

Using self-awareness to redefine a sales model

When a successful electronics company moves to a new way of doing business, personality type takes a leading role. But how?

When Ricoh was founded in Japan in 1936, it was built on three principles: “Love your neighbor, love your country, love your work.” Those ideals have served the company well—it now ranks among the Fortune Global 500. But as it moves to a new way of doing business, Ricoh is using the principles of personality type to give its sales leaders another dictum to live by: “Know yourself.”

Ian Harris, senior executive coach for Ricoh’s North American region and a former vice-president of HR with Ricoh Canada, says the company is moving to a ‘services-led model’. This approach is aimed at selling solutions for clients’ growing need to manage the flow of information in a digital office.

The new model is rife with opportunities, but implementing it means helping sales leaders redefine a successful sale. “Anybody can sell a box,” says Harris, “but that may not fit the client’s need.” Harris says Ricoh looked at leadership development as a way to set up its sales leaders for success: “What could the company do to help them meet our global challenges? And what should they be looking at for their own personal development?”

Business Challenges

- Helping the business and its sales leaders move towards a service-led model

Company Profile

Ricoh is a Japanese multinational company. It produces electronic products such as cameras, printers, scanners and photocopiers, and is the leading manufacturer of black-and-white multifunction devices worldwide. Ricoh ranks in the Fortune 500 and in the Forbes 2000 lists.

Ricoh

Solution

The global challenges are many for an industry leader with nearly 100,000 employees worldwide. “The organization is trying to get information, but people are inundated with data,” says Harris. “There are technological shifts toward mobile, tablet, and cloud computing. And there are demographic shifts, with boomers exiting the workforce.”

With those challenges in mind, Ricoh brought together 130 of its senior sales leaders at a recent conference. The five-day gathering included a half-day workshop devoted to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) assessment. When it came to using the MBTI tool, Harris faced a challenge of his own. “This is a unique group—with a majority of preferences for Extraversion and Thinking. They need knowledge before they’ll buy in, so they wanted background on the tool.”

Harris, a certified MBTI user, drew on information from the *Introduction to Type® and Leadership* booklet, which he also uses as part of his executive coaching. He did this to show participants the theory behind the tool and help them understand how they could use it in their jobs.

In the half-day session, he used the MBTI® Interpretive Report for Organizations along with practical exercises to demonstrate how accurate it is. In one exercise, participants were grouped based on their type and asked how they spent their weekend.

“It’s an exercise that’s fun but also drives points home,” says Harris. The exercise illuminated differences between Introverts and Extraverts; the groups then talked about those differences, comparing and validating their results with others in the process.

Solution

- MBTI workshop for sales leaders
- Focus on behavioral change

“Once you know someone’s [MBTI®] type, you can communicate better with them.”

Ian Harris,
Senior Executive Coach,
Ricoh’s North American region

Ricoh

Results

After the conference—where attendees rated him in the top quartile of 23 speakers—Harris heard reports back from the participants' own leaders, saying they were making concerted efforts to deal with weaknesses and showing more self-awareness. "It makes people more cognizant of differences between them, and of the value of those differences," he says.

He has since expanded on his use of the MBTI tool, ingraining it into executive coaching. "There's not a lot of pushback. The MBTI language has captured their attention."

In the executive coaching context, Harris says, "Once you know someone's [MBTI®] type, you can communicate better with them about issues of leaders' influence, stress and change, decision making and problem solving. Out of the coaching sessions emerges an individual development plan that focuses on the competencies each participant wants to develop. The MBTI information is used to supplement the plan, and participants are encouraged to share their results with their supervisors and teams".

Harris adds, "If they have that info, they can build it into the cadence of their one-on-one meetings...."

"The idea is to help you understand yourself, help you understand others and help you work in teams. What will you do differently? How? When?"

In coaching, Harris also uses information from the MBTI tool to help leaders "loosen up, get beyond past practices, and get to behavior change and adaptation." He notes that many sales leaders are good at their job but tend to rely on a foundation of what has worked before.

"But in a time of change, moving to the services-led business model, the MBTI tool gives them a roadmap to remaining open to change."

Results

- Sales leaders able to adapt better to change
- New sales model adopted more readily
- Improved problem-solving skills delivers better service for customers



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