

THE POWER OF POSITIVE PLANNING

One man's journey to award-winning inspirational leadership.

Systems director, Keith Dorling was the proud winner of the **Merit Award For Leadership Excellence** earlier this year - all the more of an achievement because



he'd started out feeling like a mere administrator, with little authority to bring about the positive changes he could see were needed for his team. Here Keith explains how working with a coach made the difference.

Where did the journey begin?

Four years ago, I was appointed as Systems Regional Director North West Europe for a global facilities management company employing 136,000 staff around the world. My boss identified me as having potential in the business and I was given the opportunity to fulfil it with the help of Coaching for Success.

Did you start coaching with a clear idea of what you wanted?

Not at all. During my first coaching session, I was asked some very difficult questions that were aimed at prising out of me what I really wanted to achieve. The answer I came up with was that I wanted to be a really inspirational leader. And from there, we went on to investigate what that meant, how I could get there and most importantly, what was stopping me.

What was stopping you?

At about this time there was a lot of organisational change within the company and I was uncomfortable with the controls that were being imposed on how I worked. I felt I'd become little more than an administrator who had no authority to effect change in a positive way.

How did you go about overcoming these challenges?

I realised I had to take stock and decide what I was going to do about it. During coaching sessions, I looked at what I couldn't do (the things that were frustrating me) and then at what I *could* do. Unexpectedly, the could-do list was much, much longer than the other one, so I realised that it was worth trying to find a way forward.

I then freed up my diary and spent two days looking in depth at every role within my team of around 15 people, considering what I would do if I was in the job to change things for the

better. I began to realise that it was all about making a radical shift, a sea change that meant concentrating on what each person could do and then just doing it!

How did you convey this new approach to your team?

I sat down with them and challenged them to come back individually with answers to some pretty difficult questions about their performance over the last year: their level and style of commitment for the year ahead and how this was going to contribute to shaping the business going forward. I wanted them to realise what lessons they could learn and to look ahead positively.

I explained that I'd got some answers of my own and that if they thought I'd got it wrong, that was OK but I wanted alternative solutions from them. The whole exercise was actually quite a lot of fun, but it did make me realise how much I'd withdrawn from my team while I'd been questioning my own role, effectiveness and future in the organisation. One of the first steps was agreeing that team members would only attend meetings and teleconferences if they were confident they could affect the outcome. This freed up time to get on with building the business and, despite being a bold step, went down very well with senior management.

How has coaching helped?

I've been meeting regularly for two hourly sessions over the last 18 months and plan to continue to do so. We've used visualisation techniques to practise my leadership style and prepare for crucial meetings. I found this very difficult at first and had to learn to be open and honest and just go with it. The whole coaching experience has stimulated my thought processes in a way that I couldn't have envisaged at the start.

Interestingly, my past training experience as a power lifter has proved useful: the experience of being a former **British Junior Champion** meant that I already knew what it means, and what it takes, to really succeed and that the prospect of failure is a force that drives me on.

So what now?

I have a real bond with the team and I'm looking forward to getting their feedback from our meeting and working together to achieve our goals. What I need to improve next are relationships with other parts of the business with a view to achieving a strategic position within the organisation: I want people to see me as someone who gives solid feedback based on a rounded view of the business and the problems we need to address.

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Old Wine in New Bottles?

Clinching a deal over a bottle of wine is a centuries-old tradition. Ancient Greek playwright, Aristophanes was one of the first to make the connection: it's wine drinkers, he said, who 'make money, clinch their business deals and win their legal cases'. In Persia, wine was used specifically to facilitate decision-making: issues would be explored whilst intoxicated and the next day, the conclusions that stood up to sober scrutiny were adopted!

Yet today attitudes to this beneficial beverage are increasingly superficial. We may consider ourselves wine experts, knowledgeable about the terroir, the soil in which the grapes were grown and the process by which it is produced. But the average time spent on deciding which bottle to buy is 38 seconds, reports Australian wine expert, Professor Larry Lockshin.

What's more, our enjoyment of wine depends more on how expensive we believe it to be, according to a study reported by University of East London psychologist, Miles Thomas, writing in the journal, *Contribute*. Researchers scanned the pleasure-experiencing frontal lobes of the brains of a group of people who were given a series of glasses of identical wine – which they were told had a steadily increasing price tag varying from \$5 to \$90 a bottle.

Virtually all the participants said they experienced greater pleasure drinking the wine that they believed to be expensive – a finding born out by the MRI scan, implying it really is more enjoyable the more you pay!



Perfect mess

Aspiring to perfection may sound like a direct route to success. Yet perfectionists perform less well than non-perfectionists, are more likely to have problems with procrastination and low productivity and frequently experience low self-esteem, anxiety and even suicidal feelings.

Going to university can be a trial for perfectionists who may become increasingly distressed despite exemplary grades, according to York psychology student, Naomi Hooke, writing in the *Psychologist*. Such students benefit from counselling but if it isn't available, she says, effective self help techniques for undergrads include:

- Identifying the 'good enough' goal as well the ideal one. 'You may want a starred first but a 2:1 would be sufficient for a good career'.
- Planning how to achieve a realistic outcome by dividing the task into manageable tasks.
- Focussing on the process of learning rather than just the result: you can learn from mistakes.

(Ed: On this last point, clients will be reminded here of our encouragement to 'separate the performance from the result'.)

Gut intelligence

We make most decisions a split second before we are aware of them – humiliating for people who pride themselves on their robust intellect. Gut instinct is powerful and frequently reliable. But the trick is to differentiate between decisions that can be

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effectively based on instinct or intuition and those where more conscious control is appropriate, says Pat Williams, writing in the *Human Givens Journal*.

The expert on the subject, Gerd Gigerenzer, Director of the Centre for Behaviour and Cognition at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, believes that this 'fast and frugal decision-making' is frequently based on 'heuristics' or rules of thumb to take advantage of evolved brain capacities, thereby enabling us to function rather than dither.

Some rules of thumb are not reliable - history has shown hundreds of times the falsity and immorality of the rule of thumb: 'Don't break ranks'. But other rules do work. And Gigerenzer invested – quite literally - in one rule of thumb to prove its success. 'If you recognise one name and not the other, then infer that the recognised name is more likely to indicate success' is the heuristic under investigation.

He and his team asked 100 Berliners with no knowledge of the stock market to pick out shares of companies they recognised from a list that was shown to them. A portfolio based on this 'collective ignorance' made 2.5 per cent after six weeks – while the portfolio of a stock market expert lost 18.5 per cent over the same period!

Back-stabbing management

Office politics are alive and frequently ruthless at the top of British industry.

A recent survey of 250 British managers found that most believe that it is essential and ethical to bend rules, engage in self-promotion and make friends with power brokers. Rarer tactics include rumour-spreading, keeping 'dirt files' for blackmail and campaigns of misinformation.

'You stab my back and I'll stab yours' is the 'consistent pattern of behaviour, reports David Buchanon of Cranfield University in the *British Journal of Management*.

Walnut study

The secret is out: the path to wisdom is strewn with walnuts. Researchers at Tufts University fed ageing rats diets that consisted of different amounts of walnuts. The rats that 'showed reversals in several measures of brain-ageing' were those that got the most walnuts.



Adding an ounce of walnuts a day to the human diet should do the same for us, they claim. Worth a go?

Pro-active coping

Perceiving and reacting to potentially stressful situations that are still on the horizon is an innate ability in the most successful and satisfied individuals. And the secret, according to Mark Kovacs of Jackson State University, is that successful people have a pro-active personality – they are both extravert and extremely conscientious.

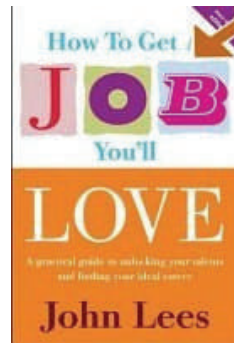
Highly conscientious people, he says, are driven by a need for structure, tend to be intolerant of ambiguity and derive satisfaction from having control over their environment. Extraversion is the tendency to be sociable, assertive and active and to experience positive affects such as energy and zeal.

Having both these traits provides the vision to see future risks, demands and opportunities as personal challenges and avenues to success rather than threatening or harmful situations. The successful person copes by managing goals rather than risks, strives for career improvement and builds up resources to assure progress and quality of performance.

Yet the current literature on stress at work largely focuses on problem-solving and risk management – and is only beginning to pay attention to the successful personality with the emergence of trainers and coaches. For while personality traits 'have a large genetic component, they can still be trained and developed by clinicians, trainers and educators,' he says.



How to Get a Job You'll Love, 2007/2008 Edition: A Practical Guide to Unlocking Your Talents and Finding Your Ideal Career



We must confess; none of us has read this book but it comes on recommendation from a client who has been doing some career coaching with us.

As you know you can buy this book from Amazon directly via our website. There are a number of favourable reviews by other

readers. E.G. *"Requires a decent amount of 'soul searching'. Good book though, and talks you through all the elements you need to consider."*

It covers such topics as:

- 'Working Smarter at Your Career'
- 'Thinking Around Corners'
- 'Your Career Hot Buttons'
- 'Who Are You?'

Perhaps you have your own recommendation for us - please let us know of any useful books you've come across that you feel we could pass on to our readers.

Meanwhile have a great summer!

Coaching for Success

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About us

Coaching for Success provides executive and personal coaching that helps individuals perform to their maximum potential.

Our corporate client list covers a range of industry sectors, including pharmaceutical, retail, finance and construction, and high profile names such as John Laing, Novartis, KPMG, Abbott and Johnson Controls.

Our coaches work with company personnel, on a one-to-one basis, enabling them to recognise the choices and opportunities available to them, to make decisions about career and personnel development and then to create and implement a plan of action designed to achieve success.

We provide professional coaching in the areas of:

- Executive Coaching
- Life Coaching
- Performance Coaching