



## **Sherpa Strength: The Newsletter of Executive Coaching**

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### **Coaching Weakness into Strength**

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Sherpa Coaching. The process offers a wide range of diagnostics and tools that can be adapted uniquely to every coaching client. Let me tell you about Matt. He's a Director of Operations, managing several offices for an important client company I'll call Acme. His C-level Executive Contact (EC) described Matt as "bright, professional, and independent." He typically got along with people, and was well-liked.

He was well-liked. Matt was not highly respected, however. Matt's weaknesses were about his leadership style. "He needs to be more comfortable taking control of situations." The EC wanted Matt "to be more credible as a leader."

An assessment of his work style showed a low tendency to take charge and a high tendency to build consensus based on details: a snapshot of his weakness with proactive leadership and taking charge. Working through the Discovery Shield, part of the Sherpa process, Matt's weakness kept coming down to passivity, being reactive instead of proactive.

Midway through our engagement, Matt came to a coaching appointment extremely frustrated. This session to be his turning point, when the lights came on for him.

Matt held a weekly team meeting that included two willful young execs. As Matt described it, their most recent meeting had degenerated into a complaint session that was all about Matt and his team's shortcomings – "Even though," Matt fumed, "it was *their* responsibility, and not ours!" Matt explained further that this had become the normal pattern. Even though it was his meeting to run, these two younger execs kept hijacking the agenda and turning the tables, putting Matt and his team on the defensive.

We went to Weakness Mountain, a part of the Sherpa Coaching process. Matt had no problem acknowledging his weakness in maintaining control of the meetings. We spent a good amount of time on the observation stage. Here Matt saw how his passive tendencies were putting him repeatedly in a reactive stance instead of an active leading one. We discussed at length what active leadership looks like, and Matt went off with the assignment to identify the insights that were most helpful to him to devise change behaviors.

He came back enthusiastically with an acronym that put his key insights together. They spelled "PACE."



Tim Stevenson with 'Sherpa Guide' authors Brenda Corbett and Judith Coleman.

P = Prepare. Matt realized that he was walking into meetings mentally and emotionally unprepared to lead, and he was too often unprepared to answer challenges.

A = Assume the Leadership Position. This phrase clicked for him, emphasizing that leaders don't need to wait for someone else to tell them to lead. They need to assume the role.

C & E = Confident Expectation. This term means that if you have been given properly delegated authority, you don't have to wonder about it or put it out for debate — you adopt the attitude of one with that authority and behave accordingly.

Matt came back from his next team meeting full of energy, because it had “worked like a charm.” He had maintained leadership of the meeting, answered questions confidently, and worked through the agenda effectively. To celebrate and cement the process, I stopped at the grocery store and bought him a jar of *Pace* picante sauce. He has kept it in his office to this day as a reminder.

On another occasion, I asked Matt how an important business trip had gone. He smiled broadly and said, “It went great! I was completely PACEd!”

Matt and I worked through Weakness Mountain multiple times during his coaching process. His Executive Contact's assessment afterward was that Matt had become “more vocal, proactive, direct, and enthusiastic.” He added that others had seen the changes also. He commended Matt for confronting uncomfortable discussions and situations. He said perceptions of Matt had been changing positively, and said, “The change has been dramatic; it has been recognizable.”

For me, Weakness Mountain is the heart of the Sherpa Coaching Process. Matt's clear improvement is one of many stories I could tell that illustrate why I hold that belief.

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