
The Hidden World of Executive Angst

A Case Study

This is an abbreviated case study to illustrate how a leader engaged in an integral process to strengthen his relationship with himself and others, while improving his self-awareness and capacity for self-correction in the moment.

Enrique is an upper-level manager of a quasi-governmental organization that has recently merged with another industry competitor. Within six months of coaching he was able to make several substantial breakthroughs in self-awareness, self-care, social awareness, and social care—leading to noticeable shifts in his leadership and performance.

*Enrique's story illustrates the behavioral changes possible with a practical framework for the integrated development of intelligence. By intentionally growing awareness and engaging in regular specific practices around his four domains of intelligence (**physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual**), his overall capacity for effectiveness grows. This impacted his personal and organizational effectiveness. And, no small bonus, he experienced more meaning and satisfaction in his life as well.*

Here is an overview of his progression, illustrating the power of learning from and transforming his angst and shadows into positive flexible actions and reactions with others.

When Enrique began to be coached, he had been with a large global high tech company for over a decade. Hired into mid-level management, he gradually worked his way up to become the obvious successor to the outgoing COO (Chief Operations Officer). At that point, though, his career advancement stalled. Fellow executives were concerned about how poorly he dealt with his anger. Although recognized as a strong strategic planner and project manager, in implementation he tended to be a harsh and brittle micromanager. Often he was aggressive and hard hitting when direct reports didn't do things the way he would like—failing to live up to his high expectations and standards. With a pacesetter style of leadership,

his direct reports couldn't seem to measure up and worked under stress and fear of being humiliated for their errors. Fear created a downward spiral that increased the very errors his direct reports wanted to avoid. The whole experience left Enrique in a tailspin. Yet, when provided with feedback, he was open and committed to learn how he could unravel this behavior and this barrier to his advancement.

Through an integral intelligence coaching approach, Enrique became aware of his four domains of intelligence and how each domain could be used to break out of destructive habits and intentionally build ones that were more effective and productive. Also he came

to appreciate how each domain was naturally integrated with the other three, either helping or hurting any efforts he made to change.

Through a series of coaching conversations in the first three months, he probed various aspects of his experience. He became self-aware concerning his angst and anger, and began to notice how and when his anger harmed his relationships with others. In addition, he took notice of how his anger affected his relationship with himself. Enrique was determined that his anger would become a window of opportunity to grow his awareness in a much more comprehensive way than simply enhancing his emotional intelligence alone.

In the **physical domain**, Enrique learned to pay attention to and recognize his body cues at the onset of angst or anger. He reflected on and named the physiological changes he had become aware of: tightness in his chest and neck, shallower and quicker breathing, a sense of feeling defensive and aggressive at the same time, and a tendency to lean forward or backward. In the **emotional domain**, he began to make distinctions that previously had gone undefined, gaining a subtle understanding of when he was experiencing anger, fear, and sadness and how the three were often closely related. In the **cognitive domain**, he realized how his body and emotions fed into fears of incompetence as a leader. Once fear triggered that vulnerability, his clear-headedness vanished and he became a bully, using words as weapons that cut to the bone. And, finally, in the **spiritual domain**, he was aware (after settling down from the rush of anger) of having lost his sense of deeper

connection with himself, others, and the very esprit de corps he desperately wanted to grow with his team. This pained him and became a driver behind his change.

To accomplish the changes he wanted, Enrique and his coach identified specific **practices** to help build his capacities for *self-awareness*, *self-care*, *social awareness*, and *social care* in his four domains of intelligence. Over the next year Enrique strengthened his competencies in these areas and in the process transformed the way he had been perceived. Before beginning the process, he was known as a hot-tempered leader, but now he was known for an even-handed manner and collaborative leadership style. He became expert at reading cues from his body and emotions as well as in others, and intentionally chose to see and champion the best in others—bringing it out in public meetings, private conversations, and correspondence. Enrique not only modeled many “lessons learned” to others, he shared freely the tools and processes for developing the four domains of intelligence.