

Coaching Case Study

Leading with Emotion

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

As part of our Transformational Leadership programme based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, participants explore the four elements of leadership that wholly engage others in change: physical, emotional, mental and inspirational.

James is a Director of a global business, with a reputation for strength that ensured he was given the most challenging assignments. The Board were initiating significant and often painful change across the business, in response to dramatic changes in the market, technology and the global context. OMA delivered a strategic leadership development programme for the Board to build their capacity to create a new vision, manage existing challenges and deliver the change. This included four two-day programmes with depth coaching and individual follow-up coaching.

During the two-day *Tempest* programme, James realised he never allowed himself to lead with emotion. His success has been based on analytical ability and personal drive. In leading others he relied on his mental capacity to give him the authority and his physical presence to demonstrate his commitment. In feedback from colleagues on the programme and from his team, he discovered that until they had worked with him for a long time, others often found him cold, aggressive, unreadable and difficult to trust. This was a profound shock to James, for whom integrity and trust were core values.

One of the programme's group coaching sessions focuses on the need to move from the Head to the Heart in leading change. James wished to practise communicating a challenging message to his senior team in which he engaged his own and others' emotions. His first rehearsal was a demonstration of his usual style: a coherent, logical, committed and powerful description of the human cost of failing to embrace a painful change: office closures, redundancies and their impact on colleagues, their families and communities. The audience feedback was one of fear, anger and detachment: "It's easy for you to be strong when we are the ones whose jobs are on the line!"

James then practised describing his emotions in public by sharing aspects of his personal life about which he cared deeply, before telling a story about one of his children in whom he had felt immense pride. James's attention was drawn to his internal physical experience, the emotional meaning he gave to it and his initial urge to ensure there were no visible signs of emotion before allowing them to show. The feedback from the audience, including colleagues with whom he had worked closely for years, was that they saw a whole new dimension to James's personality; they believed that he could "care" as well as drive others.

James's second rehearsal included a description of a similar event leading to an office closure in the past, in which he had lost friends and colleagues. He focussed on how he had felt then before expressing his desire to prevent it happening again. Soon into his delivery his eyes watered and he stopped, feeling vulnerable and foolish. His colleagues instantly reassured him that they were gripped by his openness and already felt a professional trust in him that they had never felt before. Emboldened, James continued to deliver a quiet but affecting message.

Later, when asked what they believed about him now that they had not believed in the first rehearsal or in their past experience of him, his colleagues said: "He means what he is saying", "He is not the Terminator after all", "He is on our side, not just doing the company's dirty work", "I can be open with him, rather than feeling I have to hide stuff", "He not only understands our situation, he feels it with us".

James admitted that it had been frightening to be so emotionally open and that it would continue to be a challenge in future. However, the feedback he received gave him the courage and motivation to do so.

In follow up coaching, James described the successful delivery of the message for real and the moving feedback he had had from his team. He also described a new found emotional freedom in his domestic life.