



TTI SUCCESS INSIGHTS®

# When Perception Becomes Reality

How a leading organization addressed and improved communication issues between its partners

## Houston, We Have A Problem

Three business partners that owned a physical therapy company were having a hard time communicating with each other since Tyler made the unique transition from worker to partner. For many reasons and on many levels, communication was one of the biggest challenges they faced as partners. And it was starting to become a real disruptor for their business.

Due to the close working relationship of the partners and the sensitivity of the issues, our characters and their company have decided to remain semi-anonymous for this story. The organization operates in the physical therapy field with several locations and over 100 employees doing business in the southern region of the United States.

Tyler is the newest partner, joining Jim and Pat, the two founders of the company. Making the difficult transition from employee to partner, Tyler encountered a lot of resistance along the way. To be fair, the two original founders weren't used to answering to anyone, especially someone who used to report to them. The founders were older, seasoned veterans in the business world while Tyler was still somewhat of an up-and-comer in his thirties.

Not only did a problem exist between the partners, a communication gap also existed between Tyler and his subordinates. Though Tyler was a leader, he was not the prototypical dominant, vocal type of leader. While extremely social outside of work, he often kept to himself in the work environment, not wanting to disrupt the flow of his co-workers. While he thought he was doing right by his subordinates, he wasn't connecting with them on a personal level.

Tyler was no ordinary business partner. He accomplished a lot in a relatively short period of time. Named a member of the "40 under 40 Club" in his local metro area, Tyler sat on multiple boards for local companies. Though quite the junior to his partners, he had accomplished much in his relatively short work career and certainly earned his position of partner.

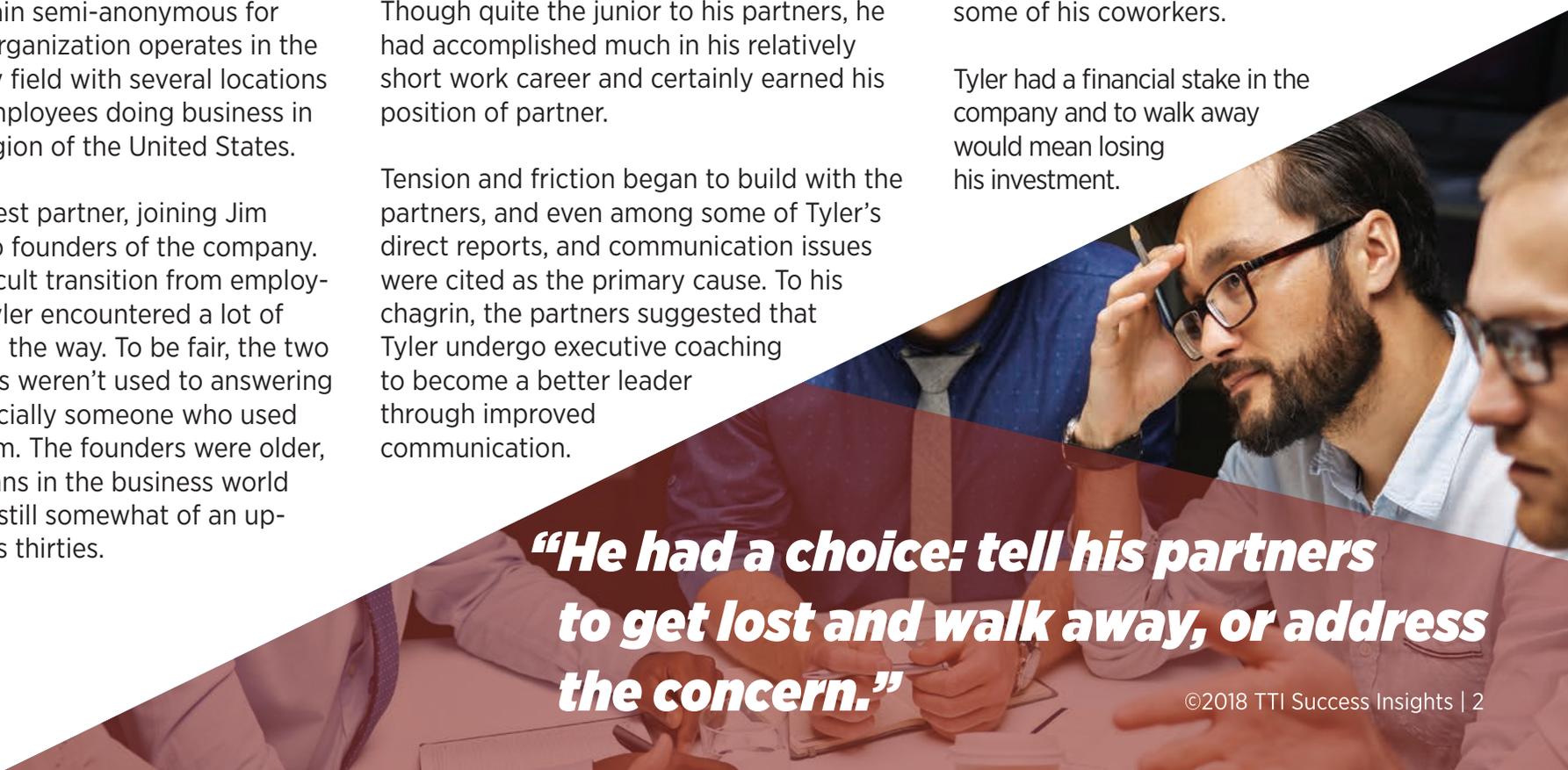
Tension and friction began to build with the partners, and even among some of Tyler's direct reports, and communication issues were cited as the primary cause. To his chagrin, the partners suggested that Tyler undergo executive coaching to become a better leader through improved communication.

## A Problem Exists Whether it is Perceived or Actual

Tyler took it personally that he got singled out for subpar communication. He was hurt and angry. And if he did think a problem existed, he believed he may have only been partially responsible considering communication is a two-way street.

He had a choice: tell his partners to get lost and walk away, or address the concern. Whether communication was really a problem was yet to be determined, but since perception becomes reality, it was a problem, at least in the eyes of the partners and some of his coworkers.

Tyler had a financial stake in the company and to walk away would mean losing his investment.



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That wasn't an option. Moreso, being a person always interested in self-improvement, Tyler was curious to find out if his communication style really was a problem. Somewhat begrudgingly, he agreed to go to meet with an executive coach to find out.

## If at First You Don't Succeed...

One of Tyler's partners was very vocal and regularly animated in his conversations. The conversations were often one-sided. With this partner regularly in his face, Tyler thought the best way to deal with that was to avoid the conflict altogether. During these one-sided conversations, Tyler basically sat there and listened but didn't say much.

Without two-way communication, the problems weren't getting fixed and the pressure began to build. Resentment started to surface between the partners.

Additionally, he took a similar low-key approach with his direct reports. Not wanting to come across as self-absorbed or disruptive, Tyler chose to keep his office chatter to a minimum. While he thought he was doing the right thing, his subordinates viewed him as aloof, disengaged or even standoffish. This quiet, low-key approach wasn't working with either his partners or his subordinates.

## Coach Michael to the Rescue

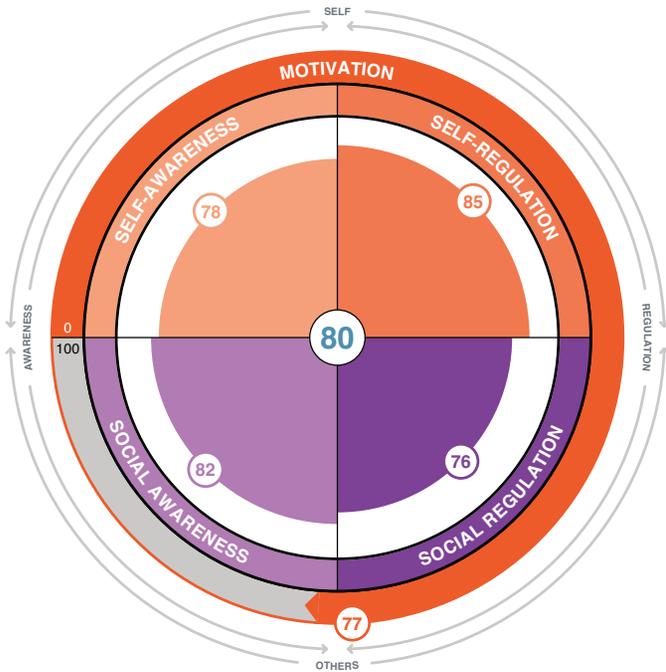
A local executive coach named Michael who specialized in workplace situations such as this one was brought in to meet with Tyler. While somewhat reluctant and still equal parts fuming and hurt, Tyler had an initial conversation with Michael and agreed to give the business coaching a good, honest effort. After all, he wanted to know if this problem really did exist, and, if it did, he needed to learn how to fix it. They agreed to meet weekly.



One of the tools Michael used was to have Tyler take a multi-faceted behavioral assessment known as TriMetrix EQ to help provide insight on Tyler's behavioral style, his motivators and his emotional intelligence (EQ).

Having heard about Tyler from the partners and the company's human resource department, Michael was expecting to work with a loose cannon. What he found instead was entirely different.

When Michael reviewed Tyler's assessment scores, he was quite surprised. His numbers represented someone who showed great potential as a leader, scoring an 80 on the EQ portion of the assessment.



Michael and Tyler talked at length about the situation Tyler was currently in, gathering background and specific details about the business relationship between the three partners. Tyler was well spoken, intelligent and advanced beyond his relatively young age. But a problem existed, nonetheless, and they needed to get to the bottom of what that problem was.

## What the Assessments Revealed

One of the assessments he took measured Tyler's emotional intelligence, also known in the industry as emotional quotient or "EQ."

To Michael's surprise, Tyler had fairly high scores across the board, indicating a very stable and effective leader. Sure, there was room for improvement, but the scores hinted that Tyler may not be entirely to blame for the situation.

The assessments showed a somewhat lower score in the area of self-awareness. Since Tyler wasn't exactly sure of his role at the time, the lower score made perfect sense considering he had recently transitioned from employee to partner. It was a huge adjustment for both he and his partners to see him in this new role.

The behavioral part of the report revealed that Tyler's preferred managerial style was less direct than that of a prototypical leader. He was more democratic than would be expected and often did not assert himself when the situation called for doing so. For him to be successful, he would need to learn to adapt his behavior in the workplace to earn the respect of his team.



Regarding Jim, the dominant partner, Tyler did not possess the same personality type and it wasn't in his nature to respond to dominance with a dominant tone of his own. Again, some common ground would need to be reached in order for Tyler and Jim to be able to communicate effectively.

## A Willingness to Change

No one can be helped without a willingness to be helped. After the initial hurt and anger wore away, Tyler embraced the executive coaching sessions. In fact, he was learning a lot about himself and making great strides every week.

Tyler was a strong believer that if he was unable to identify a potential problem, that was a problem in and of itself. Whether or not the problem really existed was secondary.

Tyler became aware that he was not very attuned to emotion in the workplace. He believed people should stick to the facts and work everything out through data and logical reasoning. He did not respond well when someone brought emotion into a conversation, especially when that emotion was anger.

After learning this about himself, he took full responsibility with his partners and his subordinates when it came to communication. He began to identify the triggers that would make him originally recoil and he'd call these situations out when they surfaced. Though he risked appearing vulnerable at times, he was able to work better with Jim letting Jim know when he was communicating in a way that made him feel uncomfortable.

Tyler also came to realize that his subordinates wanted to have a personal connection with him. They wanted him to know them on a personal level. They did not view his presence in the office as a distraction, rather viewing his presence as an engaged leader. Tyler was able to work some of his natural ability to socialize

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back into the work environment. The new conversations may have increased the time he spent in the office somewhat, but the relationships he began to build with his coworkers were well worth it.

## Conclusion

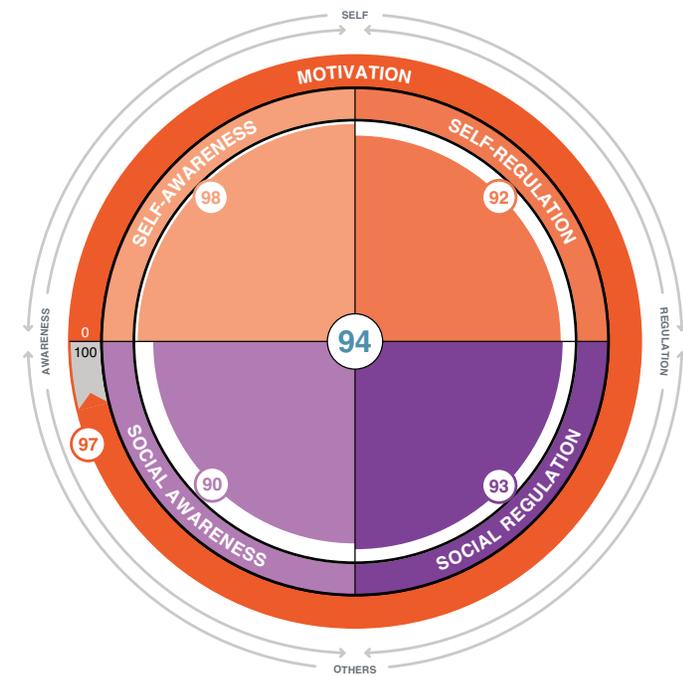
Today, Tyler has a great working relationship with his partners because they communicate on an entirely new level. They have built a mutual respect with each other and when communication gets uneasy, they have checks and balances in place to identify them.

His coworkers work hard for Tyler and the company continues to grow and thrive. Getting to know more of his subordinates on a personal level has given them the drive

to give their all where previously they may not have done so.

Interestingly, Michael had Tyler retake the behavioral assessment at the end of the coaching process. While he hoped for slight improvement, he didn't expect a whole lot of change, especially since Tyler scored fairly high at the beginning. To his surprise, Tyler's EQ (emotional quotient) scores went way up! His new score of 94 indicated a substantial increase over his original score and showcased someone who had all the makings of a natural born leader.

Tyler finally understood his role. He had overcome the communication issues with his partners and his subordinates. He knew exactly who he was and what his place was in this company. In understanding behavioral styles better, he learned how to adapt his behavior to others who had different behaviors. These changes improved communication between Tyler and everyone with which he came in contact.



While initially put-off for being forced to undergo executive coaching, Tyler quickly embraced it, made the most of it and improved his entire work situation because of it. The more a person knows about his or herself, the more he or she can communicate effectively with others and Tyler proved this to be resoundingly true.

Questions? Call **800.869.6908**  
or email **support@ttisi.com**

