, the bosses are often accompanied by... loneliness.

Maybe it is worthwhile to view yourself in the mirror of the coach's questions and treat it as a way to get ahead of your competition.

Marta Baraniak-Wiśniewska

The author is an HR practitioner, consultant and coach in a consulting company Human to Business.