



Strengthening leadership containment, authority and strategic influence in a complex organisation

Situation

Brenda*, a senior leader in patient co-production, started working with me at a point where her effectiveness was being compromised by organisational complexity and team dysfunction. Her expertise in lived-experience was frequently dismissed, she was managing a direct report whose behaviour she described as “coercive” and “Teflon,” and she was carrying a level of emotional load that was diluting her authority.

Her tendency to apologise, seek reassurance and describe her “head as all over the place” meant she was spending significant energy managing her own internal state rather than driving strategic outcomes. The organisation risked losing a highly credible leader to overwhelm, under-confidence and avoidable team issues.

Insight

Early sessions revealed that Brenda’s instinct to fill silences were unintentionally reducing her influence. She often personalised systemic issues, absorbing responsibility that did not belong to her and inadvertently shielding others from accountability.

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Once she recognised that her relational strengths could become strategic assets – when paired with clearer boundaries and containment – she was able to shift from reactive leadership to intentional, grounded authority.

Intervention

The coaching focused on strengthening Brenda's leadership containment, boundary clarity and ability to navigate high-stakes dynamics with composure – all essential to her role's organisational impact.

Key interventions included:

- Depersonalising complex dynamics and distinguishing what belonged to her versus the wider system.
- Using silence and pause to organise her thinking and project authority in senior forums.
- Developing containment as a leadership stance, particularly in emotionally charged or politically sensitive conversations.
- Strengthening boundaries and accountability within her team, including preparing for a challenging conversation with her direct report.
- Rebalancing her internal and external referencing, anchoring her confidence in the demonstrable value she brings.
- Reinstating structural supports (e.g., three-way deputy meetings) and expanding her peer network to reduce emotional overload and improve decision quality.

Impact

By the final session, Brenda demonstrated a significant shift in leadership presence, strategic clarity and emotional regulation – with direct organisational benefits.

- She approached HR and team challenges with greater composure, clearer boundaries and more strategic judgement.

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- She reduced the emotional noise that had previously clouded her decision-making, enabling her to focus on higher-value leadership work.
- She became less preoccupied with influencing upwards and more confident in her capability, supported by 360 feedback showing she was significantly underrating herself.
- She stabilised her team environment by addressing accountability gaps and reintroducing structural supports.

Brenda described the coaching as helping her “think differently in a safe and constructive way,” leading 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

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Enabling leaders to become powerful, not just competent



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