

Seasoned Executive Hurdles Over an M&A Bump-in-the-Road

The Client: John, Vice President of a large engineering consulting firm

The Circumstances: John had virtually grown up in the engineering consulting firm in which he worked – starting fresh out of college and spending nearly 25 years as a key contributor to the growth of the firm. His career had advanced with ease and he was leading one of their largest business units with over 85 people reporting to him.

When his mid-size company was acquired by a very large organization, a period of drastic change commenced. Through a sequence of lateral position shifts, John’s entire section of the company was blown apart, leaving John in a role with significantly reduced roles and responsibilities. As the year unrolled, the nature of John’s conversations with the new executive team left John questioning his leadership skills and his entire history of career success.

The Story:

Reflecting Back: “That whole year really knocked me off my feet. For the first time in my life, I felt a lack of confidence in my skills and everything I thought I was good at,” John shared. “All those years of consistent positive feedback, grounded with a steady climb up the ladder – and suddenly I was getting new information that was completely contradictory to my past experiences.”

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John added, “As my new role was defined, leaving me with little to no management responsibilities, I was feeling deflated and disconnected from where the company was going.

I had always thought I would retire from this company. I found myself questioning my whole career and was suddenly unsure what I wanted to do with my life.”

That’s when he reached out to Kami Guildner at Syzygy™. Despite the fact that John knew he had been completely

thrown off balance in the months prior, he still approached coaching with a bit of apprehension. John recalled, “When I was driving to that first meeting I asked myself, ‘What am I doing – I’m a middle-aged, grown-up professional. Why do I need a coach?!’” But that apprehension quickly dispersed as John and Kami started to work together.

“My mind was set at ease immediately” he said. “As I began to share the stories of my career and examine the circumstances around each one – I had made a very positive and important contribution to each of these! Kami’s inquisitive approach to coaching is really insightful and reflective, and reintroduced me to the John that had somehow gotten lost in the shuffle.”

Finding John Again: During those first few months of their weekly meetings together, the pair reconnected to John’s strengths, core values and overall interests – creating clarity around “the Essence of John,” and all that he stood for in his many years of career success.

“Kami picked me up off the floor and helped me regain my confidence, which I had always had, but had somehow lost in that past year,” he said. “As we looked at the essence of me from all sides, I particularly found the peer feedback impactful. The people who knew me best – who had worked most closely with me over my career – consistently ranked leadership as one of my number one strengths. As it turned out, many of my old employees wanted to follow me wherever I went. It was really enlightening, especially since this was completely contradictory to the feedback that I’d been getting from my new leadership team.”

The experience also led to a new fundamental understanding that John really liked small entrepreneurial business environments. He shared, “This was one of the big ‘ah-ha’ moments for me – I’m good at managing people, leading teams and building strong customer relationships. The big company environment just was not a fit for me.”

Exploring New Options: As the coaching work continued, John began to explore different options. “It was like going back to my early 20s, where you do a lot of soul searching and there are a whole new set of paths to explore,” John expressed.

What was different this time, however, was John had a very grounded understanding of his strengths and who he is as a person. “I realized I had the opportunity to look at these options with a whole new set of fresh eyes.” John considered a spectrum of new paths that ranged from following his non-



profit interests to teaching kids to staying in the engineering consulting field – just in a smaller company environment. For the first time in a long time, John found that he had a clean whiteboard that he could design in any way he wanted. So together, John and Kami examined the opportunities and that whiteboard drawing began to take shape.

As John started to narrow his choice down, Kami suggested he spend a session affirming his path in an equine guided coaching session. John shared his memory of this suggestion, “Remember, I’m an engineer, and we’re a pretty conservative bunch, in general. My first response was, ‘really – you’ve got to be kidding!’ But our work together had been so solid, I wanted to trust in the flow.” So that following week, John found himself in the roundpen with one of the Syzygy horses, Zip.

“The work with Zip was valuable and powerful,” he recalls. “The sensitivity and reaction of the horses to my conversation and underlying emotions was fascinating, giving me much to reflect upon. Zip mirrored my thoughts and feelings as I examined the different options and he could sense which paths I was most passionate about. I didn’t know what to expect in this work, but the response of the horse was so animated at very specific moments, that I walked away with a deeper understanding and appreciation for the choices I was making. The take-away from that session was a newfound clarity around why I was making the choices that I was making. And because this experience was so unique and certainly memorable, the visions surrounding my choices are really grounded in ways they wouldn’t have been without this special day with Zip.”

Setting New Courses: Through all of John’s exploration, he was reminded why he enjoyed his work with his current company in its infancy stages. “I decided I liked the business I’m in and I’m good at it! I just needed to work for a smaller, more intimate entrepreneurial company.” As this decision



unfolded, consequently, so did the door open to several new opportunities with companies that fit this description!

John, however, had a few critical negotiations

at his current company that needed to be addressed. “I needed to prepare for a sensitive conversation with one of the executives at my company, before I could transition to the next step. Kami helped me prepare for that conversation – strategizing an approach that would create a win:win scenario.

She coached me through the script and because I went to that meeting with an organized and polished proposal – the meeting went very, very well. I attribute our focused planning to this successful outcome.” As John works through the final stages of negotiations, he’s once again excited about the future before him. He’s reconnected back to his strengths, his values and his passions.

The Coaching Experience: In reflecting on his Syzygy coaching experience, John shared “One of the things I really like about working with Kami is that she really listens to you and her approach to dialogue helps you connect the dots. So rather than having her prescribed solution that’s going to take you from point A to point B, her process is very organic – working with you from whatever point you’re at on a given day, yet keeping oversight of the big picture.”

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“Probably, the other big thing I should mention is that I’m extraordinarily busy. I’m traveling a lot; and I’m kind of up to my eyeballs in work. Kami really has helped me move through the process. If I had to do this on my own, I’d still be floundering around because we had regular-scheduled meetings and weekly homework, and had to come prepared each week. All that structure was extraordinarily helpful to me because of my schedule. I just couldn’t have done it on my own.”

As John reflected on coaching in general, he shared “I highly recommend coaching – even if you’re not in crisis mode. I think the focused work can move the needle from good to great, because we so often don’t take the time for self-exploration work. Engaging with someone who is deeply interested in your success, helping you push the limits in exploring who you are and what you’re great at – opens new doors in ways that I never expected.”



NOTE: Names in this Case Study have been changed to maintain confidentiality of the Syzygy client.