



Case Study

Technical Manager Developing General Management Skills

The Technical Manager in the UK subsidiary of a large US parts supplier was recruited by the new Managing Director who came in to turn a poorly performing operation around. He is seen as a highly experienced and qualified senior manager within the team. The company has performed very well in the last three years, largely fuelled by the success of a new product line that the Technical Manager was instrumental in developing.

The coaching relationship with the Technical Manager started with his MD engaging one of our coaches to conduct a coaching programme with his senior management team. In designing the contract with the MD, our coach discussed the business performance and behavioural outcomes he was looking for in terms of the team and for each individual, the frequency and length of coaching sessions, confidentiality and monitoring and reporting. The written contract included these elements, as well as invoicing arrangements, cancellation terms and data protection responsibilities.

For the Technical Manager, the MD was looking for a way to broaden his management expertise, make the best use of his strategic management skills as well as functional expertise, and to encourage him to help the whole management team working more effectively together. Our coach talked through his latest Job Description, Succession Plan Profile and Performance Review and the strengths and development areas identified there.

The first meeting with the Technical Manager was structured as a “getting to know you” session. It included a discussion covering the aims from the MD’s point of view, our coach’s philosophy on coaching, the commitment required, timing, length of sessions, role boundaries, confidentiality and note taking arrangements, as well as surfacing any concerns that the Technical Manager may have about the programme. The coach and the Technical Manager discussed the reporting arrangements, review points and the whole team observation sessions that would form part of the programme. The aim here was to establish trust and respect in the relationship, and a clear set of expectations about what the coaching programme would include. The Technical Manager was excited at this stage, felt engaged in the process and committed to develop himself.

The second meeting focussed on defining the development goals that would form the structure of the coaching programme. Four development areas were identified:

- Increased competence and confidence in analysing the company financial reports and profit and loss accounts.
- Broadening role to take on more general management responsibilities.
- More time to be spent on strategic planning for the team as well as the department.
- Improvement in the working relationship with sales colleagues to achieve a more effective new product development process.

In each development area, a more detailed description of the outcome was created and specific actions were identified to address the requirement.

As working relationships between team members was a common issue for several of the management team, our coach recommended the use of the Insights Profiling tool for each of the team.

This provided a great deal of information to improve not only self awareness but a deeper understanding of what styles of communication would work most effectively with colleagues. The sections on “How to motivate me”, “How to influence your opposite type” and “The ideal environment” were particularly useful in creating detailed strategies for dealing with the development areas noted above.

As the Technical Manager’s self awareness improved, he was more open to trying to understand the different motivations and drivers of others.

As our coach had built a trusting relationship, where the Technical Manager knew that she was acting in his best interests and on his side, she was able to challenge him to open up to other ways of tackling difficult relationships. She introduced the concept of transactional analysis. Linking this with the information gained from the Insights profiles, the Technical Manager identified some new strategies in terms of the language and type of communication he could use with specific team members.

At each session, he referred to the notes he had taken of the goals and actions he had discussed previously with our coach. This enabled him to stay on track on the areas where he felt he needed most focus. Depending on what had come up in the previous month, his priorities changed. For example, when the performance appraisals were coming up for his managers, this would be the main topic of the coaching session. Where an issue came up that he wanted to discuss in between scheduled sessions, he would email or call our coach to talk it through.

Each time our coach and the Technical Manager reviewed the achievement of goals, he took a note of what had been effective and the learning points. The discussion then moved to setting the next level of goals, in the context of the original development outcomes defined at the start of the process. Three months into the programme, this led to a meeting with the Technical Manager, his two managers and our coach as facilitator, where they analysed the performance of the Technical team, defining what the team should “Start, Stop and Continue” doing.

This meant that the Technical Manager was able to provide clear direction to his managers, delegate more effectively and thus free up the time he needed to spend on strategic planning.

Assessing progress, celebrating achievements and planning for the next stage are important parts of a coaching programme. This is done at regular intervals in the Technical Manager’s coaching programme, where the coach refers to the goals defined and plans made, and recognises the progress made.

Since the coaching programme started, the Technical Manager has been asked to deputise for the MD for an extended period when he managed the shut down of another operating company. He has taken a leading role in the design and production of the company’s strategic plan as well as representing the division on the Group’s Engineering Council. The way new product development is tackled within the company has been redesigned and the Prince II methodology has been championed by the Technical Manager.

For more information on how Business Jigsaw can help in your organisation, contact Hilary Young at hilary.young@businessjigsaw.com or on 07960 536188.