



Extract from “*Shooting the Lights Out*”

Changing Direction

“Good morning, Tony, how are things going on your first day in the saddle?”

“Morning, Paulo. Fine, thank you,” I replied, not really understanding why it hadn’t sounded as convincing as I had intended.

“Fine, thank you”, Paulo mimicked. “You don’t sound so sure. What’s up?”

Paulo was the National Sales Manager, my new boss, a wonderful person I just seemed to have got on with from the moment we had met on my first day in the office when he had almost burst into my area in an almost identical manner. The company had a policy as part of its induction programme in terms of which a senior manager was allocated to a new staff member for the first three months to ensure that they settled and learnt how things were done in the company. During that time I had built a huge amount of admiration for Paulo and had found him easy to talk to, even if he seemed to be reigning me in all the time – a process he had euphemistically and jokingly referred to as ‘channelling your discretionary energy’! After the first three months he had stayed in touch on a more infrequent basis but I guess, of everyone at BCM Healthcare Suppliers, he was probably the person who knew me the best – and, as it worked out, whom I came to trust the most.

“Actually, Paulo, I am not sure why that came out like that. Things are really fine. I am in a great place at the moment. I had my first meeting with my team this morning and it went well, I thought, even if it didn’t go quite as I planned.”

“Tell me more about your meeting.”

So I told him – probably in more detail than I had intended.

“Okay, I am hearing that there might be a couple of points about the meeting that you are not sure about. Are you able to put your finger on these?”

“Perhaps there are two things. Firstly, I have always got on really well with the team but there was a different vibe in the room today. I thought things would be more or less the same between us. Then, secondly, the mood seemed to change during the meeting.”

“Would you like to explore these a little?” I nodded. “What do you think they were expecting this morning?”

“I am not sure what you mean.”

“Well, your expectations seem to have been that the relationships you have with them would carry on in much the same way. If you were them, what would your expectations have been? Remember, if you are going to get into their shoes to answer this question, you have to take your own off first, so to speak – you need to look at it through their eyes, rather than your own.”

“Gee, that’s not easy. I guess they know me quite well. They’ve all been in the game longer than I have. I suppose they were as apprehensive as I was this morning – waiting to see what I was going to do.”

“And what did they see when they looked at you before and in the meeting?”

“Umm, I am not sure. Perhaps they saw this cocky – actually, make that full-blown arrogant - youngster trying to take control of things and tell them how things were going to be done in future.”

“And, if you were them, how would you have felt?”

“A little intimidated, and indignant, I guess. ‘Yesterday he was the same as us and now he thinks he is better than us.’ Something like that...”

“Okay. So, there would be some resistance. Let’s hold that thought for a moment and go to your second concern. If you think back, when did the mood change in the room?”

“It seemed to be when George spoke.” Paulo nodded to me to elaborate. “He seemed to be opposed to me retaining my clients. What he doesn’t understand is that I have spent four years building up some really great relationships with my clients. What he also doesn’t understand is that selling is in my blood.” By now I was building up a head of steam.

“I can see you feel strongly about this. What role did you play in the change of mood in the room?”

“I suppose I was pretty dogmatic about my view.”

“What impact do you think that would have had on you if you were a team member?”

“I guess I would have shut up too.”

“That’s interesting. So, what do you think the team needs from you now that you are their sales manager?”

“Gee, you ask some tough questions. I suppose they hope that I will keep bringing in big numbers, and leave them to their own devices – not get in their way; except of course if they ask for help.”

“Is that how *you* see your new role too?”

“I guess so.” Then, almost as an after-thought, because one thing I do well is catch on fast, “I think I see what you are getting at. You want to know what I would expect of the sales manager if I were them.”

It was almost a question – and Paulo duly obliged. “Yes, perhaps it would help if you thought of it at two levels: what did you expect of Harry when he was your sales manager? And what do you think we expect of you in your new role?”

“The first one is easy – you were right: because I knew I was bringing more than the numbers required of me, I wanted to be left alone to get on with it, except when I needed some help. The second one is more difficult – help me out here.”

“Okay, let me put it this way. Why would we give you promotion and great perks at considerable expense to the company if you were just going to do more of the same – bring in the numbers with perhaps the odd bit of help for your colleagues chucked in?”

“But I thought I got the promotion because I was the best rep.”

“Yes, but do you think you would have got the new role if that was *all* we saw?”

“Whew, I guess I am a people’s person and get on with the team members. I’ve also got a big mouth and am not scared to voice my opinion. Umm...”

“What kind of opinions do you hold about the team?”

“I guess the big one is that it should be a team but that currently we are a group of individuals. If we acted more like a team, then I am convinced that the numbers would get bigger.”

“So your role in achieving this now that you are sales manager would be what?”

“Ensuring that we start becoming a team. If I am the team’s leader, then I need to facilitate this – facilitate that we work together towards a common goal. Things like that. I guess I need to help the team and its individual members find ways to make the numbers. Gee, the management side is starting to sound like a full time job. I see what George might have been getting at – I will need to do less sales, not more.”

“Less?”

“Oh no! You actually mean ‘none’, don’t you? Gee, what about all the great relationships I have built over a long period of time? Do I just give those up now?”

“Would you be giving those relationships up? Or would the nature of your relationship with them just change?”

“But if I distributed my clients to the reps, then I wouldn’t see my clients.”

“You are right in the sense that you wouldn’t necessarily see them in the same capacity as you have been seeing them up to now. But your relationship with these clients of the company are critical – so one of the challenges you have is to work out how you can retain a different level of relationship with them and other clients currently being serviced by the reps. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah, I guess it does in principle but I am going to have to give a little thought to the detail. I am sensing that my relationship with these clients now moves from a sales emphasis to kind of a marketing role. So, I might see them at functions we arrange, for example. In addition, I might see them too when I do joint visits with the reps – gee, I hadn’t thought of that. In fact, there appears to be quite a lot I haven’t thought of. I thought I would add that before you did!!”

“Not at all. On the contrary, I am really pleased to see that the pieces are starting to fall into place for you. The most important thing for many sales people to get when they move into management is that their role changes completely – they are not going to be doing more of the same. If it helps you, your role is still one of business development – but this time it is facilitating (and I would like to emphasise the word ‘facilitating’) the development of business by the reps. Whilst you were the rep with the best results, we believed that you were the person who could most successfully make this transition, effectively the transition from managing yourself to managing others. But, hey, I need to go to another meeting now. Have you found today useful?”

“Wow, my learning curve just went up a thousand percent. Is there any way we could do this again. I think it would really help me.”

“Sure. I am really glad you found it useful. I suggest that we do this on a weekly basis and see how it goes. Is that okay with you?” I found myself nodding unwittingly and he went on. “What I think would also be useful for you would be for you to email me the answers to the following three questions: First, what are you going to stop doing in your new capacity? Second, what are you going to start doing? And lastly, what are you going to continue doing? How’s that?”

“Great!” I said, thinking that this sounded easy enough. With that he got up, greeted me and was gone.

Armageddon had been averted. Well, not yet. I needed to do that email and then implement its contents. I turned to my laptop and found I had to think somewhat deeper than I had anticipated in order to answer the questions. After what seemed quite a while I typed the email to Paulo:

Stop

- Selling
- Focusing on tasks

Start

- Focusing on people
- Seeing yourself as others see you

Continue

- Holding conversations with
- the team
- team members

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