

Coaching high achievers

The Calm Zone

Harold Macmillan had an explanation for panic among his Ministers. "Events, dear boy, events", he would say, mocking those who imagine that life follows a pre-determined pattern. As in life, so in business. Today's less supportive and more demanding work environment is producing 'events' ever more frequently.

Changes in corporate life, such as delayering, the faster promotion to senior positions of young people, busier bosses, and fewer '50+' executives providing good role models and support: all these pose unprecedented challenges for senior executives.

In a speech in April 2002, Bill Pitkeathley pointed out how it's increasingly easy to get sucked into the hurricane of 'events'. To become prey to all the problems, all the misjudgments and all the stress, that over-involvement in them invariably causes. And, equally crucially, to miss the very significant opportunities the same events often create.

He has a system for helping people deal with this. He calls it the Calm Zone.

It's about preserving a degree of detachment, in which good judgment can flourish. Inside it, perspectives remain clear, and decisions sound.

It's the place where good coaching occurs. Where the executive can, for a while, stand back from problems and stress caused, for example, by a promotion, the requirement for new leadership skills, or a frenzied, task-orientated environment.

With a measure of detachment, things look different, at both micro and macro levels. Take an example at the macro level. The worldwide crisis in civil aviation as a result of 9/11 was seen largely as a terrible threat to the industry. But not by everyone. The 'threat' was dramatically turned to an opportunity by the likes of Ryanair and EasyJet. In a difficult time, they preserved their leadership, clear thinking, creativity and good management. And, as a result, transformed their businesses.

Bill provides many other examples of how clear thinking and detachment can help avoid a threat, and identify – and make the most of – an opportunity.

Pitkeathley's coaches, who have a depth of experience and strong analytical abilities, understand this process. They work with their clients to explore options and behaviours and go through "what if" scenarios. With their empathetic approach, they can help executives grow in confidence and ability.

Their role is to meet the specific needs of the individual: to support, to stimulate, to challenge, to suggest alternative options and behaviours, to identify "what might happen next", to help deal not only with the obvious hurricanes of the moment, but also possible ones in the future. Coaches are flexible and can change and develop to meet changing needs. All fitted in to suit the executive's own busy schedule.

So: do you have a Calm Zone? Read the full paper for a more detailed account of this priceless asset. It's something no busy senior executive should be without.