

## **ACTION OF THE BRAVE: HELPING GENERATION Z MOVE TOWARDS THE FUTURE THROUGH ACTION LEARNING**

It begins with a simple conversation between action-learning coach Hou Shaohua and his friend Zhao Shuping that explains what action learning is all about. However, after a serious discussion in April 2021, they realise that action learning may help Generation Z, young people born after 1995, out of the confusion of life and work as it does in other areas.



**Action Learning Coach, Hou Shaohua**

In the last two or three years, we have seen the particularity and vitality of Generation Z, who grow up with the rapid development of China. They are well educated, have good material conditions, pursue high-quality and diversity of life. Furthermore, they do not agree with the high-intensity work style, nor the use of wealth as the primary measure of success.

From April 2021 to July 2022, Hou Shaohua and Gu Zengwang from WIAL designed and carried out a Growth Action Learning Project with 7 workshops. They invited 280 Z-ers to the roundtable with their own problems. Take a workshop held in April 2022 as an example. The coaches first explained what action learning is and how it is applied to real life and work problems. After necessary questioning exercises, every student carefully wrote the most distressing problem they faced in the last

year. These young people do not know each other and their majors, occupations, families, ages and experiences are completely different.



**Action learning coaches participating in this project**

"At first, I am worried about whether they would express themselves bravely and sincerely when facing a group of strangers." Zhao Shuping, the organizer of the project, said, "But as the problems open, everyone also opens their hearts. They take off their defense and look forward to the help of their peers, which makes me feel very powerful." "I am extremely proud of them. I see not only their confusion, but also their courage to challenge the tradition." Hou Shaohua said, "They are developing new value even though they are always teasing themselves as 'rectifying the workplace'". After this workshop, many Z-ers' life choices have changed dramatically and they take new steps.

One student said she was concerned that she was unwilling to settle in Hangzhou or Shanghai. The coach and peers responded forcefully by asking "What is the most essential reference for your choice of workplace", which made her suddenly realize that what she really cared about was not the place, but whether she could be with her boyfriend. Another student was struggling whether to go to the functional department of the company headquarters or to the front-line business department. Questions from coaches and peers like "What is your career portrait in

5 years" and "How can you characterize your future career path" immediately made her fall into deep contemplation. Another girl felt overburdened that fate was not in her control while she hoped to live and work in her hometown. However, when thinking the question "What is the thing that you can't give up", she felt the courage at the scene.

At the same time, it seemed that other Z-ers were facing the similar situation. But it turned out that someone in them had valuable experience to share. As one student said, "Each of them has something incredibly relevant that directly help me solve the problem at hand."



**Young people are discussing one of their peers' problems**

After the workshop, when asking for feedback, one student said, "it is really interesting to strip out the essence of problems through questioning, which is also useful for solving problems in life. The action learning workshop is the highlight of this training as we can dissect ourselves deeply to understand our problems and learn how to ask questions to find real problems." Another student said, "It is like a spiritual spa and I feel grateful to my peers for actively exploring the source of the problem with me. Everyone is listening and giving feedback wholeheartedly all day." And they all suggested that the discussion time should be longer and look forward to more such workshop in the future. All Z-ers of the project deeply felt the power of questioning for the first time and they agreed that change requires a great deal of courage, which is more important than anything. A girl named Cheng Qi later became an action learning coach.

After that, these young people bravely have pursued the lives they really want which is guiding 280 tasks to a clearer and more direct path. Since that time, a lot has changed. They were more cohesive with each other. They promised to firmly practice their plans and stand as witnesses for each other. Some young people refused high paying jobs and returned to their hometown. Some finally dared to express their views firmly in front of their superiors. Some chose lovers rather than job opportunities and some learned to balance work and their personal lives. Some bravely stood on the platform to make speeches and so on. There is nothing more exciting than the touch of people's hearts. Action learning has completely changed the way they think and talk. Team members have realized this unprecedented sense of trust and the benefits from action learning have exceeded their imagination.

As an action learning coach, Hou Shaohua is no stranger to action learning and its value. However, he and Zhao Shuping both believe that this Growth Action Learning Project for Generation Z is a competition that will change their's lives both in terms of practicality and value. "Learning active learning course has given me a lot of enthusiasm", said Zhao Shuping, "I feel even more powerful by the chance to share action learning with others, which enable me to find a sense of value and achievement that I haven't felt for a long time in recent years. This project really reminds me that when you offer others the opportunity to make contributions, they will give you surprise and something unexpected.

Meng Xiaoxu, another partner in the workshop, said: "I think the experience sharing of successful people can't fundamentally change the situation of young people because they have stood out and it's difficult for them to truly empathize. However, partners and peers can do. They can truly have empathy, sincere understanding and support for each other rather than condescending suggestions. What has changed is not only the tone of the conversation, but also the quality of shared information and personal opinions." Obviously, this action learning project is an excellent personal learning experience for these young people.



### **Greentown Park**

The real secret is how to always keep curious and open about the problem itself instead of trying to control and manage the results, which is also the basic principle of asking questions. Something amazing will happen if we consider what may happen before asking questions to deepen understanding of the problem and keep questioning naturally and smoothly. Action learning is a value or a principle of life that may be applied in everyday life, not just as a technique.

Generation Z, living in a time when collective values are remoulding, they yearn for freedom and individuality more than ever and pay more attention than ever to the experience of life. As a result of these changes, a variety of issues may arise and lead to difficulties and confusion. However, strategies like action learning can provide them with a path to deal with these issues by analyzing problems, generating ideas, improving teams and individuals, encouraging mutual assistance and taking risks. Perhaps not everyone will take action, but someone must do.

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