

EXECUTIVE COACHING



Alpha males need hands-on style

SENSE OF HUMOUR HELPS, TOO

BY AL EMID

The coach: Margaret Miller has a certified corporate coach designation from the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches and is a member of the International Coach Federation, the International Association of Coaches and the Canadian Society for Training and Development.

The clients Food, drug and media companies.

Approach and philosophy The alpha male often strikes employees as a bully. "He's top person in the organization and makes it very clear to everyone else that he is the top person," Ms. Miller says.

"He is very controlling and a micro-manager." This extends to providing incomplete directions for assignments, leaving employees vulnerable to criticism if outcomes do not match desired results. That leaves employees feeling gun-shy about taking initiatives, considering resignation, showing reduced productivity and suffering morale issues. Shifting to a more trusting, empowering approach can several months or even longer.

For an external coach, working with an alpha male means laying the proverbial cards on the table. "I'm an in-your-face type of coach," she says.

Ms. Miller uses more formal strategies to increase the self-awareness and modify damaging behaviour. These include testing for the client's business style, personal values, professional priorities, behavioural traits, occupational interests, attitude toward money and colleagues' perceptions.

She also uses strategies aimed at increasing the client's self-awareness or



JOHN KOROBANIK / CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

The top-dog mentality needs an "in-your-face" approach to coaching.

moving him toward behaviour modification. These include readings selected to upgrade the client in modern management technique. When discussing the text, she encourages self-awareness by asking the client "Where was the 'Aha!' for you?"

Other client chores include homework assignments such as making a point of complimenting an employee's work and observing the effect, and keeping a journal by recording thoughts during stressful situations such as an encounter with an employee in which the client feels tempted to revert to the big-stick management style. Her tools include a finely tuned sense of humour necessary for working with difficult clients. "That's important for me. I have a very warped sense of humour at times and I do use it in my coaching," she says.

Success story While working with the

head of the Canadian division of a Japanese manufacturing and distribution company, Ms. Miller used most of these strategies except the test for money values. "He wasn't driven by money," she recalls. He was driven by a need to control nearly every aspect of each employee's work.

As he improved in dealing with employees, the return on investment came with decreased employee turnover and increased productivity. "I was made privy to how growth had gone over time," she says.

The bottom line Ms. Miller charges between \$250 and \$375 an hour depending on factors such as the amount of travel or amount of assessment required. She also has package rates for specific projects.

Financial Post

fpworking@nationalpost.com