



Local Government Case Study

THE COACHING ROOM, AN EXECUTIVE COACHING AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING FIRM, HELPS GRIFFITH CITY OFFICIALS IMPROVE THEMSELVES AND THEIR DECISION-MAKING

“Certainly, as an organisation we weren’t necessarily in very good shape ... we thought we were but we had room to improve. After training by The Coaching Room, we went on a very long journey and we’re in a much better place now.”

KERRY SEFTON, Group Manager, People & Systems, Griffith City Council, City of Griffith, Australia

“The Coaching Room became involved - in training and coaching - like we had never experienced before and 100+ employees from across all levels and sections of Council experienced the unique techniques required to get staff thinking and changing the way that we worked together - the change has been astounding - we have taken the 1st steps on our journey of change”.

Peter Brooks, General Manager, Griffith City Council, City of Griffith, Australia

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INTRODUCTION

The legislative and governing Councils in Australia and the administrative teams that assist them are not unlike the boards of directors of major corporations or non-profits found around the world. They are a group of individuals, elected, appointed or hired, who each bring their knowledge and expertise to the table to govern and manage as one. The individual's and group's decisions affect others and have a direct correlation to group success and therefore, on service to customers, both internal and external. This, in turn, positively or negatively affects patrons and constituents and their views of the service provided, both perceived and real.

Among the optimal-performing in government and business, this means pragmatic and collaborative leadership by individual members in an organisation as well as the group as a whole.

THE CHALLENGE

In the case of the Griffith City administration in New South Wales, this wasn't the case. The senior management team, charged with putting City Council decisions into practice and ultimately managing the city employees who carry out policy on a day-to-day basis, could sense they were not meeting the high performance standards they had set for themselves. Administration and delivery of municipal services and the decisions guiding these efforts were limited by the senior management team's self-described inability to work well together. Silos, those vertical protectors of turf and self-interest that stifle action in the most promising of organisations, had been built by team members to the point that it was difficult to work optimally as, yes, a team. Talent and commitment certainly weren't lacking among team members, but they believed a more cohesive group with targeted and focused leadership was needed to move their organisation and the community forward.

"We thought we could do better," says Kerry Sefton, Group Manager, People & Systems for the Griffith City Council. Self-analysis, that harsh diagnostic which improves those who heed its call to action, helped Griffith's senior management team see that its ability to lead was adversely affected by a lack of strategic planning and decision-making. Those, in turn, were being hampered by a lack of understanding of senior management team members of their individual strengths and weaknesses and how to work effectively as a unit.

There was, in a nutshell, the need for Griffith senior management to be visionaries and leaders, not just managers. They also needed to break free of the restraints created by that ever-paralyzing mantra - "We've always done it that way."

"Most of the people here had come up through the ranks, so they were task managers, and now they're in senior management, where you have to think strategically; more about the big picture," Sefton says.

But, as with most households, businesses and governments in today's world economy, financial resources were limited. Griffith's senior management members knew they needed to take steps to improve their team, and in so doing, the community. They also realised they would need help from an outside advisor if they truly were to achieve formative change. However, funds were limited for the type of soul-searching and guidance they knew would be necessary.

THE SOLUTION

The City of Griffith turned to the expert coaches and change agents at The Coaching Room. Here, they found people who understand that for positive change and growth to occur, people and organisations must look at their present states of being to effectively drive that change. Coaches Joseph Scott and Jay Hedley helped individuals decipher individual and group dynamics, showing them how their behavior and ways of doing things were directly affecting administrative outcomes and maintaining the status quo.

The Coaching Room's facilitators deftly guided the City of Griffith's senior management team through the evaluation and training that set its members on a solid course toward enlightened and effective leadership.

With guidance from Scott and Hedley, the Griffith administrators took a hard look at who they were and where their organisation stood. This self-analysis provided a snapshot that would provide the impetus for change toward a new leadership and management model. Outlining the elements of good leadership and the characteristics of effective leaders, The Coaching Room guided the Griffith management team on a journey of self-discovery and self-determination.

"Where did we want to go; what kind of leaders did we want to be?" explains Sefton. "The coaching took us through that ... The Coaching Room helped us through sticking points so that we enabled ourselves to develop and grow. We are now approaching issues and decisions as a team, which we definitely weren't doing before."

Using The Coaching Room's "Translation Quadrants", "Axes of Change" and the "Matrix" methodologies - designed to break down the status quo quickly to bring change that is integrated, lasting and based on issues unique to an organisation - Griffith's senior management team's members for the first time developed an overarching vision for their organisation. A guiding set of values soon followed, leading to fundamental change in how the organisation's members perceive not only themselves, but also their group and its role in leading the organisation and community.

It may sound like an easy step-by-step process, but change is always hard, and the more it is needed, the more difficult it often can be. The Griffith project was no different. Resistance to change among individuals of the management team slowed the process, but here, The Coaching Room's proven methods of maintaining team members' focus on the impediments to improvement - keeping the status quo using long-held beliefs and methods - while encouraging transformation from within garnered the desired results.

"This is radical change for us," says Sefton. "We wouldn't have had these conversations prior to coaching from The Coaching Room."

THE RESULTS

What The Coaching Room facilitators helped Griffith team members uncover came as no surprise, although the magnitude of the challenges it presented did. “We weren’t being open and honest with each other. We weren’t supporting each other properly,” says Sefton. “We were working in silos and that’s not helpful for anybody - for ourselves, our team, our organisation and certainly not for the community. So, that’s where we were and that was quite a fundamental revelation ... we didn’t realise how negative the impact was in that way of working.”

Griffith senior management team members, Sefton happily admits, are now open with their opinions and constructive in their disagreements. They are committed to working collaboratively to solve problems and address issues, something that was not possible, she says, prior to The Coaching Room’s evaluation, coaching and advising. Those silos, so stifling to growth and change before, are gone.

“Each one of the (new set of) values really means something to us, and that is where we are taking in the whole organisation with the new approach. So, I would say that has been the most fundamental change and the foundation for the values is our vision and all the meaning that is behind it,” Sefton says. “It’s now not just one section of the City Council that says this or this. It’s going to have to be the whole Council. We are as one.”

Because of The Coaching Room’s guidance in identifying issues and finding solutions, the Griffith team now eagerly looks to the future for itself, its employees and the community it serves. Fresh approaches to collaborative problem solving have cast off the “always-done-it-that-way” mentality. Senior management is expounding the benefits of The Coaching Room’s coaching, conducting its own in-house training sessions based on what administrative team members have learned. These results, too, have been impressive.

“We’ve never had that many compliments of staff saying, “That was wonderful,” Sefton, says. “It is helping the staff individually, at home, with their friends and at work.”

ABOUT THE CITY OF GRIFFITH AND ITS GOVERNMENT

Griffith, a major regional center of about 25,000 people, is the Seat of the City of Griffith local government area. The city is five to six hours drive from the metropolitan hubs of Sydney and Melbourne. Roughly 400 employees come under the management umbrella of the City Council of Griffith.

TESTIMONIALS



Peter Brooks

General Manager, Griffith City Council

For all Local Councils in NSW (and Councils in other States) there is a strong requirement (both legislative and moral) to develop long term community strategic plans - these are labelled different strategies in different States - the real issue is whether the right attitude & culture exists in Council - both staff and Councillors to ensure that genuine community consultation and then excellent service delivery happens. To ensure that these 2 occur we at Griffith City Council wanted to be an employer of choice so we had the right staff with the right culture and attitude to deliver genuinely; a Community Strategic Plan that reflects community requirements and to deliver services in a customer focused manner.

The Coaching Room became involved in training and coaching like we had never experienced before and 100+ employees from across all levels and sections of Council experienced the unique techniques required to get staff thinking and changing the way that we worked together - the change has been astounding - we have taken the 1st steps on our journey of change.



Kerry Sefton

Group Manager, People & Systems (HR), Griffith City Council

When I arrived at GCC in January 2009 I identified that the (then) Manex Team mainly discussed operational matters with the strategic planning only evidenced at the annual budget setting time. There was little dialogue between the functions as to how we could assist each other or what pressures different sections were under. The silo mentality was well and truly ‘a way of being’, which wasn’t helpful to either the individual areas or to GCC in general. I found the GCC vision and set of values in the GCC management plan, these had to be searched for as no one could tell me what they were.

I was also aware that staff were treated inequitably, with little consultation within the Manex team or consideration of the impact of how individual employees were treated and how this would be perceived within the organisation. As though some rules applied to some sections but not others. The impact this has on my team in listening to valid grievances has been disheartening to say the least. There was and still is a perception that ‘if your face fits’ you’re OK and will be looked after. This is not a healthy way of being for an organisation that wants to provide the best possible services it can to the community.

The causes of this were:

1. The term ‘ this is the way we do things here’ prevailed, large numbers of employees with very long service; small town mentality, Council is a major employer in this city, many staff are related to each other by birth and marriage and therefore do not want to rock the boat as this could affect life outside work.
2. A lack of strong management to challenge the status quo, staff being recruited into positions without due diligence checks that they are competent to do the job, therefore large on-going catch up training programs required.
3. Poor/weak Leadership, decisions made on a Friday not upheld on a Monday, leading to a lack of trust and direction. Inconsistencies even between the senior management staff. This also reinforced the lack of trust between the Group Managers.... squeaky wheel, lack of co-operation.
4. No defined vision for the Council, therefore what is our purpose, what are measurable outcomes? Difficult to produce departmental strategic plans as there wasn’t anything to align them to.

What was made available to us by The Coaching Room was a process and a language that we could learn in order to communicate with each other and start to break down the barriers. The process covered a definition of leadership, what it is and is not, an identification that most of us are managers and not leaders and an awareness of what it would take to coach us to be leaders - ie. What sort of leader did we want to become? An opportunity for self-growth through group and one to one coaching. An opportunity to discover various models of behaviour and decision making to assist with strategic thinking.

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 GCC in future. Through the Leadership training we have developed a set of values which we are working on embodying and a vision to become 'An Employer of Choice', neither of which we had before The Coaching Room came on board.

We also have available to us a set of business models to run our strategic decisions through to identify if they are valid and feasible, seen from the position of four different quadrants. The Group Coaching has given 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 does this 'serve' the values we have set for ourselves. The Enneagram (personality profile) has given us an awareness of how each member is likely to react and therefore another tool for communication and understanding from another's perspective. How we can both harness this energy but also support each other and not exploit traits. I believe the one-to-one coaching is an essential element for embedding what was being learnt as a group, how as individuals were we 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'.

Where are we now? As an organisation we have a set of values and a vision that we can share with staff, through the mechanism of the staff survey we can draw up a series of actions to embrace the vision and turn it into a reality. The Coaching Essentials Program which has been delivered to almost 100 staff has had a huge impact and is the beginning of breaking down the silo mentality and communicating across functions and departments. Through this program staff learnt about the Map/Territory Distinction and the Four Quadrants and now 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 for change.

As a group we are definitely more honest with each other, more supportive, wanting to be more strategic.

I myself, I feel happy that with The Coaching Room, I have been able to introduce the opportunity of change into GCC, but it is going to take all of us to maintain the momentum, make change happen and turn the vision into reality.

The results have been superb, fantastic, and revolutionary... It's been a big year.

I have become more confident in accepting myself as I am, learnt aspects of what has been holding me back and which behaviours have not been serving me well, but also that I have value, the one to one coaching has opened up a range of opportunities for me. I have really accepted the value of 'showing up' and being totally open with people and feel liberated...



Max Turner

Group Manager - Business, Cultural & Financial Services, Griffith City Council

Pre our coaching and training, the old management executive team (Manex) were stuck in a rut so to speak in terms of thinking and acting strategically. We were focussing more on operational issues and ensuring that our own “turf” was protected. All of this produced an air of disengagement and distrust of each other in certain cases.

We were not working together as a unified team and the rest of the organisation sensed this in our approach to managing and leading the staff within our different areas. We were not effectively dealing with the key issues facing us. Causing this was:

1. A lack of trust in each other to deal with the harder issues and leaving it up to each other to confront with those issues.
2. Self-interest in regards to protecting our own areas of operations.
3. A lack of openness and honesty in communicating with each other on some of the key issues facing the organisation and how they would impact on us, possibly individually.

For The Coaching Room to come in and see how we were operating (and failing) from a completely neutral and new perspective, was exactly what was required. The Coaching Room provided an opportunity to tell us how it was and get feedback from a totally external perspective. It also provided us with a mechanism to start communicating to each other in an open and constructive environment, ie a facilitative approach which is assisting 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 way possible.

The results are greater awareness of each other’s strengths and weaknesses. A greater understanding of what each of our personality types are through the tools, principles and models learnt in the Coaching Essentials program. The Coaching has been invaluable on both a group and one-on-one session basis - ie. Working as a group has given us a shared experience in working together to develop and define what the organisations core values are and also a greater ability and understanding of what it means to work together towards a common and shared set of goals.

The one-on-one sessions have been most valuable to me on a personal development side of things and has helped me in prioritising workloads, communicating with people better and facing up to and resolving issues that have been previously difficult to deal with as effectively and as timely as I felt were necessary or required. I feel more confident and self assured in my ability to be an effective leader for the organisation as I move forward with the coaching and training and that I have the ability to keep developing and improving for myself going forward.

It has been invaluable to me and I look forward to each session coming up. I had not thought that the coaching would have had the impact it has had on me and feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to have this level of coaching both from a Team ExL perspective and personally. The Coaching Room and in particular Joseph and Jay have provided the expertise, challenges and honest evaluation that we needed to improve both as a team and as individuals and which is an ongoing process.



Alison Balind

Manager, Communications & Community Development, Griffith City Council

Prior to undertaking the sessions with the Coaching Room, Griffith City Council's management executive, while functional, was not a particularly cohesive unit. The general feeling of the group was to protect each department's own interests rather than taking a step back and dealing with issues from a strategic level. As a result, some decisions were not made in a holistic fashion and this led to an air of distrust that was extremely counter-productive. While there were some 'alliances' within the group, the silo-mentality persisted. It was a particularly unhealthy environment that filtered through the whole organisation.

Upon reflection, self-interest was the main cause that maintained the status quo. This can be 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. While it may not be the view of others, that is very much my view and experience.

Engaging The Coaching Room was like turning on a light when you are standing naked in front of a mirror - the flaws were on show for us all to see and while the image in front of us was familiar, it was not really the prettiest picture we had seen. By firstly acknowledging as a group that there was something going wrong, the initial steps towards effecting change were made. But it is still fairly early and we have some way to go before the change I believe we are hoping for will be evidenced throughout the whole organisation.

Working in-group sessions and with one-on-one coaching, the opportunity to identify what, specifically, are the barriers to change were made easier to identify. Gaining a better understanding of how people's perceptions are developed and learning - or more importantly remembering - what our areas of responsibility are, has been crucial.

While it is a constant process to remember the information and models presented throughout all of the sessions, it becomes easier with practice - like everything. The Manager-as-Coach training program helped to cement some of the earlier learnings for me because revisiting them throughout that process provided a little more clarity. Right now, I feel that I am more balanced within myself - while I still struggle with the time management stuff, that's my issue - but I find there is less fluctuation in my moods and I am much more comfortable within myself as a leader.

It was an outstanding opportunity and I am grateful to Joseph and Jay (and Kerry) for their efforts with Team ExL but more importantly with me. They have opened the door to a better understanding of why I have done many things in the past and I find I am challenging myself daily to be a better me - or more specifically the real me.



Dallas Bibby

Group Manager Operations, Griffith City Council

Manex (as it was then termed) had realised that there was a culture throughout the whole organisation where staff were stagnant, unwilling to accept change, disgruntled, conflicting with management and their fellow staff members, with many thinking they lacked direction.

This was seen as a reflection on Manex as not providing good Leadership. Manex was seeing itself as disjointed and not having team orientated goals with departmental conflicts, mostly due to competition for budget. This selfish, silo mentality meant that we often forgot the organisational goals that we should have been pursuing.

Most of the time, self centredly, we were protecting our departments from resource constraints, as there was not enough to go around. My main issue was that we were always building new things and accepting new developments, without due consideration to the ongoing maintenance which would result in more pressure on staff as the numbers in the Operations were not increasing. Also we realised we needed to engage the rest of the staff with change management

By introducing The Coaching Room it bared our souls and exposed the individual baggage that was not serving the Manex team and us well. Some of my baggage was long standing, building up from many trials and tribulations and experiences in the past. We were not genuinely operating as a team and therefore getting the best results for the organisation and the staff.

Group sessions and especially the sharing circles made us all open up to give a better understanding to the other team members of how we feel and showed the reasons why we acted in our own particular way. The models have given me a better understanding of the inner me, some bad, some good, but this now is allowing me to make improved judgments. The 1:1 coaching resolved that I should accept what is and move on rather than linger in the past and worry about lost opportunity.

I believe with setting our 5 Values, that the team is embracing them, with myself although probably previously utilising Honesty, Love and Passion, I am now working with increased Integrity and hopefully showing greater Inspiration. The team now has evolved into Team ExL with all showing love to each other and being considerate of the constraints of other members. The organisation is transforming with staff mostly more comfortable to deal with as they can see that Team ExL is genuinely listening to them.

There is still ground to cover yet and we need to refresh each other regularly.

The process has certainly made me more comfortable with what I am and has allowed me to develop into an improved contributing team member of Team ExL. The process has been very good and my thanks are extended to Jay and Joe for their achievement in bringing Team ExL team members together as a genuine team and introducing change management to GCC.

ABOUT THE COACHING ROOM

The Coaching Room specialises in coaching for executives, leaders, managers and professionals in Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Brisbane, and Canberra and across greater Australia. It strives to transform individuals and organisations through innovative coaching and training services that lead people to the realisation of a new way of being, that enables new and highly effective ways of doing.

JAY HEDLEY - MANAGING PARTNER



Experience, qualifications and associations

- Associate Certified Meta-Coach (ACMC) with the Meta Coach Foundation (MCF)
- Member of the Meta Coach Foundation (MCF)
- Practitioner of Neuro Semantics (NS) & Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) & Master Practitioner of NS and NLP
- DISC Accredited Practitioner & Extended DISC Accredited Practitioner
- SDi (Spiral Dynamics) Accredited Practitioner
- COI Group (OEP & TEP) Employee Survey Platinum Certified Consultant

Overview

Jay heads up The Coaching Room together with Joseph Scott. Jay began his formal coaching career in 2001, when he was asked to head up the Coaching and Sales Training division within the Consumer Group of AAPT. In 2003 Jay formally founded The Coaching Room in Sydney - then a Life Coaching Company - with some 20 coaches.

Now an Executive coaching and Leadership development company, in 2008, Jay expanded The Coaching Room, opening additional offices in Brisbane and Melbourne. In 2009, The Coaching Room then merged with Apex Leadership International, an Executive coaching and coaching training company in Hobart.

Jay is ruthlessly compassionate about Executive and organisational change. Having a corporate executive background himself, Jay's professional mission is to help Executives and like professionals to unleash their authentic selves in service of their people and their organisation.

Jay's Clients (Coaching & Training)

Over the past 20 years Jay has worked with many of Australia's leading organisations and consulting firms (both large and small) such as Canberra Institute of Technology, Griffith City Council, Tasmanian Water Corporation, Tas Racing, Roche Diagnostics, Raine & Horne Real Estate, Barton Real Estate, The Tote Tasmania, Relationships Australia, AAPT, Newcastle Airport Corporation, Social Enterprise Consulting (SEC), The Donington Group, Management Consultants International (MCI), and many other major businesses and corporations.

JOSEPH SCOTT - MANAGING PARTNER



Experience, qualifications and associations

- Meta-Coach Trainer (ISNS)
- Associate Certified Meta-Coach (ACMC) with the Meta Coach Foundation (MCF)
- Trainer of Neuro-Semantics (ISNS)
- Trainer of Neuro Linguistic Programming (ISNS)
- Master of Neuro Linguistic Programming (JSA, ANLP)

Overview

Joseph Scott is an internationally experienced coach and trainer, delivering corporate and public coaching's and trainings throughout Australia and Asia. Joseph provides world-class coaching training for some of Australia's largest corporations and government institutions. He has dedicated the past 11 years to developing himself and his service offerings to be able to deliver significant coach development, transformation and performance at the top of many of today's leading businesses.

Joseph is compassionately passionate about people and the difference people can make in the world as coaches, once trained in this world-class coach training system. Joseph's main focus is on training employed executives to become coaches (ICMC- Internal Certified Meta-Coach), which enables executives to coach professionally within their own organisation.

As a coach, Joseph is able to provide robust, tangible and evidence based change results at the individual, group or organisational level for any individual or business ready to step up to their next level. This is often in a high stress environment.

Joseph's Clients (Coaching & Training)

Over the past 11 years Joseph has worked with SMEs (with just 5 members), through to coaching a global director responsible for over 700,000 staff. Clients include Glaxo Smith Kline, Reed, Diabetes Australia, British Airways, The Tote (TAS), Tas Racing (TAS), Milward Brown Optima (US), Standard Chartered, Tourism Australia (TAS), CentreLink (TAS), Masterfoods (Mars), Sara Lee, Local Authority of Greater London, AXA Sunlife, British Telecom, Accenture.