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Tigers, Stripes, and Behavior Change: Survey Results of a Commissioned Coaching Program

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Abstract

This survey focused on the effectiveness of a coaching program commissioned by a global company for high potential employees who wanted to develop their emotional competence. Survey results indicated sustained learning and behavior change among program participants over an extended period. Successful outcomes appeared to be related to the careful scrutiny of program participants, a collaborative model, an insight-oriented coaching approach, and persistent efforts to brand the program as a *developmental* resource. This work also indicated areas of continued opportunity for consulting psychology to include: the *developmental* branding of coaching initiatives; the need for early career coaching; ways to connect coaching results to existing HR practices; how to deliver high impact coaching in cross-cultural settings; and the critical need for empirical research in the areas of coaching and organization-based consultation.

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Introduction

Despite the widespread use of coaching for employee behavior change, coaches can be challenged by the cynicism of business leaders who fundamentally believe that people, like tigers, do not ever *really* change their stripes. The story of a coaching program commissioned by Rohm and Haas Company (Philadelphia, PA) to focus specifically on emotional competence* may be an encouraging example of how people can change behavior, and sustain those changes over time. Goleman (1998) defines emotional competence as follows, "…the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships."   Based on his synthesis of brain research, including insights regarding the neuroanatomy underlying emotion and rationality, Goleman concluded that the common view of human intelligence is too narrow and that a range of emotional abilities are as crucial – if not more crucial – than other competencies for high level functioning at work and in life in general. Other researchers who highlight the importance of emotional competence at work include Cherniss (2001), Jacobs and Chen (1997), and Rosier (1994).

Business authors including Collins (2001), Bossidy and Charan (2002) and Welch (2001) have also focused on the role of emotions in effective leadership. Punctuating the over-arching importance of emotional competence, Welch (2004), former Chairman and CEO of General Electric wrote, "… a leader's intelligence has to have a strong emotional component. He has

*NOTE: While this dimension of leadership is commonly referred to as *emotional intelligence,* we prefer the term *emotional competence* as it conveys the potential for development and minimizes the notion that it is set at birth.

to have high levels of self-awareness, maturity and self-control. She must be able to withstand the heat, handle setbacks and, when those lucky moments arise, enjoy success with equal parts of joy and humility. No doubt emotional intelligence is more rare than book smarts, but my experience says it is actually more important in the making of a leader."

It would appear that the emotional competence of individual business leaders has reached prominence on a par with cognitive, experiential, communication and technical criteria as essential for effective leadership. But for some executives, if not most, this dimension of leadership is the least evolved of all their leadership competencies. What is it? How does one get it? Can it be developed? This article describes a coaching model focused specifically on developing emotional competence and the results of a preliminary survey.

Background

In 1995 Rohm and Haas Company, a global producer of specialty materials used in a broad array of consumer, pharmaceutical and industrial products, revised its leadership competency model to include a specific focus on personal leadership traits -- referred to as the "You" dimension (see Exhibit 1). The Rohm and Haas "You" dimension consisting of (1) self awareness, (2) interaction with others, and (3) a broad view of the world was very much in alignment with Goleman's 1995 articulation of emotional competence.

This revised leadership competency model, intended to enrich development action planning, was well received by human resource and line managers throughout the world. They found it user friendly, and value-added in that competency information was readily surfaced and converted into actionable development plans. However, within months of the model's rollout, a

persistent question emerged with no easy answer: "What do we do when the development need is in the YOU dimension?"

J. Michael ("Mike") Fitzpatrick, current Rohm and Haas President and COO, suggested that the company commission through its human resources function a coaching process explicitly focused on the development of emotional competence. Soon thereafter, within a year of the publication of Goleman's groundbreaking 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence* a customized program was created and piloted with a human resources manager as its first participant. In an attempt to brand the program as a *developmental* coaching resource and to differentiate it from other available development and/or mentoring resources in the company, (some remedial and others focused exclusively on career management), it was named VISTA. Through an informal poll of company human resources professionals this name was chosen for its connotation of "something out there on the horizon," i.e. a positive and proactive development stretch into the future.

After the pilot VISTA engagement, the company established it as a development resource for e*xecutive* and *high potential* employees. An e*xecutive potential* employee was viewed as capable, within five years, of functioning as a leader of a business unit, subsidiary, technology unit, corporate governance unit, or geographic region. A *high potential* employee was viewed as showing promise of progressing to an *executive potential* rating, but needing one-two more developmental positions before that could occur.

While the company revised its leadership profile again (in 2002), emotional competence remains a central component in its development of top talent. This is evident in a cluster of three competencies grouped under the major criterion of Interpersonal Effectiveness. These competencies are: (1) effectiveness with others (including building/maintaining relationships with key internal and external stakeholders, social ease, poise in the face of adversity and/or pressure, handling ambiguity, empathy, trustworthiness, and conflict management skill); (2) self-awareness and self-management (including self confidence, emotional self-control, realistic appraisal of personal strengths and weaknesses, optimism, resilience, and using emotions to drive results and change); and (3) broad view of the world (including natural curiosity and appetite for learning, managing complexity, understanding other cultures, and commitment to use cultural learning and sensitivity to foster mutual goals/relationships).   Given this continued, close alignment with the construct of emotional competence, it made sense for Rohm and Haas to continue its investment in coaching focused explicitly on this dimension of leadership.

The VISTA Model

VISTA is a four-phase, collaborative coaching program that ideally involves an employee's boss and human resources partner, as well as the participant and his/her coach. VISTA coaches are external, licensed consulting psychologists (Gronsky and Haas).   While appropriate boundaries of confidentiality are maintained, frequent interactions among the four partners ensure focus on the right issues, provide helpful collateral information to the coach, give the coach opportunities to provide guidance to the boss and/or HR partner, and serve as ongoing reality checks regarding a participant's progress or lack of same. Regarding "appropriate boundaries of confidentiality," VISTA participants are considered the "clients" and the implications of this are discussed clearly in an initial agenda-setting meeting. Specifically, a VISTA coach does not share with company sources (boss and HR partner) the results of the data-gathering phase – other than how that material helps identify the coaching foci. Further, the coach does not share specifics of coaching

meetings other than to report generally on coaching momentum and progress. Typically, given the collaborative nature of VISTA, there is sufficient dialogue to satisfy company sources, as well as to enrich the coaching process.

The four phases of VISTA typically involve 40-50 hours of direct service provided over a 9-12 month period. These phases are; (1) data-gathering, (2) feedback, (3) coaching, and (4) follow-up. While this is similar to other coaching models, there are inherent differences designed to deliver psychological insight and influence sustained behavioral change. These differences include; the strong internal-external collaboration, multi-faceted and "live" data gathering, an insight-oriented coaching approach, sufficient time for participants to practice and receive reinforcement for new behavior, the handling of confidentiality, and efforts to provide secondary gain for boss and human resources partners in a VISTA engagement. In addition, VISTA coaches attend a monthly case conference to ensure their work is informed by Rohm and Haas culture factors and business developments. This meeting is facilitated by a consulting psychologist (Wasylyshyn) who has consulted with top management of the corporation for nearly two decades.

Data-Gathering

At the outset of the data-gathering phase, VISTA coaches facilitate an agenda-setting meeting in which roles, timeframe, expectations, and the issue of confidentiality are discussed fully. The identification of a representative sample of people for 360 data-gathering is also accomplished. A variety of tools is used in the data-gathering phase to include; (1) a life/career history, (2) a battery of psychometrics; and (3) a customized 360-interview protocol. The psychometric battery typically consists of the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, Personality Research Form, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R), the Lifestyles Inventory (LSI) and the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi). The 360 interview protocol has been customized and consists of questions based on the Rohm and Haas interpersonal effectiveness dimension of its Leadership Profile as influenced by the construct of emotional competence. Representative questions from this protocol are seen in Appendix A. The format of these questions capitalizes on the seminal work of McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) on using behavioral event interviewing (BEI) to assess the extent to which individuals possess role-relevant competencies. Unlike most 360 data-gathering processes that are administered electronically or by paper and pencil, VISTA 360 data are drawn "live" by the coach meeting 1-on-1 for approximately one hour with each member of a 360 sample, as well as with the participant for his/her self input. Typically there are 8 –10 people in a 360 sample. When sample participants reside in a global sector other than North America, consultants try to capitalize on opportunities when these individuals are in the United States, or interview them by phone. Coach flexibility is key in that interviews may have to be held as early as 6 am and late into the evening when respondents live in the Asia Pacific region, for example.

The primary goal of the data-gathering phase is to surface relevant, multi-faceted information that provides a sturdy foundation for the comprehensive feedback phase. While labor intensive, this data gathering increases the likelihood of unearthing the real "live" effects of a person's current behavior and implications of this behavior for the coaching agenda. In the case of John, for example (see VISTA Sidebar), the consultant's face-to-face conversation with one of John's peers, who had known him for many years, yielded an important truth. This peer emphasized the increasingly adverse effect John's arrogant and distant behavior was having on his ability to lead well. John had no awareness of this, and his reaction to the feedback was encouraging, "If this is the impact I'm having on people, I need to change."

Feedback

Because VISTA feedback is an intense and unusual experience for most participants, i.e. probing for the psychogenic basis of behaviors that have implications for leadership effectiveness, great care is taken to prepare and set the stage for this pivotal meeting. The consulting psychologist/coach spends considerable time analyzing history, psychometric and 360 data, as well as the content from the agenda-setting meeting and other conversations he/she may have had with the boss and/or HR colleague. All of this material is woven into a coherent story intended to capture the participant's attention by acknowledging his/her distinctive "gifts," and to illuminate an encouraging path forward, as well as to specify the coaching work to be done. This continuous weaving and integration of the past with current realities as related to work effectiveness *now* is an important hallmark of VISTA.

The primary objectives of the feedback phase are; (1) the identification of specific behaviors for focus in the coaching phase, (2) increased insight about the underlying basis of these behaviors, and (3) strengthening of the working alliance between the participant and his/her coach. This feedback is provided in a three-hour meeting between the VISTA participant and his/her coach that may or may not be audiotaped based on the participant's preference. Findings from each data source are discussed and the synthesis of major findings is achieved. The structure of the feedback meeting is as follows: (1) setting the stage for client to receive the data, i.e. emphasizing VISTA's branding as a special development opportunity for executive or high potential employees; client inoculation – discussing how the information may be difficult to hear but it is also a gift that can help him/her see ways to leverage their strengths using amplified emotional capability as a tool; discussion of psychometric data first, i.e. creating a foundation upon which to layer the 360 feedback; exploration of major 360 themes (provided in written format); and concluding with the pinpointing of specific information for the behavior change coaching agenda. In some cases, participants choose to reflect on feedback after the meeting before pinpointing behavioral foci and writing their preliminary action plans. Others are able to pinpoint these areas quickly and the feedback meeting concludes with assignment of the preliminary action plan.

Coaching

The coaching phase typically consists of eight to ten face-to-face coaching meetings, each approximately two hours in length. Coaching progress is enhanced further through frequent phone and email communication (after rapport is well-established in face-to-face meetings) on an "as needed" basis. Coaching meetings take place in either the coach's or the participant's office or in some neutral space in one of the Rohm and Haas facilities.

So what actually happens in the coaching meetings? Trying to describe the typical structure of a VISTA coaching meeting is a little like trying to describe how an artist paints. Most senior coaches would concur that good coaching *is* more of an art than a science. As the painter mixes deep and subtle hues of color on his/her palette so the coach makes choices about semantics, techniques, tools, and timing but always with the commitment of honoring each client's uniqueness and meeting him/her wherever he/she needs to be met. This being said, generally coaching meetings are structured around the following; an update on relevant work issues, a focus on what's most challenging/pressing for the client, re-plays of work issues with specific behavioral interpretation and/or guidance for the future, a review of any "homework" assignments and learning/applicability for behavior change, specification of new assignment(s), and a recap/wrap-up.

In the first VISTA coaching meeting, the work begins with a review of the preliminary action plan, a plan that is based on the behaviors targeted for coaching in the feedback session. By the first coaching meeting, the VISTA participant and his/her coach have at least started to work on this document which serves as a concrete guide for the ensuing coaching work. Typically, this plan is shared with the boss and HR partner who are asked to provide further input. See Appendix B for representative steps in John's preliminary action plan.

Subsequent coaching meetings focus on identifying additional insights and/or adaptive behaviors (generally outside of the participant's comfort zone) for each coaching issue. The primary objective is to expand the participant's versatility for handling a broad range of business and/or management situations in a more emotionally, interpersonally smart manner. Further, coaching meetings are often supplemented with role plays, case studies, films/DVDs, journaling, and targeted readings. This supplemental work is always chosen based on how participants learn best (e.g. visual, aural, kinetic), and can help maintain coaching momentum and focus on specific VISTA goals. For example, when John's coach learned that John enjoyed films, some were assigned for viewing. Specifically, John's viewing of Remains of the Day, a film that deals with emotional disconnectedness and the price one can pay for personal emotional isolation, proved to be a helpful coaching adjunct.

The time in between coaching meetings, typically four to five weeks, serves as valuable "lab time" for participants to apply learning, experiment with new behavior, and to discover what "works" for them given the contextual realities of their roles. Strategies to address potential "relapses" are also identified further increasing the likelihood of sustained behavior changes. One such strategy has been coined the "BLT" for *behavior lapse tactic.* Key steps in the BLT are the VISTA participant's (1) immediate admission of the behavior lapse, (2) verbal commitment to his/ her behavior change effort, and (3) invitation to others who witness a lapse to point it out, and also to acknowledge progress when/if they see it. With John, for example, he enlisted two colleagues to signal him when he had regressed, and he committed to immediate admission of the regression as well as to the re-statement of his behavior change effort.

The coaching phase is concluded by the participant fleshing out his/her preliminary action plan in collaboration with his/her coach. This "living document" reflects what was learned during VISTA and the actions that will support continued behavior change efforts. Now referred to as the "master action plan" (MAP), the participant presents it at a 1-hour wrap-up meeting with his/her boss and the HR partner in attendance as well as the coach. See Appendix C for a partial look at John's MAP. The wrap-up meeting also provides the participant with an opportunity to describe the impact VISTA has had on his/her growth as a leader, and to receive feedback regarding others' awareness of behavior change/increased effectiveness or lack of same. Other development needs may be discussed, as well as how the boss and/or HR partner can help the individual sustain gains – absent the structure of coaching meetings. In John's case, he requested and received an external communications skills workshop, continued feedback from his internal (Rohm and Haas) "mirrors," and an additional year of support from his coach.

Follow-Up

In the follow-up phase, the coach remains available for consultation as the participant seeks to solidify and build on VISTA coaching gains. Approximately four months after the wrap-up meeting, the coach contacts the participant, boss and HR partner to gauge progress and determine if any additional support is required. In some instances as with John participants have, with the approval of their bosses, contracted with their coaches for additional coaching support.

The Referral Process-Ensuring VISTA is the Appropriate Development Resource

Given the *behavioral* focus of VISTA, it can easily be misperceived as a remedial intervention. For this reason, extensive efforts have been made to "brand" VISTA as the *developmental* resource it was designed to be. Regarding process, there are four referral criteria used to scrutinize the appropriateness of each VISTA engagement, and a number of carefully orchestrated referral actions. The typical VISTA referral sequence is as follows:

- Boss and HR partner identify emotional competence as an individual's leadership development opportunity.
- HR partner discusses potential VISTA referral with a consulting psychologist (Wasylyshyn) who serves in a quality oversight role for all VISTA referrals and who assigns coaches. Four criteria must be met:
    1. The individual is an executive or high potential employee with NO performance problems, i.e. is not de-railing.
    2. The development need involves emotional competence.
    3. The individual has had direct feedback from his/her boss and HR partner and he/she values the importance of this dimension for effective leadership.
    4. The individual understands VISTA is an investment in his/her development and he/she is truly motivated to participate in coaching.
- Assuming VISTA is the appropriate development resource, the boss and/or human resources partner conveys this news to the prospective participant.
- Assigned coach contacts VISTA participant to introduce self, review VISTA process, and answer any questions.
- Coach sets up an agenda-setting meeting with VISTA participant, boss, and HR partner. The four objectives of the agenda-setting meeting are to; (1) ensure mutual understanding of the program and each person's role in it, (2) set the boundaries of confidentiality, i.e. what information remains private between the participant and coach and what information is shared with the company, (3) hear the company's perspective on the participant's strengths and development need in the area of emotional competence, as well as to specify what VISTA success would look like, and (4) identify a representative sample of people for 360 data-gathering.
- Prior to the agenda-setting meeting, the coach has separate phone conversations with the boss and HR partner to address any questions, and to ensure clarity regarding objectives for the meeting. (NOTE: A three-way conference call is also an option).
- Four-phase VISTA model ensues.
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Survey Method

Surveys were mailed to 33 of the 41 VISTA alumni who had completed the coaching between 1996 and 2002. Because the whereabouts of eight participants who had left the company were not known, they were not included in the study. In an attempt to go beyond self-report data and to get outside perspective regarding the sustainability of behavior change over time, surveys were sent to 44 Others (former and current bosses). Completion of the survey for all was strictly voluntary.

The survey instrument was composed of several rating scales, as well as open-ended items. In the initial section, VISTA participants and their company partners rated progress made in the agreed upon coaching areas. To accomplish this, each survey was customized to reflect a participant's specific development goals. Participants and Others rated progress on each goal, using a 1-10 rating scale, where 1 equaled very little progress and 10 equaled a great deal of progress.

All surveys asked for a rating (from 1-10) of the sustainability of the participants' overall learning and/or behavior change derived from VISTA. Respondents were offered the opportunity to write in comments or give examples for each of the rating scales.

Five open-ended questions examined the impact of VISTA on one's effectiveness as a leader, the ability to achieve desired results, specific benefits the company derived from the individual's participation in VISTA, the most helpful aspects of the VISTA process, and ways in which VISTA might be improved.

To avoid the role conflict of operating in the dual roles of interventionists and evaluators, surveys were returned to Wasylyshyn, who managed the data and completed the initial analysis. She had coached only the pilot VISTA participant. VISTA coaches Gronsky and Haas, who were not privy to the identities of respondents, assisted in the thematic analysis for the sections focused on Benefit to the Company, and Program Critique – both what was helpful and what could be improved.

Survey Findings

Demographics

Of the 33 VISTA participants surveyed, there was an 84.8% response rate. Of these respondents 83% were male and 17% female. The response rate from the 44 Others surveyed was considerably less (38.6%). The lower response rate of Others was primarily a function of their no longer having contact with VISTA participants who, by the time of this survey, had moved into different roles since the coaching ended. Of note, over 70% of VISTA participants who are still with the company have advanced their careers there. Of the eight participants who secured employment elsewhere, the majority (75%) of these individuals initiated their departures from the company.

Nearly 50% of the VISTA participants were in the Research organization. Close to a third were in business roles. And the remaining 22% included employees in Information Technology and Operations/Engineering. This array of functional backgrounds is not atypical for a strong technology-based company.

Development Themes

Analysis of participants' development goals, as set in the feedback phase, clustered under three major themes; (1) to increase overall emotional competence (52%), (2) to better understand their impact on others (29%), and (3) more effective career management (19%).

VISTA participants who wanted to *increase emotional competence (52%)* made progress by learning about this construct – as it relates to effectiveness at work. Wasylyshyn's (2003) SO SMART® acronym, representing the four dimensions of emotional competence, (SO = self observation, SM = self management, A = attunement to others, and RT = relationship traction), helped coaches focus specific behavioral change agendas. The first of these two emotional

competence dimensions (SO and SM) involve self management skills, and the second two dimensions (A and RT) are focused primarily on forming relationships with others.

Through the VISTA coaching, participants were helped to increase their capacity for self-observation by labeling their emotions/feeling states, and then to manage these feelings – both positive and negative emotions -- in ways that facilitated their achieving work-related objectives. They also learned how to be more attuned to others' emotional needs and concerns, practice empathy, and to use this heightened sensitivity to form and nurture more satisfying and productive relationships, i.e. have greater relationship traction, with both internal and external stakeholders. A number of VISTA participants reported improved relationships in their personal lives, as well as at work.

VISTA participants who focused on gaining *greater awareness of their impact on others (29%)* benefited most from gaining clarity about their respective communication styles. The coaching helped them focus on both verbal and non-verbal behaviors, i.e. eliminating counterproductive or distracting behaviors, and reinforcing those behaviors that increased effective communication.

Effective *career management* had not emerged in the referral stage for any of the VISTA participants but it clearly surfaced in the feedback and coaching phases as an issue of concern for some (19%). While this is not an interpersonal effectiveness issue per se, coaching gains were made through assistance with career navigation tactics. While consideration of this finding was beyond the scope of this survey, it suggests the need for more frequent and substantive career planning discussions between managers and high potential subordinates.

Progress on Vista Goals

VISTA participants were asked to rate their progress compared to pre-VISTA levels on each of their coaching goals on a 1-10 scale (10 = highest rating). The median rating (across 96 ratings overall) for both VISTA participants and others (boss HR partner) was 7. Participants and "other" ratings were congruent (plus or minus 1 on the 10-point scale) 78% of the time.

These positive findings are attributed to; (1) multi-faceted data-gathering, (2) breakthrough insights and the identification of specific coaching goals, (3) the collaborative coaching model, (4) the preliminary action plan, i.e. a tool for grounding the coaching work at the outset and an explicit action plan crafted at the end of coaching to support continued progress, and (5) coaches themselves modeling emotional competence. Of note is the fact that the majority of VISTA participants had maintained their progress over a period of one to six years (depending on when they had completed VISTA).

In addition, ongoing company-based activities helped reinforce positive VISTA outcomes. These activities included enriched job experiences, informal mentoring, and more focused performance management.

Sustainability

Over half (52%) of the participants reported high sustainability of the learning and/or behavior change achieved as a result of their participation in VISTA. A medium level of sustainability was indicated by the remaining 48%.

Managers rated sustainability as high in 60% of the VISTA engagements, and 35% as medium. The remaining 5% was based on the response of one manager who noted no change.

With 100% of participants and 95% of their managers and/or HR partners reporting medium to high sustainability, it appears that VISTA is an effective coaching model. While this

strong sustainability finding warrants further study, two factors appear especially relevant. First, the view of the *participant as client* (versus the company) produces a strong, trusting working alliance with one's coach. Wasylyshyn (2003) wrote, "…coaches who work from the perspective of the executive as the client are likely to form faster and more substantive coaching relationships. Seasoned coaches learn how to work from this perspective – satisfying both the coached executive and the sponsoring organization" (p.98). Second, the scrutiny of potential participants, i.e. ensuring that VISTA was the right development resource yielded a well-motivated group of participants.

Benefit to the Company

There were no major themes reported here. The array of benefits to the company cited by VISTA participants included; (1) becoming more effective leaders (providing vision and inspiration to others), (2) improved interpersonal skills (enhanced listening, achieving more buy-in and alignment, ability to relate to a more diverse group of people), (3) increased commitment to the company, (4) increased performance management skill (providing more timely feedback, earlier identification of potential "derailment factors"), (5) increased productivity, and (6) positive impact on the company's bottom line (better negotiating ability in high stress situations).

Neither were there major themes cited by managers and HR partners. The array of benefits to the company cited by these survey participants included; (1) more effective leadership, (2) increased focus resulting in speed to market, (3) better interpersonal skills, and (4) the retention of valued employees.

Program Critique–What Was Most Helpful?

In order of frequency, VISTA participants cited the following as most helpful; (1) achieving greater self-awareness and deeper insight of how one's behavior effects others (38.1%), (2) working with an experienced coach (21.4%), (3) 360 feedback (16.7%), (4) specific tools for dealing with aspects of behavior they wanted to change (14.2%), (5) psychometrics (4.7%), and (6) knowing that the company would want to invest in their development (4.7%).

Others (bosses and HR partners) cited several aspects as helpful. These included; (1) participants achieving better results (25%), (2) participants becoming more effective leaders (15%), (3) enhanced influence skills (15%), (4) participants' personal growth and development (15%), and (5) career progress (15%). As noted earlier, a significant number of VISTA participants (over 70%) advanced their careers in the company. Response from the remaining 15% did not fit any of the aforementioned themes.

Program Critique-Ways to Improve

Nearly 20% of VISTA participants either provided no "improvement" information or restated their positive experience. From others we gleaned clues that will be taken into account as this coaching intervention is fine-tuned. These clues include; (1) a formal check-in or review a year or two post-VISTA participation, (2) some type of ongoing support, (3) continued screening of participants, i.e. VISTA must be branded as a *development* tool, (4) ensuring the representativeness of 360 sample participants, (5) greater involvement of participants' managers, i.e. ensuring they are open to seeing and acknowledging behavior change on the part of VISTA participants, (6) greater involvement of HR partners, and (7) remaining sensitive to cultural subtleties and nuances--avoid VISTA being perceived as Ameri-centric.

Discussion

That Rohm and Haas Company would seize upon the relevance of emotional competence for leadership effectiveness and commission a coaching resource for talented employees was an innovative step in 1996 when there were few, if any, coaching programs of this type. But it was not a surprising step in that the company had been focused on the emotional dimension of leadership since 1985 when it implemented a process called Leadership 2000 (now Leadership 3000). This competency-based, holistic (focused on the whole person), and insight-oriented leadership development initiative continues to play a key role in grooming people for the top 30 – 40 leadership roles in the company. As a function of this experience, Rohm and Haas senior executives have come to value the role of psychology – and specifically, the role of emotions in the behavior of successful leaders. So VISTA landed in receptive territory, and based on the encouraging results of this survey, the company plans to expand its use of the program. The expanded use of VISTA is expected to include the identification and training of indigenous coaches (consulting psychologists) in each geographic sector. This will be especially helpful in the Asia Pacific region, a significant focus in the company's current growth strategy.

Further, certain process adjustments are being made to strengthen its utility as a developmental resource. These adjustments include ensuring the involvement of a human resources partner in *every* VISTA engagement, and linking VISTA work with existing company talent review and performance management discussions. Based on ongoing feedback from current VISTA participants, their line or functional managers, other leaders in the company, as well as people who participated in this survey, we believe the initial success of VISTA is due to four factors.   These factors are; (1) scrutiny of participants – ensuring that VISTA was the most appropriate development resource, (2) collaboration -- the collaborative relationship among participant, boss, HR partner and coach, (3) branding -- ongoing efforts to brand VISTA as a *developmental* resource, and (4) coaching approach -- an insight-oriented model.

While the first two of these four factors (scrutiny and collaboration) are sufficiently discussed in the referral process and coaching sections above, the two remaining factors – branding and an insight-oriented approach -- warrant comment. Regarding branding, from the outset it was recognized that a coaching program focused on *behavior change* easily runs the risk of being perceived as a remedial intervention. Therefore several steps were taken to at least minimize this perception. These steps included: (1) VISTA coaches handled only VISTA work, i.e. they were not involved in other Rohm and Haas engagements that were clearly remedial; (2) the rigorous scrutiny of VISTA referrals to these people were high potential employees; (3) presentations to the corporate human resources leadership team and the broader HR community to describe VISTA, its referral criteria, referral process, and to share the mounting business case research about the key role of emotions in effective leadership; (4) in the 360 interviews, probing every interviewee's understanding of the purpose of VISTA, who got to participate, and correcting misperceptions if need be; (5) providing every potential HR partner with a small "referral pad" – each sheet printed with the four VISTA referral criteria; (6) capitalizing on informal opportunities to speak with HR professionals and line or functional managers educating them about VISTA's developmental intent; and finally (7) the use of VISTA "graduates" as ambassadors to speak to other employees about the nature and process of this coaching.

Theoretically, the insight-oriented nature of VISTA is informed by the clinical tradition of time-limited dynamic psychotherapy (Strupp & Binder, 1984). This powerful, empirically tested model of brief psychotherapy integrating psychoanalytic, interpersonal, object-relations, self

psychology, as well as cognitive-behavioral and systems approaches, provided a sound theoretical base for the design and delivery of this coaching model.   Specifically, using the concept of the *cyclical maladaptive pattern* (CMP), as articulated by Levenson (1995), coaches are able to facilitate VISTA participants' understanding of the psychogenic basis of interpersonal behaviors they want to change. Levenson defined the CMP as, "…the idiosyncratic 'vicious cycle' a particular person gets into in relating to others. These cycles or patterns involve inflexible, self-perpetuating behaviors, self-defeating expectations, and negative self-appraisals, which lead to a dysfunctional and maladaptive interactions with others" (p.49). In the work with John (see sidebar), the identification of his long held belief that in order to secure love and respect he *always needed to be right* proved to be an invaluable insight as related to his current behaviors that put off or otherwise alienated people from him.

The value of VISTA can be conceptualized as a rapid sequence of delivering and applying insight, supporting participants' courage to change, (through a pragmatic coaching agenda), and providing positive reinforcement of progress/sustained efforts. As in time-limited dynamic psychotherapy (TLDP), the coaching is active, experiential, and integrative. In large measure, VISTA coaches can be successful because they themselves are emotionally competent and they are, "…experientially and contextually integrating a set of skills, any one of which by itself is relatively meaningless, and (they are) making decisions about when and how to use these skills, (in order to) get to a destination" (Levenson, 1995, p.2-3).

Despite the encouraging results of this survey, it also raises numerous questions that warrant much further exploration. These questions include: What can companies do to ensure the *developmental* branding of coaching programs focused on the subjective area of leadership *behavior*? What existing company practices can be leveraged to help sustain progress people make through coaching of this type? How might companies provide cost-effective, high impact development activity focused on behavior to employees earlier in their careers? And, from a perspective of cultural diversity, how can *behavioral* development needs be best met in differing global sectors?

Further, these early results while positive lack the rigor of empirical research. This continues to be an important challenge for psychologists providing coaching and other organization-based consultation. As Kilburg (2000) states, "There is a true absence of good, controlled-variable research that demonstrates the successful application of clinically based methods and theories to changing the behavior of individuals and groups in organizational applications" (p. 18). We echo his concern and urge that such research be done in the broader field of executive coaching. In the absence of empirical study it will be difficult for this application of psychology in business to maintain a place of respect and credibility among leadership development resources. Further, we will need to justify the expense of coaching, i.e. demonstrate the value of coaching financially. Psychologist Braddick (2004) writes, "Our ability to speak the language of business by conducting research that documents… ROI's (financial return) can influence the perceived value the market assigns to our services. Delivering programs that document impact and ROI will create new opportunities to highlight the specific value proposition …and perhaps most importantly, such efforts will help us differentiate our discipline from competing disciplines" (p. 2).

Conclusion

Rohm and Haas Company's request for a development resource focused specifically on emotional competence presented a special opportunity to design and implement a customized coaching program. While the preliminary results of this survey point to the value of an insight-oriented approach and collaborative methodology, there are likely other coaching tools that would also prove helpful to people who want to develop in this way. Rather than claim the distinctive benefits of one coaching model over another, we emphasize instead the continued importance of emotional competence as a developmental focus and urge companies to explore ways to evoke this behavior particularly among senior executives.

The magnitude of current and foreseeable business challenges will require heightened levels of emotional capability if leaders are to meet them in ways that ensure business stability and growth. These challenges include globalization, intensified off-shore competition, outsourcing, talent and knowledge gaps, the technology juggernaut, financial turbulence, political unrest globally, and the increasing erosion of physical and psychological safety throughout the world. To respond to these challenges executives will tap into a familiar repertoire of leadership competencies (strategy, business acumen, integrity, innovation management, etc.). To respond to these challenges *consistently and well* executives will need to bring something more: their distinctive abilities to accelerate deeper, productive connections to people – the most influential people both within and outside their companies. These acts of leadership are significantly *relational* and require a behavioral repertoire of self awareness, resilience, empathy, authenticity, optimism and courage. These acts of relational leadership are necessarily *emotional*. The stripes of these tigers move in the wind, shimmer on the surface, and speed through the jungle with ease.

VISTA Outcome Research – Sidebar

"I'm not sure what to do for John," his boss told the coach, a consulting psychologist. "I see him as having executive potential. He's always been one of my strongest performers as far as getting things done. He's also one of the smartest people I know. He sees both the forest *and* the trees, and he's a great problem-solver.

Here's the issue: when I described him this way at a recent Research Talent Review meeting, I got a lot of push back from other Directors. They said a number of people see John as arrogant, aloof, and hard to get to know. They also said people aren't always comfortable working on teams with him because he's not collaborative and acts like he knows it all. I don't believe he's arrogant but I know he can come across this way."

When the boss explored the possibility of providing John with 1-on-1 coaching as a development resource, it was clear that John met the VISTA criteria. This was confirmed further in John's first conversation with his prospective coach. Having decided coaching could be helpful with this *behavioral* development issue, John and his coach prepared for the agenda-setting meeting. In this meeting, with his boss and human resources partner present as well as his coach, three coaching goals were identified as related to emotional competence; (1) active listening and greater attunement to others, (2) spending more time teaching and developing others in his organization, and (3) eliminating behaviors that fed the perception of him as dismissive, arrogant, and aloof.

John appeared unemotional, even impassive while receiving his psychometric and 360 feedback – feedback that reinforced what had been discussed in the agenda-setting meeting. He spoke about the areas he needed to work on as if he were talking about an experiment rather than about himself. However, after he had had some time to digest the information, he began to take ownership of it especially in terms of his negative effect on others. In his first coaching meeting he commented, "I never realized how uncomfortable I can make people feel. This really isn't my intention. I can see what I have to change and I really want to do that." John was becoming increasingly self-aware. This was a first in a number of realizations that indicated the value of insight oriented coaching for John. Another important discovery that accelerated his progress was the identification of his cyclical maladaptive pattern (CMP). He realized that he had long held the belief that winning love and respect was dependent on his being right. This insight emerged as John and his coach reviewed his developmental history and portions of the 360° feedback. In psychodynamic terms his CMP was based on parental interjects that were consistently reinforced by environmental cues. Historically John's parents and teachers lavishly praised his intellectual accomplishments, which came easily to him. He was consistently rewarded for coming out on top throughout his academic career. This pattern was further solidified as his successes accrued in the business world.

Through the feedback John also realized that up to this point, he had distinguished himself in the company exclusively through the power of his intellect, technical knowledge, and individual contributions. Further, he also saw that if he wanted to be successful beyond his current job, he would have to drive results through others by motivating them, influencing their buy-in to his vision, and achieving alignment on key objectives. All of these behaviors were clearly unfamiliar and outside his comfort zone but he could not see any other path forward. On the strength of these insights, he built on the major points raised in the agenda-setting meeting and set his VISTA coaching goals in two broad areas; (1) learning to connect to people on an emotional level and (2) being more respectful of others' contributions.

Because John's awareness of his own emotions was minimal, the keeping of an *emotions diary* throughout the coaching phase proved to be an important tool. This not only helped him identify his own feelings, it also gave him specific language to introduce emotions into his conversations with others. He became better at empathizing with others' experiences versus his tendency to miss issues and/or concerns that often had implications for how efficiently results were achieved. Further, by reviewing job-related situations with his coach and brainstorming other, more emotionally competent approaches, John began revealing more about what made him tick. This proved to be an important tool in the coaching process. By deconstructing real time situations and role playing with his coach, John increased his array of behavioral choices. The different (and wiser) choices he made about *how* to relate to *whom* contributed to people feeling more relaxed around him.

During the coaching phase transferential dynamics became more evident in John's relationship with his coach. He became warmer and less guarded. He also began to call the coach when he had people issues he needed to discuss. In short, he made increasing use of the coaching relationship to practice and internalize new behavior. As his ability to accept others' ideas and approaches increased, he began to envision a larger opportunity. The breakthrough insight that he could achieve more in life by engaging others and becoming more relational had enormous appeal for him.

In order to improve his relationships, John invested time and energy in people beyond discussions about the work to be done. This shift from a *transactional* to *relational* way of being with work colleagues paid off quickly. John became interested in people's interests and interests outside of work. Instead of forging ahead in meetings, he'd stop and inquire what was going on if someone looked frustrated or upset. John's newfound attunement to others and attempts to build more meaningful relationships were continually reinforced. He quickly saw how effective these new behaviors were, since co-workers began to seek him out and were more inclined to share their ideas with him. This reinforcement intensified his commitment to and focus on his VISTA goals.

At the VISTA wrap-up meeting with his boss, HR partner, and coach in attendance, John presented his master action plan (MAP) along with a letter that detailed his VISTA experience. In the letter he revealed that he, "…entered the process with a fair degree of skepticism believing I was in store for a good dose of psychoanalysis and recommendations that I was not sure I was willing to adopt. I was also skeptical that I would benefit from the VISTA program." John concluded by writing, "I feel that I have benefited greatly form my VISTA experience." In his MAP, he highlighted progress made on development objectives, and action steps that would ensure continued progress. Specifically, he reviewed what he needed to do to sustain the gains he achieved through the previous year such as seeking periodic feedback from key respondents in his 360 feedback sample. He also committed to completing coursework in communication styles. John also asked for another year with his coach in order to insure ongoing objective feedback and support. His boss approved his requests for further development support – encouraged greatly by John's progress. Further, his boss agreed to have regular conversations about John's overall leadership effectiveness that would include positive reinforcement of continued progress, and early feedback when he saw something that was not in sync with John's goals particularly in the area of emotional competence.

Six months after John completed VISTA, he was promoted to a key commercial role in the company's Asia Pacific region. In retrospect, he credits the skills developed in VISTA as critical to his success in navigating the subtleties and nuances of the interpersonal dynamics he encountered in that region. In his own words, "Given the interpersonal demands of working

effectively in Asia, I'm glad I've been thinking about this and have learned about emotional competence."

Since completing VISTA several years ago, John has continued to be promoted enjoying an ever-growing sphere of influence at Rohm and Haas. The behavioral concerns that prompted his boss to provide the VISTA coaching have been eliminated. Further, John is now actively sought out as a coach and mentor for others in the company – a role for which he feels better equipped, and a role he finds satisfying at this juncture in his career.
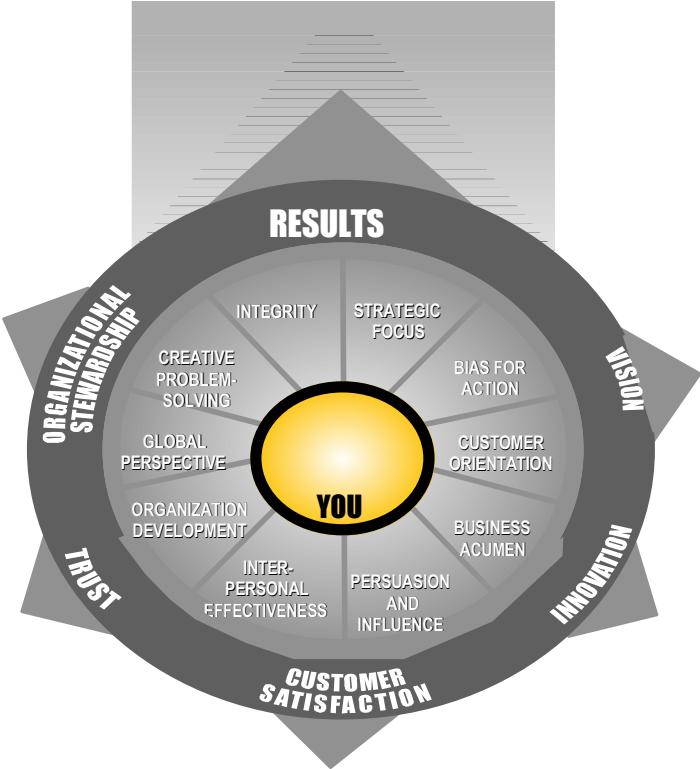
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Exhibit 1

Rohm and Haas Company

Leadership Competency Model (1995)

APPENDIX A

Sample Questions from VISTA 360 Interview Protocol

Self Confidence*:*

- *What are some recent examples of (name) persisting in the strength of his/her convictions in the face of resistance and/or criticism from others in the company?*

- *Give a recent example of (name) doing well even in circumstances that were unclear or ambiguous.*

Self Awareness and Self Management:

- *Describe a recent example of (name) staying "cool" under pressure or otherwise stressful work circumstances.*

- *To what extent are (name)'s emotions a source of strength, or are they a liability? Please explain.*

Broad View of the World:

- *Describe (name)'s ability to create and maintain key networks of contacts both internal and external to the company.*

- *Give a recent example of (name) putting him/herself into the shoes of another sufficiently well to understand the other's perspective.*

- *Please give an example that illustrates (name)'s ability to value, stay open to others'views and differences be they cultural, behavioral, ideological, etc.*

APPENDIX B

Preliminary Action Plan – Representative Action Steps

- Ask two colleagues to act as "mirrors" as I go through VISTA.

- Use an *emotions diary* as tool to help me recognize my own emotions and to build attunement to those of others.

- Practice sharing information with colleagues and direct reports that goes beyond just exchanging data.

APPENDIX C

Master Action Plan (the MAP) – A Glimpse at Actions Intended to Reinforce Learning

<u>Developmental Area</u>: Connecting to Others on an Emotional Level

- Using my emotions as a resource to learn about others.

- Be more emotionally expressive.

- Continue to gauge the emotions of others, i.e. making sure that I recognize and respond to their emotional reactions as related to the work to be done.

- Let people express and work through issues rather than jumping into problem-solving mode with the aim of supplying answers.

<u>Development Area:</u> Increasing Interpersonal Effectiveness

- Be more inclusive of others.

- Seek advice from those who are interpersonally adept.

- Let others know they've been heard; paraphrase questions, restate their answers, and summarize conversations.