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LESSONS LEARNED FROM A WOMEN'S COACHING GROUP

By Jordana Glasgow

“Freedom is about CHOICE — about choosing compassion, humor, optimism, intuition, curiosity, and self-expression.”

-Dr. Edith Eva Eger, *The Choice*

The view from the conference room on the 17th floor was bright and sunny as the women associates filed in. They looked eager and perhaps a bit uncertain as they chatted quietly with one another. I had been planning our women's coaching group for months along with my co-facilitator, communications coach Louisa Casadei. Armed with my recent coaching certification, Louisa's expertise, a carefully crafted slide deck, and a group of successful young women, we were ready to begin.

The theme of our women's coaching group was “Coaching from the Inside Out.” From my work with associates and many seasons of reading performance reviews, I'd begun to see common themes around perceived or real challenges with confidence and communication. Why do some associates find speaking out and sharing

their valued insights so challenging? Why do others doubt their contributions even in the face of repeated positive reviews? I wondered whether there was a new way in which lawyers, and women in particular, could support each other in exploring these and other professional challenges.

As Louisa and I planned the framework for our group, we acknowledged that there are often external influences at play in professional challenges which are beyond our control. Instead, our focus would be on supporting the participants in creating awareness and personal growth. We'd start by exploring the inside: What personal blocks hold us back from presenting ourselves in the way we would like to be seen? What stories do we tell ourselves? What beliefs do we hold from our past experiences, families, culture, and society that

impact how we show up? How can we change, reclaim, or perhaps lean into those messages and beliefs? And then, we'd explore the outside: What communication strategies can we use to present ourselves as we want to be seen? What techniques can help demonstrate confidence externally when faced with a challenging situation?

During our first group session we learned basic coaching techniques so the women could support one another in group discussions and individual pairings. Over the next four weeks, we spent time together exploring our own professional challenges and envisioned how to reframe them as opportunities.

We helped each other create awareness around our blocks and found ways to shift our internal voice. We brainstormed ways to

approach difficult scenarios and compiled communication strategies for speaking extemporaneously. We practiced what we had learned in real life and reported back. We drew inspiration from meaningful quotes and from each other. Each participant also had individual coaching sessions with me and Louisa and created a plan to bring their new insights into practice.

The women shined. They were open and authentic, and not afraid to be vulnerable. They supported and strengthened one another. They showed each other and themselves compassion and wisdom. We had a few good laughs too.

My goal was for each participant to come away with something of value that she could take with her to grow and strengthen herself professionally and personally. Here's just a small snapshot of what I took away.

There's strength in knowing you aren't alone:

One of the most powerful themes the women expressed repeatedly was how much it meant to know that others shared similar challenges. Knowing that their colleagues had the same worries or experiences was freeing and allowed them to support one another with empathy. The group setting also sparked relationships among colleagues from different departments and offices — a bonus lesson in networking.

As much as we are the same, we are each different:

While many women in the group shared similar challenges, each brought their own lived experience and perspective making the challenge unique to them. Two women might find the same type of experience difficult, but each for a different reason. By using coaching techniques in the group discussions, we were able to move away from advising each other on how to approach situations or trying to problem solve

for one another. Instead, we let each woman be her own guide and create goals and strategies that worked for her.

Remember the inside when trying to change the outside:

While it can be easy to identify the behavior we want to change, actually making that change can be harder. In my professional development role, I can advise associates to speak out in meetings, but that misses the opportunity

to help them understand and confront the underlying fear or motivation at the foundation of their behavior. Through our group discussion we recognized how important it is to understand why we engage in or avoid certain behaviors. When we create awareness around our motivations, thoughts, and feelings, we are better able to interrupt or accept them and change the behaviors that flow from them.

One of the guiding philosophies in our group was the power of personal choice. Dr. Edith Eva Eger, a Holocaust survivor and author of *The Choice* (a book I highly recommend), writes about our ability to choose our own path at any moment and under any circumstances. Perhaps my most inspiring takeaway from our group was each woman's openness to choice. They each chose to join the group, to share themselves, and to support one another. It was truly an honor to watch as each woman chose to accept who she was and embrace who she wanted to be. +



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