



Developing voice, authority and strategic clarity in a high-change environment

Situation

Ben*, a high-performing investment professional with a PhD in neuroscience, arrived in coaching repeatedly using the word “frustrated” and struggling to navigate a chaotic, fast-changing start-up environment. He had been headhunted from a role where he was thriving, only to find unclear expectations, poor communication and a new CEO “brought in over his head.”

Despite being informally asked to step into leadership, he felt unable to use his voice proactively and often spoke on behalf of others rather than himself. His confidence was increasingly tied to external validation, and he was unsure whether to stay in the organisation or leave.

Insight

Through early sessions, a deeper pattern emerged: Ben had difficulty asserting himself which was not simply situational but rooted in long-standing relational dynamics. He described a childhood with “renowned” parents whose expectations shaped a fear of being wrong.

Organisationally, the culture of ambiguity and sudden change amplified his anxiety, reinforcing his preference for safety and reluctance to take up authority - even as others increasingly looked to him as a leader.

M: 07872 921599 | E: catherineharrison9@gmail.com |

W: www.catherineharrisoncoach.com



Intervention

Our coaching helped Ben see the interplay between his internal patterns and the organisational context.

Key interventions included:

- Surfacing patterns of proxy-speaking and people-pleasing, inviting him to explore what it felt like to speak on his own behalf rather than through others.
- Linking past and present by asking when he first felt pressure “to be the smartest person in the room”, enabling him to connect current hesitations to childhood dynamics.
- Exploring leadership identity by contrasting his introverted, structured style with the organisation’s chaotic norms, helping him see the unique value he brought.
- Introducing concepts such as negative capability to expand his tolerance for uncertainty and decision-making without perfect information.
- Using role biography to help him integrate his narrative and understand how he positions himself with authority figures.
- Reframing career decisions from a binary “stay or go” into a research-driven exploration aligned with his strengths as a former academic.

Throughout, I held boundaries carefully and reinforced his agency and voice.

Impact

Across six sessions, Ben experienced a marked shift in confidence, clarity and leadership presence.

- He began assertively leading key meetings, with his CEO noticing and praising the change.
- He was identified as “second in command”, with the CEO planning to request a promotion for him.
- He developed a more grounded understanding of his leadership style and how to create impact in a volatile environment.

M: 07872 921599 | E: catherineharrison9@gmail.com |

W: www.catherineharrisoncoach.com



- He recognised long-standing patterns around voice, risk and external validation - and began making decisions from a place of clarity rather than anxiety.
- He reframed his stay/leave dilemma into a thoughtful, values-aligned exploration.

He described the coaching as helping him see different perspectives, avoid staying on the surface and build a reflective capacity he had previously avoided.

I found the sessions with Cat very rewarding. The coaching gave me a safe environment to be open, reflect and focus on my growth. I was surprised to see professional progress after only a couple of sessions. Cat's style is highly collaborative – she guides rather than tells, helping you come to your own conclusions through listening and thoughtful discussion. As long as you're willing to be open and proactive, I believe anyone would see real professional growth.”

*Ben is not his real name, confidentiality has been protected

Catherine Harrison

Executive Coach and Leadership Strategist

Enabling leaders to become powerful, not just competent



M: 07872 921599 | E: catherineharrison9@gmail.com |

W: www.catherineharrisoncoach.com

