

## Building Blocks 2.3

### Summary of a first session

#### What is this?

This is a summary of the first session of a coaching assignment. It might have been written by a novice coach, to help them reflect on, and learn from the session. We offer it here to display the key points, the flow of the discussion and a little content from the conversation.

This is not a scripted account of the conversation, nor a guide to the 'perfect' first session. It simply shows what type of things might be discussed, to provide a foundation for later coaching conversations. Detailed facts of the discussion are intentionally reduced, to enable us to focus on the key points and general flow.

<b>Coach:</b> Carla Foster	<b>Client:</b> Jack Jarvis
<b>Date of session:</b> 3rd May	<b>Duration:</b> 2½ hours
<b>Location:</b> London	

#### Session objectives

- To learn a little more about Jack.
- To identify some initial goals for the assignment.
- To discuss how the coaching assignment might be structured over time (currently estimated at five sessions over six months).
- To discuss some of Jack's current issues and challenges.
- To agree a way forward, e.g. actions following this session.

#### Personal and professional background

- Joined Global Tek Autoparts Ltd. seven years ago (has over 20 years in manufacturing).
- 44 years old, originally from Dublin, Ireland.
- Married to Elizabeth, ex-nurse, for eleven years.
- Has two children, Frankie (seven years) and Chloe (ten months).
- Jack still has both parents, Donald (retired teacher) and Kath.
- Brother Matthew, Engineer is older by three years.
- Sister Jolene, writer, younger by five years.



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#### Context for coaching

Jack is the Project Director of the Pyramid Programme, which is six months old. The Pyramid Programme aims to create environmentally friendly processes for the manufacture of car parts. It is a two-year project with a budget of £2.7m. This project represents a new direction for the company and is already the subject of media attention. This means the Pyramid Programme is both a high-profile and potentially pressurized situation. Jack's industry knowledge and entrepreneurial ability were the main reasons he was chosen for the role.

Jack has a fairly senior team of five people. These people are all new to him and he has needed to build working relationships quickly. Each of his team has their own teams reporting to them. The overall project team is around 45 people.

Jack is married with a young family. He lives on his own during the week and travels home at weekends. This is also new situation for him and one that he and his family are getting used to.

#### Initial objectives for coaching

Jack is interested in three areas:

1. His ability to manage performance, e.g. in terms of the ability to deliver. He admires anyone who can do this naturally:
  - 'I see people who are better at this than me.'
  - 'I don't feel strong in this area; I have trouble letting go sometimes.'
  - 'It's especially difficult with such a senior team, we've got some strong characters.'
2. His ability to 'stay at the appropriate level', e.g. be the guardian of the vision and create leadership for others, rather than getting 'lost in the detail':
  - 'I need to manage my time better – that's an immediate opportunity.'
3. He'd like to find ways to foster better relationships, both within the team and with some of the suppliers.
  - 'Manufacturing is pretty cut-throat'.
  - 'This project is high profile so our approach must be different.'
  - 'The environmental conversation is an issue for everyone. We need to be collaborative.'

#### Jack's objectives for the project

- 'I want the vision for the programme to be owned by the whole team – I want people to engage at an individual level, to feel that we're doing something worthwhile.'
- 'That we stay aligned over time, i.e. what we're doing and how we're doing it.'



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- 'I want to feel that we're harmonizing our approaches; that people are really pulling together, supporting each other.'
- 'That technically, we maintain quality. That we get the specifications side of the manufacturing process right. That's where we have the experience – I want to see that count.'
- 'I'd like to see more creativity around some of our solutions; we need to display a fresh approach.'

### A need for a more consistent style

Jack acknowledged that his attitude towards the individuals in the team can vary. For example, if he believes in someone's ability from the outset, that person will get his commitment and support. That person will experience him as open, friendly and supportive. But if someone makes a poor first impression, he is likely to make assumptions based on their overall ability. He may even withdraw support from them over time, simply by being less communicative or warm towards them.

This person's performance may then degrade, which may go unnoticed for a period, until Jack's attention is drawn to the situation. This person may have needed support and not been getting it, or concealing issues, which later cause difficult situations. Jack has recently had one such example, where a serious issue arose. 'The guy had been off doing his own thing – I just hadn't seen the mistakes being made.'

Through discussion, Jack decided that a more structured, consistent managing style would improve this situation over time, for example:

- Regular, structured group reporting sessions.
- Monitoring measures of performance more closely, e.g. delivery against plan.
- Regular, structured one-to-one meetings based on coaching principles.

Jack explained that he has various styles of managing, dependent on the individual. Sometimes this works and sometimes it doesn't. For example, some people had regular one-to-ones with him, while others didn't. He identified this irregular contact with some people as one of the causes of his 'blind spots'.

### Structuring time

Jack explained that he also wants to manage his time more effectively, in order to focus on the priority tasks. We quickly estimated how Jack spends his time, as shown in the table on the next page. He saw opportunities to improve the allocation of his own time and his team's time. For example, Jack wanted to spend less time being interrupted at his desk in ad hoc conversations. One way he thought this could be possible was to have regular, structured conversations with each of his



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team. Jack also saw benefits from involving the team more in some of his own activities, e.g. involving them during the early stages of generating ideas, sharing his workload, etc. One obvious area was to have the team take more responsibility for liaison with suppliers, once the team is more aware of the importance of that.

Jack wants to spend time identifying what activities are needed to increase performance across the team. Then he can work out how to focus more time on those activities.

### Creating 'head space'

Jack decided he'd like more 'time to think'. He explained that he often felt 'on his back foot' and had a background concern of having forgotten something. When we explored this further, he realized that what he actually wanted was a feeling of 'free space' in his head. For example, if he felt the project was well organized, well structured, running well, he'd feel like he was 'on top of things.' Automatically that would mean that his thought processes would be clearer, and he'd feel he had more time to consider things.

### Conclusions

Jack valued time spent talking about his situations and challenges. We agreed the initial focus of the coaching, and his objectives for that. He agreed it would be useful for Carla to gather feedback from his current and previous project team. He would also be interested in seeking feedback on the project generally from some of his suppliers but will ask his own team to do that.

### Let's gather feedback

We agreed to interview some of Jack's colleagues to gain feedback about Jack's strengths and development needs. Jack will make requests of the following people:

1. Bob Bailey
2. Diane Cooper
3. Nigel Carter

Carla will conduct interviews by phone.

### Actions

1. Jack to construct a list of priorities and refocus his time against those priorities, e.g. meetings with his team.
2. Jack to contact the three people for Carla to interview and send contact details.
3. Jack to reflect on, then confirm the current schedule of coaching sessions, e.g. six over a twelve-month period.
4. Carla to e-mail of actions agreed, plus book recommendations, e.g. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey.
5. Carla to contact Jack's PA to schedule next session in approx. four weeks' time.



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**Additional support & reading, by Julie Starr**

- The Coaching Manual, Pearson Education
- Brilliant Coaching, Pearson Education
- The Mentoring Manual, Pearson Education

For more information and free downloads, go to [www.starrcoaching.co.uk](http://www.starrcoaching.co.uk)

