

Executive Coaching for a Troubled Leadership Team

Challenge

The leadership team of Spandex, the European subsidiary of an American multinational company, was burdened by dysfunctional team dynamics. Internal politicking and self-promotion prevented team members from truly listening to one another and accusations of mistreatment and dishonesty abounded. Spandex President Rod Larson described a deterioration of relationships that had progressed to the point of utter unproductivity resulting in a leadership team that was unable to capitalize on business opportunities or solve organizational problems.

Rod was familiar with Arbinger's approach but was unsure if it could work for a multinational team with members from diverse cultural backgrounds and business perspectives. However, he knew that something needed to change.

Solution

Rod engaged Arbinger to deliver a two-day workshop to the leadership team, with a focus on building trust and cooperation. Rod also requested a year of ongoing, post-workshop implementation support and executive coaching from Arbinger in order to help team members embed outward mindset strategies and tools in their day-to-day work.

According to Rod, the workshop had an immediate and tangible impact on the dynamics of the team. The follow-up executive coaching and implementation support helped sustain that initial change and reinforced the impact of Arbinger's approach on an individual level. Shortly after the

implementation support began, Rod began hearing team members marvel at how the team had started to function. They said things like, "That was the best business meeting that I ever participated in," and, "I've never been a member of a team that has worked so well together." With time, members saw their team transform into the most productive and honest team they had ever seen.

In fact, when Spandex's corporate parent was in the process of being acquired by another firm, the purchasing company specifically mentioned the unusual cohesiveness and rapport they noticed within the Spandex leadership team. According to Rod, the implementation support and executive coaching work ensured that the impact of the Arbinger training remained just as intense as it had been immediately after the initial session. Rod said the difference in his team after the Arbinger work was "like night and day" and credits Arbinger with producing "remarkable results."

As part of its work with Spandex, Arbinger discovered that the company was embroiled in an adversarial relationship with a manufacturing division of the same multinational corporation. As a result of this ongoing feud, tremendous mistrust had built up between the two units. Both parties would withhold important information—such as new product plans and market intelligence—that would have helped the other unit operate more effectively, better serve the company's end-customers, and increase sales. Ironically, the president of the manufacturing division had previously been president of Spandex. The situation became so caustic that the divisions even began providing each other with misinformation.

Spandex managers knew exactly what the other side was doing wrong, but they were blind to how they were contributing to the problem themselves. Despite the extremely high costs of the conflict on both sides, the divisions were trapped in a perpetuating cycle. Each side focused on self-justification, emphasized tangential issues, and failed to seek resolution to

the primary issues underlying the conflict.

Through a combination of workshops, consulting, and executive coaching, Arbinger helped Spandex managers to understand the true nature of the conflict and then see the situation in a totally new light.

Results

As a result of this work, Spandex managers were able to see how they were contributing to the conflict and, much to their surprise, how they were unwittingly inviting the very behavior they claimed to despise in the sister division.

Spandex managers committed to changing themselves and the situation. Guided by Arbinger's principles, these managers were able to quickly determine what they needed to do. The core of the change was in the way they viewed themselves, the sister division, and the situation as a whole. By adopting a more objective, blame-free way of seeing things, they were able to effectively implement an outward mindset that powerfully animated the subsequent behavioral shifts. The transformation in the way that Spandex viewed and dealt with the sister division was so stark that the president of the sister division told Rod, "We don't know what you're doing over there, but whatever it is, it's working." In response to the changes made by the Spandex team, the sister division quickly reciprocated, becoming open, honest, and helpful themselves. As a result, the overall relationship radically improved in both directions, even though Arbinger worked only with one party to the conflict. The change was so radical that executives within the parent company, who were not themselves directly involved in the conflict, were nonetheless able to sense a profound shift had taken place.

Rod summed up the changed relationship in one word: "remarkable."

Arbinger delivered immediate, tangible results. Where we were highly dysfunctional and totally unproductive, there is now honesty, individual accountability, and collaboration. I have no other word for it than 'remarkable'.

Rod Larson – CEO | Spandex