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The Coaching Lab and Planning Session

A. Overview.

By the end of a Coaching Lab session, those attending seek to strike clarity around what issues will be pursued, how those issues will be tackled in a general sense, and what resources will be applied. Any constraints will be aired so that everyone knows the boundaries within which the initiative will progress. Measurements that will be engaged will be identified so that all players understand how success will be measured.

A Coaching Lab achieves the following outcomes:

- ? Allows specific information to be “extracted” from the data set that will improve understanding of the conditions that exist in the organization.
- ? Begins or continues a process whereby non-supervisory employees' empowerment is strengthened.
- ? Provides a working environment within which top management and front-line employees join in the collaborative effort to find and begin to fix problems that exist in the organization in earnest partnership.
- ? Allows those who will be involved directly in problem solving to judge the commitment and enthusiasm of the change agent team (depth and breadth).

The Coaching Lab is an environment within which the computer and *CapacityWare*TM, the client, and core volunteer members of potential solution-oriented teams come together to identify, prioritize, and begin planning to solve organizational problems at a root level that has a bearing on capacity.

Critical elements include open data, open dialog, and open options:

- ? **Open Data.** With the exception of protecting the anonymity of survey respondents, any data that bears directly on the ability to identify problems at a “root” level and develop viable solutions must be open to all participants. It is imperative that non-supervisory team volunteers be present and that all data be available to them in this process – even data and information beyond the scope of the survey, but connected to potential issues and solutions.
- ? **Open Dialog.** If members of an organization are uncomfortable having open dialog about sensitive topics in a mixed group of senior management and non-supervisory employees, this in itself is symptomatic of the low-capacity culture that needs to be changed. Senior managers must take the lead in creating an atmosphere within which non-supervisory participants will feel comfortable speaking openly. It will be the facilitator's job to assure that everyone eventually participates in dialog that will identify problems, help everyone

understand the problems from viable points-of-view, and engage in advancing potential remedies. It is during open dialog that the most critical commitments will occur: non-supervisory team members will be sufficiently convinced that senior managers will follow-through on prioritized issues to a conclusion, and that senior members will entrust non-supervisory team members to advance “big picture” solutions.

- ? **Open Options.** As soon as critical issues are identified nearly everyone in a group will have a “favorite” solution. Many capacity development efforts are lost because the guiding coalition leaped too quickly to a “favorite” solution rather than trying to develop a comprehensive set of potential solutions that address the full range of difficulties. There may be ten or twelve potentially viable solutions in a set. In this case, all viable solutions must be prioritized according to agreed upon criteria (cost of implementation will likely be one of those criteria). All viable and selected options that emerge from this process may be implemented simultaneously, or may be implemented based on the degree of prevailing urgency. Rushing too quickly to “solve” a symptom rather than an underlying “root” problem may leave the organization in worse shape.

The Coaching Lab environment must allow those who will ultimately solve organizational problems at a cultural “root” to feel a sense of legitimate empowerment from those in the organization who will “charter” the initiative to bring about those solutions. The empowerment will be derived from a judgement of sincerity and commitment between the client (and senior staff members present) and core volunteer team members (largely, but not exclusively, non-supervisory employees).

The actual Lab is normally conducted in a four to eight hour block – off-site. Advanced reading materials are provided so that participants are prepared for the session and arrive better able to contribute. During the session four major “parts” are pursued:

- Exploring the Data (beyond a fundamental familiarity developed in advance by each participant),
- Overview Planning,
- Timeline and Event Structure Decisions, and
- Measurement Selection.

B. Roles.

A successful Coaching Lab will engage the following participant roles:

1. The Consulting Team. A consulting team facilitates the Coaching Lab by providing the following services:

- ? Creates and distributes advanced reading materials.

- ? Creates and distributes handout materials.
- ? Group dialog facilitation – controls the agenda.
- ? Group recording – butcher paper.
- ? Manages *CapacityWare*TM.
- ? Manages *CapacityWare*TM reports and documentation before and after the Coaching Lab.

2. The Client (Senior Leader). The client attends the event and fully participates in the dialog without driving either the agenda or the dialog (it is normally best to hold comments back initially, thereby letting others begin the dialog). The client provides the following:

- ? Opening remarks.
- ? Validation of the selected priorities.
- ? Validation of the timeline.
- ? Validation of the measurement tools.
- ? Closing remarks.

3. The Client Direct Reports. In most cases it is difficult for direct reports to balance the need for “business as usual” and the need to develop capacity (especially when the capacity being developed is deeper in the organization than management or supervisory ranks). Direct report participation includes the following critical elements:

- ? Support for the time and other resources it will take to complete the process.
- ? Transformation of Coaching Lab outcomes to management goals and objectives.
- ? Encouragement of ideas that push the limits (and sometimes go beyond the limits) of the current culture.
- ? Advocacy for courses of action that emerge in the planning process.

4. Team Volunteers. Non-supervisory participants provide the front-line perspective to problem identification and resolution. They are invited to the Coaching Lab because they have a special perspective that cannot be provided by any other participant. They also have the unique task of being front-line advocates for change and reporting their honest perspectives on the process to coworkers. Their responsibilities also include:

- ? Attending meetings.
- ? Engaging in honest and open dialog about the implications of adopting proposed courses of action.
- ? Sharing their experience with coworkers and being a conduit for information from the front-line as it impacts team decisions.

5. Special Participants. Special participants’ range from union representation to outside consulting resources that will be impacted by potential courses of action developed during the Coaching Lab. Although special participants may not be involved

directly in the dialog about “content” issues, they are encouraged to lend their expertise on topics that will enhance the chances of success.

C. What to Expect.

A trained consulting team will conduct the Coaching Lab to assure consistency. It is the responsibility of this team to keep the Lab on track and respond to participant’s needs as they arise.

1. Advanced Preparation. Approximately one week prior to the Lab participants will be provided with advanced reading material. This may consist of simple documentation distributed during data feedback sessions, or it may consist of special materials that help participants better understand the trends that emerged from the data collection effort. Typically, managers will have prior access to comprehensive data feedback reports, whereas non-supervisory participants may not – so extra attention must be paid to the distribution of appropriate materials to non-supervisory participants.

2. An Orientation. The consulting team will provide each participant with a complete set of appropriate handouts at the beginning of the Lab. When appropriate, brief introductions and other opening remarks will also be a part of the orientation. In addition, participants will undergo a brief orientation on how to “read” the various forms of graphics. When the Lab is an immediate follow-on to data feedback into the organization, the Executive Summary may also be reviewed.

3. Review of the Comprehensive Results Report. Participants will be given and review the “Comprehensive Results Report.” This sheet will contain a summary of all information extracted from the data collection effort. The consulting team will focus participant attention on those items of special interest.

4. Prioritization and Selection of Priority Issue(s) to Resolve. Rarely do organizations have the resources to pursue a resolution of all top issues. It therefore becomes important at the outset to prioritize an appropriate number of issues that CAN be pursued by the organization AND be adequately resourced to achieve the desired outcome(s). Normally, from three to seven selected priority issues ought to be on the annual list of priorities (it is reasonable for these priority issues to be selected and validated by the client during the Coaching Lab). These selected priority issues translate easily into senior management goals for which accountability can be fixed. Each of the issues will have a team assigned of from five to eleven team members. The number of team members will be determined by a combination of the available pool of volunteers, the routine work requirements of the organization, and the breadth of likely problem implementation.

5. Team Formation. It is likely that those participants who will actually serve on Teams to further identify and help solve problems will not all attend the Coaching Lab.

Some people have volunteered already (this is normally achieved during the Data Fair or Data Break environment). Once the specific priority items have been selected, however, it will likely stir the interest of others who have not yet volunteered. Those attending the Coaching Lab and who are serving in a non-supervisory capacity ought to be given critical early-on roles to help form the team and establish momentum. Managers and supervisors ought to be adjunct team members primarily used to assist the team from an arms length rather than participate in a traditional way. When priority issues have been identified, the consulting team will determine who has an interest in serving on which issue group. This is NOT a final selection, but rather an initiative that will help establish momentum (it MAY turn out to be the final selection, however).

6. Plan for Priority Issue Resolution. The immediate plan for the resolution of selected priority issues can be forged during the Coaching Lab. The plan will consist of three major model elements (OMR): the Outcomes to be ultimately achieved, the Methods that will be engaged to achieve those outcomes, and the Resources the organization will commit to ensure success. Facilitators learn this simple planning model at Team Facilitation sessions conducted quarterly throughout the year. During the Coaching Lab, once priority issues have been selected, small groups of two to five participants can be engaged in planning for each issue using this model. The result of breakout sessions can then be briefed back to the entire group with immediate feedback provided by senior leadership on-the-spot so that adjustments can be made quickly.

7. Timeline Creation. Using roll paper, each issue group will post potential milestone events (or conditions) that cover the next 12 to 18 months to assure success. All issue group milestones will be posted to the same piece of roll paper so that participants can easily see the relationship between issues and take advantage of potential synergy at simultaneous events as they occur. Examples of potential milestone events for inclusion on the timeline are (note that some events will be recurring):

- ? Team Meeting.
- ? Progress Report to Senior Management.
- ? Progress Report to Organization Members.
- ? Finalize Process Review.
- ? Make Recommendations to Final Approval Authority.
- ? Adoption of Recommended Policy and/or Procedural Change.
- ? Measure Interim Results.
- ? Measure Final Results.
- ? Celebrate Success.
- ? Publish Learnings – Best Practices.

8. Event Planning. In the previous step, events were identified in broad terms and sequenced on a general schedule – during the "Event Planning" step, the minimum essential details required to conduct a successful event are put in place. Additional information concerning specific events may be required subsequent to the Coaching Lab. Minimum information may include:

- ? Name of the Event.
- ? Theme or Description of the Event.
- ? Date and Times the Event will Occur.
- ? Location.
- ? Number Expected to Attend (names if available).
- ? Name of the Team Facilitator (if identified).
- ? Potential Costs Associated with the Event.
- ? Guidance from the Approving Authority.

9. Measurement Selection. Several options are available for measuring progress. Any or all of them can be used effectively to help determine if the strategy adopted at the Coaching Lab is achieving the desired results. The objective of measurement is to protect the organization's resources from being misused or misapplied. If the current strategy isn't achieving desired results, adjustments must be made to the strategy in some way that will increase the return-on-investment (ROI) being made to enhance the organization's capacity. There are six major measurements that can be applied:

- ? RGB Capacity Assessment.
- ? Periodic Metrics.
- ? Individual Performance Self-Assessment.
- ? Event Evaluations.
- ? Approach Index.
- ? Annual Quality of WorkLife Index.

10. Recap and Closure. At the conclusion of the Coaching Lab, the consulting team will help participants recap the event. Transcriptions of event recordings will be made and delivered back to the participants as a permanent record of what transpired.

D. What NOT to Expect.

The initial Coaching Lab is the last step in the Diagnostic process, yet it is the first and a continuous element in the system of organizational capacity development. There will be many opportunities for Coaching Labs following the initial Lab as the effectiveness of follow-on event activities are periodically measured and necessary adjustments are made. Participants must not expect that problems will be solved during this session, rather it is the event during which agreements are made that will lead to a renewed capacity.