

SCL Chapter 17 – Expanding the Value of Coaching

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This real-life case study shows how an executive can expand a simple coaching assignment to benefit his team and the entire company. I hope the article also reinforces my observation that the most important factor in executive coaching is not the coach. The importance of the coach pales in comparison to the importance of the person being coached. This case study shares the essence of my work in coaching Alan Mulally, who, as we discussed earlier, is widely-considered to be one of, if not the, greatest corporate leaders in this century.

When we first met, Alan was President and Chief Executive Officer of Boeing Commercial Aircraft. In his storied career at Boeing, Alan had been involved in the design and delivery of every major aircraft. Boeing Commercial Aircraft was a key division of Boeing Company and employed, at the time, over 40,000 people. The Boeing Company is one of the largest companies in the world and employed, at the time, over 100,000 people.

I had the opportunity to work with Alan as an executive coach for over a year. Although I am not sure how much Alan learned from me during this period, I learned a tremendous amount from him and from his team! I hope that the great work done by Alan and his team can give you ideas that you can use, either as a coach or as a person being coached.

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Getting Started

As we have discussed throughout the book, my coaching process is somewhat unusual. My mission is to help successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams. I work with my clients and their managers to determine: 1) who are my client's key stakeholders and 2) what are the key behaviors that my client wants to change. The company pays me only after my client has achieved a positive change in key behaviors as determined by key stakeholders.

The project began when I met with Phil Condit, the CEO of the Boeing Company. Phil was clearly a "fan" of Alan's. He let me know that Alan was a fantastic leader who had produced consistent results. He felt that the larger Boeing Company would benefit if Alan played an even greater role in reaching out across the company and building relationships with his colleagues in other divisions. Boeing, like many of my clients today, was striving to increase synergy across divisions and build more teamwork across the company.

When I first met Alan, I was amazed with his enthusiasm and love for his job. He was clearly in a place where he wanted to be. Alan was, justifiably, very proud of the great airplanes that Boeing produced and proud of the people who worked with him. Over the years, I have worked with over 150 major CEOs. I have met a lot of committed leaders. Alan was one of the most committed leaders I have ever met.

Alan liked the design of our coaching process. He saw it for exactly what it was, an excellent project management designed

aimed at helping people. As a top engineer, he grasped the concepts immediately. Alan developed a list of key stakeholders and called Phil to validate his list. He decided to work with me. (This turned out to be one of the luckiest moments in my career.)

As we began, he assured me that this project was going to be a big success. After about one hour of my explaining how the Stakeholder Centered Coaching process worked, Alan just smiled and said, “Marshall, I was responsible for building the Boeing 777 Aircraft. That was really complicated! This is pretty simple. I think that I can handle this!”

Collecting Information

I conducted one-on-one confidential interviews with each of Alan’s pre-selected stakeholders. Both colleagues and direct reports agreed that Alan was brilliant, dedicated, hard working, high in integrity, great at achieving results, well organized and an amazing leader of people.

Alan’s peers agreed that the company would benefit if he expanded his role, reached out to them and formed cross-company partnerships designed to benefit Boeing. His peers acknowledged his fantastic results in leading Boeing Commercial Aircraft and understood why the entire company could benefit from his expanded partnering.

Alan’s direct reports agreed that Alan, his team and the company would benefit if the Commercial Aircraft team played a larger role in reaching out across the company. They also wanted Alan to focus on making sure that everyone felt included. A couple mentioned that Alan was so focused on

achieving his mission that he could (unintentionally) leave out people or ideas that were not on his "radar screen".

After I interviewed all of Alan's stakeholders, the interview data was collected and summarized by topic, so that no individual could be identified. After reviewing the summary report of the interviews with Alan, he agreed that he wanted to work on "reaching out across the company and building partnerships with colleagues" as his personal goals. He also expanded the goal to include his entire team.

Alan also decided to work on "ensuring involvement and inclusion" with his direct reports. Alan checked in with Phil and both agreed that these were worthwhile goals.

Involving Team Members

Our research on behavior change is clear. If leaders get feedback, follow-up and involve their co-workers in the change process, they get better. If they don't follow-up and involve their co-workers, they usually are not seen as improving.

As part of the coaching process, Alan religiously had one-on-one discussions with each of his colleagues and direct reports about what he had learned in his initial feedback (as we described in previous chapters). He thanked them for their input, expressed gratitude for their involvement and positive comments, openly discussed what he wanted to change and asked them for their ideas on how he could do an even better job.

After the initial discussions with his direct reports, Alan made a minor modification in one of his goals. He decided that his

direct reports wanted him to do a great job of "inclusion and validation". Boeing Commercial Aircraft was going through very turbulent times. Several of Alan's team members wanted to make sure that he was "checking in" with them and validating that they were headed in the right direction during these changing times.

While I always recommend that my coaching clients follow-up with their key stakeholders to get ongoing ideas for improvement, Alan came up with a much better idea. He got his entire team involved! Not only did Alan pick key colleagues to connect with on a regular basis, so did everyone on this team. This expanded the benefit "reaching out" far beyond anything that Alan could do by himself. In fact Alan's team established a matrix with ongoing process checks to ensure that everyone was "sticking with the plan". All members of Alan's team talked about whom they were contacting and what they were learning on a regular basis. They shared information with each other to help improve cross-functional teamwork, synergy and cooperation.

In the area of ensuring inclusion and validation with direct reports, Alan developed an amazing discipline. He would consistently ask, "Are there any more ideas that we need to include?" and "Are there any more people that we need to include?" at the end of each major topic change or meeting. This gave everyone a chance to reflect and made sure that everyone had the opportunity to make a contribution.

Often in the meetings of high-level executive teams, there is an "outer ring" of people who may attend meetings. These are people who may report to team members and may be providing information on key topics that are going to be

discussed. Not only did Alan reach out to make sure that his team members were included, he also reached out to ensure that everyone in the room was invited to participate.

Over the course of the year, I had follow-up discussions with Alan's direct reports. Not only did Alan pick an area for personal improvement, each one of his direct reports did as well. This way the process of change not only benefited Alan; it benefited everyone.

Near the end of our time together, a couple of his direct reports showed great maturity by telling Alan, "When we started on this process, I was a little critical of you for not being inclusive. In the last few months, you have been doing everything that you can do to include people. You have asked me for my input on a regular basis. I have to admit something. You weren't the problem in the first place. Sometimes I just wasn't assertive enough to say what I was thinking. It was easier for me to blame you than to take responsibility myself."

A Year Later

At the end of the coaching assignment, I had the opportunity to interview each of Alan's 15 direct reports and his 10 colleagues from across the company. They were asked to rate his increased effectiveness on each item on a "-5" to "+5" scale (with "0" indicating "no change"). Not surprisingly, his improvement scores were outstanding. 40% of all numerical responses were a "+5" and over 85% were a "+3" or above. No individual had a negative score on any item. I have seen hundreds of reports like this. These scores were 'off the charts' in terms of being positive.

In "reaching out across the company and building partnerships" both his direct reports and colleagues were extremely satisfied with his progress. They commented on his ongoing dedication to being a great team player. They noticed how he had "gone out of his way" in meetings, phone calls and e-mails to be a good partner.

In "ensuring that his team does a great job of reaching out and building partnerships", his scores were equally positive. Both groups commented on the ongoing process that he put in place with his team. In fact, some of his direct reports commented that their colleagues across the company had also started becoming better team players. (It is much easier to be helpful and supportive to someone else, if they are trying to be helpful and supportive to you!)

In "ensuring validation and inclusion" his direct report scores were not just positive; they were amazing! His fifteen direct reports had over 100 positive comments and nothing negative to say. They almost all talked about the value of his asking for input on an ongoing basis and including everyone who was involved in the decision.

More than almost any company in the world, Boeing's business was dramatically impacted by September 11 and its aftermath. This was an extremely hard year for Alan, his team and his company. Many of his team members noted how easy it would have been for Alan to "lose it" and not reach out to others during this tough time. He had every "excuse" not to put in the time. They were amazed at his ability to involve, inspire and motivate people when times were so tough. Some of the written comments were more than positive, they were moving.

Learning Points for Coaching

Alan Mulally has taught me many wonderful lessons. One of most important lessons (that we have discussed earlier) is that by working with great people, I can see great results. I can also learn a lot about leadership! My old mentor, Dr. Paul Hersey, taught me a lesson that Alan Mulally validated. Paul said, “The biggest room for growth is with people who are already great! They are ones with incredible potential to do even more.”

During our time together at Boeing, Alan had greater external challenges and problems than almost any of the executives that I have coached. In spite of this, he achieved outstanding results in building relationships with his colleagues and being inclusive with his team. He didn't get better because I did anything special. In fact, I have put in much more time with people who have achieved much less. He reinforced an important lesson for me (as a coach) - only work with people who care!

If you are ever the person who is being coached, remember Alan's great case study. Never put the responsibility for your increased effectiveness on the coach. It is your life. Like a personal trainer, the coach can help you get in shape. You are the one that has to do the work.

Not only was Alan a model of ongoing dedication and commitment, so was his team. Every team member had a positive, "can do" attitude toward improving teamwork across Boeing. Alan's positive results were not just a reflection of his great work; they were a reflection of his team's great work.

True long-term change requires discipline over time and effective process management.

One of the great false assumptions in leadership development is, "if they understand, they will do". If this were true, everyone who understood the importance of going on a healthy diet and exercising would be in shape. Every executive that I meet is smart. In terms of behavior, they all understand what they should do. Alan did it! He had the courage to get honest feedback, the humility to reach out and ask for help and the discipline to do the hard work required to make it happen!

Alan established an ongoing process and discipline and "stuck with it". He managed a process. He made sure the follow-up discussions were scheduled. He had the discipline to ask, "Are there any people or ideas that we need to include?" over and over again. Alan worked with Carrie, a great executive assistant, who helped keep him and his team on track. He was smart enough to get over any ego and to encourage his executive assistant to manage the process.

By involving team members and key stakeholders, the value of the coaching process can be increased exponentially.

Not only did Alan get better, everyone around Alan got better! His entire team was involved in the our coaching process. Everyone on his team reached out across the company to build partnerships and increase synergy. Everyone on his team picked personal "areas for improvement" and focused on getting better. Many of the members of Alan's team later began to implement the same process with their own teams. In

some cases, people in our divisions across the company began reaching out to Alan's team in a much more collaborative way.

Alan was given a simple challenge to change his own behavior and to increase his positive personal impact on Boeing. Through his effort at personal improvement and then his inclusion of his team, Alan ended up benefiting hundreds of people across Boeing.

After our time together, Alan Mulally, went on to lead one of the greatest turnarounds in US history at Boeing Commercial Aircraft. When he called to leave Boeing, and serve as the CEO of Ford, he led an even greater turnaround. In future chapters, we will share a few highlights of what he did at Ford and show why his 'leader as facilitator' model is so well suited for the leader of the future.