

Learning on the Run 28: Data-based Career Decision

How to help someone clarify their commitment to the work they are doing?

The Request. A Director of a Conservation Division from a state Department of Natural Resources requested a coach for her Senior Manager who was leading the Energy Conservation program. She wanted the manager to think more broadly about conservation policy in general and about a future vision for energy conservation, specifically.

Larger Context. The Director was frustrated with the Manager during senior management team meetings. The Manager wouldn't provide much input and his decisions were rather slow. He had been with the department as a highly capable analyst and was recently promoted. The Director had expectations that the Manager would take more risks with his decisions, would be more articulate and clear with his input to division strategy and would create a future vision for the energy program. In his new position, the Manager was beginning to question his commitment: "Do I want to get up to speed in this program area, and embrace this role and still be true to myself especially given the sophisticated, politically charged and economically competitive environment I find myself in?"

Consulting Intervention. After several coaching sessions, the Manager reported that he had begun to be even more prepared for the senior management meetings and had inserted himself in those discussions genuinely and with ease. In one case, his ideas were developed into an action plan by the team. He also reported that when asked by the Director for his 30-year vision, his response was that the current status was good. The Manager was about to begin a two-week vacation with 1 or 2 days back in the office. A suggestion was made to the Manager to allow some time to go by without much conscious thought about his program to see if any ideas surfaced more spontaneously about any preferred future he might have for his program. This was an experimental test: Does he have any freely-associated ideas about vision? What if anything might come to mind?

Last line: One way to help someone gain insight into what they are truly wanting is to ask them not to focus on their issue directly, but to see if any thoughts freely come to mind more spontaneously during a natural break.