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# The Case for Coaching: Using *Personal Directions*® to Support Executive Development

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A major challenge for a product development company is assessing the potential of the various product development opportunities available to it at any

time. Ideas for possible products arrive constantly from consultants, organizations, trade and general business publications, industry surveys and daily professional contacts. Of all the factors which need to be considered in the process of evaluating these ideas, the most important one is the product's potential for long-term viability in the market. A case in point is MRG's *Personal Directions*®. Three years ago, when executive coaching was starting to gain greater acceptance as a means for developing high level executives, it was not certain whether this would be a passing fad or would grow into a widely accepted practice. At the time, we believed there was sufficient evidence to indicate that this approach would gain a higher level of acceptance, and that MRG could provide a product to support it.

*Personal Directions* has now been available for approximately eighteen months, and has been enthusiastically endorsed by many of the MRG network consultants who are currently providing executive coaching in their array of services. This article provides MRG's views on the factors which have helped this form of development grow in popularity; the role that *Personal Directions* is playing in the executive coaching process; and the perspectives of two

MRG network consultants who have had extensive experience with this product.

## Contributing Factors

There are many reasons for the growing popularity of this means of development. Over the past few years organizations have downsized, rightsized, outplaced, delayed, merged and consolidated. As a result, most are quite lean in terms of staffing. The individuals who remain are shouldering significant responsibilities. Many companies recognize this and are committed to ensuring that these people are as competent as they can possibly be.

A related issue is the current low rate of unemployment. A consistent refrain heard from many employers is that they are having a very difficult time finding people with the right skills and qualifications. As a result, many organizations consider it both wiser and more cost effective to invest in developing and/or addressing the performance problems of current employees, whose needs and issues are known, than to replace them with less than ideal candidates whose needs and issues are not known.

Organizations are also realizing that, if individuals have performance problems which are holding them back from fulfilling their potential, addressing their needs and issues through any type of group development is likely to have a limited level of success. It is only through ongoing and focused one-on-one discussions that critical behavioral issues can be meaningfully addressed and resolved. There is

no doubt that this is a costly approach to development, but for the valued employee who has proved his or her worth, the investment may be easily justified. A factor of economic timing may also be contributing to the willingness of organizations to underwrite such development. In the thriving North American and European economies, a large number of organizations are doing quite well and have the financial resources to devote to this form of development.

### ***Personal Directions***®

MRG's *Personal Directions* occupies a unique position in the vast array of assessment techniques and support materials which facilitators are employing to guide these development efforts. *Personal Directions* is a report which provides individuals with personalized feedback based on their responses to the *Personal Directions Questionnaire*. The questionnaire measures three areas of a person's life: the types of emotional satisfaction one is striving to achieve, the life sectors in which one is currently investing time and energy, and the quality of life one is currently experiencing.

The first section of the Report provides individuals with feedback on their "Personal Directions," the underlying directions they use to guide their lives. Our Personal Directions represent our aspirations and motives, our emotional drivers. They show the direction and force with which we are likely to push against the world in order to achieve specific emotional goals. The way in which these goals are achieved may vary dramatically, depending on the person. For example, a person who gains satisfaction from giving support, affection and empathy to others is very different from a person who rejects this focus and wants to be highly self-sufficient and independent.

The second section of the Report, "Your Personal World," provides individuals with feedback on the areas of their world in which they are working to realize their Personal Directions. Feedback is provided on 18 specific dimensions or sectors of life, showing the emphasis and energy currently being invested in

each. Each sector represents a major area of experiences, values, interests and activities. The profile of these life sectors is arranged according to their influence on four specific aspects of life: Professional/Public Self, Leisure Self, Personal Self and Inner Self, forming a continuous range from one's direct dealings with the external world to one's most internal, introspective life.

The third section of the Report, "Quality of Life Considerations," provides feedback to individuals on several dimensions that might be considered "bottom line" outcomes in life (i.e. one's current levels of satisfaction and security). These quality of life factors may be looked upon as another piece of the puzzle in optimizing one's enjoyment and satisfaction with life. They are often helpful in providing direction for future decisions and development. To that end, the *Personal Directions* Report also provides a structured process for integrating all of the feedback information, prioritizing developmental areas, and creating personal action plans.

### **Consultants' Perspectives**

Since it first became available eighteen months ago, several MRG network consultants have used *Personal Directions* extensively as part of their executive coaching work. Bob Oberlander of Lee Hecht Harrison in San Marino, California and Maxine Lange of Maxine Lange Consulting in London have provided us with some of their observations concerning the richness of their experiences with *Personal Directions* and the benefits this product has provided to their clients. Maxine's observations are profiled in the accompanying article, "*Personal Directions*® – A Case Study." In the following comments, Bob offers some very specific examples from individual client experiences, as well as more general observations:

- A senior executive was forced to leave his organization because of his inability to recognize that certain attributes were working against his effectiveness and needed to be changed. *Personal Directions*

data helped him understand the root cause of the behaviors that derailed him, and showed him how to choose a more compatible position in his next career move.

- One woman's combination of life sector scores (low on Career and high on Recreation and Community) validated her decision to retire and pursue volunteer activities.
- High scores on both Insecurity and Dissatisfaction may be a sign of a career in jeopardy.
- Reviewing the low scores an individual receives on various dimensions can be very helpful in revealing and clarifying that person's turnoffs and stresses.
- Comparing an individual's very high scores from *Personal Directions* data with actual observable behaviors from *Leadership 360*® data can reveal strong drivers which may significantly work for or against the person and his or her potential to change.
- Certain high scores may be very helpful in identifying issues which could derail a person within a particular organizational culture.

- *Personal Directions* data is very helpful to the senior executive who has failed more than once and is trying to decide what route to take (i.e. corporate, entrepreneurial, volunteerism, or retirement).

A growing number of MRG network consultants are using *Personal Directions* and have found the data especially useful in working with the following groups of clients:

- Individuals who risk derailment because of performance problems, or who have underlying issues which are holding them back from fulfilling their potential;
- Individuals who are engaged in ongoing career planning and, rather than addressing specific performance problems, are fine-tuning their career development;
- Individuals who face increasingly stringent selection criteria as they move to higher levels and find that issues which might have been disregarded before are now significant differentiating factors because all candidates are highly competent and have excellent track records on the job.

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