

NOTE: The following mini-case includes a client at Zampella Group whose story and scope of work is outlined below.

From “Individual Leadership” to “A Culture of Learning Leaders.”

INTRO

- Cheryl, female, mid-50s
- Director, State Public Health Agency
- Public Health Policy, managing staff of 75.
- Managing a \$65 million budget
- Coaching Timeline: Year 1 (weekly); Year 2 (bi-weekly)

Cheryl came to us at a pivotal point in her career. She’d just been recruited from outside government to a high-visibility role at a state-level public health agency. She had a stellar reputation and was sought after for this position – one that required political acumen and communicating across multiple departments, while maintaining relationships with many community-based health organizations. With responsibility for a \$65M annual budget and a staff of 75, Cheryl suspected that her current approach to management was insufficient to meet the intensity of her new demands.

“My survival strategies were to put my head down and slog through work chanting an inner mantra of ‘it’s up to me, bottom line... I’m the only one who can solve this.’ I drove myself forward, drowning out the silence of others in meetings with my own voice, looking for the weaknesses in others to illustrate my worth to myself, working to prove my value and right to my position, leading from a perspective of one.”

DIRECTION FOR COACHING

Cheryl was self-aware, successful, and confident. She’d achieved much success with her current skills, relationships and experiences and had continued to expand her self-knowledge through seminars and retreats.

In our first year, we engaged in practices and learning to shift her perspective of leadership and her view of herself as a leader. This enabled Cheryl to move from seeing *leadership as an individual activity* to seeing it as an opportunity to learn and grow by creating a culture of learning leaders.

“I was a classic hero leader, focused on developing my own solutions to problems, intent on proving my own value and worth through fixing every situation in front of me ... I knew there was something about my work patterns that would not continue to be effective at this higher level.”

In year two, we worked bi-weekly to create practices that leveraged her new perceptions and learning into a sustainable leadership mindset.

“Tony consistently challenged me to move beyond myself, beyond the limitations of my present understanding of the world and how I fit into it. Tony and his work, although profoundly deep and deeply challenging – has also paradoxically – been the most accessible and practical work I’ve ever accomplished.”

OUR APPROACH

Cheryl came to the coaching experience with the expectation that we could support her in facing the challenges associated with her new role from her current mindset. She wanted to increase her capacity to produce results in this role and to be seen as successfully leading the department. While these were admirable goals, they were based in outmoded, conventional thinking – one that perceives leadership as an individual phenomenon.

Together, we created a 12-month plan and Learning Arc – with study, core competencies, and practices – that encouraged “unlearning.” This involved engaging in an inquiry into Cheryl’s outmoded self-perceptions, to let go of antiquated beliefs and practices; and to create time and space in her schedule for discovering new possibilities.

“Tony brought a unique set of abilities and perspective to our coaching relationship – one that synthesized the science of human education and development, the wisdom of eastern philosophy, and personal insight to this work. He listened deeply and his ability to identify my underlying issues was profound.”

THE CLIENT EXPERIENCE

At the end of our engagement, when asked how she now viewed herself as a leader, Cheryl responded:

Tony almost immediately recognized my need to be a hero and quickly broke through my walls of self-deception to help me see the possibilities for a new way. With guidance, mentoring, educating, coaching, and challenging — over time, I shifted and learned, and shifted and learned, and shifted and learned more than I ever thought I would. Looking back, I see that all those shifts and learnings built upon each other to bring me to a new type of leadership.

Two years of working with Tony and I am a new type of leader, the type of leader I never thought I could be. I leave working with Tony with a sense of wonder at his ability to impact others; and a profound appreciation for him and his work. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to work with him and I hope others who are on the journey to be committed leaders find their way to him.

I learned to take risks with my leadership, to listen more deeply, to take time to breath, and, *most importantly*, I learned to empower those around me and to leverage their wisdom – to commit to a new way of leading, listening, and being at work. I shifted from a “leadership of one” to a deep commitment to leading together with those around me – a leadership of accountability that empowers “we.”