



The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations

IJCO

Coaching in Government from the “Shadow”

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This article first appeared in the *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*, 2008, 6(1), 52-68. It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). Email John Lazar at john@ijco.info for such permission.

Journal information:

www.ijco.info

Purchases:

www.pcpionline.com

2008

ISSN 1553-3735

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Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.

Coaching in Government from the “Shadow”

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As a Shadow Coach™, Donna Karlin helps her government clients identify not only the source of a problem but the ‘core dynamic’ underneath the source, knowing there is yet another level where the ultimate drivers of their thinking, behavior and performance operate. Karlin indicates in this article that she has to almost instinctively know these underlying dynamics. The client’s situation and frustrations must become crystal clear and very coachable, in the moment, quickly, and within the framework of government policies and processes.

INTRODUCTION

TVs are on-tuned in to what’s happening on Parliament Hill. Communication specialists, political advisors, high level government officials, and world leaders rush in and out of offices and meetings. BlackBerrys constantly buzz and press releases and briefings are written, distributed, reviewed, edited, commented on and delivered. That is the normal atmosphere on a good day when there are no major catastrophes such as tsunamis, quakes, bombings overseas, or fluctuations in the value of the dollar, dramatically affecting imports, exports and trade. On top of that add the challenges of a country being led by a minority government and the continuing threat of a confidence vote in the House of Commons, which might at any time, on any vote, bring the government down, plunging the country into election. Then it actually gets busy. This is the ‘world’ I coach in. As a Shadow Coach™ in the Canadian government and political offices, all my coaching happens in the context of my clients’ days. It is a complex and chaotic environment that never sleeps, is always on call. My clients wonder what ‘work-life balance’ is, as they can’t remember the last time they were actually able to experience it.

CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING: SOME BACKGROUND

Some of the policies, processes, framework and challenges I will cover in this article are the following:

- Contracting difficulties
- Language laws
- Security clearance
- Staffing policies and procedures
- Lack of succession planning, especially in leadership positions

- In the middle of public service renewal, therefore transformation of public service

To quote the Clerk of the Privy Council (the most senior non-political official in the Government of Canada):

The Canadian Public Service of today is Canada's largest, most complex institution, with 387,641 employees (according to Statistics Canada), more 'lines of business' than any Canadian private sector organization, more 'points of service', both nationally and internationally, and ongoing pressures to revamp our 'product lines' in response to the demands of a changing world.

- Canada's largest employer, 387,641 employees including Canada's military (65K soldiers), reserves (25K), and RCMP (20K)
- Canada's most national employer, i.e., more centres and points of service than any other employer in Canada (1600 points of service)
- Canada's most multi-skilled workforce
- Canada's most international employer (in over 150 countries) (Statistics Canada, 2007)

In the post 9-11 world, the Canadian public service has shifted towards strengthened border security, transportation security, national security, Arctic sovereignty and support for our active military engagement in Afghanistan. Service quality standards, with measurable and transparent tracking, have been established in a number of areas and the results are encouraging. And the list goes on, as do the challenges (Lynch, 2008).

- Along with these challenges the Federal Public Service is in the middle of the third major renewal period in recent history. If the Public Service, as a core national institution, does not renew itself for future as well as current service to the government and people of Canada, it risks becoming less relevant, less useful and less respected as the years go by. If a commitment isn't made to a continuing process of renewal, the Public Service will not remain a creative national institution, central to the governance and development of Canada.
- In some government departments close to 90% of senior leadership can retire immediately and 90% of the feeder group to that level of leadership can retire immediately as well. The current Canadian population eligible to replace these groups has decreased by 60%. The public service will need to recruit a large number of talented individuals to fill in those gaps. With renewal, it's not

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only imperative to attract the right talent in the right positions; it's also necessary to retain this new talent and to evolve them into positions of strong leadership. With the multi-faceted challenges facing the Canadian public service right now, there is an increased need for coaching at all levels, both at the highest levels of leadership and in fast-tracking rising stars into leadership positions that will soon be vacated by an aging executive cadre. These factors greatly impact the role of an executive coach to senior government leaders and their staff.

Public expectations for increased government accountability

Canadians expect their government to provide more, better and faster services without increasing their taxes. At the same time, they expect their government to make sound decisions, to be transparent and to account for the use of their taxes.

With the implementation of the Federal Accountability Act and associated Action Plan, the Government began a major transformation of its accountability to Canadians. The implementation of the Act over the coming year will bring increased discipline to government operations and lead to strengthened confidence of Canadians in their government. In this context, Privy Council Office (PCO) as a central agency and as the Prime Minister's department has a special duty to lead by example by demonstrating an efficient and effective use of public resources, with excellence being the benchmark (Privy Council Office, 2007).

Breaking into the bureaucratic realm in Canada is not an easy feat. There are miles of red tape, and policies in place that do not make contracting with government easy by any stretch of the imagination. With our new Federal Accountability Act and Freedom of Information Act, all external contracts with the federal government over \$10,000 must be posted on the web. All contracting must be open, transparent and open to scrutiny. Therefore, most contracts go through the competitive process, making it very difficult, especially for small firms, to be awarded those contracts.

Complexity of issues

Although the priorities of the Government are clear and focused, the business of government in a modern society is inevitably complex. There is increased interdependence among governments and a convergence of sectors that are changing relationships and policy design. Decision makers are faced with challenges and opportunities that are influenced by varying pressures, international circumstances, budget limits and changing expectations. In addition, the

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Government faces a minority situation in both the House of Commons and the Senate. To deal with this level of complexity, PCO must support integration within the federal government community, and encourage teamwork within and across departments and agencies. As well, strong and effective networks involving the federal government, other orders of government and stakeholders are key success factors. PCO must also ensure that it is able to attract and engage people with a high level of policy expertise and analytical capability (Privy Council Office, 2007).

Individual departments, for the most part, work in silos. Leadership within each department often works in silos as well, by virtue of how many of the departments are set up in reporting structure and deliverables. There are huge disconnects in communication between leaders, between leaders and their direct reports, and therefore in translating mandate and focus of the organization downwards so staff can work effectively. With huge staff turnover, lack of succession planning produces large staffing holes for people in senior positions. Many of my clients are doing double and triple duty, often doing the work of at least two and sometimes three high ranking officials. This is not sustainable. Many are taking early retirement, adding to the succession issue. From a coaching perspective, the stressors and pressures on high ranking government leaders are astronomical.

As workload gets heavier, the coaching has to be tighter and faster without losing its effectiveness. It's almost impossible for clients at that level to clear the time needed to have long and in-depth sessions. The coaching methodology has to fit into their current dynamics, which presents a continuing challenge for a coach.

Societal and demographic changes

The face of Canada is being reshaped by societal and demographic changes. The population of Canada is aging, with 4.1 million Canadians 65 years of age and older in 2003. The number of older Canadians is expected to reach 6.4 million in 2020 - nearly one in five Canadians. According to 2001 Census data, the median age of the labour force was also up from 37 in 1991, to 39 in 2001. In addition, immigrants who landed in Canada during the 1990s and who were in the labour force in 2001 represented almost 70 percent of the net growth of the Canadian labour force over the decade. With the baby boomers aging and fewer young people entering the working age population, the potential exists for shortages in certain occupations.

The federal public service is also impacted by these important demographic and societal trends. For example, a large number of employees in the executive cadre category will be retiring within 10 years. Public service renewal will

require a new focus on recruitment, retention and leadership development in the Public Service of Canada (Privy Council Office, n.d.).

Work ethics have also changed. Baby boomers, and ageing public servants in positions of leadership are notorious for working an average of 14 hour days. Those replacing this executive group refuse to spend all their waking hours at work. Therefore, when considering decreased working hours per individual, in effect, each person leaving would have to be replaced by three people to do the same job, not one (Duxbury, 2008).

Plans include:

- Supporting the renewal of the Public Service of Canada, grounding renewal initiatives in the business of government, to ensure that the 21st century public service reflects excellence and leadership at all levels. Initial priorities will focus on:
 - Human resources planning in order to understand future requirements, over the short and long term;
 - Better recruitment to renew and sustain capacity at all levels;
 - Investing in people and leadership through **coaching** (emphasis added), training and development; and
 - Enabling human resources infrastructure through processes that support efficient, connected and user friendly recruitment, development and planning.
- Strengthening the Public Service's culture of teamwork and promoting leadership while making excellence the benchmark (Privy Council Office, n.d.).

As Head of the Public Service, the Clerk of the Privy Council serves as the principal link between the Prime Minister and the Public Service of Canada, and is responsible for the quality of expert, professional and non-partisan advice and service provided by the public service to the Prime Minister, Cabinet and to all Canadians.

My clients' foci must be in alignment with the strategic direction set for them by the Clerk of the Privy Council. Therefore, my work with them has to support these directives while, at the same time, helping them evolve to their level of excellence, both personally and organizationally.

PARKING POLITICAL OPINIONS

When working with elected political leaders, it's a private sector mentality doing business within the bureaucratic world. There are fundamental processes that create conflict between where the policies of the present government are created and where and how they are implemented. Bureaucrats are non-political

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and have to park their political preferences while they get the job done. As a coach, in order for me to serve my clients, I too must park my political opinions and preferences. It's not about the politics, party in power or policies from my personal perspective; it's about the clients and where they want to be in their worlds. If I coach individuals based on my personal preferences, then it's about me and not about where they want to be in their worlds.

Years ago, when speaking at an International Coach Federation conference, a young up-and-coming political coach came to sit with me at the Political Coaching special interest group (SIG). I asked her, "Why do you want to work with political leaders?" I knew how intense an environment it is and wanted to see what drove her to work in this niche. Her response was "So he / she can represent me better; do a better job for our party and government." My response to her was "If you're coaching an individual with this hidden personal agenda, then it is no longer about coaching them into their levels of excellence or in alignment with their passions and values, it's to achieve your end goal." I recommended she become an advisor or political supporter. I asked her if she didn't recognize the conflict of interests between her private wishes and her purpose as a coach.

It's not always easy parking one's political opinion, another reason why there are very few political leadership coaches. There are many advisors and consultants but coaches are few and far between.

KNOWING THIS WORLD

Although executive coaching is fairly commonplace in corporate environments, it is not as prevalent in the highest level of government and the political realm. There are many key factors at play here.

In order to work in this environment, a coach must have high level security clearance and enter the contract having been cleared at the appropriate level for that office or department. The higher up the individual is in the department, the tighter and higher the security level has to be. If the coach or contractor is new to the department, and has to wait for clearance, there is a good chance that coach will lose the contract to someone who has clearance and can start immediately.

It is extremely difficult for a coach to work with senior leadership in government without knowing the mandate of the department and its areas of responsibility. The ramp-up time to learn background, organizational structure, areas of focus and history is short, though reading material extensive. There is a huge and ever changing learning curve to be an effective coach in that context, especially as political party leaders come and go, policies

change regularly and world events shape a great deal of our international policy (again effecting client's work load, work focus and intensity). In addition to learning about each department's world, it's important to know the hierarchical structure. This includes the classification structure of staffing and statements of qualifications for each level in each area of classification. It also involves being able to not only see staff as talented individuals but also as pieces of the puzzle in an organizational structure where hiring processes are rigid, time consuming and difficult at best.

The very nature of a bureaucratic structure makes coaching more difficult than in the private sector. Firing ineffective and difficult staffers is almost impossible to do on an immediate basis. It often takes two years or more to document behaviors fully and well enough to warrant going against unions and grievances.

Language policy and diversity. Our 30 million inhabitants reflect a cultural, ethnic and linguistic makeup found nowhere else on earth.

The longest-standing test of Canada's capacity to balance unity and diversity is the challenge of linguistic duality. We live in an officially bilingual country. Bilingualism is at the very core of our approach to diversity. It has been a defining characteristic of Canadian society from the very beginning of our constitutional development (Heritage Canada, n.d.).

Coaches who work with leadership in the political realm and highest levels of government must have working knowledge of both Canadian official languages, English and French, in order to understand the conversations and communications in meetings and briefings. It is the right of Canadian public servants to be able to speak their language of choice and highest comfort level when in meetings or engaged in one-on-one conversations. In order for the coach to be able to discern communication style, clarity and subject matter or pressures, she must have a good grasp of both languages. It's not uncommon for both languages to be flying across the boardroom table in one conversation.

It is the mandate to the office of the Clerk of the Privy Council to renew the Public Service and grow new talent into the country's leaders of the future. The mandate is clear, which should make the coaching engagement a bit easier; however, the processes and availability of willing participants in this environment are not, especially as the rate of pay is significantly less than for similar work being done by coaches at comparable levels in the private sector.

STEWARDSHIP OF COACHING LEADERS WITH GLOBAL IMPACT

When working with global leaders in various areas of expertise,

it is paramount that my work doesn't negatively impact the amazing work my clients already do by radically changing their paradigm or shift of focus. Stewardship assumes, at a minimum, the operating principal of 'do no harm'. In my work with these leaders, I have to continually ask myself "What dimensions of stewardship must I pay attention to in my work so as to do no harm?"

Case in Point

One client, a senior executive in government, is responsible for a program that manages the financing for health initiatives implemented in cooperation with multilateral institutions, partnerships, and non-governmental organizations.

Funding is directed at supporting global, regional and sub-regional program initiatives aimed at alleviating major causes of mortality and morbidity across developing countries. This health systems group also provides funding for programs and projects that are designed to build country systems and networks of community-based health care. Support for training and other initiatives helps to enhance the performance and sustainability of health systems as they seek to reach the Millennium Development Goals (Canadian International Development Agency, n.d.):

- eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,
- achieve universal primary education,
- promote gender equality and empower women,
- reduce child mortality,
- improve maternal health,
- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, etc.

My client is a quick thinking, extremely intelligent, results-oriented individual whose main focus is to succeed in these global initiatives. For this client it's not a matter of inadequate performance or results as this client gets amazing, measurable results. It's a matter of his process, how he does his work and interacts with others which creates conflict. He runs his directorate like a private sector think tank, using evidence-based results as a measuring stick to their success as an organization. His views on how to implement programs and fund initiatives worldwide don't necessarily mesh with others in positions of leadership in the organization. In these instances, everyone's collective hearts are in the right places; they just are not in alignment regarding how these programs and initiatives are framed, designed and implemented. There are other fundamental disconnects that are far from insurmountable. From a position of stewardship, I ask myself, "How can I help him through these challenges without compromising the extraordinary results he's currently getting?"

Government bureaucratic processes are well defined. Bring in a visionary thinker who works with the team in an innovative

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way and you're going to rock the bureaucratic boat. Add to this someone who gets results and creates global impact, and many egos will be bruised.

I have to make sure how I do my work, which would ultimately impact how he does his work. I can not in any way compromise the extraordinary results he and his team are presently getting. It's a slow and delicate weave and flow of coaching, sharing awareness and looking at potential impact of every change he might make in his way of being. My ultimate goal is for him to be absolutely comfortable with all the changes in dynamics and communications, both written and verbal. As a result, the impact, if any, on deliverables or results would be minimal, while the impact on him as an individual wanting to grow and evolve to his level of excellence would be huge.

Reflections: I am constantly looking for how alliances can be made. There are definitely issues around how this client does his work with regards to communicating, openness and transparency, hierarchical restraints and bureaucratic processes. However, his results are extraordinary. How can I help him make those alliances and strengthen relationships so all parties get exactly what they need in order to have successful programs, processes and frameworks that support ongoing initiatives where everyone succeeds? How can he strengthen those relationships so his work is supported organization-wide, therefore not in any way compromising his present successful outcomes? This goes beyond his job, role and level of responsibility; in this case, success translates as reduced mortality, the well being of children, and better health initiatives overall, worldwide.

Second Case in Point

Earlier in the week I had asked the head of the Afghanistan Task Force, Stephen Wallace, if I could interview him for this article. He accepted this invitation graciously. Scheduling it was a whole other matter—for his world, like his schedule, changes on a dime. After being rescheduled more times than I could count (also a regular occurrence for me) I finally arrived in his suite of offices, across the street from Headquarters.

While waiting outside his office before the interview, I sat quietly in a corner of the lobby watching the fast-paced movement of staff as they ran back and forth from one office to another, diving into their work. By sitting quietly I was not only able to observe the intense energy and focus of the staff but, as happens quite frequently, but was also able to note that individuals came over to me to share something that had happened through the day or what was happening in their lives. It was fascinating. It always amazes me how people in these roles gravitate towards these kinds of conversations. I might be someone outside their

immediate world but at the same time I am one who understands it in the most fundamental way.

I had all my questions ready. I knew his work, observed him in Executive Committee and worked with him at Executive Committee retreats. This, however, was a new role for him and he seemed to thrive in it—an observation I had made to him earlier on in the week before this interview was even considered.

My questions were as follows:

1. What difference would it make in the quality of the work you do if you could positively impact the stressors on you and your team?
2. Blind spots – Are there any recurrent breakdown situations within the team or between task force members and leadership that you are blind to or attempt to push aside because you're not sure how to resolve them effectively?
3. How do you effectively deal with the isolation that goes with being in your position?
 - Isolation inherent to the political sensitivity, complexity and tight deadline demands with regards to the government's mandate itself
 - Isolation due to physical location of task force and rest of Headquarters
 - Being looked at as an elitist group with regards to handpicking the best and the brightest staff from Headquarters to man the task force (leaving many in the organization not only short-staffed of peak performers, but feeling as if the rest of their work was insignificant in comparison).
4. Are you a part of thought partnerships; i.e., do you have allies and sounding boards? [Parenthetically, these are critical roles coaches can play with senior leadership to enable the removal of roadblocks and social isolation.]

By the time I walked into Stephen's office, I was already considering whether or not these questions were in fact relevant. I needed to alleviate his concerns about disclosing any information that wasn't vetted by the government (rightfully so, since this is a very hot topic politically and globally). I decided to share all my questions with him first to see his level of comfort. My questions involved the environment and intensity within which he works, not the content.

A key distinction in my work is that I don't have to specifically know the content of what my clients are doing as much as how they're doing it and living with it. I have to learn context and background, but a line is drawn regarding what is necessary to my work and support to clients.

The conversation flowed. Sometimes we would look at a part of a question but not the question as a whole--for example, "stressors" in question 1. Instead of answering that question as is, Stephen spoke about the paradox involved in a high intensity environment. Clarity of purpose can make a difference to the point where stressors don't even matter; rather they infuse the office environment with energy. There's a reward at higher levels and, as he said, "Sometimes when you're chucked off the deep end of a cliff, you don't sink, you soar." That's a perfect description of my observations of where he is right now: soaring. He is an extremely insightful individual. His awareness of self, staff and the intensity of his environment in many ways are stronger than he might realize.

He continued to describe the environment. Stress isn't overblown, it's faced head on. The intensity allows people to shine and develop. He's working with extraordinary people. The 'price' of being exposed to these stressors might be in terms of being drawn into a strong singular focus that can crowd out other people in one's life. Even so, in life outside the workplace, something happens which in the end creates the ability to be creative and resilient in these outside relationships.

Stephen looks at the ebb and flow of this environment as keeping a tempo. We discussed George Leonard's analogy of a tennis game (G. Leonard, personal communication, May 1, 2007) where each player moves, the racquet moves, the ball moves, and yet once you get that rhythm of the game, a dance is created that connects people and movement and focus. The changing environment hones skills, awareness and the ability to respond. Even on so called 'bad' days, they perform and perform well. That curve of performance doesn't fluctuate as much as it might for some others. Challenges in this task force can be fierce, but they are surmountable. It's the reactions to the challenge that are variable. Still, they think in tempo.

Reflection: Working with clients in similar environments, I can say that their speed of processing information and the ability to respond, not simply react, to the complexity of their environment is almost second nature. My coaching doesn't involve dramatically changing work processes and effectiveness, as teams such as this work like a well-oiled machine. It also doesn't involve interpersonal relationship issues as the level of respect is so high, it's tangible. Surviving in this type of environment with side bickering and power plays could never be sustainable and could easily break down the cohesiveness and synergy of the group. Again, this isn't a focus for coaching. By virtue of who these people are, their personalities and priorities don't allow room for those interpersonal dynamics. A coaching focus in this environment would be to hone awareness of the rest of their worlds beyond their

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immediate work environment. Can we ensure they stay plugged in with the rest of Headquarters, colleagues, and peers, as well as not forgetting that there is a life outside this building? Are they also considering what their work life will be after the task force is no longer needed? Every conversation, choice, success and overcome challenge will help define what post task force life will hold for them. The future is created now, not later—remembering that fact is a key component when working with anyone in such a highly focused environment.

I believe many would benefit greatly from watching his style of management, leadership and how quickly he processes information and acts on it. Even though this is an extremely intense environment, he is responsive to it, not reactive. This is a skill many struggle to learn and few attain.

Blind Spots

Looking at question 2, blind spots, there were many ways we discussed what they would look like, again helping me see other areas of focus when working in these environments. The nature of teamwork itself suffers in an environment where the ability to do tasks really fast determines how they will be delegated and carried out. Collaboration is easy; teamwork is not easy, since everyone works at a different level and pace. The rhythm for how to manage tasks and deliverables is opposite to normal team dynamics. They have to deliver in the moment. Tasking is more to individuals within a collective setting rather than to a team. Out of approximately 80 staff at Task Force Headquarters, about 15 of these staffers deliver 40% of the deliverables. Those who work quickly, effectively and at high energy are tasked first. It would be great if all worked in the same tempo; however they don't. Since this small group of high performers do deliver and quickly, a blind spot is that they're tasked more than others. The blind spot is recognizing that everyone doesn't work at the same pace and not to expect that everyone will. It's also not having the kind of time focus that allows teams to be built. Their 'long-term' focus is only a week and a half; therefore they have to be able to work on separate operational planes. He likens it to a 'schizophrenic' way to operate. In many ways it's a militaristic way of thinking. Stephen used the analogy of "force generation" where the military has to generate capability, training successors to successors. Right now, succession planning in the government and in the private sector is minimal and the country is feeling the consequences of that. In the case of military engagements, if succession was an issue, such consequences would be unacceptable and very visible.

Another blind spot that we discussed is about this being a highly intense though seductive environment. Seduction can make one blind to what's being ignored in the rest of one's world. We

discussed how there are similarities in our worlds. Even though our work is very different, enjoying it to such a degree makes it very easy to work 100% of the time and forget there is a life outside our environments. High energy, intense learning environments constantly feed the mind and can be so seductive that the rest of the world fades away. It can be like an addiction, making one want more and more.

Coaches can be great ‘reality checkers’ as they challenge their clients to be aware of the seduction and to set boundaries so they don’t lose the rest of their lives along the way. It’s also paying attention to the staff as they experience the same magnetic draw, making sure they don’t burn out and lose their overall focus along the way. A Shadow Coach™ who partners with clients through the chaos of their days also can lose sight of life outside these walls. Focus is absolute as these coaches have to pick up the context and content of their client’s worlds as well as coach them through situational dynamics that aren’t serving them. As I watch clients become totally immersed in their worlds, and work with them through this, I’m also reminded on a personal level to be on guard so as not to slip into the same patterns.

Reflection: Sharing and working with a client to define their blind spots is a key factor in discovering what they’re not seeing, paying attention to, or choosing to be aware of. Once blind spots are tabled in conversation, clients can make an informed choice as to what to do about these blind spots.

Shadow Coaching™ is a particular advanced application of reflective and observational coaching that provides one way for clients to go below the surface into the key dynamics of a situation, illuminating their truth of the moment and making decisions that move people forward. It is a real-time learning approach to develop *refined self-awareness* and enhanced capabilities in the workplace through reflection on one’s practice. It enables people, not only to benefit from the continuous presence of an observing coach over an extended period of time in a typical set of workdays, but also to develop their own role as self-observers for the long term. It teaches clients to become reflective practitioners. This type of coaching is ideally suited to organizational leaders who must make decisions and act adaptively in intense work environments. Observation and laser coaching can bring another experienced, fresh perspective that can help identify problematic dynamics, work habits and assumptions that impede effectiveness. The laser coaching aspect of Shadow Coaching™ involves being able to provoke the leader’s awareness of problematic features in ways that can be addressed immediately. It goes beyond support to problem solving and attends to the individual, social, relational and environmental aspects of the client’s ‘world’.

My ultimate goal is for the shadow coach to emerge in the clients themselves--especially as their knowledge of the worlds they live in expands, forcing them to see everything through more global lens. Especially in a high performing environment I have to show them that their world is more than mere facts, data and knowledge. As I expand their knowledge and insight through the coaching engagement, they can better experience and build on their uniqueness. By honing in on what's unique and expanding their horizons, they can really fly.

Thought Partners

Stephen and I then spoke about 'thought partners' and sounding boards--what I sometimes call "reality checkers" who support leaders in these high profile, politically sensitive areas of responsibility. Stephen put it beautifully when he said, "Afghanistan has a quality to it that gets under the psyche of public consciousness. It is now a part of the Canadian culture. It is no longer just a government issue, but in the minds of all Canadian people." Because of that he can have rich conversations with people outside government, those who have retired and can give him insight into their perspectives. These conversations can help him see others' perspectives and perceptions.

Reflection: A key role the coach plays when working with clients at this level of government, or in the political realm is one of ally, partner, and non-judgmental sounding board. Most people in the highest levels of government don't have these allies and often find themselves socially isolated. They are very careful as to what they share with peers and colleagues as it is a fiercely competitive and political environment.

One day seems to flow into another. Clients have a job to get done and all their focus is on doing it to the best of their ability and leading staff to do the same. Coaches, however, have more than one client. Not only do they have to be a non-judgmental sounding board, catalyst and bridge from one behavioral style to another, but also have to make sure, when working in such a fast and all encompassing environment, that other clients don't fall by the wayside.

Isolation Factor

Stephen and I then talked about the isolation: being physically moved to another location, albeit across the street from Departmental Headquarters. At first I wondered if this was detrimental to dispelling the notion of this group being elitist and hand-picked. After observing the staff in this separate environment, my question morphed to "Being in a separate location is actually to your benefit, isn't it?" Stephen agreed. How they do their work is fundamentally different from the usual flow of a bureaucracy. There is a group synergy that might not have occurred if

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they were in the main building. The pace and the way they do their work is so different that the isolation gives them space, not physical but proverbial, to work in their unique and impactful way.

The pace never slackens. It's the extreme of intense. Does the group seem stressed by it? Not at all. They look as if they are so accustomed to this focused intensity that they're no longer aware of it being anything outside the norm. It's become like the air they breathe, their natural state of affairs.

Reflection: I too love working in these environments. I have to process an extraordinary amount of data such as behaviors, ways of interaction, communication style, written communication, political policy and global cultures. Add to this short timelines, dynamics of the workplace as a whole, energy levels, engagement, level of responsibility, global and/or financial implications, political mandate, bureaucratic hierarchy, volume of memos, reading material, emails and correspondence, processing time and staff support and engagement. This is my clients' world and therefore my world as their Shadow Coach™. It exemplifies the term "intensely complex". Through all the data I gather, I need to translate observations to situational snapshots of moments in time that illustrate the differences between where my clients 'are' and where they want to be. There is no time for hour long sessions. Sometimes all that's available to me is a five minute window between meetings and briefings. So sessions are laser; they quickly zero in to one situation or behavior. I have to get to a key dynamic of a situation in seconds, articulate what I need to get across as clearly and concisely as possible so my client 'gets it' instantly. We process that information and look for ways to integrate change immediately. There is no such thing as 'doing it later' as 'later' isn't an option in their worlds.

CONCLUSIONS

Working within government, especially as a Shadow Coach, is enriching, energizing and rewarding. I learn more in a day than most do in any other setting. Every day brings a richness, awareness of the workings of the government, our governing party, Canadian policies, programs, our impact on the world, and our place in the world as a whole. Coaching leaders in government gives me a sense of making a difference while, at the same time, validating my role as a coach. I help clients bridge the gap between where they currently are and where they want to be and how that translates to better serving Canada and its people.

Those who coach in government work in this environment because they feel as if they have a fundamental role to play in helping government serve its citizens more effectively, thereby having an impact on the country as a whole, i.e., serving the greater good. Those coaching in the public sector know they will

not earn anywhere near the income they could in the corporate world; they do so more from a position of service to the country they live in and its population than for monetary gain. A coach working within government might not make millions but the rewards are priceless. Those in positions of leadership have no allies. Even though they are a part of the bureaucracy and are not elected officials, their positions are still politically sensitive and individuals at the highest levels are still appointed by the Prime Minister. It is competitive. At the same time people in these positions can be shuffled into other departments overnight, upsetting the equilibrium of the executive cadre and sometimes the organization as a whole. When I coach clients at this high level in government I provide not only a supportive environment but also a safe one where provocative dialogue can take place, where my clients discover a new depth and breadth of being that they might not otherwise have achieved.

Government is less focused on efficiency than it is on efficacy and accountability. There are boxes upon and within boxes: structures, hierarchy, processes, policies and procedures that box clients in and stymie their talents. It's a series of interchangeable widgets where people lose their identities. It's more about functionality than personality. A distinction is dictated rather than chosen--or, as a client of mine says, he's continually 'voluntold' to do something, asked to volunteer without choice in the matter.

When I encourage clients to embrace their individuality, talents and strengths, where the environment erects roadblocks every step of the way, I have to make sure I don't create more conflicts. Rather, I help them see how to marry the two so bureaucratic structures still allow them to fly as individuals.

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