



The Leadership Challenge

By James Wright

First published in Pharmaceutical Executive Europe

Making our way up the corporate ladder and putting ourselves amongst the top echelons of movers and shakers is a career aspiration for many. However, having reached the upper rungs, the sensation of fulfilment can fragment remarkably rapidly. Pressures from peers, board members, shareholders, direct reports, from our families to make a meaningful appearance now and then, and not forgetting pressures from ourselves — who among us is not his or her own toughest critic? — all contribute to a daily re-appraisal of our abilities to perform at the required level.

Despite the exalted company in which we now find ourselves, many of us report feeling isolated and under-skilled. Scenarios confounding our expectations present themselves at this level: finding colleagues reluctant to be entirely frank with us, for fear of jeopardizing their own fragile empires; finding the trust within our teams eroding because we are delegating less to them in case they, well, just don't come up to scratch — these are just two among many. What we once considered to be fulfilment now increasingly resembles survival.

The traditional model of leadership, where designated high-fliers are promoted to positions of influence and power and required to create loyal followers and increase the company's short-term bottom line at all costs, is under scrutiny.

A metaphor from Sir John Whitmore's book *Coaching for Performance* likens a company employee to an acorn. Inside that acorn is all the "oak tree-ness" it needs to become a magnificent oak. All it needs to fulfil its potential is a supportive environment. "See people in terms of their future potential, not their past performance," is a typical quote from his book. A growing number of corporations are investing heavily in their topmost executives, senior and middle managers, creating precisely such support cultures using Corporate Coach Training programmes. The benefits of the resulting 'coaching culture' — a blame-free, self-aware, personally responsible work ethos — then cascade easily throughout the organization.

"Catch people doing something right," Ken Blanchard's famous maxim from his *One Minute Manager*, has, deservedly, become a coaching industry catchphrase. Employees worldwide regularly report in surveys that they feel

far more motivated to work harder when they feel valued and trusted, and that recognition and praise are far more important to them than a pay rise. Music to the ears of the Accounts departments — companies simply need to learn how to bring these skills authentically to the table. Ethical behaviour towards colleagues (and families) is demonstrably more likely to produce harmonies and rewards than an orange conical vegetable and a beating implement.

Coaching reframes traditional harsh beliefs into accessible skills. Once termed "soft" skills (deemed somehow less likely to achieve tangible results than the "hard" blame culture tactics so prominent and rewarded in many industries), coaching skills are now reframed and promoted as "essential" or "ethical" skills in the business world. However, this is not to claim that shrewdness and toughness are neither essential nor ethical bedfellows of both business and of coaching. In *Best Practice in Performance Coaching*, Carol Wilson states, "although coaches tend to be amiable people, coaching is not about being 'nice': it simply enables people to muster all their inherent resources to work for them."

A large number of organizations, having undergone the coaching process, can now testify to the difference it has made, and in particular how empowerment of new leaders rather than the creation of new followers, and how emotional intelligence rather than factual intelligence, are the keys to true motivation.

About James Wright

James Wright MSc is Deputy MD of Performance Coach Training Ltd, a joint venture with Sir John Whitmore's Performance Consultants International Ltd, and a specialist in team building and dynamic communication. He has delivered talks and training workshops to business and sporting audiences all over the world, inspiring them to achieve outstanding performance shifts both professionally and personally, and is the author of "Seven for a Secret" (Fisher King 2007).

Contact:

jameswright@performancecoachtraining.com

www.performancecoachtraining.com

0113 226 1702