



# From Uncertain to Aligned: Coaching a Young Leader to Define Their Leadership Voice

## Real Stories, Real Shifts – A Coaching & Leadership Library Case Study

*Coaching journeys where self-awareness sparked change, and clarity led to action.*



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# Background: The Transition Into Leadership



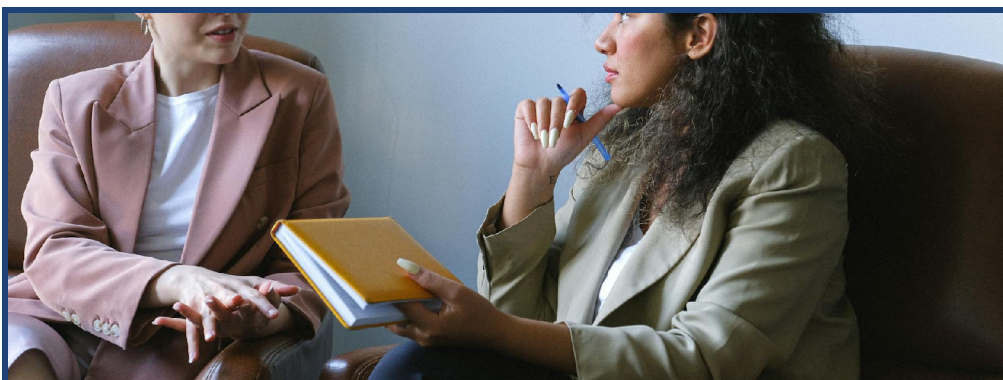
Riya (name changed) had recently been promoted to a team lead position. On paper, she was thriving: she had the respect of her peers, deep technical expertise, and a solid track record of delivering under pressure. But her new role brought unfamiliar territory, managing people, navigating ambiguity, and speaking with authority in cross-functional meetings.

"I feel like I'm acting. Like I'm just trying to sound like a leader, but it's not really me," she admitted during our first session.

Though she had the skills, what Riya lacked was confidence in her leadership identity. She wasn't sure how to lead in a way that felt authentic, especially in an organization where louder, more assertive styles seemed to dominate.



# Coaching Focus: Bridging the Internal Gap



The coaching engagement was centered on helping Riya lead from the inside out. Her challenge wasn't performance-based. It was rooted in self-perception, internalized expectations, and a desire to feel real in her role.

Together, we set three intentions:

1. Clarify her leadership identity, based on her values, not mimicry
2. Strengthen her voice and confidence, especially in group settings
3. Develop micro-practices that aligned her intentions with real-world behavior



# What We Did in Coaching



The coaching process unfolded over six sessions, and each phase built on the last.

## 1. Reclaiming Strengths and Values

We began with the Strengths & Values Snapshot, a simple reflection tool that helped Riya name what made her feel strong, centered, and energized. Her top strengths - empathy, curiosity, and structure, weren't traditionally celebrated in her fast-paced environment. But once she saw how they had supported her success so far, she began to view them not as soft, but strategic.

We used coaching to reframe her thinking:

- Empathy isn't weakness, it builds trust.
- Curiosity isn't indecision. it drives collaboration.
- Structure isn't rigidity, it provides clarity for others.

She began to own her way of leading, rather than apologizing for it.

## 2. Unpacking the "Shoulds"

Riya carried unspoken beliefs about leadership that she had to be commanding, always confident, and outwardly charismatic. In coaching, we challenged those beliefs. Through visualizations and "future self" exercises, she explored what it would look like to lead on her own terms.

She journaled between sessions, reflected on stories from her career where she felt proud, and even recorded short voice memos describing "what leading like me" sounded like. These practices helped her reconnect with her inner leadership compass.

## 3. Micro-Experiments in Leadership Presence

We moved from insight to action. In each session, Riya identified one micro-behavior to experiment with, low-stakes, low-risk, and fully aligned with her evolving self-awareness.

Examples included:

- Starting team check-ins with a values-based prompt
- Preparing one statement of clarity before each cross-functional meeting
- Requesting feedback from her direct reports after a difficult conversation
- Mentoring a peer to test her ability to hold space and guide

These were not massive transformations. They were quiet, deliberate shifts and they began to reinforce her confidence in real time.

# What Shifted



By the end of the engagement, Riya wasn't just "sounding" like a leader, she was being one, from a place of self-trust.

Here's what changed:

- Language: She started using clearer, more intentional language when setting expectations, which helped her team feel more aligned.
- Body language and tone: She noticed she no longer avoided eye contact in meetings or rushed through updates. She spoke a little slower, more grounded.
- Emotional regulation: She recognized the voice of self-doubt when it showed up and responded with curiosity instead of panic.
- Initiative: Riya began mentoring a newer colleague, something she'd previously felt unqualified to do. It turned out to be one of her most energizing weekly moments.

But the biggest shift was internal. She no longer questioned whether she belonged in a leadership role. She stopped trying to emulate others and instead leaned into a leadership style that reflected her values and strengths.

"I didn't need to become someone else. I just needed to stop hiding who I already was," she said in our final session.



# Why This Case Matters



This case reflects what many transitioning professionals experience, the moment when external success outpaces internal certainty. Promotions, new roles, and high expectations can create a disconnect between how we see ourselves and how others see us. Without self-awareness, leaders often default to imitation or overcompensation. But through coaching, Riya rebuilt her leadership identity from the inside out.

This story matters because it reminds us:

- Leadership is not about changing who you are, but about leading more intentionally as who you are.
- Self-awareness is not a soft skill. It is the gateway to presence, clarity, and influence.
- Small shifts in how we speak, how we act, how we interpret, can generate profound change over time.

## Try This

Reflect on a time you felt most “yourself” at work.  
What values or strengths were you honoring in that moment?  
How could you bring more of that into how you lead today?

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## Related Resources

- How-To Guide: How to Use Your Strengths to Lead Through Uncertainty
- Template: Strengths & Values Snapshot
- Article: Why Self-Awareness Is the First Step to Stronger Leadership

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