



From emotional overload to confident, contained leadership

Situation

Brenda*, a senior leader in patient co-production, entered coaching feeling overwhelmed, self-doubting and frustrated that her lived-experience expertise was often dismissed. She frequently apologised, sought reassurance, saying her “head was all over the place”. At the same time, she was managing a team with significant dysfunction including a direct report whose behaviour she described as “coercive” and “Teflon”.

Insight

Through our work, Brenda began to see how her emotional valency, instinct to fill silences and tendency to personalise organisational dynamics were limiting her influence. She recognised that her frustration and anger were partly systemic, partly personal, and that her relational strengths could become strategic assets when paired with clearer boundaries and containment.

Intervention

I supported Brenda to:

- Depersonalise complex dynamics and distinguish what belonged to her versus the system.
- Use silence and pause to organise her thinking and project authority.

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

W: www.catherineharrisoncoach.com



- Develop containment as a leadership stance, especially in high-stakes conversations.
- Strengthen boundaries and accountability within her team, including preparing for a challenging conversation with her direct report.
- Rebalance her internal and external referencing, linking her self-belief to the value she demonstrably brings.
- Reinstate structural supports (e.g. three-way deputy meetings) and build a broader peer network to reduce emotional overload.

Impact

By the final session, Brenda showed a marked shift in confidence, clarity and leadership presence. She approached HR and team challenges with greater emotional regulation, strategic thinking and boundary clarity. She described feeling more grounded, less preoccupied with influencing upwards and more comfortable in her own capability - reinforced by 360 feedback showing she had “no blind spots” and was significantly underrating herself.

“My coaching with Catherine came at a time where I was at a crossroads in my career, not sure where my leadership role was taking me and at a time where I had a lot of self-doubt. Catherine’s ability to help me think differently in a safe and constructive way has been really impactful for me, moving me to more positive belief and confidence in what I can bring as a leader in the NHS.”

*Brenda is not her real name, confidentiality has been protected

Catherine Harrison

Executive Coach and Leadership Strategist

Enabling leaders to become powerful, not just competent



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W: www.catherineharrisoncoach.com

