

Helping sales leaders put services first

When Ricoh was founded in Japan in 1936, it was built on three principles: “Love your neighbour, love your country, love your work.” Those ideals have served the company well—it now ranks among the Fortune Global 500. But as it moves to a new way of doing business, Ricoh is using the principles of personality type to give its sales leaders another dictum to live by: “Know yourself.”

Ian Harris, senior executive coach for Ricoh’s North American region and a former vice-president of HR with Ricoh Canada, says the company is moving to a “services-led model,” an approach aimed at selling solutions for clients’ growing need to manage the flow of information in a digital office. The new model is rife with opportunities, but implementing it means helping sales leaders redefine a successful sale. “Anybody can sell a box,” says Harris, “but that may not fit the client’s need.”

Harris says Ricoh looked at leadership development as a way to set up its sales leaders for success: “What could the company do to help them meet our global challenges? And what should they be looking at for their own personal development?” For the sales leaders themselves, another question was vital: “How do you increase profitability?”

The global challenges are many for an industry leader with more than 100,000 employees worldwide. “The organization is trying to get information, but people are inundated with data,” says Harris. “There are technological shifts toward mobile, tablet and cloud computing. And there are demographic shifts, with boomers exiting the workforce.”

With those challenges in mind, Ricoh brought together 130 of its senior sales leaders at a recent conference. The five-day gathering included a half-day workshop devoted to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment.

When it came to using the MBTI tool, Harris faced a challenge of his own. “This is a unique group—with a majority of preferences for Extraversion and Thinking. They need knowledge before they’ll buy in, so they wanted background on the tool.”

Harris, who was certified to use the MBTI assessment by Psychometrics Canada, drew on information from the Introduction to Type and Leadership book series, which he also uses as part of his executive coaching, to show participants the theory behind the tool and help them understand how they could use it in their jobs.

In the half-day session, he used the MBTI Step I Interpretive Report for Organizations, administered through Psychometrics Canada’s online testing platform, CareerID, along with practical exercises to demonstrate how accurate it is. In one exercise, participants were grouped based on their type and asked how they spent their weekend. “It’s an exercise that’s fun but also drives points home,” says Harris. The exercise illuminated differences between introverts and extraverts; the groups then talked about those differences, comparing and validating their results with others in the process.

After the conference—where attendees rated Harris in the top quartile of 23 speakers—Harris heard reports back from the participants’ own leaders, saying they were making concerted efforts to deal with weaknesses and showing more self-awareness. “It makes people more cognizant of differences between them, and of the value of those differences,” he says.

He has since expanded on his use of the MBTI tool, ingraining it into executive coaching. “There’s not a lot of pushback. The MBTI language has captured their attention.”

In the executive coaching context, Harris says, “Once you know someone’s type, you can communicate better with them” about issues of leaders’ influence, stress and change, decision-making and problem-solving.

Out of the coaching sessions emerges an individual development plan that focuses on the competencies each participant wants to develop. The MBTI information is used to supplement the plan, and participants are encouraged to share their results with their supervisors and teams. “If they have that info, they can build it into the cadence of their one-on-one meetings.”

“The idea is to help you understand yourself, help you understand others and help you work in teams. What will you do differently? How? When?”

In coaching, Harris also uses information from the MBTI tool to help leaders “loosen up, get beyond past practices and get to behaviour change and adaptation.” He notes that many sales leaders are good at their job, but tend to rely on a foundation of what has worked before.

“But in a time of change, moving to the services-led business model, the MBTI tool gives them a roadmap to remaining open to change.”

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Ian Harris Ian Harris is a senior executive coach with Ricoh, where he uses a collaborative approach to improve executives' overall performance management, leadership behaviour and competencies. He holds a diploma in HR management from the British Columbia Institute of Technology and is certified to use a variety of assessments including the MBTI.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is available
from Psychometrics Canada at www.psychometrics.com