

HOW SHIRISH HELPED ANUP GET INTO A NEW GROOVE

A case study from HumSarathi archives

THE PROBLEM

Jogi Sachdeva was the MD of Zeus Cooling Solutions. The company produced cold-chain equipment for the perishable foods industry. In 4 years, he and his core team of 8 people had built a profitable enterprise. Poised for explosive growth, Jogi foresaw a problem. His core team had become too dependent on him for guidance & approvals, which slowed them down. His efforts at delegating decision-making authority to them had not worked.

A problem most chief executives face

HUMSARATHI

A specialised program called HumSarathi attracted Jogi's attention. Their claim: We make your core team capable in 3 months, thus making delegation possible. Their method was: Weekly 1-on-1 meetings with a coach combined with real-life assignments. No absence from work required. This seemed quite unlike the MDPs his team had attended, which had wasted both time and money.

Intense engagement with no loss of productivity

He nominated 4 core team members to the program. The coach was Shirish, an entrepreneur with a 20-year track record of helping people change.

Coaches are senior professionals from various industry-backgrounds

KICKOFF

The first person to meet Shirish was Anup, the RSM for North India. As pre-arranged, Jogi joined the kick-off meet briefly, and told Anup:

"The project objective is to reduce your dependence on me & enable you to act with speed.

1. Make business decisions on your own without seeking my approval for minor issues.
2. Sort out any problems or conflicts with other departmental heads without escalating to me.

The objective needs to be met in 3 months. It's okay for you to make mistakes while learning. Everyone learns that way. I will support you."

Clear goal shared transparently

Time-bound project

Thereafter, Anup and Shirish agreed to speak once every week... or more often if needed.

Boss open to delegation & supportive of learning

JULY... EXPLORATION

The first phase of the project, Exploration, took a few weeks. They talked about Anup's workstyle, what influenced it and how it could be changed. Shirish did a bit of questioning and a lot of listening. As Anup reflected about himself, he discovered that risk-avoidance was a persistent pattern in his life. He had chosen a career in a 'safe' industry. He sought Jogi's approval for every small matter. He leaned on Jogi's authority to get his work done through his peers, rather than confronting them directly. And though risk-avoidance kept him safe and cozy, it limited his potential. Secretly, a part of him had always wished he were bold and confident. Now, Shirish helped him see that change was possible, and here was an opportunity to remove the bottlenecks that held him back.

Shirish as a COACH

Sense of urgency and opportunity acts as motivator

AUGUST... SANDBOX

The second phase of the project was more intense. Shirish called this the Sandbox Phase. Anup would experiment with changes in his behaviour. They would meet and review what happened. Then, if Anup felt ready to take on a bigger change, he would try something bolder next week. This would go on for 4-6 weeks.

In the first week, Anup tried a different tack to obtain some information that the R&D Head had promised him but repeatedly delayed. During the review meeting, he was pleased to recall how he succeeded in his little experiment. He had stood patiently near the R&D Head's work-desk and politely stated that his work was stuck without the information; and that it made sense for him to leave only after he got the information. This was something he had NEVER done before, preferring instead to send meek reminder emails with a copy to Jogi.

In the second week, Anup pushed back at Jogi himself, insisting that the company NOT give a customer an exceptional discount. Anup felt he could swing the deal even without it. To his surprise, Jogi parried a bit and then simply said, "OK, your customer, your decision!". In the next week, he signed on a distributor for the company's products, only informing Jogi AFTER he had done so. Again, to his surprise, Jogi merely sent a terse email with just one word: "Noted".

These changes did not go unnoticed... Jogi sent a message to Shirish, saying that Anup had been pushing back at him lately and this was an encouraging development. Shirish promptly conveyed this feedback to Anup, to the latter's delight.

Everything wasn't smooth sailing however. In one instance, Anup had trouble convincing a customer's technicians to maintain a leased machine properly. Shirish switched to a more hands-on, advisory role here. He freely shared 'how-to' advice, and they role-played some scenarios before Anup's next meeting with the customer. Thus better prepared, Anup was able to finally get traction from the customer's side.

Shirish as a PRACTICE BUDDY

Boss supports Anup, as promised, and offers feedback promptly

Shirish as a MENTOR

SEPTEMBER... TEST FLIGHT

It was now time for the final phase of the project, which Shirish jokingly called the 'Test Flight' phase. With Anup's consent, Shirish wrote a short email to Jogi, which read:

"In the last month of the project, you can expect Anup to make decisions independently, often without your approval. You can also expect that he will manage his relations with his peers & customers without escalating to you."

From now on, Shirish and Anup would speak only at Anup's discretion. Not surprisingly, Anup did not ask for any meetings hereafter. A few weeks later, the project drew to a close with a final update talk between Jogi and Shirish. Jogi reported that Anup had been operating quite independently for the past few weeks. Speed of decision-making in the field had gone up... as a bonus, Jogi wasn't getting dragged into operational nitty-gritty and found the mindspace to think of the big picture.

Transparency keeps everyone in sync and project on track

What HumSarathi delivers: Bandwidth for Big Picture stuff

EPILOGUE

A month after the project ended, Shirish informally asked Anup how things were coming along. In reply, Anup reported an interesting incident. A client had defaulted on payments for leased equipment. Zeus moved to retrieve the equipment, as per contract, but the client physically prevented it. Jogi was in favour of going to court over this. But Anup, on his own initiative, travelled to the client's premises, braved a hostile reception, but eventually convinced them to return the machine. He was finally living the bold and confident life he had dreamed of.

Clear goal + Support of boss + Handholding & Practice = SUSTAINED CHANGE

HumSarathi

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