



THE **LEADERSHIP CONTEXT**

What Do My
Stakeholders Need
Of Me?

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Background

Moana is a Company Secretary and General Counsel for an ASX top 50 organisation. When coaching was proposed to support her it came after a series of feedback sessions that underpinned some poor performance. This was in the eyes of her stakeholders who were concerned that she was not operating at the right strategy level for her role.

The objectives that were set for the coaching included stronger and more transparent stakeholder management, particularly of one key stakeholder, lifting her head out of the details in order to develop her team for them to be more strategic in what they were doing and thirdly to improve her written communication in order for it to have a stronger commercial lens.

Our Approach

Moana and her coach met on a regular basis, typically every third or fourth week and looked at both the overarching goals that were set for the coaching as well as the specific goals and targets that had been set in prior sessions. Using a pre-session reflective sheet, Moana was able to prepare for every session with what she had done, achieved and learnt in-between each of those sessions.

One of the first and most important insights that she had toward her coaching process was the view of her key stakeholder. Previously she felt she had to satisfy many stakeholders and found herself caught between their respective needs. But by identifying with her coach the needs of her most important stakeholder and realising that her role was to be that person's ally as opposed to a messenger for them, this changed the way she operated in service of that person's needs. The impact of this flowed beyond just serving one stakeholder into her preparation for key meetings, the documentation that she sent out in advance of meetings and the style of writing that she gave when answering key questions her stakeholder had.



Learning how to communicate so the message lands

Whilst we know from coaching that one insight and action can have multiple outputs, Moana was surprised to see the legal recommendations she had previously given were quite vague and unhelpful when viewed through a commercial lens. Having taken time to understand the needs of her key stakeholder, she then reviewed the way she wrote her reports for the organisation. Working to make them brief, to the point, succinct and commercially insightful was a departure from the way she had previously written her recommendations. This did not happen overnight and Moana received ongoing feedback from key stakeholders on a monthly basis to help her improve the style of communication she was delivering.

A moment of transformation

A key transformation for Moana was undertaking a stakeholder mapping exercise. This is an exercise that allows the leader to identify a range of stakeholders, what their needs might be and then to go and interview them accordingly. It not only gives the leader solid insight into where they might need to help stakeholders but it also allows the leader to set and manage the expectations of those stakeholders. Moana's coach worked with her to give her a set of questions that allowed her to interview and clarify with her stakeholders what they needed. After the exercise was completed, Moana set herself on a daily basis to answer these four questions:

1. What does my organisation need of me today?
2. What does my team need of me today?
3. What do I need of me today?
4. What does my son need of me today?

This simple exercise that she completed every single morning allowed her to focus more sharply on the needs of her stakeholders and deliver accordingly.



Making progress

Over the course of the coaching her coach introduced a range of positive psychology ideas for her. The notion of mindfulness and daily gratitude had a profound effect on Moana's ability to show up every day. She built a habit of taking time to be mindful every morning through the four question exercise and every single night took time to fill in a journal on what she was grateful for in that day. Moana read a lot of positive psychology articles and found a newer science that backed up notions such as the Amygdala hijack to be quite enlightening. It allowed her to make sense of previous life experiences and why and how she acted in the ways that she had done. She had now embraced positivity as a way of living her life into the future.

Lastly in terms of developing her own staff, she developed a mantra of getting off the dance floor and looking at it from the balcony as a way of making sure that she was regularly taking a helicopter view and delegating to her staff as appropriate. Whilst she has not mastered this completely, in her own words she has got out of the way and is taking more time to develop her staff.

Outcomes

In her final coaching meeting Moana said that coaching was a game changer for her. It encouraged her to step up into a more strategic role and it facilitated the learning that she needed. She talked about how at this stage of her life she was ready for coaching whereas in the previous years she probably would not have understood the need or the urgency that she had to undertake.

