

# Executive Coaching for HR Professionals?

Dennis Preston - HDA



Mergers, acquisitions and corporate restructures – all are triggers for major change and upheaval in companies. More often than not the HR team will find themselves at the forefront of these events. But are they properly equipped to operate simultaneously at both a strategic and practical level and provide the most effective business solutions when everyone around them seems to be in fire-fighting mode?

Put another way, does the HR Director or manager have the support they themselves need to guide the Board and CEO through the change process?

Dennis Preston, an independent change consultant and associate with HDA, argues that Executive Coaching for HR professionals may be the answer.

## Change Projects Usually Fail!

Despite all that has been written about corporate change, most initiatives still fail. Why? The same three reasons appear every time:

- No clear vision
- Insufficient planning
- Poor communication

These effects are magnified when a company experiences massive change such as a merger, acquisition or corporate restructure. It is a fact that more than half of such events do not deliver the business results and shareholder value expected. Where such initiatives have been successful – and they can be recognised as having clear vision, a comprehensive plan and an effective communication strategy – they have invariably given proper attention to the three main drivers of any change, large or small, that affects a company:

- Culture
- People
- Processes

*“If you can keep your head when all around you have lost theirs, then you probably haven’t understood the seriousness of the situation”*

## So what has this got to do with HR?

Everything! If you have ever been through a major organisational change you will doubtless recall the extra pressure placed on the senior teams from the outset. And this means not only keeping the business running but also driving through the change programme often under the tightest of timescales. At this time you might have seen a change in behaviour as individuals attempt to take on a number of different roles throughout the transition.

The Board and CEO will usually have an agenda that concentrates on ‘hard’ issues – financial targets, shareholder value, customer retention, analysts’ forecasts. Softer issues, including culture change, performance management, communications and re-alignment of HR policies are often seen as important but not quite having the same impact on other ‘measurable’ results. These issues generally fall to the HR Director or manager to deal with. But surely it is also their responsibility to elevate these issues to a strategic business level and keep them high on the CEO’s agenda?

Easier said than done! Because it is at these very times when the spotlight falls on the HR function to maintain stability in the day-to-day operation of the business – particularly where ‘people issues’ are involved – and also respond to the new demands raised constantly by the change programme. So it is not uncommon that the HR Director or manager can feel ‘disconnected’ from the big picture and end up filling every available minute of the day fire-fighting and reacting to events while others set the pace for change!



*“If your boss is getting you down, look at him through the prongs of a fork and imagine him in jail”*

### **But it’s not like that here!**

I apologise – of course this is not always the case and in some companies, maybe yours, HR is properly acknowledged as a key strategic function, on a par with Finance, Marketing, Sales and Operations, with all its policies and practices fully aligned with the business strategy. In these companies, the HR department has built strong equal partnerships with other business functions. If that’s your company, Congratulations! You might want to share your success secrets with other less enlightened colleagues – there are many of them.

If that is not you, maybe you want to think about raising your game?

It might be as simple as recognising that your CEO has a different agenda from yours – strategic versus practical perhaps?

It may be that you need to reinforce your business skills and re-engage with the issues around change.

It could be that you always have a problem raising the profile of HR in your company.

*“A problem shared is a problem halved, so is your problem really yours or just half of someone else’s?”*

### **A Way forward**

HR Directors and managers need to see the effects of change through the eyes of their CEO. At one level this might mean understanding more about the concepts of strategic planning, Return on Investment, Corporate Communications, facilitating transition teams and other key skills. At another level, you might want to improve your working relationship with your CEO to the point where you can become their trusted advisor.

Training and Development can certainly help but may not deliver results quickly enough or to the depth needed. And this is where Executive Coaching can come in. Executive Coaching is about improving personal and business performance. It is also about people making change work for them. A recent survey of UK companies revealed that 80% of managers believe that coaching can improve their performance and one third have used organisational change – mergers, acquisitions or restructuring – as a trigger to use coaching for the first time.

But how often is it left to the HR Director or manager to arrange coaching for other executives (in those enlightened companies that have embraced coaching) and not take advantage of coaching for themselves?

### **HDA Coaches HR Professionals**

As one key component of its Executive Coaching service, HDA offers coaching for HR professionals who may be experiencing some of the issues mentioned above. Each programme is tailored to the specific needs of the individual and is delivered by experienced coaches, many with HR Director or CEO backgrounds themselves.

Interested?

*(All quotes courtesy of David Brent – BBC Comedy series ‘The Office’)*

## More on HDA

HDA has delivered world class human capital consultancy services across all sectors for over 25 years. We are a quality accredited human capital consultancy, consulting to world class organisations, as well as to the public sector and SMEs. We work across the UK, and internationally, and develop long-term relationships with the organisations with which we work.



Organisations work with us because of our blended offering, our established international network, our client relationship flexibility and our uncompromising outcomes-focused approach to everything we do.

HDA delivers a broad range of human capital consultancy projects and services. including consultancy in:

### **Talent Management, Development and Engagement and Career Transition**



#### **More on Dennis Preston**

Dennis Preston is a Senior Consultant with HDA, specialising in senior management and board level coaching and facilitation. He is a strategic thinker with a sharp intellect for business, organisational and interpersonal issues and the ability to put complex ideas into context. His strong influencing and negotiation skills enable incisive and challenging questioning to stimulate creative thought. He is particularly interested in challenging business leadership to identify and articulate the business drivers that inform their decisions.

Dennis's background includes Directorship of a Global Investment Bank, two posts as Head of Strategy and Planning and the design and delivery of executive development programmes in the UK, Japan, Hong Kong and the USA. Dennis has worked for the London Stock Exchange, Bank of England, Dresdner Kleinwort

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