



# Team Coaching Practitioner

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CASE STUDY: SWEET DREAMS

# Sweet Dreams case study

## Introduction

Welcome to the *Sweet Dreams* Chocolate Factory. This fictional business is the place where we will explore our learning and the application of team coaching. You will eventually know it well. For now, make sure you read this overview and get to know some of the characters who are a part of the Alice's team. These characters, scenarios and this business are based on real team coaching experiences.

The story will unfold as we move through the programme and we will add more information as needed. Some parts you will fill in with your imagination as you play various roles.

## The Story

Alice is the new team leader for the marketing team of a chocolate manufacturer, *Sweet Dreams*. She has been in the role for 3 months and she has 3 team members. The team has recently lost two members and a headcount freeze means they are unlikely to be replaced, so everyone is feeling under pressure.

- Stefan is the longest serving member of the team and was disappointed not to have been given the job when the previous leader – a very hands-on, directive manager -- retired.
- Angelique is the conciliator and mother hen – constantly intervening to smooth conflict. She needs to feel wanted. Sometimes her own work suffers because she is too busy helping other people.
- Ravi is highly creative and ambitious – and also often impatient with others inside and outside the team.

Alice takes over the team at a time when both Corporate and the Marketing team's performance has been flat, though not disastrous, for a couple of years. Her own boss has made it clear that a massive performance improvement is expected, in terms of both output and relationships with internal stakeholders. She knows she has to demonstrate real progress within three months.

## The Company History

*Sweet Dreams* was founded 120 years ago. It remained a family business, operating mainly in its home country and three neighbouring countries, until ten years ago, when it was acquired by a larger multinational. A rapid period of international expansion took place, but stalled, and growth has been static since then, with the company pulling out of some of its new markets when product innovations did not succeed. Marketing reports into a new (12 months in the job) Sales and Marketing Director, Jabu.

## The Team History

Alice's predecessor, Gregoire, was in the role before the acquisition. A distant relation of the family, he was very hands on and made no secret of using his connections. As the company grew and more demands were placed upon the marketing team, he responded by exerting more control. Ravi was brought in as an innovator by the new Sales and Marketing Director in spite of Gregoire's objections. While his retirement was billed as voluntary, he had no choice in the matter.

Technologically and philosophically, the team's approach to its task can be described as "traditional".

One of the triggers for Gregoire's removal was the loss of two people, who had been brought in by Jabu, along with Ravi, to shake things up. One quit within two months, fed up with not making progress; the other had a serious illness. The global headcount freeze was directed by the international holding company, which has run into serious problems in another subsidiary and is looking to others, including *Sweet Dreams*, to generate short-term cash.

Alice is the only one of the team, who has experienced individual coaching. She has had one positive and one negative experience. Team coaching is new to all of them. Alice was persuaded by her boss to take on team coaching. She recognises that she needs all the help she can get.

## Team Members

### Alice's story

Hi! I'm Alice. I'm the new Marketing Manager here in marketing at Sweet Dreams. I've been here just 3 months. I was really looking forward to the challenge. I'm 32 and I feel this is the job I have building my career up to.

I have huge respect for my boss, Jabu, and I know he has got my back. He told me the team needed a good shake up, but I didn't imagine how much! You know they talk about a honeymoon period when you take on a new job – well I haven't experienced any of that.

When Jabu suggested I should bring in a team coach, I jumped at the chance. I've had one to one coaching before – some good, some bad – but I think it could make a real difference.

If I'm honest, I am worried that I may not be up to turning this team round. They have had years of coasting along and being told what to do and Jabu has made it clear he wants to see a rapid turnaround. I have got my work cut out for me.

### Jabu's story

Hi. I'm Jabu! The Sales and Marketing Director and Alice's boss

These are tough times for our business. We are under a lot of competitive pressure and we are paying the price for lack of investment in recent years. That includes marketing. Alice is just one of the team reporting to me. If I'm honest, I brought her in to sort out her team to get the problem off my desk – so I can concentrate on other, more pressing priorities. I don't have the time to babysit her. That's why I authorised getting in a coach. I know she needs more resources, but I am battling with Finance to maintain the budgets we have. I have got her back, but I know we are asking a lot of her. Success for me is a massive performance improvement by Alice's team, in terms of both output and their relationships with internal stakeholders.

### Stefan's story

Of course, I'm upset! Gregoire, our old boss, always led me to believe I would step into his role when he retired. I stood in for three months while we hired his successor. I had plans for this department. I'm proud of everything we have achieved – we have cupboards full of awards – but it seems that the company doesn't value any of that anymore. I don't have anything against Alice. She is a smart enough and seems to want the best for us, but she doesn't have the

experience I have – she is the same age as my daughter. I want to stay professional, but it's hard when I don't feel valued. What makes it worse is that Alice has bought into top management's new-fangled ideas about how marketing should be run. I can see this is all going to be a disaster. I guess I shall stick it out till I can get early retirement.

### **Gregoire's story**

I am the ghost at the party here. I've never met Alice. I had a good team. Everyone knew what they needed to do and came to me for decisions to knit all their work together. I saw part of my role as maintaining the company's traditional values. It was becoming an uphill struggle. Now several of the team have quit and they have put this young woman in to lead the team. After 30 long years and so many changes, I'm glad I'm out of it!

### **Angelique's story**

This used to be such a happy place to work. Now we are short-handed, and the bosses are demanding more and more from us. It's not the same. I feel so sorry for Stefan – he has had a poor deal. And I feel for Alice, too, coming into this situation. I'm doing my best to mother her – she needs all the emotional support she can get.

### **Ravi's story**

Hi, I'm Ravi – I'm 24 and I'm going places. This job is a great opportunity for to get experience and build my reputation. Or it would be, if they were not so far behind the times. The way we do things is sooo outmoded. I'm hoping Alice will give me a much freer rein to develop new digital campaigns. I'd like to get involved in product development, too. I think that area should be led by marketing, not by production as it is now. I have this great idea for "sniffing chocolate". Here's how it would work...

### **Conclusion**

That all for now. Get to know this team, it's members, stakeholders and their context. You will spend a lot of time with Alice as this team coaching engagement emerges.  
Context

### **Ground rules for role plays**

To set the stage for optimal learning, there is a tension between bringing your character to life and giving the team coaches the opportunity to practice. To balance this tension, we've suggested a few key points:

- Be generous to your team coaches. If they're on track, don't throw a spanner in the works just to see how they'll respond.
- Understand your character and try to be authentic in role playing but in keeping with the team's objectives.
- Be aware of your character's 'agenda' and be present to what's happening in the moment.
- As a team coach, practice all the skills you're learning in class and be fully present to what you bring as a person, letting go of the need to 'do it right'.