

Leadership and Coaching Alliance

A Story of an organisation's Transformation

An integrated program of coaching and training can improve leadership, performance and organizational culture with measurable bottom-line results.

By Pat Grove, founder of Pat Grove Coaching Academy

This article presents the process, outcomes and discoveries of a cultural change program facilitated by an alliance between Neil Muller Construction which is a design and construct Cape Town based construction company, Pat Grove Coaching Academy, which provides leadership/executive coaching and leadership team coaching, and the Pat Grove Coaching Academy associates. The story begins in the spring of 2003 when Shaun Webber, CEO of NMC, felt as if the company, employing over 170 employees, was riding a stationary bike. People were churning and turning their wheels, expending a great deal of effort with insufficient return on effort. A mood audit survey indicated a lack of visible leadership, a "victim mentality" and a concern for an in-person survey of the CEO and senior leaders revealed similar results.

For example, the current culture did not reflect core organizational competencies or values. Inefficiencies and lack of clarity and accountability resulted in inadequate productivity levels. The company's narrow focus on results alone had created an environment lacking purposeful leadership, innovation, creativity, and the thinking and planning time necessary to improve processes and increase productivity. Although the CEO, Shaun Webber was asking for innovation and strategic thinking, the leadership was not modeling the skills and competencies necessary to inspire the trust and confidence in the employee base necessary to bring about change. It became clear to Shaun Webber that without purposeful and innovative leadership, driven by a clear business vision and internalized core values, existing problems within the organization would not be resolved. Pat Grove challenged Shaun to embark on a cultural change initiative for the purpose of addressing and resolving the challenges at NMC. Starting with the notion that "every organisation is a mirror image and reflection of its leadership."

Pat Grove proposed that the process start with a leadership team development.

Shaun accepted the challenge. Over time an integrated process of Executive Coaching, Team Coaching and Coach Skills Training was developed and deployed. This process resulted in a transformation of the leadership and the culture. There was a significant change in individual and team behaviors, the quality and nature of communications and in some cases the actual functioning of the work teams and the systems. The biggest change was evident in how the leaders were showing up both as individuals in their work units as well as a visible leadership team working collaboratively together. This transformation of the leadership was the catalyst for real

cultural change. What follows is a brief overview of the integrated coaching process, as well as its impact on NMC.

A Quick Look at the Process

Between August of 2003 and February 2005,

- 3 Teams did the Coaching in Action workshop
- The Construction Management did a whole day with Pat
- All Directors were coached by Pat Grove
- All 19 managers and directors attended 16 early morning lectures on Relationships and Commitment
- Pat Grove worked with the Managements teams.
- Everyone involved took an additional 4 workshops and interactions with Pat Grove's Associate Coaches.
- Pat spent a whole day with Managements wives explaining the change taking place.

These facts reveal the enormous commitment and investment by NMC to realize the envisioned changes.

The Integrated Coaching Process

The first Senior Leadership Team Coaching 3-day off-site was held in August 2003 with Pat Grove and Konrad Bartel as coaches. About 4 months into this process, the CEO requested that each Leader work with a coach. Approximately 4 months later, the Coaching Skills Training process began. These components were overlapping and synergistic, but for ease of discussion, we talk about the three parts separately.

Executive Coaching

The focus for executive coaching at NMC was on individual leadership development – including the being as well as the doing of leadership. The coaches challenged the leaders to expand their leadership skills and to reflect on how they were showing up as leaders in the organization. Leaders were asked to identify what behaviors they wanted to embody and then they were challenged to demonstrate those behaviour's. The leaders were asked to make commitments and hold each other accountable for following through.

The executive coaching connected the different parts of the integrated process of coaching. For example Pat coached the CEO of NMC on his leadership presence in the leadership team. As a result of the coaching, Shaun became more aware of his own questions, priorities and challenges. He started listening more instead of trying to solve others' problems. He spent more time with people, encouraging them and suspending his judgments. His new leadership style created a more collaborative team and a more engaged organization.

"Coaching has given me skills that have made a difference in both my professional and personal life. The impact has been real and noticeable."
(Shaun Webber).

Shaun Webber and his senior team believe that executive coaching established the groundwork for the effectiveness of the Team Coaching and Coaching Skills. It gave him grounding in the coaching methodology and more confidence as a leader. A few months after the start of the coaching process, each member of management team was being coached and trained to conduct coaching interventions to cascade the process to the bottom echelons of the organisation.

"Leaders unsure of where to enhance their own leadership need to use their organizations as mirrors. What's happening in the organization will tell them where to look!" (Pat Grove)

Team Coaching

The goal of the team coaching for the leadership team was to support the team in implementing their core leadership competencies and values and to cascade the coaching culture through the organisation. It was assumed that higher performance and outstanding results would naturally flow from this change. Pat Grove Coaching Academy started by creating a coaching process that enabled the leadership team to establish a shared and purposeful leadership vision by employing the coaching principles of suspending judgment, honoring confidentiality, and focusing on the client's agenda. Pat and his team created an environment of openness and trust in which to work with the team. Leader conversations became more meaningful. When interviewed, one leader revealed: "This was the first time in a long while that I felt I could speak from the heart." The coach consistently challenged the leaders to demonstrate evidence for the positive impact of their leadership. They provided real-time rigorous feedback on what was working and not working and, as well encouraging each leader's strengths.

Through lengthy dialog, the leaders were inspired to create a 'statement of accountability':

"175 + Employees were Engaged, Fulfilled and Feeling like They Are Adding Value." Realizing that their dictatorial style and lack of accountability hadn't brought out the best in people, they committed to focusing on this new vision. This new site vision supported the business vision and was shared throughout the NMC organization.

Coaching Skills Training

NMC chose Pat Grove of the PGCA for Coach Training (a program with a readily applicable coaching skills training program) to conduct the coaching skills training component. The goal was to provide the NMC leaders with coaching skills that would increase their leadership effectiveness. The Pat Grove Coaching Academy developed a customized training package, using NMC leadership language, vision, values and goals. The training program was structured for three days: an initial three-day session, with a fourth day for follow up within a short time. With an experiential approach, the training provided an introduction to fundamental principles and skills of coaching, with an emphasis on practical application for realizing the site vision and

making the values more visible in the organization. Participants also learned the distinction between being a coach and using coaching skills as a manager.

Over a half year period, all department management teams were trained. Several leaders and team members approached the coaching skills training with skepticism. Their resistance showed in statements like "Coaching is the flavour of the month," "I don't have time for this," and "I have work to do!" Over time most of the resistance and skepticism began to dissolve. Pat Grove, the coach and training facilitator, saw many lights go on in the form of insights that participants gained in the classroom. By lunch break on the first day of training; people came forward saying, "This is what we are starved for in our organization - the human side of doing business." As participants experienced being authentically seen and heard for the first time in their dialogs with each other, they deepened their trust and respect as they began to interact without judgment and blame.

Insights that were attained during the coaching skills training supported NMC values of Empowerment, Respect for People, Creativity, Sense of Urgency, Integrity, Courage and Networking. For example, continuously providing solutions does not support empowerment, but rather engenders learned helplessness. Coaching affirms the value of empowerment, as it provides the tools that enable employees to find their own answers. In addition, suspending judgment supports the value of Respect for People. It also creates a safe place to speak candidly, allowing the necessary risk-taking required for Courage and Creativity. This environment began to approximate what Peter Senge and other thoughts leaders have termed a "learning organization."
Looking at the Change

The transformational and cultural change within NMC was clearly visible. In this article, we focus on three specific change areas: leadership, culture and tangible results:

Changes in Leadership

The leadership team's site vision drove NMC to deliver sustained superior performance and profound results. This vision came alive for many of the NMC employees through the coaching initiatives of their leaders. Many leaders modeled the changes. Leaders asked more questions, provided more support and encouragement, and demonstrated their commitment to being effective. Overall leadership in the organization became stronger and more visible. Coaching gave the leaders higher awareness of their accountability issues. They were able to build on their strengths and work together to improve the work culture. There was more authentic dialogue between leaders – more honest and direct communication. Issues which had previously been buried were brought into the light of day.

The change in the culture can be reflected by the phrase: "Living the NMC Values." Coaching principles were visibly integrated into many parts of the NMC culture. The NMC employee opinion survey showed an increase of almost ten percent of employees who said that NMC is a great place to work.

The senior leaders attributed the increase to the shifts they were making as a result of embracing the coaching initiatives. They also acknowledged the fact that they were more involved, more engaged and felt like they were adding value. In other words, the leadership team had become models for the site vision.

Tangible Results

Three examples of results we believe can be attributed to the integrated coaching process:

1. The NMC leadership team decided to take charge of their own destiny. They defined what the strategic contribution of the company could and should be. The strategic contribution, together with the site leadership vision, the values and the core competencies were adopted as guidelines for all NMC business decisions.
2. One significant change was evidenced by the directors taking time, when appropriate, to ask their direct reports questions versus immediately telling them what to do. What the directors discovered was that deeper trust was developed and their direct reports learned to make more of their own decisions. Because of this, the team leaders had more time to think and plan strategically, which paid off in greater efficiency and productivity at all levels.
3. The procurement department improved their ability to meet their objectives. They internalized the skills of championing and challenging with a commitment for continuous learning; they became a learning organization, improving productivity in many areas. They challenged themselves to do the impossible. They increased their ability for "out of the box" thinking and innovation, embraced new perspectives and eliminated the fear of being judged. These directors have continued to reinforce the use of coaching principles in their day-to-day work.

Facing the Future

Three main challenges face this organization and it's Leadership.

1. NMC is facing some major business challenges and at the same time wants to further implement the leadership vision. In times of pressure, people tend to fall back to their old, more dependent behaviour and expect someone else to solve all their problems. The company needs all employees to actively work on achieving a bright future for the company. Keeping this in mind, continuing to practice their new skills and behaviors, not losing perspective and not getting lost in the day-to-day details continues to be a challenge. This is already evident by the workload since the start of the year.
2. The challenge is to find a way to integrate the new leaders into the coaching and learning process. Continuing to work on unifying the leadership vision of the leadership will be critical for success. A serious

program is now needed to implement succession planning as older members of the leadership prepare for retirement.

3. At the start of the coaching initiative, the CEO invited people to engage in personal coaching. Not all leaders chose to participate. Also, among those who did participate, there is currently a difference in the way coaching is implemented in different departments. The challenge is to keep the differences manageable. In the spirit of “lessons learned” the coaches recommend a more uniform approach. In order to achieve a sustainable cultural transformation, there needs to be greater alignment and commitment throughout the entire organization. One approach would be to establish a “pocket of excellence” in one department before expanding to include the larger population. It is worth clarifying that a coaching initiative is usually not a necessary and sufficient methodology for wide-spread organizational change. Utilized effectively, coaching can be a powerful tool that augments and amplifies the impact of other initiatives such as training, education, and consulting.

Pat Grove, Founder

Pat Grove Coaching Academy

Pat Grove is an international Ontological Coach. His organisation has trained just over 650000 people in 16 countries. Pat specialises in Training Coaches, adding Coaching to Managements styles, executive coaching and Team coaching. He also leads transformations through cultural change in Organisations. Pat collaborates with Konrad Bartel a TOC expert in the creative design and delivery of coaching programs that enable organizational leadership teams to further develop their leadership capacities, both individually and collectively. He can be reached at pat@patgrove.com. Pat brings 30 odd years of success in the development of leaders and organisations.