

Griffith pursues its potential

Its decision to sign up for a comprehensive leadership coaching and team-building program is yielding major benefits for Griffith City Council.

When I arrived at Griffith City Council in January 2009, I identified that the then twice-weekly Manex team meetings focused primarily on operational demands rather than thinking and acting strategically. Self-interest was the main reason for the status quo, a situation which was evidenced by the practices that were employed across a range of Council functions from recruitment to budgeting processes. It was the case that people protected their own patch before considering any other area. The silo mentality was well and truly 'a way of being'. There was little dialogue between departments as to how we could assist each other or what pressures different sections were under.

There was a culture throughout the organisation that meant staff were stagnating, unwilling to accept change, disgruntled and conflicting with management and their fellow staff members. Management was not working together as a unified team and the rest of the organisation sensed this in our approach to managing the staff within our different areas. In short, the Manex team was seen not to be providing good leadership.

Manex acknowledged that something needed to be done, because this disjointedness and apparent lack of team-oriented goals was having an impact on the services we provide for the community in which we all live and work. We invited various training providers to 'sell' us their solutions for leadership coaching and team building, such as the Stephen Covey methodology and Human Synergetics. But it was Joseph Scott and Jay Hedley who blew me away when I attended a *Coaching Essentials* course in Sydney run by their organisation, The Coaching Room.

I was overwhelmed by their passion for assisting individuals and organisations to unleash their potential through coaching, their depth of corporate knowledge and their uniqueness. Jay and Joseph could never be described as 'average', off-the-shelf training providers! I persuaded the Council's General Manager and Manex team to give The Coaching Room's *Unleashing Leadership, Leadership Self Actualisation* program a trial last June.

For outsiders to come in and see, from a completely neutral and new perspective, how we were operating (and failing) was exactly what was required. It provided an opportunity for them to tell us how it was and provide feedback from an external perspective. It



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also provided us with a mechanism to start communicating with each other in an open and constructive environment. This assisted in breaking down some of the reserve and hesitancy in bringing out the real issues that had been stopping us from operating and leading in the best possible way.

We were taken through 'what is leadership – and what this means to us', covering such issues as the key variables and dimensions of leadership, taking an intentional stance and how leadership works. This process also enabled us to identify our personal powers and competencies, the relationship skills required for operating as a team and our best leadership states. Lastly we looked at how to lead a self-actualising organisation using collaborative leadership. We identified where we were and where we wanted to be.

We were given models to work with such as the *four quadrant perspective*, the *map/territory distinction*, the *axes of change* model and the simple but very effective *what, why, why* model, as well as others that we now use in our daily working lives to assist in our strategic decision-making processes to identify if they are valid and feasible.

In addition to the three-day *Unleashing Leadership* program, we undertook one-to-one coaching to identify and unleash any self-limiting beliefs and group coaching to embed what we had learned and how to work together as a team more effectively. The group coaching gave us a safe place to open up and express our concerns about each other and how individual behaviour is perceived by the group and could be perceived by the staff, and whether this 'serves' the values we have set for ourselves.

Completing an Enneagram (personality profile) has given each person an awareness of how each member of the Manex team is likely to react, providing another tool for communication and understanding from another's perspective. We learnt how we can both harness this energy while also supporting each other and not exploiting others' traits. I believe the one-to-one coaching is an essential element for embedding what was being learnt as a group, enabling us to understand how as individuals we were resisting or supporting the process of change and what we needed to change within ourselves for progress to occur. The one-to-one coaching helped us to get 'unstuck'.

Following on from *Unleashing Leadership* we completed a *Manager As Coach* program to enhance our communication skills and gain greater understanding of each other and also of the teams we manage.

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The results have been phenomenal. We have learnt a new language and are able to communicate more easily. The leadership training teased out of us what our long-term ambitions are as individuals, as a team and where we want to take Griffith City Council in future. There have been a number of outcomes, not least of which is a set of five values that we wish Manex and the whole Council to grow into and embody: passion, honesty, integrity, inspiration and love, and a vision to become an 'employer of choice', none of which we'd previously had.

So where are we now? As an organisation we have a set of values and a vision that we can share with staff, and through the mechanism of an Organisational Effectiveness Profile staff survey we are drawing up a series of actions to embrace the vision and turn it into a reality. Manex decided to embrace what we had learnt and offered the *Coaching Essentials* program to staff to help them join us on our journey of changing the culture within Griffith City Council. It has now been delivered to approximately 100 staff and we intend to continue with this program for the remaining staff.

It has had a huge impact in breaking down cross-functional barriers and increasing communication across the whole organisation. The staff, too, now understand about the map/territory distinction and the four quadrants and have a greater depth of understanding when interacting with other colleagues. There's a 'buzz' around the place that did not exist before and staff are pushing the new Team ExL (the post-coaching name for the Manex team) for change.

As a senior management team we are definitely more honest with each other, more supportive, with a will and intention of being strategic leaders.

Would I recommend other councils follow suit? Yes, I believe many organisations both private and public sector would benefit from leadership coaching. We all get into ruts, staff change and it is essential to be very clear about what the organisation wants to achieve for its customers and stakeholders and how we are going to lead our people to achieve their potential.

Would I do anything differently? At the start of our journey we had no conception that a few months down the line we would be contemplating a whole-of-organisation change. At this point in time we are feeling a little nervous about the huge task in front us and question if we have enough resources and resilience to complete the task! We believe that it will be a two to three-year project – but one that we can be proud of.

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