

ACTION LEARNING BRINGS NEW INSIGHTS AND POSITIVE RESULTS AT REPAIR CARE



A gamechanger. That, according to Jos van den Berg, is Action Learning. A way of thinking and working together that he was introduced to several years ago and not only uses in his work as director-owner of Repair Care, but has integrated into his whole personality. "They say I've turned 180 degrees and I think that's fantastic," he says.

With Action Learning now spreading throughout the organization, the effects are becoming readily apparent.

Anyone who asks any of the 75 employees of Repair Care International B.V. in Waalwijk, the Netherlands, how Action Learning has affected their work can expect a positive answer. From the director-owner to the employee who has yet to even begin his first day at work, the method has permeated all levels of the international company. For the developer and seller of wood repair products, the effects are felt on the shop floor, but that change did not happen overnight.

Coaching instead of directing

It's 2018 when Jos van den Berg asks the management team of Repair Care to name three goals that he himself, as an executive, should work on. The MT didn't have to think

long about that. They came up with two business objectives, but the third was the most surprising: go take a coaching course, share what you've learned and apply that to us so that you start coaching us more and more instead of directing us.

Jos van den Berg, owner of Repair Care since 2012, was shocked by this. Not because this request made him feel like he wasn't doing something right, but because he thought a coaching course wasn't for him. "I was shocked by this objective because I didn't think my character was at all suited for that. I'm bright red, I really have very little patience. So when I was told that, I said to the relevant MT members: Can I do that? Can you see me doing that? And to my great surprise, they said, 'yes, we can see you doing that, but you have to get guidance for that.'"

Jos found that guidance from Twan Paes, director of Action Learning at WIAL Netherlands, although an extensive search for courses preceded that. "I saw and discussed all the possibilities and that's how I ended up with Twan. There was a connection, so I followed and did the whole package offered by WIAL," says Jos, who feels drawn to the idea behind Action Learning. "The basic principles appeal to me, the idea of upstream-downstream, ratio-emotion. What moves a person, how to connect and all this connected to practical applications. Learning, doing and actively working with that in the sessions. That appealed to me because then you see what you can and cannot do. To my great shock," says Jos, who likes to explain what scared him: "It was during an exercise and I had to train with asking open questions without an opinion. Twan saw me doing it and then said, 'stop for a moment Jos, what are you doing?' I said 'I think I am asking open questions'. He asked again and I replied 'that I was actually just working from my own self and transmitting and trying to manipulate things here'. Twan replied that this was the answer he expected and the group confirmed it. Then you are basically mowed down flat just above the ankles and you can start over or try to do better. At that point you realize that you are a beginner. And have to start at the very basics."

"You start to see that asking open questions, taking an interest in others and what you have learned can take you much further in life. It's been an eye opener for me, a game changer, I went completely from sending to receiving."

That's what Jos van den Berg did, and he left no stone unturned to fully master Action Learning. He took the theory and put it into practice, attended six one-day team sessions, brought Action Learning sessions to his own organization and wrote a final report. Through it all, Jos learned a lot. "You start to see that asking open questions, taking an interest in others and what you have learned can take you much further in life. It is an eye opener for me, a game changer, I went completely from sending to receiving."

A clear difference

The fact that Jos has taken Action Learning training is something he not only notices himself, but those around him have not failed to notice. Whereas to friends he was

known for his waterfall of words, Jos is now the one who listens more than he tells. "Then a friend says how nice the conversation we had was or a specialist said he told me things he really shouldn't say. Asking appropriate questions encourages people to tell, even about their deepest feelings."

On the shop floor, the difference is very clear and they let him know it. "They say Jos is very different, he has turned 180 degrees," and he likes hearing that. "I think it's fantastic. The fact that you are no longer steering, but following and by following well you still have an influence on what happens, that is something bizarre, something you are not familiar with. You're familiar with directing and hierarchy, because that was the treadmill you ran in."

Putting the Jos of today next to the Jos of ten years ago, those who have known him longer see a different man. "I was different. I was really the director, someone to look out for a little bit because the director was quite a dominant man. It was much more about directing. Now there is a very different atmosphere here, a different culture. Employees feel very free. I always say that if a director comes in and the conversations just go on, then you've got it right. Now the conversations just go on when I come in. Whatever they're talking about."

Not top-down, but for everyone

The great result Jos van den Berg achieved thanks to Action Learning has led to it now spreading throughout the organization. The management team has followed the sessions and all MT members want to become or already are an accomplished mentor, and Action-Learning sessions are organized for all 75 employees for which they define a problem themselves. "Everyone working at Repair Care is free to participate. It's not top-down, starting with management but if we find something good, then everyone gets to do it. So the whole organization is involved."

As more and more Repair Care employees embrace Action Learning's methods, the question is whether the atmosphere within the company has improved. "Yes," Jos van den Berg says confidently. "Not only because of me, but because of the management team and because of what we have accomplished with the whole organization. That is that we know how to find each other more and more and listen to each other instead of saying 'this is how it should be'."

Employees, although Jos van den Berg prefers to call them colleagues, are happy in their work. In the most recent employee satisfaction survey, they gave Repair Care a score of well over eight. That does not mean, however, that the goal has been reached. "We have come a long way, but there is always room for improvement. The feedback that focuses on asking questions, we really need to get better at that. All project teams need to do this better. A ten percent find it difficult to get and give feedback."

Now that Action Learning has become commonplace at Repair Care, new employees are also expected to be able to handle it. It is even an integral part of the selection



procedure. Jos van den Berg: "They all go straight through the merry-go-round. In fact, we select at the front door on the basis of these qualities. During conversations with direct colleagues, managers and HR, the questions are asked in such a way as to show whether someone can develop and how empathetic and flexible of mind he or she is.

For us, this is at least as important as education and work experience. We would rather hire the person who can develop than the person who has 20 years of experience. We usually have less interest in that, because the person who wants to learn can do a lot." Now that Jos van den Berg has mastered all facets of Action Learning, that doesn't mean the work is now done. As far as he is concerned, it never will be. "Action Learning is very good for my life, but I don't feel like I'm there myself. I have to do my best every day. People sometimes say that I let it go again when I get very excited about something, then I start talking and not listening anymore," says Jos, who reaffirms this by the enthusiastic story he just told about Action Learning.

For questions, contact Twan Paes, Master Action Learning Coach Netherlands at info@twanpaes.nl

Source: [Action Learning brings new insights and positive results at Repair Care - WIAL Netherlands \(wialnl.nl\)](#)