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Bath Consultancy Group

Team coaching made easy

A methodology for building team-level excellence

By Peter Hawkins | Published: 14:03 GMT, 26 April 11 | [CIO UK](#)

Howard Niden had recently been appointed as CIO of [Mayer Brown](#), a large US-based international law firm that was in the process of becoming more global.

"I need your help", he explained. "My new employer wants the IT division to spearhead the global integration. I have inherited some good and some not so good technical managers, but I need a high performing leadership team."

We sat down and began to plan out the journey together. This was informed by the five disciplines model of leadership team coaching.

First I was interested in the nature of the team's commission. Howard made it clear that they had many stakeholder commissions and had to find a way of bridging them. The firm's Senior Partner executive wanted to have a common platform for all work internationally.

Local country partner teams wanted local autonomy. Individual partners often wanted their own expensive bespoke IT solutions.

"We have to treat them all as customers, but somehow we have to partner the senior executives in making clear what is in scope and what isn't."

Together we ran a team event for the nine senior managers who reported to Howard, jointly to clarify the team's mission, the function's purpose, strategy, vision core values and what this was going to require from the senior team to make it happen.

The team felt good about the way they had created this together.

We moved on to look at how the team would need to operate differently and to co-create together to be a high performing leadership team, rather than a group of managers with a common boss.

As team leader, Howard made it clear that he needed two things:

- Each of them to work together to resolve issues across the function, rather than come to him to referee boundary disputes
- Become leaders who not only effectively managed their own departments, but developed the skills and capacities of all their people.

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He added: "I also need you to all be able to represent the complete leadership team, and not just your own department, when you speak to your people, lead a cross functional project or [engage with our stakeholders](#). We need to connect as joined up collective leaders with all our stakeholders."

We began to explore how to make these changes happen and agreed that we would have coaching for the whole team. All the team members were given an [individual coach](#) and every three months a session would be done with the whole team. Given the team were in Chicago, London, New York and later Hong Kong, the team coaching sessions needed to be by video-conferencing with as many members as possible co-located.

These sessions explored different aspects of moving to being a high-performing leadership team and focussed on core learning. Sometimes there were learning in-puts to raise the individual and collective leadership capabilities, sometimes there was group exploration and action learning around specific challenges.

The team learnt how to be effective coaches of their own people, resolve conflict, work sensitively across different cultures and interest groups, engage with stakeholders and achieve greater authority, presence and impact with senior stakeholders.

It was a two to three year journey and gradually the team learnt to resolve issues together, coach each other and lead as a team.

Howard became less of a super-manager, and more of a strategic leader, focussing more externally, knowing his team could integrate more of the internal work processes.

Looking back Howard comments:

"What I learned during the sessions that Peter led over the past several years was that how you work as a team makes a big difference. I now understand how important it is to be able to truly depend on the people I work with and they grew to better understand their responsibility in the partnership we undertook." Making these commitments involved subtle but important changes in the way we work and improved both the quantity and quality of what we produced. Each international expansion we have undertaken has gone better than the previous ones."

Mayer- Brown IT function also began to get external recognition for the work they had done.

In 2010 they won the Best Cloud solution of the year at the Legal IT Industry Awards in London. This is indicative of the Mayer Brown IT organization's move from being an average performer to being a high performer. This change started with building a collective leadership team.

Professor Peter Hawkins is Chairman of Bath Consultancy Group, Professor of Leadership Henley Business School and author of Leadership Team Coaching, published by Kogan Page.