

## Coaching with Type

According to the CIPD, coaching was top of the ranking of the most effective talent management activities used by organisations in 2013 and it continues to be a key tool for learning and development. A good coach has a repertory of approaches and techniques to draw on; in this article, I share some of my experience of coaching using personality type.

I find personality type particularly helpful in coaching because all types are equally valuable, with unique talents and pathways for learning and development; this creates a positive and affirming context for the coaching conversation - the client can see that their strengths go hand in hand with their development needs and one is often the flipside of the other. It is also a very versatile tool and once grasped by the client, can be applied in many different ways.

Last year I had several coaching clients at a utility company; below are two case histories of how using type as a tool in coaching, helped them become better leaders and influencers.

### **Building Relationships**

Ann (not her real name) held a middle management role in IT. She was a reluctant coachee, referred to me by her manager, who respected her technical skills, but believed her poor relationship skills damaged her effectiveness.

She came to the first coaching session because she knew that it was her last chance to salvage her career in the company. We did MBTI (she came out as INTJ), focusing initially on her strengths and what she brought to the IT function. Her unique contribution was her strong strategic vision and her ability to put systematic plans in place, and this was valued by the organisation. However, she often struggled to get co-operation to implement her plans; her MBTI profile helped her to understand the need to spend more time and effort in building relationships, and in our coaching sessions we discussed and rehearsed actions she subsequently took.

We also used MBTI as a framework to make sense of the relationship dynamics with one of her colleagues with whom she often had conflict. Most of their interactions involved a crisis situation where he demanded an immediate reaction and resources from her team. From what she told me of his behaviours, we hypothesised his type as ESTP, and talked through their interactions from his perspective. As an ESTP, his likely strengths would be in handling crises and emergencies, he would be motivated to have an immediate impact, and would experience stress if nothing appeared to be happening. He would find her minimal communication style, lack of immediate reaction to his problems, and desire to stick to the plan, frustrating. Furthermore, with both of them having Thinking preferences, they would each be more concerned about "truth", who was right and who wrong, rather than harmony and co-operation. Using type in this way gave her insights into her colleague's personality and she worked out strategies to deal more effectively with him, as she realised that by changing her own behaviours she could alter the dynamic of their relationship.

The third way I used MBTI with Ann was to adopt a coaching style that I felt would appeal to her preferences. Her NT temperament meant she would value knowledge and mastery in herself and others, so I gave her theories and models to work with and took opportunities to praise her increasing competence as she tried out different approaches. She also liked a planned and

structured approach, so we always clarified objectives for the sessions and reviewed progress against her actions. This approach gave me credibility in her eyes and turned her from a reluctant client to an enthusiastic one. More importantly, by our final coaching session, she was more confident and skilled in building relationships and had fully embraced the approach that “you can’t change other people, you can only change yourself”.

*“Like giving presents at Christmas, we tend to give to others what we want for ourselves, rather than what **they** need”*

### **Leading Others**

People lead best when leading from their strengths; however, like giving presents at Christmas, we tend to give to others what we want for ourselves, rather than what *they* need. Managers new to leadership positions soon learn that people are motivated in different ways and that, in order to engage them rather than stifle, they need to adapt their style and sometimes lead and influence from their less preferred functions.

Clare (not her real name), was newly appointed to the IT leadership team. She had requested coaching to, as she said “step up to the next level in leader behaviours....be recognised and respected as a good leader”. She had a strong reputation for her ability to deliver against long term goals and her best-fit type, ENTJ, was consistent with this – using her cognitive processes of systematising and visioning, she was able to create a clear vision of the direction of the IT function and a systematic plan to achieve it. However, she lacked self-belief and confidence in herself as a leader and was struggling to identify appropriate role models and patterns of behaviour for her new position. She didn’t want to behave in what she saw as the overly forceful manner of some of her colleagues on the leadership team, (a mix of men and women), but she had not identified an alternative approach.

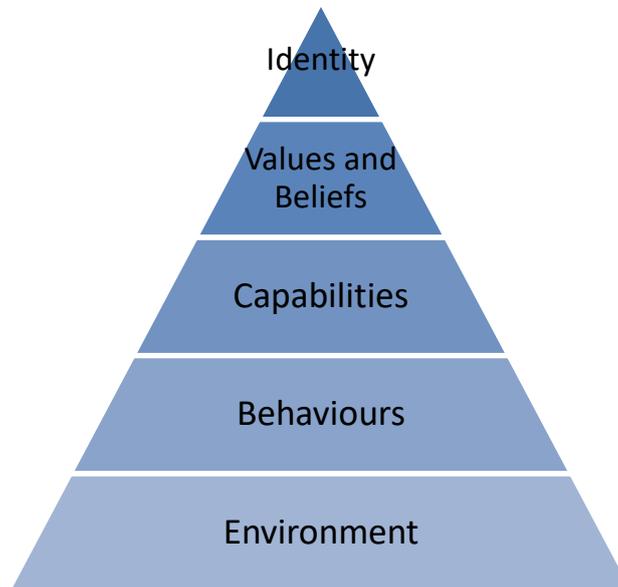
Clare was interested in type (having done Insights previously) and it was her suggestion that we use type as a tool in coaching. Over several sessions, we used type as a vehicle to help her understand herself, her strengths, motivations, and identity as a leader, as well as how she might need to develop her less preferred functions in order to lead others, including her senior colleagues.

I used the type trilogy approach to help Clare diagnose her dilemmas: looking at her NT/Rational temperament, Clare had a strong drive to feel competent in leadership and a strong desire for a model or blueprint of what a leader is, but didn’t have one; looking at cognitive processes, her primary source of perception was introverted intuition (visioning), but she had not been able to access this to create a vision of herself as a leader; looking at interaction styles, her in-charge style was expressed less aggressively than the way she saw it being expressed by some of her in-charge colleagues (ESTJs), and this had made her uncertain about her own style of behaviour as a leader.

At this point, I felt that a different tool would be helpful to Clare to enable her to create a vision and identity for herself as a leader. I used the NLP neurological levels to structure a conversation in which we discussed a specific occasion when she had felt like a leader. Starting at the bottom of the triangle, I asked her questions at each level to help her to re-live the experience, finally reaching the top where she talked about what was important to her and what sort of a leader she was. This

process helped her to create her vision of leadership, and also translated the vision into the pattern of specific leadership behaviours, consistent with her personality type, that she was seeking.

### Neurological Levels



Source: Robert Dilts

We also used type to look at behavioural changes she could make to become more influential with her colleagues. Type dynamics enabled Clare to see how she might spend up to half her time in her dominant function of extraverted thinking, leaving little scope for the sensing and feeling functions (an example of this was her comment that she saw meetings as good opportunities for a “lively debate”, but had noticed that other people appeared to have discussions outside the meetings and did not enjoy these debates in the same way). She realised she needed to make time to talk to her colleagues and get to know them better, but this felt like time wasting; her high task focus (typical of NJ) meant she needed a *reason* to talk to them, so she employed strategies that worked for her, such as planning time in the diary, and using work activities as a pretext for contacting people.

#### Finally...

Every client and every problem is different, needing different approaches and tools, so I would never advocate using personality type for all clients, but for those who are receptive to it, I have found it to be a valuable source of inspiration and insight, for them and for me, as I continue to learn and develop as a coach.

#### References:

CIPD, *Annual Survey Report, 2013. Learning and Talent Development*

Berens, L. *Interaction Essentials*, (2011)

Dilts, R. *Changing Belief Systems with NLP*, (1990), Meta Publications, Capitola, CA

The Type Trilogy was developed by Susan Nash and Sue Blair. See [www.type-academy.co.uk](http://www.type-academy.co.uk)

The Insights tool was developed by Andi Lothian. See [www.insights.com](http://www.insights.com) for more information