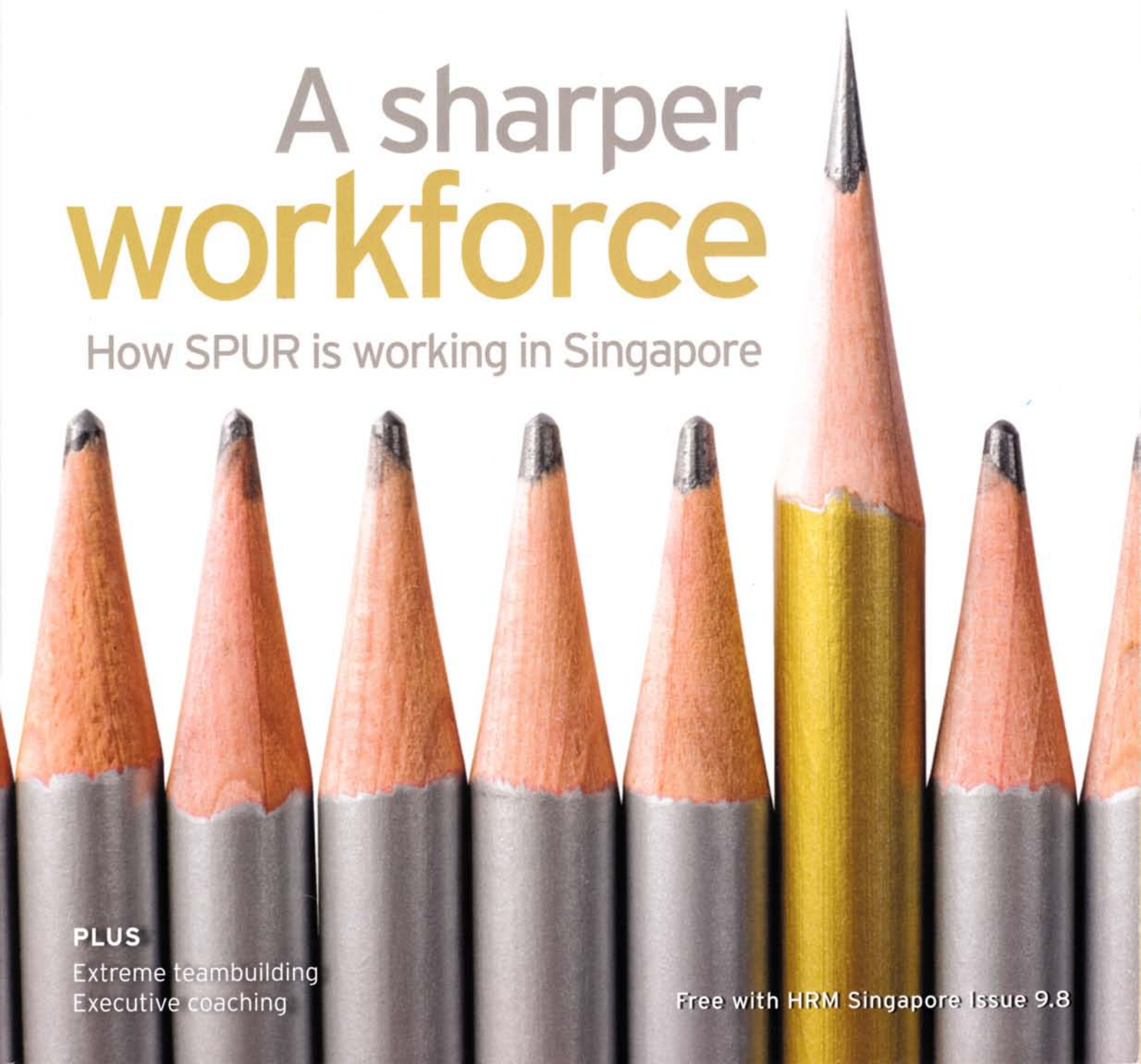


## A sharper workforce

How SPUR is working in Singapore



**PLUS**

Extreme teambuilding  
Executive coaching

Free with HRM Singapore Issue 9.8

# Thanks coach!



Just because a leader or executive is near the top of the tree doesn't mean the need for coaching subsides. *HRM* looks at the specific training requirements of senior leaders and the business case for C-level coaching

**F**ive years ago, if you Googled the word 'coach' the top hits would provide you with nothing but bus schedules. Now, many of the pages returned are on the rapidly rising field of executive coaching. Coaching has gained importance as expectations on leaders in the corporate world increase.

Gone are the caveman days of a leader ruthlessly leading by force – the 'get on board or get out of the way' philosophy. In today's world, a C-level executive needs to have interpersonal skills and high-level judgment. In a single 24 hours, leaders may be called upon to give keynote speeches, chair crucial meetings,

develop strategy, and also focus of succession planning. On top of all this, they are expected to handle the duties with grace, professionalism, energy and enthusiasm.

This is where an executive coach often steps in. "Executive coaching is, in essence, a process through which the coach supports the client to take action to make big improvements," says Paula Marcondes, Principal Consultant and Managing Director of ACT Training International. "This process takes an average of 12 weeks, during which the coach and the client meet on a weekly basis for 1 hour." The ultimate goal of executive coaching is for the

behaviour of the executive to change in a way that improves overall performance.

True coaching is non-directive and it helps someone get clarity on where they are and where they want to be, explains Tony Latimer, Master Certified Coach of the Asia Pacific Corporate Coach Institute. "C-suite executives become 25% to 40% more time-efficient when they have a plan and know how to get there."

### Coaching Leaders

Executive coaching is directed to increasing an executive's ability to integrate their new-found confidence and strategic insight into their leadership style. It assists the executive to develop a distinctive leadership and personal style that will lead to effective retention of key people and higher productivity throughout their company.

"Coaching is important as it develops employees into leaders," Latimer says, adding that the demand for executive coaching has been increasing throughout the recession. "When the going gets tough, as we see in the news every day, the focus is on the leaders."

Société Générale, a France-based investment bank, says leadership at the top end is a vital factor in surviving the global downturn. "In these trying financial crises, Société Générale believes more than ever in enhancing leadership qualities - equipping its leaders with the appropriate skills to build a sustaining style of management where recruitment, selection and retention are obviously important," explains Joyce Yap, Head of Asia Pacific HR at the bank.

She says leadership is one key area where Société Générale can differentiate itself. "To achieve the competitive advantage, we know that we have to do something that is difficult to emulate by our competitors - which is to build an organisation that helps make it possible for regular employees to perform as if they were all top performers," Yap says.

In order to achieve this goal, Société Générale, which has its asset management business for Asia Pacific headquartered in Singapore, has this year embarked on a path to build a performance coaching leadership culture.

## C-suite feedback

Measuring returns on training is not an exact science, say HR professionals. What is important is that there is a consistent awareness of the benefits and how they relate to the business. Some of Société Générale's leaders, who have gone through performance coaching sessions, said the following:

- » "I learned the difference between problem-solving and coaching and the importance of reaching into someone's subconscious to help them identify real issues and solutions, and how to avoid misinterpreting behaviours as attitudes";
- » "Most important was understanding the effect of being less emotional and suspending judgement. This training was a treasure hunt!"

It has brought in expertise from the Asia Pacific Corporate Coach Institute. "We want to equip our current and future leaders with the necessary skills to move from the paradigm of 'telling' and problem solving to a more pro-active, non-directive approach towards performance management. We believe that with these skills they will be better able to hold 'black-belt' performance (enhancement) conversations with their staff," says Yap.

C-level executives are looking for an opportunity to improve their leadership capability and effectiveness when it comes to coaching. Targeted training, can improve their self-awareness and sharpen their existing skills in areas such as leadership, communication, motivation, influencing and perception management.

“

**C-suite executives become 25% to 40% more time-efficient when they have a plan and know how to get there”**

*Paula Marcondes, Principal Consultant and Managing Director, ACT Training International*

Marcondes remembers a client whose high potential staff member was being groomed for the C-suite. “(His) appraisal time and time again came back saying his presentation and commanding skills were poor. We had to establish where the gap was specifically. Was it in terms of his visual and vocal cues? In terms of his messaging capabilities? In terms of flow or delivery, (or) his ability to adapt to different audience styles?” Thanks to some targeted consultation, the client and employee soon answered that question, leaving him able to focus on the exact skills or changes required.

Good leadership also requires emotional intelligence which, in turn, requires an ability to understand and manage intentions, emotional responses and communications. Everyone needs feedback, insights, and encouragement, particularly the executive leading an institution, but they still need to turn to someone, somewhere, for confidential and informed advice.

Executive coaches come in here because they work together with executives as equals, but with a focus on the executive’s life, aspirations and both personal and professional development. Coaching supports executives who face exceptional pressure to deliver innovation and cost-savings in an environment of continuous change, downsizing and budgetary constraints. **HRM**

