

Client feedback to Coaching and Hiking



Vincenzo Abate interview with Manager Seminars

The graduated business engineer Vincenzo Abate is a partner at buw consulting, which is part of the buw corporate group with its 3,500 employees. buw consulting GmbH is the largest customer care consulting firm in Germany and has more than 50 management consultants working for it, who provide practical support for their clients with regard to customer acquisition, customer loyalty and exploitation of customer potential. Whereby the primary focus of the consultations is on the fields personnel, ICT and management.

Why did you decide to take a coaching? Vincenzo Abate: The aim was to prepare myself strategically for my partnership with companies. How did you find the right coach? Abate: I am a consultant myself so I used consulting methods in my approach. First I looked into where coaches were located within a radius of 200 kilometers. Then I checked which consultant would suit me and had ninety-minute preliminary talks with three coaches before I made my choice.

What convinced you? Abate: The coaching approach and the tools suited me. Other deciding factors that convinced me were the pragmatic style of the coaching combined with honesty and trustworthiness. The Internet presence had already made a good impression on me as being professional. I had the best feeling with this coach.

Gut feelings appear to play an important role when choosing a coach. Abate: It was a mixture of 50 percent rational considerations and 50 percent gut feeling. I did not place so much importance on the coaches' references, because these only tell a part of the story. More important for me was to observe how the coaches worked.

What role did your coaches' approach of combining coaching with hiking play during your first meeting? Abate: That was one of several different approaches that I had not been aware of to start with. I am a management consultant and work around 60 to 70 hours a week. In other words: not enough exercise, not enough fresh air, a lot of sitting and working

in closed rooms. So my coach suggested combining coaching with hiking. And that is what we did!

What was your first reaction to the idea of combining coaching and hiking? Abate: Very positive! I could well imagine it as I am person who loves nature and it annoys me that I do not have enough time to spend outdoors. How was the coaching-hiking organized? Abate: We met at arranged locations in the Sauerland region of Germany. These are well-know hiking paths, often running near lakes. Sometimes the coaching sessions consisted of a-half-day meeting and sometimes even a whole day. To give you an example: we spent two hours hiking plus two hours reflecting in a conference room, where the issue was documented in writing and aims and tasks formulated.

What really sticks in your mind? Abate: I remember one working day in particular, that had been very stressful and had left me with really no inclination whatsoever to take a coaching session. After half an hour's hike combined with coaching along a path through some woods I noticed that my mind was continuously clearing. Although my mind had been foggy and I had been unable to concentrate before we set out. What helped was the combination of movement and letting the day pass in revue.

Wouldn't it have been just as effective to go jogging instead? Abate: Jogging through the woods has no strategic element. The questioning techniques of my coach were an excellent way of helping to process the issues. I very quickly experienced a learning effect.

What did you really good in the coaching? Abate: Doing something positive for my body – thanks to the relaxed environment combined with tanking up on oxygen. This led to my gradually taking up sport again seriously over the course of the one-year coaching program. That was also an issue of the coaching: to start doing more for my health. In the year 2007 I often suffered with respiratory disorders and that was why my aim with this coaching was not a just professional one but also to do something for my health.

Does your coach integrate the way you see things, i.e. woods and fields, into the coaching? Abate: Hiking and communication, or rather reflection, play the bigger role in a coaching with hiking program. You really take notice of your surroundings. You let it work for you personally.

What specific issues were important for you when you started the coaching? Abate: I wanted to be able to express my position more clearly in meetings. Optimising my standing and my charisma was also important for me as well as positively developing my personality any my strengths. In addition I

wanted to work at being more diplomatic when chairing meetings. I sometimes encounter situations with a strong fighting spirit and this can sometimes be misunderstood.

How did the woods and fresh air help you to find answers? Abate: It was important for me to get out of my usual environment. Having a conference room as the normal venue for the coaching would have been remaining in my normal working environment.

In other words your everyday surroundings? Abate: Exactly. And then I tend to take over the role of consultant myself. I quickly fall into a certain pattern of behaviour, simply because of the surroundings. The woods are a neutral terrain. The natural setting allowed me to let my thoughts and ideas wander and to think through strategies. You are not restricted by a roof over your head or the walls around you, but are free in an open space. And this promoted creativity.

Quite literally boundless thoughts. Abate: What is more you can walk a little way without needing to talk. Sitting opposite someone in a normal coaching situation you quickly come to the conclusion that your counterpart expects an answer. You feel under pressure. And that is not the case while hiking.

You were probably dressed differently, too, weren't you? Abate: I certainly did not hike wearing a suite and tie and leather shoes. Over the course of the year I became consciously aware of my surroundings. It was wonderful to walk through the snow, to see the first green leaves of spring and hear the birds singing. That is also a kind of relaxation.

What exactly does such a releasing of tension feel like? Abate: If you have been under heavy pressure all day long and worked a lot with your brain, then you look forward to changing over to a positive piece of work. In such situations coaching can be a real release of tension.

How did you work on your aims? Abate: My coach gave me feedback as to how I had reacted in certain situations and suggested how I could have done things differently. We also played through realistic situations.

While you were hiking? Abate: Yes indeed, it was the communication exercises in the fresh air that I really enjoyed, because they were not so dry and stiff as they would have been in a classic seminar.

What aims have you yourself achieved? Abate: I achieved my aims to 100 percent. I am now working with my coach to learn and implement classic tools

of leadership, because I want to give my colleagues more intensive coaching in future. My other achievements are that I am healthier now, that I sleep better and have learned to delegate so that I take less work home with me.

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