



Executive Coaching

A client's Perspective on the coaching process

"High-performance coaching" is how executive coach Laurie Hillis describes her recent experience with Patricia,* a senior analyst focusing on operational excellence in a Calgary-based pipeline company. Patricia was looking for ways to improve her communication skills to meet the challenges of her unique position.

"I'm an 'individual contributor,' neither a leader nor a member of a team," says Patricia, "but in a sense, the entire organization is my team because I need to collaborate across most of the company at multiple levels. And my work requires change from people—change that is not always comfortable. There's potential for significant resistance."

"Patricia's position demands exceptional communication skills to deliver messages in a way that will ensure commitment," says Hillis, who worked with Patricia from September 2010 to February 2011. "When you're coaching someone as skilled as Patricia, you're really just helping them hone their skills to bring their best self."

To do that, the coach has to "have a beginner's mind," she says. "Stay on the edge of new learning, and be willing to experiment together." But she notes that experimenting demands mutual trust between coach and client. "The way we built our coaching relationship established a framework that Patricia was able to replicate in order to gain the trust and influence she needed in her role," she says. "It takes a willingness to be vulnerable. That opens up the doors to play and to experiment."

"By the time we started, I was ready to jump in with both feet," agrees Patricia, "but I wanted to make sure Laurie had me."

To put Patricia on the path to safe ground, Hillis used assessment tools including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) Step I and II. "The MBTI is a non-negotiable for me as a coach," she says. "It helps with building the solid foundational relationship before the coaching relationship, and the trust you need to enable speed of progress. The Step II tool validates growth that has already happened, and allows me to coach to [the client's] style."

Patricia was impressed with how deeply her experience with the MBTI tool reflected what she knew about herself: "It was far more detailed than I expected, down to a fine level. I've never had my style described more clearly or succinctly. Laurie's credibility was reinforced by the MBTI tool."

Working in a safe space with a coach helped Patricia find the personal strengths she could apply to the less safe challenges at work. "It was like rocks in a river," she explains. "I could



feel them, I knew they were there. But Laurie helped me see through the water and pick them up. Her interpretation provided me with so much confidence, I took a giant step forward in trust. Once we had that, I felt courageous.”

Patricia says the coaching has had far-reaching effects on her work—and her life. “My ability to collaborate, to listen and to be patient have all improved,” she says. “I have more room for people who need to take more time. And all these improvements enmesh, so the quality of the output also improves. Better solutions, better process.

“And here’s the most important thing: I’m happier. More calm, more content, more confident, every single day. I trust my own experience and instincts, and that has changed my life. It’s like sailing. After all the instruction, there comes a moment to take the wheel. I stopped looking at all the flags and indicators, and I trusted my instincts on what to do. I could respond in a way that would move us to where we all wanted to go.”

***Note: The client’s name has been changed to protect confidentiality.**

Laurie Hillis

president of Megatrain Inc., has been an executive coach for over 15 years. She is a senior faculty member at the Executive Education Department of the University of Alberta’s School of Business, and was a founding member of the Southern Alberta Association of Psychological Type.

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