
When Anger Gets in the Way of Business Intelligence

A Case Study

This is an abbreviated case study to illustrate how an integral (four-quadrant, four-domain) approach can enhance the effectiveness of coaching for authenticity and, in turn, performance improvement, especially around the issue of anger awareness and management.

Michael is a mid-level manager of a quasi-governmental organization that had recently merged with another industry competitor. He was coached for three months from the ID four-domain approach. Within that time he was able to make several substantial breakthroughs in self-awareness, self-care, social awareness, and social contribution.

Here are a few pivotal moments that enabled him to shift how he saw himself and others, and how that led to some meaningful changes. Those changes, in turn, enhanced his business intelligence with both internal and external customers.

Prior to meeting Michael, I interviewed his immediate and next-level-up supervisors—who both were willing to explore coaching as a developmental tool for the first time in their high-tech company. They explained Michael’s many business strengths, his value to the company, their vision for his promotion to higher ranks, and a few weaknesses, that—if not addressed—would stall him at his current mid-management level.

From his supervisors, I found that Michael had grown his business unit substantially in the past few years, landing and managing the company’s largest contract; he was beloved by his customers, and had become considered to be a “high potential.” His supervisors recognized that a few characteristics stood in the way of his advancement. He needed to become much more aware of establishing good relationships with co-workers, and in particular to restore a few important relationships that had sustained such damage that those colleagues had asked not to work with him in any way. Whereas external customers adored Michael, internally he was seen as a bully. With a command and control style, he often was sarcastic with

direct reports and colleagues in other departments. This was a fork in the road as far as upper management was concerned. They didn’t know if the change was possible, yet were willing to make the investment to allow Michael the opportunity.

When I began working with Michael, I shared his supervisors’ opinions with him—the strong points and their concerns. He was chagrined, embarrassed, and fearful for his security. He was virtually unaware of his sarcasm and bullying tactics or the impact they were having on others. After assuring him that his supervisors’ investment was a mark of their faith in him, he settled down **emotionally**, began to **physically** relax, and considered the accuracy of the feedback. It was a slow beginning.

Over the next few sessions, I did a lot of listening. What I observed was this really wonderful human being, with great qualities and a good heart, at war with himself on a number of fronts. As I listened, I noticed that he not only spoke about other people sarcastically, he even spoke about *himself* with sarcasm. As he spoke, a consistent set of operating

assumptions emerged, and a larger story unfolded about who he was in the company and who he was personally. More of his personal stories detailed his anger when he felt slighted or demeaned in any way, or when he felt others used power over him. He detested when others did that to him, and in telling stories of how he treated colleagues, came to realize that he was doing the exact same things.

This was a **cognitive** “aha” for him. He “got it” on his own that it was odd to be doing to others what he hated being done to him. He softened **physically** at that very moment. He pulled forward in his chair, relaxed and straightened a bit, and seemed to have lightness physically and emotionally. He was both calmer and more energized. He even laughed at himself. As he continued to talk, telling newly interpreted stories about how others must’ve felt when he was doing this, his sarcasm vanished. He spoke cleanly about himself and others. I pointed out to him the changes I had just witnessed, in order to make transparent and anchor the shifts in his body, mind, and emotions. I asked him how he felt about himself at that point. He thought for a few long seconds and responded that he felt as if he was beginning to come home. Once at home with himself, he knew he could be attuned with others. That was a **spiritual** moment, evoking his **spiritual** intelligence.

In the sessions that followed, Michael experimented with holding a different set of assumptions about others. He began to assume best intentions. In areas of ambiguity, he gave the benefit of the doubt and interpreted first in a direction of good will. As a result, he began to notice a lot less problems arising and a lot more good things happening. He began noticing how he was feeling in his body when tension and anger occurred. The tightness in his throat, shoulders, and

back, and shortness of breath were tip-offs that he was losing his clear-headedness. When these red flags showed up he knew to breathe deeply and ask open-ended questions like “can you tell me a little more about that?” until he regained his **emotional** and **mental** balance. If he was on the telephone and got these warning signs, he would stand up, straighten his back, take a few deep breaths, and gently pace a bit to regain his balance—first **physically**, and then **emotionally** and **cognitively**.

By the three-month mark, Michael’s relationships had taken a dramatic turn for the better. When he made mistakes, defaulting into old behaviors, he now apologized to the person he offended. He was becoming masterful at asking what others thought instead of offering his own opinion right away. And he was gaining skill at coaching others to figure out their own problems. He loved this new way of being. It was easier and more meaningful.

What to me was pivotal was that Michael was absolutely genuine in his motivation to change. He didn’t do it for the promotion. He did it because for him it was a better way to be. He wanted to be a person that helped others to grow, who showed gratitude and appreciation for the contributions of others, and displayed compassion and understanding when things didn’t go well. And he wanted to feel better about himself.

In our last session, Michael let me know that he had followed through on several of his commitments, and had his first physical in three years. That freed up energy that had been lost through low-level worry about his health. He also had begun sleeping more, exercising three times a week, eating more nutritiously, and enjoying a renewed relationship with his wife. He learned the impact of authentic listening, and staying focused

on the other person's story without trying to fix it or take over the conversation.

Michael was stepping into his true self and a much bigger world, and was also well on his way to being looked upon as worthy of promotion to the next level up.