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EQ-i[®] Coaching A Case Study in Resolving Conflict

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“The Vice President, tired of seeing his team torn apart by bickering, asked both managers to work with an executive coach . . .”

As our client, a midsize organization, introduced a new line of products, Kurt, the Manager of Operations, decided to use the opportunity to recommend changes that would make the manufacturing process more efficient, lower the price of their products and add to the company’s bottom line.

After analyzing the data one last time, Kurt met with Randall, the IT Manager, to pitch his idea and get buy-in since the project would need the full support of and significant resources from IT. After listening for about ten minutes, Randall informed Kurt that he had a large project of his own and had no intention of dedicating resources to Kurt’s project.

The men spent the next two weeks either avoiding each other or arguing in meetings. The Vice President, tired of seeing his team torn apart by bickering, asked both managers to work with an executive coach from High Performing Systems.

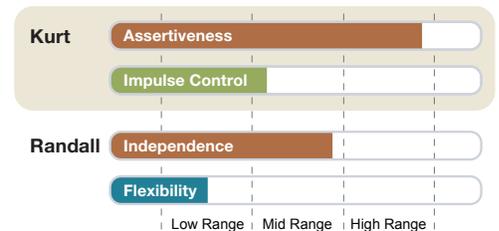
When we spoke with the VP, he said that he agreed with Kurt’s idea, which is why he had not given him a cease-and-desist order. “Our most pressing strategic goal is finding ways to use technology to increase efficiency in our plants,” he said. “Kurt’s idea would help us achieve our goal in 18 months.” The VP did admit that Kurt tended to be impetuous and easily frustrated. On the other hand, he had noticed a tendency by Randall to reject others’ ideas. “Whatever the outcome,” he told us, “the conflict has to be resolved. I can’t let this project tear my team apart.”

Kurt: “When Randall joined our company, he seemed to move fast, coming in with a lot of experience and new ideas. At least, they were new to us. Now I see that many

weren’t new to Randall. They were based on how he managed IT in his former position. I know I could have handled this better in the beginning—I came on too strong—but it seems to me that Randall could be more open to other people’s ideas.”

Randall: “Look, I’m still new at this job. I admit I can feel overwhelmed at times. And it doesn’t help when some guy I’ve barely met storms into my office with a year’s data, slams it on my desk and expects me to commit major resources at the drop of a hat. As if it’s the only project on my plate! Kurt’s a hard charger who never stops, but he needs to back off sometimes.”

After getting the story from both perspectives, we asked the men to take the EQ-i 2.0. Kurt had two out-of-balance Subscales. First, his Assertiveness (AS) was noticeably higher than any other Subscale. He came across as aggressive rather than assertive. Second, his Impulse Control (IC) was much lower than his Assertiveness.



The two out-of-balance Subscales that we felt contributed to Randall’s response to Kurt were his high Independence (IN) and lower Flexibility (FL). He admitted that part of his anger came from his feeling that Kurt was trying to tell him what to do. His lower Flexibility caused him to dig in his heels even though the VP seemed to support Kurt’s idea. Before facilitating a meeting between the



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“They continue to implement the strategies they put in place to keep their out-of-balance Subscales from interfering with relationships.”

men, we met with them individually. We noticed that even when he talked with us, Kurt spent more time planning his defense than listening to what we had to say. After discussing the concept of active listening, we spent a week helping Kurt with listening and responding to specific comments and questions raised by others.

For his part, Randall admitted that his high Independence sometimes caused him to over-react when he thought others were trying to control his agenda. We asked him to write the pros and cons of Kurt’s idea, and he admitted that seeing them in black and white showed him how much the new process could benefit the company. As a result, he felt ready to give it the time and attention it deserved. “But I still need to think through what this would take,” he said. “It’s a large project and I’ve got to balance it with the company-wide software program they hired me to implement.”

We began the first meeting between the two men by having Kurt explain how this new process would help the organization meet one of its strategic goals. Then Randall had an opportunity to ask about IT’s role in the change. Kurt jumped in during Randall’s time once or twice (low IC/high AS), but he caught the HPS facilitator’s signal and

apologized. Randall’s initial response to Kurt’s impulsive comments had been to say, “That won’t work” (high IN/low FL) without taking the time to think through them. Eventually, Randall accepted Kurt’s apology and jotted down one idea he acknowledged might help IT implement the process more quickly.

At the end of the meeting, both managers set realistic deadlines for Randall to study the material, during which time Kurt would not bring up the project either privately or in meetings, thereby giving Randall time to digest all of the information without feeling pressured. For his part, Randall promised to move the project up on his list and meet all deadlines.

Over the course of the next three months, Randall and Kurt learned to work well together as Kurt got feedback from his assistant before he barged into Randall’s office with new ideas or information, and Randall took the time to think about Kurt’s ideas before reacting to his assertive nature. They continue to implement the strategies they put in place to keep their out-of-balance Subscales from interfering with relationships. We now coach each manager once a month to make sure they stay on track and will transition to bimonthly soon.



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