



## Ivy League University Thrives with Long-Term Coaching

Coaching has permeated the ranks of a university organization over the course of nearly a decade. Through a strategic partnership with Career Directions, a somewhat dysfunctional organization has become cohesive and highly productive. Synergistic improvements were realized when the following coaching approaches were applied at different levels of the organization.

- ➔ Retreats (senior leaders, all staff, unit teams)
- ➔ Individual coaching of senior team members
- ➔ Team coaching
- ➔ Hiring assessments
- ➔ Performance management coaching
- ➔ Career coaching/job fit analysis
- ➔ Mentoring managers in coaching techniques

### *Facilitating a New Vision*

When a senior vice president took the helm of a key organization at this university, she had a vision for what the organization could achieve, but lacked a team that was able to immediately pull together and deliver on that vision. Career Directions was tapped to assist her in implementing the vision by facilitating several retreats, the first of which was a retreat for all staff members. Over time, retreats were also conducted with senior leaders and with individual unit teams to help instill focus and to translate vision to reality. Career Directions “took the whole staff through a series of conversations and exercises where we came up with a new set of core values for the office and a set of operating principles. We had to go back and remind people what treating people with respect meant.”

### *Reshaping the Organization*

Once the vision was communicated and the ground rules were in place, Career Directions assisted with shaping and realigning the senior management team. The team received coaching on approaches to increasing unit productivity, and in becoming more effective partners with both internal units and external



organizations. Over time, individual team members received leadership and organizational coaching – whether they were newly appointed leaders who needed to acclimate themselves quickly, or existing leaders who shared the vision but needed help with breaking out of historical roles and approaches. As one vice-president described his ongoing experience with coach David Gruner, “He’s helped me be more tolerant, and at the same time, he helped me learn to push back when that is needed...to delegate more...to buttress my own abilities and to have the strength and energy to do the right thing.”

Both performance management coaching and team coaching were important aspects of making the whole organization function cohesively and achieve lofty goals. Career Directions helped leaders learn how to raise the bar gradually, communicating the changes respectfully and professionally. They learned how to hold difficult conversations with low-performing staff members, motivating them to meet the rising expectations, find a better fit within the organization, or seek a position outside the university. Managers also learned to use hiring assessments to guide the selection of individuals who could readily align with and execute the organization’s mission and goals.

### ***A Unique Style of Coaching – Effective and Spreading!***

As more than one leader indicated, whether it’s through work with individuals or teams, Career Directions offers a style of coaching that builds the trust needed for individuals to share and examine their vulnerabilities. From there, the coachee can quickly move forward and identify competencies that need to be strengthened. As the senior vice president herself commented, “On the one hand it feels gentle, and yet on the other hand, he [David Gruner] drags you where you don’t want to go to get you where you need to be...He helps you come to it yourself, and to practice that same approach on a daily basis...He has been one of the key architects in helping us achieve an almost complete turnaround.”

This unique coaching style works well for the organization, and over time, David Gruner has begun to mentor leaders to coach their own staff members. Career Directions continues to provide coaching to the organization, both in taking on new challenges and to work more effectively with other university organizations. As a result of the successes experienced by this one organization, the influence of Career Directions coaching has begun to filter throughout the campus. Additional organizations have begun to request management coaching services so that they can model the “best practices” they have observed in this organization.