

Trainer's Yarn about Linking

By Olivier Wyler

Sylvie and Rimsky

Sylvie: More and more I feel tense. I look at the mountains that seem so peaceful, cold, and unaffected by my troubles. The cable car is approaching the alpine village where I'm about to train a team of marketing managers. The theme: more performance through better teamwork.

In front of me sits Rimsky. We've never trained together but we're going to co-present this workshop. I don't know him very well. We've met twice before but I've only had time to tell him about the workshop's objectives. I know the marketing team's company and I've asked Rimsky to join me because of his experience in teambuilding.

Sylvie is a good girl, Rimsky is lazy

Sylvie: The growing tension I feel doesn't come from the altitude or from the cold, darkening world passing by – nor even from the pending workshop, as I've good experience with marketing managers. I'm asking myself: How am I going to stand Rimsky? We're so different. Everything is so vague with him and he hasn't prepared anything precise. We've just reviewed the program and again he approached it from a very global point of view, not taking any notes at all. I don't think this guy is serious.

I'm very organized. After our preparatory work - during which we agreed the different steps of the program - I carefully planned every detail of the workshop and each moment is now perfectly organized. I feel comfortable when the entire session plan is written down. Establishing a clear and accurate timetable gives me a definite feeling of certainty and security, as I know exactly what's going to happen. It's almost as if the seminar was already over.

Rimsky looks quite happy, watching the high, deep and white landscape. He's lost in his own thoughts – a dreamer. Our workshop is certainly going to be a flop. He even forgot to give me back my Team Management Profile. More and more he's getting on my nerves.

*Sylvie closed her file and put it back into her briefcase. She was worried about Rimsky and facing a disturbing paradox: *Our mission is to facilitate and develop teamwork with this marketing group but we both work in totally different ways, with different thought processes, values and approaches. How ever are we going to work together?**

Rimsky looks a rascal, Sylvie is more and more anxious

Rimsky: How lucky I am to work with Sylvie. She must certainly be a Thruster-Organizer or a Concluder-Producer (Oh yes! I still must give her back her Team Management Profile!). Each of her documents is so carefully put in a plastic folder, all organized in files with the inscription of her company's logo on the front page.

Astonishing how some people need to plan and have 'everything in its place'. Funny also how, in contrast, I need openness, freedom and space to feel at ease. When everything is 'set in stone' through pre-determined procedures I tend to suffocate. I appreciate it when agendas are upset by unforeseen moments, unpredictable opportunities, and new ideas. I prefer participants to be active and creative, and to raise crucial questions and new issues with them.

Furthermore, I prefer holistic perspectives, to proceed from the 'big picture' to more precise views, following clearly set objectives but with freedom to decide the best way to get there. Sylvie needs to work with details and stick to the plan.

I think that Sylvie and I are a very balanced team and that we're going to be very successful in our workshop... if we ever succeed in resolving our differences.

Too much irony

Rimsky handed Sylvie her Team Management Profile and suggested she read it. The Profile described her as a Concluder-Producer (Introvert, Practical, Analytical and Structured) with secondary strengths in the roles of Controller-Inspector and Thruster-Organizer.

Sylvie fully agreed with the description provided in her Profile, but was a bit shocked and disappointed to note that she was placed on the Wheel away from the Advising area: *Does it mean that I'm not made for consultancy?* Sylvie was about 35 and concerned about her future.

Rimsky answered ironically: *As a Concluder-Producer and Thruster-Organizer you're above all a person of order and action. Consulting is perhaps not quite the job for you, as it requires you to be question-oriented and speculative. Your Profile shows that you prefer concrete results. Statistically we don't find many consultants with preferences like yours. If I were you, I would perhaps change my job!*

I have a Profile of Explorer-Promoter (Extrovert, Creative, Analytical and Flexible) and feel that there are big risks in us working together in this workshop. You fundamentally like to set goals and achieve them quickly, while I prefer just to open discussion and help people search for new ways.

Sylvie listened rather disconcertingly while Rimsky continued to challenge her with negative comments on her preference to work only with the facts, based on clear validated results. *It's important for people like Sylvie to carefully and accurately pursue all consequences of objective results,* thought Rimsky.

Within 30 minutes they would be arriving at the village and be in contact with the participants. Meanwhile, it was dark and snowing. The mountain peaks were now invisible.

Rimsky took out the team Wheel of the marketing team from his bag. There were 2 Explorer-Promoters, 6 Assessor-Developers, and 1 Thruster-Organizer. *Isn't this a worry?* asked Sylvie, a bit afraid. *Yes it is. All their Profiles are quite similar. The risk for them is to rush into opportunities and ignore crucial details. Just have a look: all participants are Extroverts, 8 out of 9 are Creative... They might well need other people around them - perhaps quieter, reflective and more practical - to compensate for their dominant tendencies.*

Oh, enough of that! protested Sylvie angrily. *According to you, we have problems when we're too similar - like the participants on our next workshop; we have problems when we're too different - like you and I for example; and I haven't embraced the right career! I asked you to come and facilitate the work and to bring solutions, not to point out as many questions and difficulties as you can!*

Rimsky was happy, in a few words Sylvie had defined the critical aspects they had to deal with: the need for differences within a group, the necessity of linking these differences efficiently, and the advantage for individuals to work aligned with their main preferences.

The blunder

The cable car was just leaving a tunnel. Clouds were scattering, and both Sylvie and Rimsky were silently observing the reappearing cliffs and ridges. *You're certainly going to be the key person in this workshop,* said Rimsky to Sylvie, *because with your combination of Introvert, Practical and Structured preferences you'll be able to balance the group efficiently.*

Rimsky continued in his very Extrovert, Creative, and - as we are going to see - imprudent way: *Sylvie, what about beginning to challenge our marketing team with two or three very crucial and enthusiastic topics concerning their future and let them dream up and discuss new possibilities during two or three hours tomorrow morning? After that, during the afternoon, you could ask some burning questions about the details and consistency of their goals, and how they'll implement them.*

Of their goal or of your goal? asked Sylvie in a clearly annoyed tone. *Are you serious? You want us now, just before beginning our seminar, to replan the program?*

Rimsky very quickly realized that he had made a mistake. Despite his experience in teamwork and in communication processes, he had forgotten the basics of Linking Skills. His dominating intuition had temporarily taken the lead in his mind and he had forgotten that Sylvie couldn't participate in such quick, adventurous, and improvised changes.

Both were now silently catching sight of the glittering lights of the village, down in the valley – a barrier forming between them. Rimsky was regretting his ineffective communication but was convinced that his idea would be great, very powerful and lead to significant changes. It could directly reveal, like a mirror, the strengths and weaknesses of the team and point out new opportunities for development. Sylvie had the impression that she had destroyed Rimsky's energy and was again feeling anxious about how the workshop was going to take place.

Let's be clear and organized, proposed Rimsky, adopting a more peaceful attitude and strongly marking key words. *We need this team to be concrete and organized. We must follow a clearly defined plan to prevent team members from losing themselves. We have to steer them towards clear objectives. They have to feel that we all know precisely what to do. How do you think we should divide up our work? (This approach is often a way to solve conflicts). *Would you agree if you could precisely follow our plan starting at 11 o'clock?* asked Rimsky. *This wouldn't be really 'precise'*, answered Sylvie, *as our program is fixed to begin from 8 o'clock and not from 11!**

As we can see, negotiation is not Sylvie's first quality. *Be confident*, said Rimsky trying to calm down Sylvie, *the success of the workshop will also depend on matching their preferences. As they have mainly Extrovert and Creative preferences they must have the opportunity to freely discover new perspectives and share opportunities. Believe me; if we allow them to do this we'll be much stronger when we help them to bring Practicality and Structure into their processes. Let me facilitate the first three hours of the morning, then you take things in hand and return to our plan.*

Sylvie was amazed and nervous. She wasn't really convinced, but didn't see any other solution.

Unexpected solution

Meanwhile they had reached the village and were about to get off the train. Rimsky wore very handsome Italian leather shoes, not adapted to the local wintry climate. What had to happen happened: getting off the train he slipped on the icy ground and broke his leg.

Sylvie was, of course, very sorry for him. She had to run the seminar alone, which she did quite well. When however, two days later, the marketing team's boss paid Rimsky a courteous visit at the hospital, he commented about the workshop: *All objectives were met. We learnt much and are satisfied with the service. The only thing we missed was controversy. The whole workshop was clean and ordered. We had no conflicts and that worries me. Opposition usually gives us energy - an energy which keeps us agile for many weeks.*

Rimsky smiled, thanked his visitor and fell asleep.

Summary

In the end, the workshop was not as successful as expected. Participants didn't have the chance to freely exchange and share their thoughts, as they would have liked to. Sylvie's conduct of the workshop was stiff and too structured.

Rimsky should feel guilty about that. He had all the necessary knowledge in hand to make a success of this meeting. Why?

Firstly, because he knows his Profile, and also knows that Explorers-Promoters, like him, aren't always careful enough. They dream too much and don't take sufficient details into account. He wasn't well equipped for these winter conditions and fell, breaking his leg. Knowing his Profile, he should have paid attention and could, perhaps, have avoided such a stupid accident.

Secondly, knowing that Sylvie was a Concluder-Producer, he should have made her feel secure by carefully preparing the workshop and by giving her confidence. Instead he relied on his own intuition and improvised, which contributed to irritating and destabilizing Sylvie. Once again, he didn't fully exploit the information he had.

To sum up, we can say that Rimsky was not up to pacing different personalities efficiently. He had difficulties in overcoming his own preferences and in linking to different perceptions and values.

Considering what he knew from his own and Sylvie's Profiles, he could have taken much better advantage of the situation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Agence Team Management

Agence Team Management

France: PR Le Pas-de-l'Echelle FR-74100 Etrembières
Switzerland: Place de l'Eglise 19 CH-1255 Veyrier - Genève

Tel : +41-22-7841616

Fax : +41-22-7841666

www.agence-tm.com

infos@agence-tm.com

Olivier Wyler has his office in Geneva and works as a consultant specializing in management development and teambuilding. He has used the Team Management Systems approach for more than ten years and successfully uses, in particular both the Linking Skills Profile Questionnaire and Team Management Profile Questionnaire, to improve managerial and team performance in Swiss and European companies.