

TROUBLESHOOTER



The locus of control

Sarah says she is 'psychologically unsafe' and feels ridiculed in her new role as a senior leader. How can coaching help her become a more effective contributor?

The Issue

Sarah is a young talented new leader within an international organisation. She manages a team of 300 people across a geographical region she comes from. She works at a senior level reporting directly into the global head of her function as well as the regional CEO. Over and above her post, she has also been invited, and has accepted, to be the regional lead on diversity and inclusion (D&I).

Although there is an agreed culture of D&I, Sarah has experienced a number of issues and recognises many others are experiencing the same. In her previous company she felt comfortable speaking up, contributing, challenging and suggesting ideas in meetings. However, since she joined this company she

has experienced the following at senior level meetings: she has been ignored, talked over, experienced ridicule about her ideas and criticised for the inputs she has given. She is now feeling highly demotivated and fearful and is unable to speak up and be an effective contributor in these meetings. In her own words she feels 'psychologically unsafe'. None of this takes place during one-to-one meetings with colleagues.

How would you approach coaching Sarah so that she starts to feel more psychologically safe and confident that her opinions do count, whether in face-to-face or virtual meetings?

Veronica Munro is an international executive coach

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The Interventions



Tim Salisbury
Executive coach,
Tim Salisbury
Associates
Limited

The first thing that is really important is to ensure Sarah feels comfortable and safe speaking with me. Clearly, this means building rapport and contracting with her around confidentiality, etc. I would typically tell her a story of someone in a similar position to demonstrate credibility and give her hope that coaching can work and we can get this sorted.

I would then explore the problem in more depth so we can decide how we will move forward.

Two possible avenues of approach:
1. It is really important that she gives feedback to these individuals, one to one, and I would encourage her to have open conversations with them, and talk about the impact they are having on her. She would role-play and practise her feedback so she feels comfortable.
2. Probably even before the above, I would use NeuroLinguistic Programming as a 'confidence anchor', so she would be resourced to give the above feedback.

I would marry this with a talk around Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and her internal thoughts and feelings. By

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becoming aware of the triggers, Sarah can start to do something different in response to them. I use the analogy of a fork in the road – the trigger hits and produces a fork. Sarah may be defaulting to one side of the fork and not saying anything or feeling bad. However, it is at this point she must give herself a positive affirmation, eg, 'My contribution is valid and I am going to say it' and then speak up. Breaking the negative cycle is key.



Ana Loback
Managing partner
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Sarah may be about to experience a turning point in her leadership journey, and with every turning point in one's life there is always a trigger, and the potential for learning and growth. I would be interested in exploring with her the following:

1. Identifying the triggers she is experiencing and how these experiences shape how she sees herself, her own narrative about herself, her emotions and her confidence in these situations. Being a thinking partner for

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her and giving her the space to face these is important. She may want to go higher and get out of these situations and once again feel she has a voice, impact and be included in these discussions but, if she wants to go higher she has to go deeper; so peeling back the layers and helping her process and reflect on these is essential.
2. Helping her explore this turning point as an opportunity for personal growth (and potentially the collective awareness of the team). Identifying how she can make the most of this experience, what

can she learn about herself and what affects her experience, as well as what she can do about it.

3. Helping her explore her personal power: what is within her remit and her scope, and her personal power to stand up and stand out. Practically speaking we will uncover what choices she may have in those moments. Uncovering these will increase her sense of power and what psychologists call her 'locus of control', her sense of her ability to control herself, her environment and others.

She can then map out her future choices in response to these triggers to ensure she has a voice, is heard and is true to herself. It is important to encourage Sarah to consider these types of challenges (that affect her sense of being) as opportunities to pause and take the time to uncover new learning, ways of thinking and behaving that strengthen her impact and effectiveness.