

The Three Cs: Communications, Confidence, and Consensus

“A team is not a group of people who work together. A team is a group of people who trust each other.” Simon Sinek

Regardless of your industry, the year 2019 has been a tough one in Argentina. High inflation, political uncertainty and recession have taken their toll in almost all business areas. But despite this scenario, I am ending the year on a positive note, and would like to share the story of my last executive coaching student of this decade with you.

This job came out of nowhere. Normally coaching is planned months in advance, but this one was sprung on me, as was the team of four who I worked with: I am lucky to work on a regular basis with very experienced coach Marcela Gola, of [Gola & Asociados](#), who is an expert on executive coaching with a focus on storytelling. The leader of the team, Ariel Castiglioni, founder of Ágora Global, was an unknown to me, and in fact to date, we have not yet met face to face. Ariel teaches Change Management and Leadership at the [UTDT](#), and inspired my confidence immediately. And last but not least Ailen Schiffer, the team’s millennial, a recent UBA Communications graduate who was in charge of the design aspect of the job, but also made valuable contributions on body language and even on business trends. My own area of expertise is executive coaching in English, with a focus on clear communications for professionals working in English as their second language.

From the very start, the team clicked. Something just happened and there were no preliminary discussions about how we were going to work. We just went into action and work we did. As Ariel was our leader, we copied him in on all email communications and the team’s WhatsApp was buzzing from dawn to midnight with ideas, support and suggestions for the task at hand.

And what a task it was. Rarely have I had the privilege of such a dream job. Let me describe the situation to you, though, for the purposes of confidentiality, I will respect the coachee’s anonymity.

Juan González, as we will call him, is currently CFO of a major international financial services company. He was in the process of being promoted to CEO and our team was called on to prepare him for a grueling 3-hour interview at company headquarters. There he would have to present his life story and career trajectory, as well as two cases at work: one difficult and the other a success. We only had four 2-hour slots in which to prepare him, which he had to squeeze in to his usual demanding schedule.

Normally when I do executive coaching in English, one of my main concerns is the coachee’s English. But here this was not a concern. Having worked abroad for most of his life, Juan’s English is perfect, so I was able to focus on content, body language and delivery.

His life story, which I will not recount here in full, is quite extraordinary. He attended one of Buenos Aires’ competitive-entry state schools, where his talent for mathematics was spotted by a teacher who encouraged him to study economics. This is a demanding degree but with a job guaranteed at the end of it. Like many Argentine students Juan worked his way through university, first in the SSN and then at the AFIP. Studying at state universities is compatible with working in the public sector as there are 6-hour shifts, but it was still very taxing and a capacity for hard work is one of Juan’s most

notable qualities. A strong friendship with school friend Federico was also crucial. Federico went to the same university so they continued to study together and also got their first jobs together. These kind of friends for life are common in Argentina, unlike in the rest of the world.

He has strong family ties too, with one brother and a mother who only went back to work when Juan was 15 after his father's untimely death.

Soon after getting his degree, Juan decided to try his luck in the private sector and went to work in a European financial services company who were just starting up in Argentina. Observing his potential, they soon head hunted him and offered to take him to head office in Europe.

This was a life-changing decision for him. He was already dating the woman who would stand by him for life, and they took this opportunity to bring forward their wedding date and set off to Europe together. After working there for several years, he went to Chile to be a bit closer to his family and this was also an opportunity not only for career growth, but also to grow the family, as that is where their 2 children were born.

After several years in Chile, he switched jobs to another major financial services company and went to work for them, again in Europe. It was a big decision to make and he talked it over a lot with his wife. They agreed that she would give up the work she had pursued in the tourism industry until that point and dedicate herself to their children. Without her unconditional support, Juan's career might never have spiraled the way it has.

Once, when he was just taking on a new position, he had a boss who was a poor communicator, who spoke to him quite loudly, sometimes in front of his colleagues. Without confronting him directly, Juan quietly took him aside and explained that was not acceptable behavior. He never had any problem with him again.

Soon after, he changed positions again within the same company, and had a boss who was the best one he had ever worked for. That boss taught him a lot about managing teams and the business side of the financial services industry. This was a turning point for him when he realized that he was moving away from the positions he had held until now in the technical side of the industry to occupy more managerial positions.

The family were growing up abroad and doing well at their international school where there is a lot of movement of people. But Juan wanted his children to experience some of the strong ties that he had been fortunate enough to grow up with in both family and friends.

So when the position of CFO in the same company but in his native Argentina arose, he was drawn to it. Once again, it was a difficult decision, but with support from his then boss and the family, he applied for it and returned to Buenos Aires a couple of years ago. Re-entry was not easy, particularly for the children who had never lived in the country, but they adapted and settled in well.

Today, with the opportunity to lead the company, Juan prepared his cases, which I cannot transcribe for reasons of confidentiality, and worked on other aspects of interview preparation such as any possible questions that he might be asked, especially with reference to the core competencies of CEOs. Juan ticked all the boxes, the cases covered many of those core competencies, in particular his leadership of teams.

Juan pushes his teams as hard as he pushes himself and has been pleased to see how they have responded by growing under his leadership, and are more autonomous and proactive, seeking out the wider issues of the business and preparing strategically for the outcomes in Argentina, a country where the risks faced on a daily basis are only seen on paper in the ROW.

Juan is a joy to work with, and with the support of our team, we helped him prepare for his cases, life story and some possible questions. He is very smart, applied, calm and thorough, and we rehearsed possible scenarios and practiced the questions in role play until we were all satisfied with the result.

He sailed through the interview and his career continues to grow, perhaps because, like the team who coached him, he is firmly grounded on three core values: communication, confidence and above all, consensus.

Joanna Richardson,

December, 2019