

Coaching Case Study

Remotivating De-motivated People

(Names, positions and organizations have been changed to retain confidentiality)

Participants of our 2-5 day “Inspirational Leadership” programmes, with the support of a coach and a small group of peers, have the opportunity to “rehearse” influencing techniques used successfully by Shakespeare’s Henry V.

In a recent Coaching session Charlotte chose to address the challenge of re-motivating de-motivated people.

Charlotte is a Senior Manager in a large organization undergoing structural change. She leads the team responsible for communicating and delivering this change. Team members were resistant to the change themselves and in some cases bewildered by it. She described an atmosphere of obstruction, defeat and cynicism.

We “set the scene” by moving furniture and ourselves to represent the team meeting room. Using the myth as a reference we remembered and analysed how Henry V readied his own de-motivated troops to achieve the seemingly impossible. He used dynamic “Warrior” energy with images and stories to fire the imaginations of his people, and to re-engage them with the mission. Substituting her team with fellow Coachees, Charlotte then had a first go at “Motivating the Troops”.

Charlotte described this first rehearsal as “typically disastrous... they’ve heard it all before and they still don’t buy it”. Disheartened but determined we invited the rest of the group to offer feedback on what worked well – “coherence/logic/structure of argument and demonstrated authority”, and what could be “even better if” – “more physical presence, eye contact, congruency, passion and compassion to infuse team with the will to make changes”. It was agreed by all that less information and more dynamism was needed.

Charlotte took all this on board. A change of energy was required and we got to our feet at this point to engage in a brief exercise. The activity coupled with lots of laughter helped people ground, centre and energize themselves again.

I asked Charlotte if she agreed with and supported the changes being made in the organization. She said they were tough to implement but absolutely essential. When I asked her to say more about this she confessed she was actually deeply concerned that unless a collective will existed to embrace these changes, the work of their organization would be irrevocably eroded. When I asked why this would be an issue of great concern, her response was profoundly moving. She spoke

about her underlying reasons for working for this organization and the essential service it provides. She described a trip to a country in which these services do not exist, and the negative impact that has on the population. She used story and metaphor to engage us, telling us of a particular family she had met and what their lives could be like with access to her organization's services. As she spoke she made eye contact; her voice was louder, more animated, and she used bigger and more open gestures. Charlotte spoke with passion and compassion about the urgent need to implement changes to protect the service.

The feedback offered by the group confirmed that she had been profoundly engaging, energizing and motivating.

I challenged her to take these qualities into a 2nd rehearsal. She made a conscious choice to stand up and "hold my ground!", to make eye contact, dare to be open about how much she cares, and to communicate her sense of urgency.

The second rehearsal was so much more powerful than the first information-heavy attempt. Her use of story graphically illustrated the importance of the planned changes, to protect the service and its continuing worthy benefits for all.

Charlotte experienced her ability to access her own passion and dynamism, authentically expressing it in a way that motivated others. Her peers said she had given them "an adrenalin shot", "a potent reminder of why I do this work in the first place... you melted my resistance, and give me the will to weather this storm".