

NATIONAL POST

FP WORKING ■ WEDNESDAY, JULY 5, 2006

EXECUTIVE COACHING

Homework includes some self-reflection

Coach helps RBC bosses de-stress

By AL EMID

The coach Sheila Goldgrab, president of Toronto-based Goldgrab Leadership Coaching Inc.

Designation Master Certified Coach from Lexington Ky.-based International Coach Federation.

The client RBC Financial Group

Approach and philosophy Large companies increasingly turn to executive coaching to help ease the stress from competing priorities at the office and at home, says Ted Tomkowiak, RBC Financial Group's senior vicepresident in taxation.

"I think they're starting to see there's value here because we are putting a lot of pressure on people," he says.

In dealing with corporate pressures, Ms. Goldgrab encourages reflection and bolsters that with assigned readings and situational testing. "Reflection really is different than what they do all day. They're thinking about issues. They're not necessarily thinking about themselves thinking about the issues," she says.

Success story At RBC Financial Group's Toronto headquarters, Mr. Tomkowiak ushers a journalist into his office filled with the expected stacks of taxation materials and decorated with a collection of his son and daughter's drawings on the bulletin board.

Reflection and innovative thinking might have been what the doctor ordered after Gordon Nixon, president of RBC, publically announced in September, 2004, a realignment of the bank's organizational structure, resources and processes designed to accelerate implementation of the client-centred corporate vision that was made known internally in 2003.

"I want to make sure I'm aligning myself with where the organization is going," says Mr. Tomkowiak, who leads 45 tax specialists plus support staff in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.

His agenda includes crystallizing the tax department's role in the RBC structure, a significant task since the organization operates in more than 100 countries. To accomplish this he would need to influence executives in other areas, as well as tax department staff.

During their initial meeting, Mr. Tomkowiak and Ms. Goldgrab discussed meeting these and other challenges and together assigned a high priority to accomplishing them by improving communications with other areas and within the tax department.

In some cases, Mr. Tomkowiak's mission would be to persuade another department that a different approach would produce tax savings for the bank and for



Sheila Goldgrab

shareholders. During their meetings coach and client used strategies such as role-playing to prepare for a presentation to another department, in order to connect more closely with its agenda and the priorities of its leaders. Mr. Tomkowiak would suggest a specific approach and Ms. Goldgrab would propose alternatives.

On a more personal note, they discussed Mr. Tomkowiak's need to become more open with his staff so they would see his personal side, as well as his leadership side. "She encouraged me to be more open in the office (and said) 'the staff want to know you more as a person,'" he says, gesturing toward his children's pictures.

Role-playing helped Mr. Tomkowiak increase his patience with staff, an exercise that produced unforeseen benefits. "It's actually helped my golf game," he says. "I'm playing less golf but I'm playing it better because I'm more patient."

Return on investment The RBC tax unit has become better – and more visibly – aligned with the institution's new vision. Other areas are more receptive to its proposals than previously, a difference that produces tax savings.

The bottom line Ms. Goldgrab negotiates fees depending on demands of a specific contract.

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