

[Home](#)

Dear Reader,

We all have heard and learned how to address crisis as an opportunity for change and for deep learning. When things run smoothly, only the ever-uneasy spirits seek innovation, a disruption of what is, and change. But when we are in midst of a crisis, we all have no choice but to change. I am sharing with you today the story of an unwanted, unplanned team crisis event, that I happened to experience during a training session in Mexico, as part of the Team Coaching Certification program.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

"There are some days that go by without any problems to tackle. But then I wake up."

Uncle Wilbur



Issue 130

 Send by email

 Share on Facebook

 Tweet it

June 2011

Team Crisis Event

by Isabel Rimanoczy

I was working as a Team Coaching Trainer with a group in Mexico. In order to learn about the role, interventions and mindset of a professional team coach, the students are grouped in small project teams, where they experience the real-time team dynamics while working together on a project, and

they also experience the Team Coach in action. In this particular module I had introduced a session where team members would take turns playing the role of the team coach, to practice and at the same to add value to the teamwork. Debriefing a session, asking what worked well and what could be done differently, was one of the processes that I recommended.

At the lunch break, one team member approached me to share her frustration, indicating that things were not going very well. The "practicing" team coach had decided to give her "straight" feedback, in a way that for her was aggressive, not timely, and was not even asked for. In addition, one other team member contributed to the feedback with her own opinion about her colleague's attitude. The woman talking to me had felt under attack, and asked the "feedback giver" for concrete examples of what she had done that upset her peers. She knew that when providing feedback it is important to state what the other person did, what we felt, and how it could be handled differently. However her peers didn't provide that information she was requesting, and the conversation retained a hostile and blaming tone, escalating the tension.

I asked her how I could help, and she didn't know. I thought it could be timely to have a fishbowl conversation with her, talking about the problem with the rest of the participants listening in, or to introduce a Feedback process. She didn't want to be in a fishbowl conversation with me, fearing that it would make things worse, and opted for the feedback process, avoiding a direct reference to the conflict. So after the lunch break, I introduced a few more tools that could come in handy for team coaches, and the feedback process was just one among three other tools I introduced.

The session went on but after the next break that team didn't show up at the agreed time. When I checked, they indicated they were in midst of a "situation" and needed more time to conclude. I respected the decision and waited, intrigued by how they were handling their conflict. As they came out of their meeting room, I noticed that the woman that had previously approached me was tense, and her "blaming" colleague had red, teary eyes. I had the choice whether to ask them individually how they were doing, or assume they would ask for help if they needed it from me. I decided on the latter, although I also rapidly redesigned the next session.

As the break was over, I noticed people seemed to be "dragging their feet" a bit so I introduced a short exercise that can be used with teams when the energy is low. The instruction is brief: everyone finds one other person to share some important event of their life, but without using understandable words. Gestures and signs accompany the words of a non-existent language, sort of "Wuu gnac po thaaaa AMMM ohpu dagag", etc. The exchange is short, and then the other person does the same, and then all change partners.

And then I couldn't believe what I started witnessing. The sign language and the noises that came up all over the room, in these different couples yelling and laughing, were related to people fighting, and people crying. Without obviously getting any alignment, members of the team in crisis but also members of the other groups, began to act dramatically like violent aggressors, and like hurt victims, imitating tears and sadness, all over the room! So much for unspoken events...

I decided not to debrief what happened, and we moved on to the next session. This one I had also changed from the original design. Instead of what I had planned, I indicated that we would engage in a new process, that was valuable for team coaches. The process consisted of an individual Stop Reflect on the question

"What am I learning about the attitudes necessary for a Team Coach?"

Then, I had prepared on a table a number of images², and they had to select one or two pictures that best answered their question. We sat in a circle and shared lessons and reflections about the mindset and attitude of a Team Coach, using the selected pictures as a trigger for reflection and insights. After that session, I asked them to go back into their project teams, and do an individual Stop Reflect with the following question: What are my personal learning goals? What would I like to change about myself or develop in my training to become a team coach?

Having identified the one or two learning goals, each team member was invited to ask their team mates for support, indicating how he/she would like to be helped. This was a very important nuance, since some like to be gently reminded "just in time", others prefer a private comment during the break, and others like to be yelled at, at their own request!³


So the groups went back and worked through this new part of the session, and we gathered back an hour later. I was amazed again by what I encountered. The conflictive team came back laughing, the women were hugging each other, the men were putting their arms around one or the other, in mutual appreciation and affection. Several team members had tears in their eyes, but not of sadness, of deep connection. In the debrief session, they didn't share details, but several team members indicated this had been the most powerful afternoon. They had been able to dive into their own learning challenges, share them with their team, and, more importantly, as each other for support and help. That had created an atmosphere of exposure, humility and trust, that transformed their relationship as a group. It bonded them in a new, powerful way. It raised respect and appreciation, compassion and awakened their desire to help each other in this difficult journey of learning that we all go through, our lifelong journey. This group of people had weathered a storm on a precarious raft, and made it together to the shore. They were no longer the same.




¹ Special thanks to Goddess Diana who taught me this exercise at Yoga Laugh in Hollywood, Florida.

² I used a set of printed images, produced by the MiL Institute in Sweden. It consists of 80 images of people, landscapes, objects, animals, that work as stimuli to generate insight, find an answer in the images instead of in words.

³ Indeed, one participant asked his team mates to yell at him when he was taking over the group and interrupting. When the team mates refused to do so, suggesting a more soft and appreciative reminder, he insisted vehemently: No, guys, he said. THAT is HOW I learn best!! Yell at me!! Talk to me in strong words, like "You IDIOT STOP!!" They all laughed and accepted his request.

 Send by email

 Share on Facebook

 Tweet it



LIM News is published by LIM LLC
Editor: Isabel Rimanoczy
Editing Support: Tony Pearson
Ph:
E-mail: newsletter@LIMglobal.net
<http://www.LIMglobal.net>

ARL - Action Reflection Learning™ and Earning While Learning™ are registered trademarks, owned by LIM LLC.
Copyright © 2011 LIM LLC. All rights reserved.