

Seth – A Case Study in Support of Coaching for Career Transition

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Name: Seth

Age: Forty

Education: Bachelor of Science degree with a major in advertising and marketing

Current Occupation: Director of Operations with a growing hospitality group

Marital Status: Married with two young children

Residence: Has lived in Atlanta, Georgia since 1998; previously resided and worked in Alabama for 10 years, then California for 7 years

Coaching Engagement: January 2007 to November 2007

Presenting Issues and Concerns

Seth is a hard-working, creative, self-aware professional with a winning personality. He works as the director of operations in an upscale restaurant group. An ENFJ (based upon the *Myers Briggs Type Indicator*), he enjoys the people and pace at his current job, but is frustrated at having to work as hard as an owner without the true benefits of ownership. He has been employed with this group for nine years. Serving as the general manager for one restaurant and overseeing five others, he works six days a week, two of which stretch from 8 a.m. to 10 or 11 p.m. As he wrote in his *Client Interview Form*, the biggest problem with the career is: “The career itself. There is little or no quality of life as a restaurateur.”

Seth is happily married and has two young children. He has a passion for family, food, wine, guitar, mountain biking, racquetball, golf, reading and following *South Eastern Conference* football. In addition to his degree in advertising and marketing, he has certifications as a

sommelier and ski instructor. He has also just completed the initial training requirements to serve as a professional mediator. He has volunteered with the *Special Olympics*, the *Arthritis Foundation* and local philanthropic groups.

Seth easily articulated what he considered to be his strengths and weaknesses, and felt that he wanted to find a new career as a chief executive officer. However, he often felt lost and overwhelmed when thinking about making a career transition. He felt he lacked information about job opportunities, duties, available career resources and occupations, and he didn't know how to get the career position he might desire. As he wrote in his coaching intake paperwork, "I just don't really have an idea of what is out there."

He also felt uncertain about the type of work environment he might desire and what was most important to him in a career, and he felt unable to decide what direction he wanted to take with his career. He was concerned that he might make a bad decision and that his personal responsibilities might interfere with his ability to make a sound career decision.

Career Coaching Barriers/Goals

Although Seth lacked information about how to get a new career, he was clear he wanted one in a top executive role. As he wrote in his *Client Interview Form*, the type of industry was less important than "the position itself, the latitude to operate within that position, the support of peers and management, and the culture of the company." He felt skilled as a manager. He enjoyed "hiring, training, developing and managing people," as well as "determining the vision for a company and then setting the strategy to get to that vision." He liked running companies and the idea of being a chief executive officer (CEO). He conveyed that his dream job might be as a CEO, a position in politics, creating a non-profit charity, or even as a golf pro. He liked the

balance of “managing people and working with financial statements.” He was also drawn to being a mediator, real estate developer or director of training.

In short, he wanted a more challenging and fulfilling role that allowed him to excel in a position in which he had autonomy, authority and prestige.

When I asked Seth about barriers to achieving his goals, initially he was unable to name any, but it became clear that the main barrier was his crushing work schedule that made it difficult for him to come to regular appointments, complete assignments in as timely a manner as he would have liked, and conduct his search for a new career. Still, he persevered, always providing thoughtful responses, outwardly demonstrating a strong belief in himself and progressing with his occupational exploration exercises.

Assessments/Information Gathering

After our initial session, Seth and I discussed his personality preferences, based upon the profile he obtained from a previously completed *Myers Briggs Type Indicator-MBTI* (see Attachment I in Appendix). Using his *MBTI* preferences, I shared with Seth the core elements that he might focus on while looking for, or considering, a better fit or best fit career position. The driving force for an ENFJ is often the opportunity to “naturally and conscientiously move into action to care for others, to organize the world around them, and to get things done” (Martin, 1997, p. 44). Seth’s intake interview and paperwork supported the assumption that his career responsibilities and achievements were in alignment with the primary motivators for his type. The ENFJ will strive to “offer care, cooperation and facilitation for people’s growth; articulate messages that others want or need to hear; remind stakeholders of their mission and core values; and provide support, believing in the positive nature of people” (Krebs Hirsh & Kise, 2000, p.

40).

In the broad sense, the ENFJ is most at home in “supportive, appreciative, creative atmospheres; structures that bring results yet respond to people’s needs; with co-workers who focus on improving things for the common good; where personal growth and self-expression are encouraged, where social interaction and harmony exist” (Ibid).

As a leader, the ENFJ may distinguish himself by a desire to “lead with energy and enthusiasm; to take charge of the start-up phase; communicate and often become spokespersons for worthy causes; work to include and support people while allowing for their own and others’ autonomy; pay attention to what motivates others and encourage them to act” (Hirsh & Kummerow, 1998, p. 21). Seth’s career with the hospitality group involved a progression of leadership roles and he consistently served the organization by engaging his staff in talent development initiatives. Therefore, I felt it would be beneficial to provide an in-depth interpretation of the strengths and contributions of ENFJs, as well as the connections between personality and career development.

Following the interpretation of the *MBTI* material, I encouraged Seth to complete two additional assessments, the *Newly Revised Strong Interest Inventory* and the *Work Personality Index (WPI) Career Transition Report*.

The *Strong Interest Inventory* organizes the applicant’s current interests among six personality themes: Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C). Seth’s results revealed the strength of his primary areas of interest, also known as his theme code, to correlate with the descriptors for ESA (see Attachment II in Appendix). “The various Strong inventories have been based on the assumption that individuals who are attracted to and enjoy a specific occupation have similar interest profiles and therefore, by

assessing and matching the interests of individuals exploring careers against those of workers in the field, counselors can help people make better career decisions” (Gibson & Marianne H. Mitchell, 2003, p. 246).

Seth’s top five interest areas from the *Strong* include: culinary arts, human resources and training, performing arts, politics and public speaking, and law. The *Strong* also revealed that the 10 occupations most closely aligned with his interests are: corporate trainer, top executive, sales manager, social worker, community service director, operations manager, attorney, college instructor, special education teacher and investments manager.

Seth’s *WPI Career Transition Report* organized his results into six categories: working with others, dynamism, work style, problem solving, dealing with pressure and stress, and identifying and managing change (see Attachment III in Appendix). The key points identified in these six areas are summarized below.

Working with others. Seth would enjoy careers which: involved frequent teamwork, working closely with colleagues and consulting with them; gave him the opportunity to meet people and use his outgoing style but that also allowed him to take an impartial approach to problems; didn’t involve him in interpersonal issues; and allowed him freedom to complete tasks in areas for which he had mastery.

Dynamism. Seth would enjoy a competitive and challenging career in which he could advance and achieve, one that allowed him to work at a steady pace as he overcame obstacles, solved difficult problems and persistently met targets.

Work Style. Seth would enjoy a somewhat structured environment that required a high level of dependability with people who value getting things done, but which

followed general guidelines as opposed to precise regulations, that gave him freedom to adjust his work procedures, and where he didn't have to spend a lot of time carefully checking details.

Problem Solving. He would also enjoy a career that required innovation, creativity, ingenuity and solving complex problems with abstract thinking; that let him develop original solutions and focus on future opportunities; and that involved analyzing and discussing data.

Dealing with Pressure and Stress. Seth's best-fit careers would utilize his high level of self-control, involve problems he could solve without stress, but that were demanding and took place in a high-pressure work environment.

Identifying and Managing Change. Seth would enjoy careers that allowed him to take the initiative, and that continually provided new challenges in which he could identify new opportunities and take advantage of them. The careers also would involve some routine tasks, but would have some variety and require flexibility to moderate change ("WPI: Work Personality Index," 2007, pp. 5-17).

Coaching Sessions

After our first session, I provided Seth with targeted web links by subject to aid him in enhancing his initial lists of transferable skills and career values. I also asked him to complete the *Client Interview Form* (see Attachment IV in Appendix), which provided a wealth of information about the directions in which to lead Seth. His 11 answers led to many follow-up questions, which shaped our sessions, as did the *MBTI* material, and the results of the *Strong* and *WPI* assessments.

Since Seth had a pre-existing job interview lined up, I provided him with information about the strengths and productive environments associated with his *MTBI* type to aid him in determining if the job might be a good fit. I also offered to update his resume now and refine it later when we had defined a clear focus for his career search.

At our next session, we discussed the results of his *Strong Interest Inventory* report, and following the session I provided him with Internet resources for suggested follow-up exercises on occupational exploration. In one core exercise, which he practiced throughout our work, he extracted the essential elements of several occupational descriptions, with the goal of finding positions that complement his core skills, values and interests. “We must find the best fit possible of people’s strengths and the roles we are asking them to play at work” (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, p. 245).

The next week, I sent him information about the personality type of the company owner who would be conducting his upcoming job interview, based upon his educated guess from previous calls and meetings. The information was intended to aid him while talking with her about the job for which he was pursuing, as well as provide him with a technique to integrate *MBTI* data into the interview process. I also reviewed the occupational titles he highlighted on the *Strong* report and advised him to take his time researching the titles and extracting the key elements of each occupational description.

In our next session, we began focusing on developing a new resume that would be both content rich and visually appealing. Seth did excellent work on my request for additional information to be incorporated into a profile section highlighting his areas of expertise and key career accomplishments. I also asked him to identify conferences, seminars, workshops, and courses he has successfully completed to date, to demonstrate his ongoing commitment to

professional development. His existing resume was filled with lists of job duties and failed to clearly convey the value that he would bring to an organization (see attachment IV in Appendix). I stressed to Seth that the resume was his primary tool for personal branding and marketing. Therefore, an effective resume should “clearly communicate your purpose and competencies in relation to the employers’ needs; be concise and easy to read; outline a pattern of success highlighted with examples of key accomplishments; motivate the reader to read it in-depth; tell employers that you are a responsible and purposeful individual – a doer who can quickly solve their problems” (Krannich, 2005, p. 179).

I also suggested that Seth continue researching occupational titles of interest, by preparing a *pros vs. cons* list for each. As well, I urged him to start searching job boards for the preferred qualifications of several occupational titles in which he was interested.

A week later, I provided him with a draft of a new resume (see attachment V in Appendix) and assigned him the task of creating a concise cover letter, targeted for a company and position which he was interested in pursuing. I emphasized that his letter should include several key pieces of information from his resume, linked to skills and accomplishments, to entice the reader to review the resume in depth.

After our next session, we focused on the results of his *WPI* assessment. I encouraged him to highlight what he agreed with in the *WPI* report, concerning his strengths and talents, then make notes of information he felt was not a match with his background. I also asked him to adapt his draft of his cover letter into a letter of introduction to recruiters and companies of interest. I asked him to review his resume in detail and reflect upon his accomplishments, giving himself credit for all that he has achieved, and to consider what personal assets and gifts have aided him in facing setbacks or attaining goals. “When you are performing a particular activity...if you find

yourself actually anticipating that activity...it is a pretty good sign that you are enjoying it and that one of your talents is at play. Spontaneous reactions, yearnings, rapid learning, and satisfactions will all help you detect the traces of your talents. As you rush through your busy life, try to step back, quiet the wind whipping past your ears and listen to these clues. They will help you zero in on your talents” (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, p. 75). I reminded Seth that my goal was for him to truly believe that he had earned this next step on his career path to an executive level and shareholder track, and that he could trust his instincts and feel ready and able to take on the challenge.

Seth completed three letters targeted to recruiters and three to hiring managers. As a result of his recent interviews, he was offered a position as a director of retail operations, but concluded that this position was really a lateral career move and he decided to decline the offer. Undaunted, Seth continued progressing with his job search activity. We decided upon an approach that relied upon his networking contacts, where he would call and email the members of his network with a request for feedback on contacts at recruiting firms and companies of interest. Those who responded would be sent a more focused letter. I advised him to log his networking and search activities to aid him in gauging warm leads and to track his follow-up effort. “Networking works best as a long-term strategy of building and strengthening ties, not as a ‘call-only-when-you-need-a-job’ strategy. Stay in touch with your most important contacts, even if it’s only to drop them a holiday card or send an e-mail occasionally” (Graham, 2005, pp. 40-41).

At our next session, we discussed whether he should establish a timeline for leaving his current position. I urged him to consider: that a job search could take months, particularly one that involved transitioning to a new career; how long he could afford to remain unemployed;

whether family and close friends would support his decision to leave; and whether he would be okay with letting go of the identity of operations manager to focus on the next phase of his career.

I also gave him referrals to two business consultants to assist him in his search and provided him with a list of links to guide him. I recommended that he carve out half days and full days to dedicate to his job search and to proceed with his networking. Meanwhile, he continued to explore opportunities in the field of mediation.

Seth's busy schedule was a barrier again, as three months passed before our next contact, and he expressed that he continued to be unable to find a time to come in. Therefore, we communicated via email. He expressed an intriguing development: in a few instances, while talking with executive recruiters, a suggestion had been made that he might be a good recruiter. He also asked for my advice regarding three specific search firms. I agreed that the role of "recruiter" was promising, and that the key would be finding a quality organization that represented a nice fit with his criteria for a new career position. I recognized two of the firms as being of quality and suggested he speak with each further.

I reminded him of the strengths and productive places for an ENFJ and, based on his ESA theme code, found several links with a career as a recruiter: human resources, corporate training, sales and operations. As well, his ES sub-code revealed several other links to recruiter: career and life coaching, training and development, mediation and arbitration. I also reminded him that based on his career experience, his strengths included: selecting, developing and mentoring staff; understanding organizational dynamics; mediation; sales; operations; and business. "Recruiter" was also promising because Seth was process and goal oriented and keenly aware of the benefits of placing the right person in the correct role.

At our next session, we discussed the informational interviews he'd conducted to explore the role of executive recruiter. He reported that he had not found the time to research potential companies of interest. While a top executive role in a small- to medium-sized, growth-oriented company or entrepreneurial venture was still appealing to him, he still felt unclear about the career upon which to focus. Due to the fact that Seth could not dedicate the proper amount of time to his job search, I suggested that he consider hiring a career management firm to assist him in his search process. I then recommended several such firms. I also provided him with web links to search for employers of interest, gave him information regarding franchises, and suggested an Internet database of franchise resource material.

In our last contact, Seth reported that he was "focused on trying to develop one or two business concepts." He was "keeping up with the job postings of key companies" and "trying to research other companies of interest." It was slow going, he said, but "he was doing one thing every day with the ultimate focus on trying to start a business."

Outcomes and Results

Seth's search well illustrates the challenges of career transition: finding the time to conduct a successful search, while keeping up with current responsibilities. In the beginning, Seth was very dissatisfied; he knew he wanted a new career, but didn't know what that was or how to obtain it. During our work, his many talents were revealed and embraced. Despite a very difficult and exhausting work schedule, he thoughtfully responded to every task, keeping his eye on the important outcome.

Through encouragement, self-assessment exercises, the use of formal assessment, and his hard work, viable career options emerged. Seth's search for a fulfilling role continues, but given

the tools at his disposal, along with his own ambition and tenacity, there is little doubt that his next position or business venture will be a success.

Coach's Reflections

Seth's life is marked by both challenges that have been met in his career and a myriad of interests that have been pursued for personal enrichment. He consistently demonstrates a powerful work ethic and strives to produce results that speak to his appreciation for competency and quality. I believe Seth has completed development opportunities, such as becoming a sommelier, a ski instructor, and trained mediator, in a mission to set himself apart and be perceived by peers and colleagues as someone who is interesting and has expertise. The variety of interests that Seth pursues may also reflect a level of indecision, not wanting to exclude any possibilities, as well as a method to combat boredom in his career.

Seth clearly dedicates a great deal of his time, effort and energy to his vocation. He can in fact be characterized as a "workaholic". Seth is extremely humble, is not ego centric, values people and rapport, and seems to measure success by assessing both the plan of action and the results. He consistently sacrifices personal time for the benefit of his work and his company. However, I don't believe he makes this sacrifice as a selfless act. Rather, he may be trying to prove his worth and value to both his superiors and himself. It is my opinion that Seth is seeking greater rewards for the time and energy that he dedicates to his career. And the rewards he values most would come in the form of an executive role and stakeholder interest in a promising business venture.

Seth has been with his current employer for almost 9 years. He freely admits that he has progressed as far as he will be allowed to within this organization, due to decisions made by the

owners of the company. The owners feel that there is no need for an additional shareholder in their enterprise and have rejected Seth's request to buy an interest in the business. Therefore, Seth is powerless to effect the change he desires for his role in this company. I believe he feels justified in his request. He is extremely disappointed with his superiors and therefore, desires an opportunity to wield greater control over his career and his destiny.

Recommendations for Ongoing Career Development

At the current age of 40, Seth has achieved a great deal, both personally and professionally. He has a supportive spouse, 2 beautiful children, a lovely home and a successful career position that is the result of a sound progression of skills and accomplishments. However, what Seth lacks is a healthy dose of self confidence.

Seth should continue his search for an executive position within an organization that represents a strong match with his interests. By identifying and pursuing these opportunities, his resolve should be strengthened as he investigates very realistic career options. Seth should also give serious consideration to pursuing additional, focused professional development activities. To more effectively compete in the market, he will surely benefit from the completion of a graduate business certification or a master of business administration program. Workshops and conferences on entrepreneurship, the franchise market, and venture capital arena would also support his quest for a position as a chief executive officer.

Seth is currently armed with the skills, tools and resource material to support his job search. He must now transform time, his longtime nemesis, from a liability into a powerful asset. Seth will need to reallocate time by actively reinforcing realistic barriers between his work and personal life. He will then be in a position to dedicate more time to his needs and establish

greater work~life balance.

List of Resources and Tools Employed Within the Scope of Coaching Engagement

- I. ENFJ - *Type and Coaching Summary*.
- II. *Newly Revised Strong Interest Inventory Interpretive Report* - compiled for Seth.
- III. *WPI Career Transition Report* – compiled for Seth.
- IV. *Client Interview Form* – completed by Seth.
- V. Seth's original resume, reviewed in January 2007, at the onset of the coaching process.
- VI. Updated resume prepared for Seth, as a result of our coaching engagement.

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