



Gaining strategic career clarity and establishing boundaries during a high-stakes transition

Situation

James* came to coaching having left a long-term employer without a new role secured – a high-risk career move that created both opportunity and uncertainty. He wanted clarity on what roles would genuinely energise him, how to articulate his strengths, and how to make career decisions aligned with his values rather than “luck”, “chance” or “favouritism”.

At the same time, he was navigating complex personal dynamics: as an only child of a parent with health challenges, he was balancing professional ambition with family responsibility. These experiences were shaping his work patterns and decision-making – sometimes outside his awareness.

Insight

Early sessions revealed that James’s career choices were influenced by deeper patterns linked to caring, responsibility and fear of over-commitment. His six roles in the same number of years – which he initially framed as “loyalty” and “graft” – also reflected a search for meaning and impact rather than simple restlessness.

He struggled to recognise his own capability, despite rapid promotions and senior leaders advocating for him. He presented as both confident and underconfident:

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decisive in manner yet resistant to acknowledging his strengths. Coaching provided a structured transition space where he could explore these tensions safely and begin to integrate his career narrative.

Intervention

The coaching focused on strengthening James's strategic clarity, confidence in his capability and ability to set boundaries – all essential for navigating a career pivot and avoiding repeating unhelpful patterns.

Key interventions included:

- Mapping his career narrative from past to future, identifying the motivations behind each move and the through-line of caring, impact and people-centred work.
- Challenging his tendency to minimise his achievements and helping him articulate the skills others clearly saw in him – particularly relationship-building and reading people.
- Exploring the interplay between work decisions and family dynamics, enabling him to better make choices from clarity rather than unconscious pressure.
- Supporting him to define boundaries for his new portfolio career and avoid the overworking patterns he wanted to leave behind.
- Providing a reflective, contained space that reduced anxiety and helped him think critically about his aspirations, values and next steps.

Impact

Across three sessions, James made significant progress in career clarity, confidence and strategic decision-making.

- He secured a new role aligned with his values and used coaching to set boundaries that would prevent previous patterns of overload.

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- He gained the confidence to shape his career direction intentionally rather than opportunistically, mapping choices closely to what matters to him.
- He became more comfortable expressing his thinking out loud, reducing the internalisation that had previously clouded decision-making.
- He developed a clearer understanding of his strengths and potential, supported by external validation from senior leaders.
- He built optimism about his next steps and a more grounded sense of professional identity.

“Cat coached me through a transition period as I left a long-term role and took a break before shifting my career direction. I was impressed by how thoughtfully she explored and challenged my biases and concerns. Cat’s support has helped me gain a better awareness of what I want from work and a clear sense of my direction and core values.”

*James 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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