



Strengthening leadership authority and strategic impact in a high-growth, high-change environment

Situation

Ben*, a high-performing investment professional with a PhD in neuroscience, joined a rapidly scaling start-up at a critical stage of growth. Despite being hired for his strategic capability, he was operating in an environment marked by unclear expectations, inconsistent communication and a newly appointed CEO “brought in over his head.”

Although colleagues were informally looking to him for leadership, he struggled to assert influence, often diluting his impact by speaking on behalf of others rather than driving his own agenda. This created a risk of underutilising a senior hire at a moment when the organisation urgently needed clarity, authority and stabilising leadership.

Insight

Through early coaching sessions, it became clear that Ben’s hesitation to take up authority was being amplified by the organisation’s volatility. Long-standing patterns around risk, voice and external validation were interacting with a chaotic culture, resulting in slow decision-making, reduced strategic presence and uncertainty about whether to stay in the business.

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Intervention

The coaching focused on strengthening Ben's leadership authority, strategic clarity and ability to operate decisively in ambiguity – all essential to the organisation's performance.

Key interventions included:

- Identifying and eliminating patterns of proxy-speaking and people-pleasing that were limiting his influence.
- Linking current leadership hesitations to earlier experiences of pressure “to be the smartest person in the room,” enabling more confident judgement calls.
- Positioning his structured, analytical leadership style as a stabilising force within a fast-changing, unstructured environment.
- Introducing concepts such as negative capability to support faster, more grounded decision-making without perfect information.
- Using role biography to help him shift his stance with authority figures and step into a more senior, strategic identity.
- Reframing his stay/leave dilemma into a structured, evidence-led exploration, reducing distraction and improving focus.
- Engaging with a key board member from the start, to align on goals for the organisation whilst protecting confidentiality for Ben.

Throughout, I reinforced boundaries, agency and ownership – enabling him to practise taking up authority in real organisational moments.

Impact

Within six sessions, Ben delivered measurable improvements in leadership presence, organisational impact and strategic contribution.

- He began assertively leading key meetings, with the CEO noticing and praising the shift.
- He was identified as “second in command,” with the CEO planning to request a promotion.

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- He developed a clearer, more grounded understanding of how to create impact in a volatile environment.
- He made higher-quality decisions driven by clarity rather than anxiety, improving his effectiveness and reducing organisational risk.
- He reframed his career decision-making into a thoughtful, values-aligned process, reducing uncertainty for both himself and the business.

Ben described the coaching as giving him “a safe environment to be open, reflect and focus on my growth,” noting that he saw professional progress “after only a couple of sessions.”

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

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Enabling leaders to become powerful, not just competent



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