


**CASE  
STUDY**
**UNION BANK OF CALIFORNIA: Coaching to empower employees**

"We all have a tremendous amount of potential," says Sean Brawley, president and founder of Imaginative Coaching, "but, unfortunately, we also have a great capacity to get in our own way. This can be expressed by a simple formula: Performance is equal to potential minus interference." Brawley explains that there are two levels of interference: external and internal. In terms of the workplace, external interference consists of obstacles in the work environment that hinder employees' performance, while internal interference involves personal barriers such as stress, fear, or beliefs that prevent employees from realizing their full potential (see Figure 6.8, below).

High levels of workplace engagement are achieved when employees understand how to effectively address and overcome both internal and external barriers to success. Managers play a crucial role in facilitating this process because they are charged with creating both a supportive and trusting environment as well as challenging their direct reports to overcome obstacles so they can reach new levels of performance excellence. Brawley believes, "To ensure long-term success, managers need to learn how to coach and develop their staff."

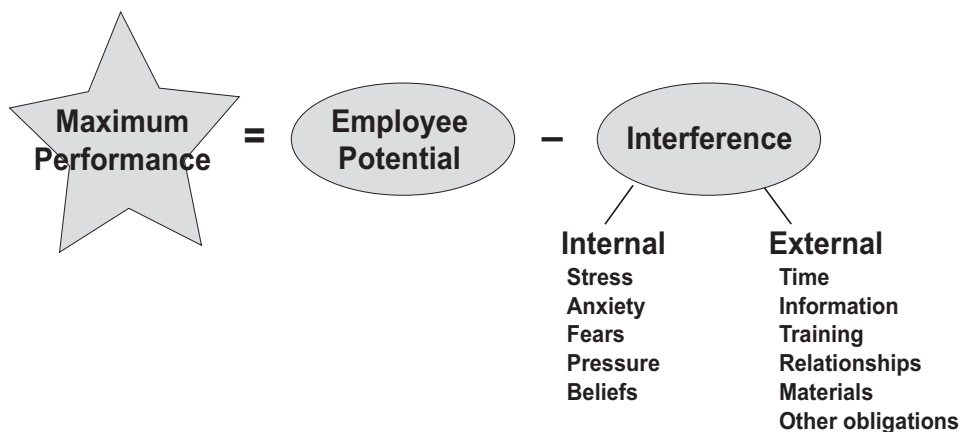
*Involving employees through coaching*

Through his program, "Coaching for Excellence," Brawley introduces leaders and employees to an easy-to-implement developmental coaching model that helps them be more productive on a day-to-day basis. "Coaching is a communication process that develops awareness, personal accountability and trust," says Brawley, "It facilitates individuals' and teams' learning and performance and creates meaningful experiences in the workplace." While he claims there are a spectrum of coaching styles, he highlights two primary skills of the "coaching" process:

1. **Listening:** The coach listens attentively and openly to employees' concerns and feedback.
2. **Questioning:** Rather than giving advice or telling employees what to do, the coach asks a range of questions that get at the core of the issue. Through the questioning

**Fig 6.8**

Sean Brawley's employee performance equation



process, employees identify their own conclusions and develop solutions based on the answers they give.

“For example, when a manager gets his list of annual objectives, he can either devise his own plan and distribute tasks accordingly; or, he can explain the year's objectives to his team, ask for their suggestions and feedback and then work with them to formulate a strategy and delegate responsibilities. In the first approach, managers ‘tell’ employees what to do. In the second approach, managers ‘coach’ employees to develop optimal solutions. Managers who take the second approach are almost always surprised at the results. When employees are more involved in the goal-setting process and have a say in how they will contribute, they typically exhibit greater creativity and are willing to be more accountable for achieving their goals.”

To fully grasp the fundamentals of coaching, managers go through a two-phase process. First, they learn how to be self-reflective – that is to more effectively evaluate their thoughts, feelings and actions to ascertain what worked, what didn't and what got in the way. Second, they learn to coach others. “Managers who are taught to confront and overcome their own obstacles through coaching learn to coach their employees to do the same. This kind of supportive, empowering communication encourages learning and development, which ultimately leads to increased performance.”

#### *Coaching managers at Union Bank of California*

Brawley's coaching techniques have been successfully adopted at one of the largest banks in California. “When I met with the vice-chairman at Union Bank, he told me that coaching had been identified as a critical skill necessary for managers to achieve the higher sales goals of the bank, but realized they had never offered them any training programs in this area.”

Brawley began his “Coaching for Excellence” program with the bank in March of 2003 and has worked with over 150 regional, branch and customer service managers. His program was introduced at 40 branches that were undergoing major changes as part of a pilot for the new “power-bank” model Union Bank was trying in an attempt to increase sales and improve customer service. The power-bank model included alterations in the branches' floor plans, modifications in job roles, extension of branch hours and changes in customer interactions.

According to Beverly Griffith, vice-president and manager of internal consulting at Union Bank of California, “We wanted to include the ‘Coaching for Excellence’ program as part of the new model because we felt it would give our managers the communication tools they needed to create buy-in and effectively implement all the changes with employees.”

Brawley's two-day workshops (each including 14 to 16 managers) were preceded by in-depth questionnaires and one-hour interviews with each of the participants to better understand the personal obstacles, goals and experiences managers had in their workplace. “Many managers I encountered were not performing as well as they could due

to excessive stress levels, frustration with poor-performing staff members and personal anxieties such as fear of confrontation.”

During the two-day workshops, Brawley aimed to raise managers' awareness about their listening skills by leading them through a series of guided observation exercises. Working in partners, one manager was asked to share about a current issue in the workplace while their partner was instructed to listen attentively. “Most managers perceived themselves to be good listeners; however, when I asked them to focus solely on listening (and to forget about problem solving and formulating responses), they often discovered they were not truly hearing what people were saying to them. By raising their listening awareness, they automatically learned to be better listeners.”

Another major component of the workshop was to teach managers the questioning methodology that would allow them to coach employees to become their own problem solvers. Brawley believes that in order for individuals to get to a place where conclusions can be drawn and solutions developed, they need to have as clear a picture as possible of both their goals and their current reality. These two elements are clarified by asking a series of simple questions such as:

- *Goal:* What is your goal? What specifically would you like to accomplish? Why do you have this goal? What benefits will arise from accomplishing this goal? Who will you ask to help you to accomplish your goal? When would you like to reach your goal? How will you know when you've been successful?
- *Reality:* Where are you currently in reaching your goal? What have you done so far? Who is involved in the process? Why have you chosen this particular approach? What are you doing that is working well? What are you doing that is not working well? Do you think you have been effective thus far? Why or why not?

“Once people have clarity about what they want to achieve and where they are currently, they are able to identify gaps and obstacles that may be preventing them from moving forward. At this point, managers can guide employees to brainstorm solutions in order to bridge the gaps and overcome obstacles.”

Brawley claims, “This process is valuable for a range of situations from facilitating employees' career advancement within the company, to resolving team issues, to achieving overall company objectives. The important element is that employees are involved in continual learning within the workplace, which creates a more meaningful and engaging experience.”

Following the initial two-day workshop, each manager participated in three coaching sessions with Brawley in order to address personal and professional issues and to continue learning how to become effective coaches for their employees. The final aspect of each delivery of the program was a follow-up meeting where Brawley had managers reflect on the positive outcomes and challenges of putting the techniques into practice. The meeting allowed managers to get further training in areas of uncertainty, practice with and support one another in implementing the new techniques and give valuable feedback to each other.

*Improved performance at Union Bank of California*

The early results from the “Coaching for Excellence” program have been good. Senior leadership from the bank have seen increased levels of performance, received positive feedback from post-program surveys and observed higher levels of workplace enjoyment and engagement in power-bank branches where managers have been through the program.

“We are currently in the process of developing a formal measurement tool to evaluate the effects of different elements in the power-bank model. In the meantime, we’ve relied on anecdotal evidence and direct observation to gauge the outcomes of the coaching program,” says Griffith. “Many managers have told us that without the coaching sessions, they feel it would have been much more difficult to implement power-bank changes. The increased performance we’ve observed in power-bank branches has convinced our leadership team that the ‘Coaching for Excellence’ program has been a fundamental part of the new model’s success.”

In one specific example, Kirstine McAllaster, a customer service manager, used what she learned in the program to increase customer referrals to additional financial services from seven to 57 per week. McAllaster had been having trouble motivating her bank tellers to promote the bank’s referral initiative to existing customers. She decided to put coaching techniques into practice and called an informal staff meeting to ask her employees why they were reluctant to refer, what they could do to improve referral rates and how she could support them in their efforts.

After discussing overall objectives and the reasons for resistance in reaching these objectives, she encouraged employees to come up with solutions for bridging the gap between current and desired number of referrals. Employees developed the idea of a “perfect day,” in which they would attempt to refer every customer they came in contact with to the best of their ability. McAllaster guaranteed her support and agreed to be available to coach employees to address personal obstacles to referring throughout the day. “My employees’ referrals during that day and the days to follow increased immensely,” says McAllaster, “The best part about the initiative was that it was their idea. Although my involvement is still important in helping them to stay motivated and accountable, my employees have continued to perform well and our branch is now ranked number one in the region for referrals.”

*A lasting impact*

Due to the positive results Union Bank of California has observed, they are planning to expand the pilot program sometime in 2005 and want to continue using the “Coaching for Excellence” program as part of the ongoing effort to facilitate the changes. “A big part of the next phase of the coaching program is integrating the techniques in order to become a learning organization,” says Griffith. “It’s about training the trainer and finding ways to maximize the coaching tools managers have been given to improve performance across the organization.”

According to Brawley, “Many managers go through training programs to improve their

skills and competencies, only to return to the workplace and get bogged down in old habits. They may only use 20% of what they learned. But in learning how to confront their own internal and external obstacles through coaching, and then using those communication techniques to coach their staff, there is a much greater chance for lasting workplace empowerment.”



## CASE STUDY

### **BOMBARDIER AEROSPACE: Managers build business knowledge**

Employee engagement at Bombardier Aerospace is very much filtered through the lens of the industry's challenges over the last four years. After over a decade of growth, the last four years have seen cutbacks unprecedented for many of its long-term employees, and which have had an understandably debilitating effect on employee morale.

Part of Bombardier Aerospace's approach to employee engagement, therefore, centers on the idea of “intellectual engagement” – encouraging employees to increase their business acumen in order to mobilize against industry threats and help the business turn the corner. As well as assessing the general caliber and credibility of formal communication media, therefore, employee surveys over 2003/4 have asked certain questions to look at shortfalls on this critical business need:

- *Can you identify the company's key business priorities?*
- *Do you feel your business unit/function is contributing to at least one of them?*
- *Do you feel able to contribute as individuals?*
- *Do your managers discuss the business priorities with you in meetings?*
- *Do you feel able to contribute to these discussions?*

“What we realized was that employees didn't really understand the challenges faced by the industry as a whole, or what they represented for us as a company,” says director of internal communication, Lise St-Arnaud. What also emerged was that the front-line manager was a key facilitator of this understanding.

#### *The impact of the supervisor: Linking knowledge to engagement*

The research showed that although there was good communication within the upper levels of management, communication credibility and responsibility needed to be improved at the front line of management and that this had a critical link to the need to drive business acumen.

In the operations area, for example, employees hadn't always been involved in quarterly meetings with their managers. However, the survey revealed that for the 62% of employees who *had* attended a quarterly meeting with their manager, a significant number (69%) felt informed about the business priorities and the key performance indicators they would be measured against, and 59% felt they had been shown how their business unit contributes to meeting business priorities.