

To Whom It May Concern:

I began a coaching relationship with Birgit Zacher Hanson in January 2015, after being offered the chance to select and work with an executive coach to assist me in my transition into the Senior Executive Service as Director of the Chicago VA Regional Office. In my position as Director, I am responsible for leading change, leading people, building coalitions and delivering results in the delivery of benefits and services to Illinois Veterans and their families. I have many priorities to balance, and must always work within the perceptions of Veterans, stakeholders such as Congress and Veteran advocate organizations, and employees.

Since working with Birgit, I have been able to better focus on what needs to be done before things get done. She has assisted me in prioritizing the pieces of what goes into major decisions or projects. She has helped me see what is behind the challenges I face with my management team, and more importantly, has provided concrete strategies I can use to overcome these challenges. Recently, Birgit traveled to Chicago to meet with me and my management team. She provided hands-on training for my first line supervisors and higher level managers on how to have difficult conversations with employees, with the desired result being a culture of accountability.

I will say that selecting Birgit as my executive coach was one of the best decisions I have made as a Senior Executive. I had the opportunity to select any number of government-experienced coaches, but liked the idea of learning and seeing from a view outside government. My choice has paid off in many ways that I did not ever anticipate. I have a confidant who listens to me without judgement, who does not know the players in my game, and who I can say anything to without a chance my leaders will hear about it. Our scheduled calls force me to set aside time for reflection on issues that, in the past, too often would get pushed aside or down for more concrete goals and objectives. I am grateful for my relationship with Birgit as coach, mentor and friend.

Suzanne Nunziata  
VA Regional Office Director, Chicago  
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