The meaning of work-life balance

Question 1

Alright, so starting off with work-life balance, what do you think the similarities and differences are between work-life balance and work-life integration, are they the same or different?

I think they are different, because you do have to have a differentiation between work and home, and I think if the two do blend and mesh into one another, then you are never fully at home and never fully at work, so my sense is that it is a balance more than an integration. Having said that to get that sort of balance you sometimes have to have a system or method of working or working environment that allows flexibility and being able to work from home or work flexi time, create the balance but still differentiate, so I speak from my experience and some experience from my wife, that you do have to compartmentalize to a degree, so I would say integration and balance are two different things.

Question 2

What does work-life balance for woman mean to you as a manager-coach?
I suppose it means balancing the demands of family and children and interests outside of work with the demands of the role but also with the need for stimulation and fulfillment in the job. So it’s having, looking at it from a woman’s perspective, I think is what you are asking me, it seems to me that woman, particularly working women, have a real kind of emotional issue where they do not want to neglect their family and want to be a really good mother but equally they want the challenge and want to be a really good professional person in the workplace - and that for me is the real challenge for them, how they balance those two and how they deal with them. There is an element of guilt that comes in where they say I want to fulfill myself and I want to have a challenge and I want to be out there, but I also want to be a good mother and not neglect my children and my husband and my family, so that kind of balance is difficult and interesting to strike.

It’s about creating an environment that gives enough opportunity and flexibility to minimize that tug of war that happens, without demeaning the professional side of the role, or in fact, being so rigid that they can’t deal with the demands of family and work and their role outside of work.

**Question 3**

Okay, so in what way is work-life balance important to woman, why would they want to achieve work-life balance?

I think it is similar to the point that I raised earlier – it’s around finding and being able to be a good mother, a good wife, or member of the family if you don’t have kids, but also fulfilling your academic potential or having a challenge from an academic or relationships perspective or forming professional or collegiate relationships outside of the household. I take it from a lot of the discussions I have had with my wife, she has been through this thing as well, in various different roles, in being a house mother and being really frustrated in that because you are not getting the academic and professional fulfillment and the academic discussion with colleagues at work, and then working full time and being really frustrated because she is not getting the opportunity to be there for the kids and feeling guilty that she
is leaving them alone. To working part-time and feeling like she is not achieving that sort of balance because there is always kind of conflict between the two.

**Question 4**

*What are the particular challenges that you think woman experience in achieving work-life balance, I mean what goes into getting that balance between home and work?*

I suppose the first thing that comes to mind is the work role that you are in, that will have a big impact on it because that dictates the kind of flexibility that you have, whether you are able to be in an output generating role, which I think makes it a lot easier to achieve that balance or whether you are in an input generating role. So my view is your level in the organisation can make it that much more difficult to achieve that sort of a balance. Whereas if you are a receptionist, you are stuck here from 8 until 5 with an hour for lunch, it’s much more difficult to achieve that as opposed to someone like (manager) who is in a much more output driven role and will have the flexibility to go and deal with taking her child to OT or attending sports days which is part of the work balance and I think level within the organisation around remuneration and earning power, although money doesn’t make you happy, the bigger your earning power the more options and flexibility you have got around achieving work-life balance.

I suppose the other challenge would be the level of support or the kind of infrastructure that you have got around you. If you have got family or a network, that can help you achieve that balance and flexibility.

I also don’t want to be condescending about it, but it also depends on your personal relationships, and how you manage your personal relationships, and how you manage the demands that are placed on you by your family, and how you manage the demands that are placed on you by your manager, so I think some of the challenges are easier met by people with a better emotional intelligence that can deal with these things and set the right parameters for each interaction, I suppose. If you have got your family continuously putting
unreasonable demands on you, but you need the money and have to work, then it sort of exacerbates that emotional conflict.

*The working woman’s reality in attempting to achieve work-life balance*

**Question 5**

Okay anything else that you want to add there, because the next question ties in. So what do you think the realities are facing woman in the workplace today?

I still think that there is still sort of a stigma attached to working woman, and even in the most forward thinking workplaces, there is some sort of a negative connotation that woman aren’t going to be able to do the job because they are going to have to be spending half their time looking after their kids or managing commitments outside of the workplace, so I think that is a reality. I also think there are more and more demands placed on woman from a job perspective because they are in the workplace and need to deliver just as much, and on the same basis, as a man; but also from a family and a school and an extra mural or extra-curricular point of view, there are ever increasing demands and there are increasing demands on being more involved with your kids and it’s almost expected that you are at every sports event and there are huge amounts of extra mural events that happen in the school system, so it’s increasing demands.

And what do you think those demands do to the ability of woman to deliver in the workplace and successfully juggle or balance both of those roles?

I really think it depends on the individual and their ability, going back to the sort of emotional intelligence and their ability to juggle the demands because I think two different people with the same demands will handle them very differently. I suppose it also has something to do with the environment at work because if you are feeling like you have got a challenge and you are enjoying what you are doing and you are getting the kind of stimulation and development that you are looking for in that job, then you are more likely to have a positive view about balancing those demands. I think if you are sitting here hating
it but you know you have got to come to work because you need the paycheck and you are not getting the support and the development opportunity and the challenge, then you are going to start resenting that and then it becomes much more difficult to deal with those balance issues. You are going to be more inclined to become more frustrated and panicky about how you are going to deal with those demands and then you get into a glass half empty situation, where you are not getting either side right.

**Okay and other realities?**

I suppose on the other side of it, just thinking about it, and I think it would depend again on personal relationships but it seems to me - and maybe I am completely wrong because I haven't had that much experience in it - but there is a difference in how involved fathers and male interests in the family are to what they used to be. I mean, I think probably 20 years ago there was much more demand placed on a working woman to some degree. Now there is kind of a willingness and an understanding that the dads are going to be involved in giving the kids a lift to school or spending time taking kids to the doctors but I suppose it also depends on the level of seniority of the spouse and their ability to be flexible and have input into helping with that balance. My sense is that, in at least a portion of the female workforce, that maybe it is a bit easier in today’s environment at a senior level, than it may have been. I would think that it is more at a senior level though.

**Any other realities?**

I think there is still, in everybody’s mind, this perception especially with younger professional woman around ‘should we be employing them to the risk of losing them to maternity leave?’ So then they say ‘well even if I have a baby I will be coming back’ and then things change when you are out there. So I still think it is a reality, it’s probably not right, but it is a reality that is faced for a younger woman who is trying to get into a role and build a career and I think the reality is that the structures are not in place, generally, to assist and manage that issue, maternity leave and working flexibly and creating an environment that is conducive to that, so you are limiting access to a whole skills base if you can’t deal with it.
correctly, so I don’t know what the answer is, but it’s something that needs to be thought through.

**Question 6**

Okay, so based on these realities, how do they impact the achievement of work-life balance?

I think we are probably better than most based on the ability to achieve work-life balance within the environment, but I think they have got to have a negative impact on work-life balance based on - well, there is a lot of pressure to show that you can achieve and do everything in the workplace and having it seen that you are delivering as much as your male counterparts, while still trying to achieve the balance at home and I think in a lot of instances, both suffer.

**Question 7**

*What do you think brings working woman a sense of meaning?*

I think having the ability to be a meaningful part of the organisation in their chosen field, and being able to kind of express their intellectual and academic and professional abilities and view and ideas, but being able to do that in an environment where they don’t feel undervalued and resented because they have got roles and responsibilities outside of the workplace. Then I think also, wider than the personal and family stuff, is to be treated as equal and I am not sure that it’s like that, I don’t think a lot of male managers or employers feel that woman are equal.

I think it has got to be based on the fact you are assessed on your competencies and abilities and what you bring, rather than you are male or female or indeterminate.

*So competencies and abilities and do you think that at times that is not the case?*
Yes, I think less so because there have been a lot of strides made but I think there are certain elements of society that still don’t think it’s the case.

**Question 8**

**What do you think brings women fulfillment?**

Shoo – it’s got to be very personal! At a superficial level, and particularly about working women, then at a certain level fulfillment has got to come from being able to achieve that work-life balance or being able to make a meaningful contribution and to have input and meaningful relationships at a work and professional level, without significantly compromising their personal and family relationships outside of work. To be able to be seen as “useful members of society”, I mean I talk to my wife about these things, and she says you feel wasted - so if they are at home they feel they are not living up to their full potential, no sense of identity, I am just the mom and the taxi driver, I am not my own person and I don’t have an identity or a creative outlet for my intellectual ability, but I think stay at home moms are undervalued in that respect as well. So I think there is a danger that they don’t find fulfillment and are caught in between two stools where you feel like you are not doing a good job as being a mother or wife or a family member but you are also not living up to your potential in the workplace or committing as much as you could. It is also very individual and I think it depends on what you measure as success, so different woman will have different things that bring them fulfillment based on their definition of success.

**Question 9**

Alright, taking all of that into account, the need for work-life balance, the challenges, the realities, the sense of meaning and fulfillment, what support do you think could be provided to optimise the work-life balance of working woman?

In general, I think flexible working hours and the ability to work away from the office has got to be something that can help in that sort of environment. I think our sort of approach to coffee conversations, on a more personal interaction, and understanding the challenges and
difficulties and issues of achieving work-life balance, and trying to be proactive within a reasonable framework to address those issues, it has to make it easier, depending on your frame of reference. I am just sort of thinking of the administrative-based people, and more hours-based people and how you provide that sort of support. I mean then it brings up all sorts of issues of providing crèches and that sort of things for the kids, and how do you maximize the time available for family and responsibilities outside of work such as maintaining the home and doing the cooking and I think about (cleaner) who is the breadwinner, pretty much, but has to do all the cooking and all the cleaning and all the looking after the kids and still work a full day, without any real ability to be flexible, and then to catch a taxi home in the evening, so its almost impossible to assist with that at a certain level. But thinking differently, from a different point of view, you might say that you incur more cost as an organisation with those things, but she has more time and more work-life balance and through that you are going to have an employee that has more time and is more committed and productive when they are at work. So maybe you have one extra cleaning lady, so their shifts or working time is reduced, and it may be more expensive but maybe you have better benefits in the long run in the way they interact and develop, and you might unearth some talents in people that you didn’t know existed just because they haven’t had an opportunity to explore those, because there is no balance in their life.

The challenge becomes quite difficult when you start doing that for female employees and the guys start saying ‘well, what about me’? Because you could have men that feel exactly the same way about work-life balance and want to be involved with children, and in many families you may have a situation where the mother is the main bread winner and the corporate high flyer, and the father is the kind of care giver and the family support, so he has the same kind of work-life balance challenges.

**Anything you want to add to that?**

It’s a fascinating subject when you come to think about it, finding a way to deal with this hugely complex environment.
Question 10

Well, the next question links in with that and that is what role, if any, should the organisation play in optimising work-life balance?

Well, I think it is a no brainer, the organisation must try and be proactive in optimising work-life balance because we are all about happy, fulfilled, productive people and getting the best out of people, so there can be no doubt in my mind that unless you have a reasonable work-life balance, you can’t be functioning at an optimum level. If you are sitting at work worrying about what is happening with your kids or worrying about what is happening with your wife or someone at home, you can’t be fully focused and equally, if you are at home worrying about how you are going to meet the demands of your role, you can’t be a good parent or a good caregiver and that detracts from both your performance at home and at work and at that level, there is a work-life integration. How you do and how you feel in each one affects your ability to perform in the other. So I suppose, going back to the question before of what sort of support can you give, I suppose some of us take it for granted, but there has to be some training and support and life skills development to assist in how you think about it and how you achieve work-life balance. It’s is not so much about giving, it’s a two way street, the employee or the working woman having some input into how they can achieve that and helping them to think about the issues of work-life balance and how they might make decisions or structure their life around achieving that. I mean, it depends on how far you want to take this thing down, I mean if you think about businesses and where you source your workforce from and if the majority of your workforce are coming in from miles away and are having a real problem with work-life balance because of travel, do you relocate your business given the constraints of everything else but you might think about moving closer to where the people are coming from, then it is giving them that time in terms of travel and everything. I think too often a business location is dictated to by the senior guys who have access to transport and access to offices next to our kids schools, so the people who have the biggest ability to influence their work-life balance make it as easy as they can and they can do that.
What are we on now, I keep on jumping around, it’s going to be a nightmare to collate all of this. I think on the role, it has to be good for the organisation to foster an environment where work-life balance is appropriate and balanced because you don’t want to be too soft and too accommodating rather like our performance management because then you have issues, but then the negative impact is equally you don’t want to be too hard and too restrictive, you have got to find that balance. You are never going to find the optimal balance because each person is going to have a different need and want based on their psyche and their definitions of success and all the things we have talked about, so I don’t think you will ever be able to please everyone, so you have got to have a reasonable, proactive response to trying to optimise work-life balance, I think.

Anything else you want to add to that?

No I think I have covered it if anything comes to mind I will let you know.

The role and skills of the manager-coach

Question 11

Okay so then it sort of moves onto looking specifically at the roles and skills of the manager-coach. So in your role as a manager-coach, what do you do that helps working woman?

Sherbet, nothing! No, I suppose the fact that I have experienced that at home and I know first hand the kinds of issues that working woman deal with and are faced with, it makes it slightly easier for me and I think I am more inclined, I think, to be flexible and to assist and to try and find and allow that time, and to have the flexibility to deal with issues. So I suppose my style is to leave it up to the individual to try and find that balance, realising that there are obligations that you have to meet, depending on your level within the organisation but within that, there is a need to be reasonable and flexible from our side because you are going to have challenges, so I would expect the working woman to do her utmost to structure and manage her life, such that they try to achieve optimum work-life
balance on a day-to-day basis and then be kind of receptive and sympathetic to issues that come up because they are going to come up. So as long as they are being mature and responsible in saying that I realise that if I want to work, then there is going to be some sacrifice and some commitment that I am going to have to make, but equally we realise that you are going to have to make some compromises and sacrifices in the workplace to allow them to have that balance, so it is a two way street I suppose. And think you need to be sympathetic to the fact that some things can’t be planned for.

I suppose that is where I struggle a bit because it is easier for me to deal with work-life balance and things around (female managers) where they have output based jobs, whereas then you take (administrator) for example, it is much harder to deal with those things because you can’t actually be doing your job if you are not at work.

Yes

In that kind of secretarial support role, so I suppose it is quite easy for me to say it is not too difficult to manage the work-life balance because I am managing professional people as opposed to administrators, so if you have a whole team of administrators, how do you achieve that balance? One person is experiencing a whole lot of challenges and the others are sitting there thinking ‘why are they getting all of this special attention and I am not?’, so it’s very difficult at that level. So forgive me if I say things that sound fairly condescending but here you have really intelligent, professional people that are used to managing and delegating and understanding responsibilities and managing other people and their lives, so there is not a lot of coaching or support necessarily, it is just communication and understanding their demands and meeting them.

**Question 12**

**Okay, is there anything else you think you could do to help working woman?**

I don’t know, in my view and at the risk of being blindsided and not knowing that I am blind, I think I am pretty open to an environment of allowing it to happen and being receptive to
the needs of sort of achieving that sort of balance. I think we do have a situation particularly in our team whereas can we manage the output, so there are certain things that you are going to have to do in terms of relationship with clients and outside of that, do what you need to do to achieve that balance.

**Question 13**

**Okay, what relevance do you think your manager-coaching conversations have to the woman that report to you?**

I think it is different per person, there is a different relationship at each level so it depends on that person, and I suppose that my approach and style is not to pry or get involved in issues that they don’t want to chat about. Specifically (manager), I am interested in what she does outside of work but I don’t get involved in her personal relationships and family issues that she has got because she doesn’t really like to talk about that sort of stuff, so I take a view that I am there to be supportive and help if she wants it, but I don’t offer necessarily opinions in any way. It is far more of that coaching role of asking questions if they don’t want to go any further down that route then leave it how it is but creating an environment where they can raise it if they want. Whereas, at the other end of the scale, much more discussion and interactions with (administrator) are more around ‘these are the issues I have got, the problems’ and being an ear, I suppose, because there are impacts that that has on her ability to perform and to kind of be present, so being present when you are at work and being able to perform because you have all these other stresses and strains in the background.

So I would like to think that my sort of style and coaching has an impact on the work-life balance for the woman in my team, but I am sure it could certainly be a lot better. I am also kind of not good at that, I suppose that sort of softer relationships type communication around personal issues. My comfort zone is probably to steer away from those if it is uncomfortable, but at the same time if they engage and want to chat about it, I can offer an ear and some opinion but I don’t necessarily like to get into that.
So, it’s keeping it in a coaching role of asking the questions and if they want to share it and it comes, then you will discuss it.

So creating an environment rather than opening the debate.

**Question 14**

**What role do you think your manager-coaching coffee conversations could have generally in the working world of the 21st century, so not yours specifically but generally?**

Well, I think it is a fantastic way and opportunity to kind of understand the stresses and strains, and balance the demands, that staff members have in the modern world. So as a mechanism, it is an extremely useful way to identify issues, both positive and negative, and also you kind of learn as much from the coffee conversation with one person, that they might learn from you, you can apply that learning and knowledge to another situation, so you don’t have to be all knowing, it’s not this kind of senior person dispensing wisdom, but rather being a conduit of knowledge and information. I think with coaching, done in the right way, it must make people more effective and make people feel more valuable and useful in the organisation, to make them feel as though they have got a voice and I think it is the only way you can actually achieve a reasonably flexible, accommodating work environment. The old sort of management style of dictatorial or no discussion, you come to work and do your thing, you can’t effectively manage a flexible environment.

**Anything else you want to add to that?**

That is probably it for now.
**Question 15**

So what effect do you think your manager-coaching conversations have on the work-life balance of the woman who report to you, if any?

To be quite honest if I think of (direct reports/managers), I don’t think I have a big impact on their work-life balance but just the fact having those discussions and having an open two way communication means that we can deal with stuff if it comes up. I think, more because there is a specific issue with (administrator), I think it has had quite a big impact on her life, to be able to try and deal with what she is dealing with at the moment with her son. I am not sure if, outside of an open communicative environment, with those coffee conversations, you would have got to a resolution, so there, I think, it has had a positive impact; so we will have to see how that pans out and if there is progress and how it develops.

So it kind of goes back to what you were saying earlier that it is kind of individualized.

It is, yes.

There is definitely, as with anything in people management, there is no one size fits all because everyone is going to have a different view to them of what is work-life balance, to them what is success, what brings them meaning, so I suppose that says; that is the role coffee conversations can have in the workplace of the 21st century - to understand what the touch points are and what are value and meaning creators in each person’s psyche and what are their expectations of work-life balance and how do you explore that in a coffee conversation. I mean when we are at different ends of the spectrum in terms of what we believe work-life balance is, from an organisation to the individual, either we are completely aligned or we are at different ends of the spectrum and how do you close that gap, then coffee conversations and effective management potentially bridge that, whereas the other way is if you aren’t having those discussions, I suppose the only other way is to say ‘this is our policy on work-life balance’ and then you are trying to reduce it to one size fits all, and you end up pleasing no one; which is always a problem with systems and processes and
especially in larger organisations, people try to systematize it and the average employee does not exist, so you end up pleasing nobody.

So, I suppose in terms of what organisations need to do, on that line, the organisation does need to have some kind of a view of - what is work-life balance and what does that mean to the organisation - because if you don’t have a reasonable standard organisational view with the right kind of flexibility and interaction to achieve work-life balance across the board, then you kind of end up being all things to all people and you potentially create more turmoil, so you are allowing one person to do something but the other person can’t.

So having a general idea of the benchmark or what the parameters are?

Yes, I mean you are never going to achieve the perfect balance; and you are always going to have this pull of people who want to have more flexibility and more flexible time, whereas an organisation does have goals and objectives that need to be fulfilled and this is the kind of commitment that we do need, where you do need to be committed and delivering; it’s not a social system where you are getting paid to be a stay at home mom, its finding that balance in terms of the expectations of each party.

**Question 16**

Alright, so what do you think, if anything, you could do more of or less of to support woman in achieving work-life balance? You may have covered it.

I suppose I am not sure we could really do much more. Maybe in terms of what we could do less of, are we rigid about having early morning meetings or do we make people stay late unreasonably or do we kind of enforce strict working hours and I think from that perspective, if you can’t find work-life balance within our team, then you are battling, you won’t find it anywhere else.

You may have an influx, of course!
I hope that’s the general view – but it’s also the nature of the job because we also don’t have a lot, I mean I am just trying to think about it, whether it is sort of unintentional prejudices, I think we only have one partner outside of Jo’burg that requires traveling and that sort of thing and it just so happens that I have assigned that to (male direct reports) and I don’t know if that was unconscious, so you could select partners that are locally based if you know you have someone who has young kids at home and can’t be traveling all over the place. I certainly haven’t done anything like that intentionally but I am sure there is more we could do.

**Question 17**

Anything that you could do, that you possibly don’t do, that could optimize work-life balance?

I think, on that point, maybe it is about being more proactive or more thoughtful in how you assign roles and responsibilities within, obviously, the demands of the work and the job output criteria. I suppose being consultative - if we had a situation where someone moved their head office to Cape Town, then the manager needed to be in Cape Town 2 or 3 days a week, I would say should we then reassign or then swap you with someone who is here, so I think it is about being responsive to the needs of the organisation rather than asking the employee to fit in. I suppose all the time, there are some fundamental deliverables that you have to deliver, if no one else had that skill or capability, then we would have to find another way of dealing with that.

**So it’s always in the parameters of the specific job**

Yes but then it always goes back again to understanding what work-life balance means to you, because balance doesn’t mean it has to be 50/50 because if you assign more weight, I mean some people feel they have a better work-life balance if they spend 80% of their time at work and 20% at home, as long as the home 20% is quality time and it meets the needs that they want, so it’s not assigning equal importance to work and family. There is also another issue of how do you define work-life balance.
It’s interesting you say that, I mean when I was single I travelled a huge amount and that was my balance - I loved the travel, I got out and about and saw the country.

Maybe I am being blinkered, maybe work-life balance is not only about work and family, but even then I think we are pretty good for allowing time to explore CSI stuff and deal with or go and balance with sport or extra mural requirements, we go to dance classes on a Thursday and we are pretty flexible about allowing you to structure your lives around those – shoo!

I opened a can of worms, (laughter)

It’s a nightmare!

**Question 18**

Then I think you have answered this one, but what support do you think you as a manager-coach could provide in the achievement and optimisation of work-life balance?

That is just creating an environment of understanding and discussion and responsibility on both sides, and I think an empathetic approach to management, because there are just ever increasing demands. I think I am just lucky with the type of people that I have to manage. I am not sure how I would manage work-life balance in a heavily administrative environment where you need people physically at their desks at those times and how you would deal with guys saying ‘I need to take my kid to the doctor every 3rd Wednesday’, I suppose you would find a way in the same basis of communication and within the roles, sharing a load and finding some kind of an optimum balance, but I think it would be much, much more difficult in that sort of an environment than it is in our environment.

We also don’t have anyone here who has young kids, the administrator being an exception and I suppose that also says something because that is the more difficult one to manage and find a balance with, because there are more demands with young kids that are less self-
sufficient or independent. (Manager) has a kid in the sense that her niece is very close to her and she is very involved in her niece’s life, she doesn’t have children of her own and (manager) has older kids and just recently there were just some challenges around OT and getting diagnosed as ADD and the child is in standard 6, so there are some issues around going to have the assessments and support around that but I think it also is around the nature of the family structure that she is trying to find balance with, which is also putting more sort of demand on management and the ability to sort of deal with work-life balance.

Maybe it is just my frame of reference because the first thing you assume is work-life balance is balancing family and career, as opposed to just balancing free time and work time, then I think that is a general discussion, it is not just woman in the workplace, it is going to be anyone that is trying to find that balance between personal and work time.

**Question 19**

**Do you think there is any connection between manager-coaching conversations and the retention of woman in the workplace?**

Absolutely, there has got to be a direct correlation. Again, I don’t want to stereotype but woman are more communicative and want more of a communicative and interactive management style and my view is they do resolve issues and find fulfillment in communication and kind of bonding, and feeling a sort of self worth through communication, so it seems, to me anyway, that it is a natural way to manage woman instead of ‘you do this because I am the boss’.

**Anything else you want to add to that?**

Is there a connection - I think in today’s modern world, it has got to be the way you manage people in general, but I think it is particularly useful in understanding the demands, so to me there is a direct connection between the two.
**Question 20, 21 and 22**

Right the last few questions are around skills particularly, so it’s saying ‘what skills as a manager-coach do you think you utilize well?’, ‘what skills do you think you need to utilize?’, so kind of is there a gap and finally ‘what do you need to develop further? and then finally ‘Is there anything that would help you become a better coach?’, so that could be training, support, infrastructure or whatever?

I think I am quite empathetic and I have quite a good sense of people and when to push and when to talk about things and when not to. But equally I think I am not great at conflict situations or uncomfortable situations, my natural tendency is to either make light of it or kind of avoid it, rather than confronting it head on, so that I think is development and optimisation of the coaching role or skills to explore that sort of stuff without feeling uncomfortable or glossing over it because you don’t want to get involved.

This is just generally and not in terms of coaching woman?

**No generally**

As a result of avoiding conflict, I suppose I have a tendency to be a bit too soft in terms of not addressing hard enough the underperformance issues, not that we have many in the organisation, but let me say that some of the feedback I have had from the guys, is that that is not really the case, but when I have to, I still don’t feel as though I am addressing those issues well enough.

At a personal level I am not a natural communicator and kind of good at forming close relationships easily, I am gregarious but I don’t play communicative kind of roles easily, so that makes it hard in those sort of coffee conversation discussions, it goes back to this issue of the more sort of personal issues that come up and conflict. I think it is just about being aware of trying to be a bit more open and forcing yourself to communicate more rather than less.
Any skills that you think you utilize well or that you feel a manager-coach needs to display?

I think you have got to be genuine and you have got to be honest and you have got to be able to listen and have a balanced view, which I suppose sometimes I have a tendency to have my own view and I feel as though I end up giving advice, and hearing what I want to hear instead of listening with sort of a balanced ear, so that is maybe is something I just have to consciously work on, I hear what I want to hear and respond to that. Or to try and manage the outcome that you want and that is effectively what management is, to bring people round to your point of view but to do it in such a way that they don’t feel you are sort of coercing them.

I think that is something you constantly want to brush up and develop, coercive is making someone do and co-operation is kind of moving towards something together. So, also having a balanced view of yourself, so not being defensive or obstinate – you have to have an open approach and people pick up quite quickly, I mean it goes back to how do you build trust in a team, how do you engender honesty and openness, the only way you can have effective conversations like that is to be trusted. I am not sure I am answering your question, those are more personality traits.

You said empathetic, having a good sense of people and sort of knowing when to push and when not to, listening

Listening as much as you talk and not hearing what you want to hear. I know we have had some training on how you ask questions and how you push back, so not giving the answer but asking the question that kind of leads the person to the answer, that is a key skill in conversation discussion, so I suppose we have had that but maybe feedback and refreshers on those sort of skills, because I think I do have a tendency to just give the answer, or what I think is the answer.

So eliciting responses from people rather than giving them.
I don’t know if it is a skill or a frame of mind but in the conversations it is really important to be there fully. Because it is so easy to think of this other thing I am supposed to be doing or my report is outstanding or these guys are waiting for a proposal, then you are only half involved and just run through the thing.

So where would you put that in terms of these questions?

I suppose it would come in with what skills do you need to optimise this role, I suppose it is a skill to be able to manage your time so you are involved and also to make sure that you are constantly listening and involved in the conversation and not just listening.

There is an interesting book by Nancy Kline called the Thinking Environment, creating an environment that allows people to think and she says the quality of someone’s thinking is a direct correlation to your ability to listen to them, so the better my listening the better your thinking.

Okay, the better your listening, the better my thinking, if someone isn’t listening you can’t think. I think it’s also around the environment that you create and you create a comfortable environment to think. If the person feels like their thought process is valued and that you genuinely interested in what they are saying, you are going to be more confident and positive and the more confident and positive you are, the better your thought processes are.

Question 23

Anything you feel could help you become a better coach, you did mention refreshers on sort of questioning skills and eliciting info and not advising, anything else?

I think it kind of goes back to coaching techniques and just building on the techniques of how to question and ask leading questions and how to keep the conversation flowing to the point of completion, as opposed to getting it started and stopping, and there is nothing worse than creating the environment where people think you are listening to them, but you
are not really and you kind of do it half-heartedly and get it going but then can’t sort of wrap it up and come to a conclusion.

Anything else?

It’s food for thought, hey!

If anything comes up you are welcome to pop it in

The way we try to manage people and develop people and create opportunities, it’s strange that we still have such an unrepresentative mix in the business.

I think it is also a general comment on this industry, there are not a tremendous amount of woman in senior positions in the industry.

I wonder why, do you think it is because of the industry?

I think it is the history of the industry, certainly the industry has changed completely in the last 15 to 20 years. 20 years ago it was a real boys club, lots of drinking and partying and the guys worked from 7 in the morning until half past 12 and build relationships over lunch and drink but I think that has changed, it’s a much more professional and demanding industry and based much less on this sort of collegiate atmosphere, but there are still residues of that, the senior guys and certainly in the more established businesses and brokerages are still the guys who are the board members and the non-executives, I think it hasn’t been long enough for the next wave to come through, so maybe that is part of it.

Interesting, other industries aren’t to the same degree, but still are...

People will always say they never make a conscious decision to go into this industry - you end up in it, so maybe it’s often a situation where you get in there because you have known someone or you have had a relationship or opportunity to get in, you don’t go out and build
a career in the industry, so maybe with that old school boys club mentality, fathers aren’t
saying to their daughters go into this industry, but saying to the son ‘that will be quite nice.’

Then the men in those positions are looking for men similar to them.

Yes, so you have got a double sort of barrel. I don’t know why it is, because it shouldn’t be
like that, I think if you think about it, it is very much relationships driven, consultative,
partnership and to a degree quite administrative and woman are generally good at that
balance between being administratively efficient but able to communicate and form
relationships. So they should kind of ideally be suited to this industry.

It is interesting that it is across the board.

There aren’t any now that are run by woman.

Very interesting, anything else please let me know. That was very useful.

The interviewer thanks the respondent and closes the interview.