

Helping successful leaders stay that way

Leadership coaching

Background

For more than 20 years, Rabab Ghazoul has been working as an artist, cultural practitioner and community organizer. She produces art works and creates cultural projects, which focus on how culture and creativity can address issues of power, change and agency.

Her achievements are many.

She has been invited to exhibit her work in the Iraqi Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and has been the keynote speaker at the International Engage Conference. In 2004, she created a Film Club, providing tailored access to independent films and documentaires for women from diverse backgrounds. Running for 12 years, with audiences of up to 120 women per screening, and recently the recipient of Big Lottery funding, the Film Club is testament to Rabab's commitment and passion to cultural democratization and meaningful access to the arts.

Rabab excels at motivating change and making things happen. For example, in January 2016, she was the key organiser for Cardiff's Culture March, part of a campaign which challenged the city council's intended £700,000 cut to cultural provision in the city. Cardiff was the only city to successfully reverse austerity cuts to the arts.

Key Issues

Rabab started to wrestle with a common issue which comes with success: she felt pulled in various directions. She never had enough time to fulfill her commitments to the projects she was working on, or to her own art practice, and her plans to establish a new company.

Rabab explained: "I wanted to know how to navigate different strands in my work and juggle different demands on my time.

"I knew I wanted to shift the way I worked but struggled to know how and where to focus, so I'd not managed to move things onto the next stage. I found myself avoiding making decisions and not making the best use of my time."

As she observed, "In many work situations, people have a line manager or supervisor; as a freelancer you don't have that support, whilst you are often juggling several projects at a time. I needed a sounding board, a space where I could get clear ideas about what I was doing and why."

Rabab wanted some protected time to think about the things that would develop her art practice, her career, and working trajectory. She also wanted to make the next step in forming a company, but lacked conviction in her own leadership qualities. She didn't quite believe that she was the person to do it.

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Rabab Ghazoul

Solution

Rabab approached Emma for leadership coaching. She found that her time with Emma gave her the opportunity to focus on her current tendencies in how she was working, and why she was avoiding taking certain steps.

“The coaching sessions helped me re-think my own narrative,” she explained. “I had the space to remind myself of who I was - the experience I had behind me - and subsequently was able to articulate actions that would be in line with my ethos and principles. I re-asserted my own convictions, and became more confident in taking challenging actions.”

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Rabab

With Emma, Rabab talked through scenarios where she wanted to focus and declutter, especially in relation to time spent on communication. Through getting this clarity about what she wanted the outcome of her communications to be, she spent less energy and time on it.

The sessions themselves created that essential ‘protected thinking time’ that successful leaders like Rabab need, so they can reflect and gain clarity.

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Rabab observed that, “Emma creates a really easy space, where I feel totally comfortable. She has a very light and warm touch and yet, when needed, she’s strict and incredibly insightful. I find this helps me cut through a lot of stuff which otherwise would hinder my progress.

“Emma also brings a sensitivity and a sensibility about the human being in front of her. I find there’s always a sense of things moving in her sessions, where you experience shifts in clarity and, therefore, in your future actions.”

Results

As well as becoming more focused, Rabab moved her career on, taking actions she had been procrastinating about for years.

At the end of a coaching session, Rabab agreed a set of actions. This led to her being able to create a website for her art-work. This action strongly supported the next stage of her career.

She reflected that, “I had to focus on how I wanted to present my work as an artist – define what my practice was all about. Creating the website gave me the clarity to articulate those things, and finally finish something I’d begun – and discontinued – many times.”

Essentially, her time with Emma gave her the energy and belief to keep being a successful leader. As Rabab said, “No matter what mood I arrive in, I always feel invigorated after a session with Emma. Because I’ve been able to get to the heart of an issue, so I always leave ready to take the next step.”

Conclusion

Successful and inspirational leaders often struggle to make the time for thinking, reflection, reinvigoration and then action. One-to-one coaching with someone who understands leaders and their issues can be an incredibly effective way of helping them gain this.