

A Leadership and Coaching **Alliance** One Story of Transformational Change

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

by Fran Fisher, Adria Trowhill, Jeanie Nishimura and Margriet van de Steeg

This article presents the process, outcomes and discoveries of a cultural change program facilitated by an alliance between Aventis Pasteur Limited Canada (AvP/CA, which manufactures vaccines and other immunotherapeutic products that protect against infectious diseases), Posi-TRAK Coaching and Consulting, Inc. (which provides leadership/executive coaching and leadership team coaching), and the Academy for Coach Training (an International Coach Federation-accredited coaching skills training school).

The story begins in the spring of 2000 when Mark Lievonen, President of AvP/CA, felt as if the company, employing over 1000 employees, was riding a stationary bike. People were churning and turning their wheels, expending a great deal of effort with insufficient return on effort. Feedback from an employee survey indicated a lack of visible leadership, a “victim mentality” and a concern for a viable future.

Posi-TRAK’s in-person survey of the president and senior Canadian 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 global leaders were asking for innovation and strategic thinking, the Canadian 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 Mark Lievonen 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. Posi-TRAK challenged Mark to embark on a cultural change initiative for the purpose of addressing and resolving the challenges at the AvP/CA site. Starting with the notion that “every organization is a reflection of its leadership,” Posi-

TRAK proposed that the process start with AvP/CA senior leadership team development.

Mark 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 AvP/CA.

the three parts separately.

Executive Coaching

The focus for executive coaching at AvP/CA 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 behaviors. 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, Adria Trowhill coached the president of AvP/CA on his leadership presence in the Canadian leadership team. As a result of the coaching, Mark



Intervention Snapshot

Between the spring of 2000 and January 2003,

- * 22 Aventis Executives were coached by a total of 7 coaches;

- * 20 days were spent off-site Team Coaching the AvP/CA Leadership Team;

- * 9 Aventis teams undertook the Coaching Skills Training of three days, a total of 130 employees.

These facts reveal the enormous commitment and investment by AvP/CA to realize the envisioned changes.

The Integrated Coaching Process

The first Senior Leadership Team Coaching two-day off-site was held in August 2000 with Adria Trowhill and Jeanne Nishimura as coaches. About six months into this process, the president requested that each VP work with an executive coach. Approximately six months later, the Coaching Skills Training process began. These components were overlapping and synergistic, but for ease of discussion, we talk about

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.”

--Mark Lievonon, President Aventis Pasteur Limited Canada

Tony D'Amore, the vice-president of product development Canada believes that executive coaching established the groundwork for the effectiveness of the Team Coaching and Coaching Skills Training. It gave him grounding in the coaching methodology and more confidence as a leader. A year after the start of the coaching process, each member of the Canadian Leadership Team was working with a coach.

"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!"

--Adria A. Trowhill, MCC

Team Coaching

The goal of the team coaching for the Canadian leadership team was to support the team in implementing their global core leadership competencies and values. It was assumed that higher performance and outstanding results would naturally flow from this change. Posi-TRAK started by creating a coaching process that enabled the Canadian 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. Adria and Jeanie 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 coaches 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 shared purpose:

"1,000 + Employees are 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 global business vision and was shared throughout the Canadian organization.

"Looking back, one of the greatest successes was in getting the Canadian leadership team aligned. Before the team coaching started, none of the team members had an understanding of the issues and problems faced by the other members. The team coaching gave us collective understanding of the organization and each others' issues, and created, support and buy-in."

--Pierre Meulien, Chief Executive Officer, Dublin Molecular Medicine Centre

Coaching Skills Training

AvP/CA chose Fran Fisher of the Academy for Coach Training (an accredited program with a readily applicable coaching skills training program) to

conduct the coaching skills training component. The goal was to provide the AvP/CA leaders with coaching skills that would increase their leadership effectiveness. The Academy for Coach Training and Posi-TRAK developed a customized training package, using AvP/CA leadership language, vision, values and goals. The training program was structured for three days: an initial two-day session, with a third day for follow up within three months. 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 one and a half year period, all department management teams were trained. Several leaders and team members approached the coaching skills training with scepticism. Their resistance showed in statements like "Coaching is the flavor of the month," "I don't have time for this," and "I have work to do!" Over time most of the resistance and scepticism began to dissolve. Fran Fisher and Adria Trowhill, the training facilitators, 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 AvP/CA values of Empowerment, Respect for People, Creativity, Sense of Urgency, Integrity, Courage, 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."

"Coaching creates an environment of unconditional acceptance where learning, growth and transformation naturally occurs."

--Fran Fisher, MCC

Looking at the Change

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

Changes in Leadership

The Canadian leadership team's site vision drove AvP/CA to deliver sustained superior performance and profound results. This vision came alive for many of the AvP/CA employees through the coaching initiatives of their leaders. Many leaders modelled 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.

"As a result of the coaching dialogues, I began to trust my vision and values. I increased my ability to enhance the work experience of others, and to contribute to their growth both professionally and personally."

--Brian Fielding, Vice President, Finance and Chief Financial Officer

Cultural Changes

The change in the culture can be reflected by the phrase: "Living the AvP/CA Values." Coaching principles were visibly integrated into many parts of the AvP/CA culture. The 2002 AvP/CA employee opinion survey showed an increase of almost ten percent of employees who said that AvP/CA 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 AvP/CA leadership team decided to take charge of their own destiny. They defined what the strategic contribution of the Canadian site could and should be to the worldwide AvP organization. This contribution was communicated to the CEO of AvP

for North America, who then acknowledged the strategic contribution to AvP/CA's employees. The strategic contribution, together with the site leadership vision, the values and the core competencies were adopted as guidelines for all AvP/CA business decisions.

"I am proud of the stand we have taken for this site, what we've done, the strategy we defined and the way we are working towards achieving it. We're not only talking about it, we're actually doing it."

--Mark Lievonen, President, Aventis Pasteur Limited Canada

(2) The IS Department realized an important software development and implementation project by their deadline, which had never happened before in the history of AvP/CA. The chief information officer attributed this success to the application of the coaching process with his team. 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.

"My management team has actively embraced the coaching model, and are now coaching one another on a routine basis. Their attitude has also carried over into our projects and we are finding rapid resolution to difficult issues, which is helping us to meet our timelines. The coaching has created a much more positive working environment, which results in employees feeling engaged and fulfilled. The value of bringing large, complex software projects in on time or even ahead of schedule also saves the company money."

--Roy French, Chief Information Officer, Aventis Pasteur Canada

(3) The product development 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 up to 75% in some 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 con-

tinued to reinforce the use of coaching principles in their day-to-day work.

“Being engaged in the process of coaching for about two years now, in this department we see a significant increase in our ability to meet our project objective. We also see a significant increase in employment satisfaction, morale and enjoyment at work.”

--Tony D'Amore, Vice President, Product Development, Aventis Pasteur Canada

Facing the Future

Three main challenges face this organization and its leaders:

(1) AvP/CA 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 behavior 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.

(2) From 2000 to present, half of the members of the leadership team have changed positions and are no longer part of the team. 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 Canadian leadership will be critical for success.

(3) At the start of the coaching initiative, the leadership team 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.

Fran Fisher is a Master Certified Coach (MCC). She is a partner with The Leadership Alliance, and founder and President of the Academy for Coach Training which provides customized coaching skills training, consulting and mentoring for teams and organizations. Fran currently serves on the advisory board of the Association for Coach Training Organizations (ACTO), and was an executive board member of the International Coach Federation (ICF). She can be contacted at fran@coachtraining.com.

Adria Trowhill, Master Certified Coach (MCC), is a partner with The Leadership Alliance and President of Posi-TRAK Coaching and Consulting Inc. Her background in organizational and clinical psychology combined with extensive experience addressing leadership, performance, organizational development and change issues, provides a comprehensive, in-depth platform for her coaching. Adria can be contacted at adria@positrakcoaching.com.

Jeanie Nishimura, B.A., M.Ed., Professional Certified Coach (PCC), is a team, executive, parent and personal coach with expertise in teaching, training and development. She collaborates with Adria Trowhill in the creative design and delivery of coaching programs that enable organizational leadership teams to further develop their leadership capacities, both individually and collectively. Jeanie is the former Vice President of the International Coach Federation: GTA Chapter, and she can be contacted at jnish@accglobal.net.

Margriet van de Steeg, MBA, is a coach and consultant focussed on the development of leaders and their organizations. She makes a difference for her clients by enabling them to be more effective in managing and developing the human talent in their organizations and improving their own capabilities. Margriet brings almost 15 years of international business and human resource experience coupled with a strong academic background (MBA) to her coaching and consulting practice. She can be contacted at HumanTalentCons@aol.com.