

Authenticity is not a poster on the office wall. In London, it lives in the way leaders hold the room when the Tube strike leaves half the team remote, how they give a straight answer when a client asks about a missed deadline, and how they carry decisions through the scrutiny of regulators, investors, and tabloid headlines. Over the past decade coaching leaders here, I have seen that authenticity is both a value and a set of well-practiced habits. It can be taught, trained, and stress-tested, and it survives only when embedded in the daily cadence of work.

This piece looks at practices Leadership Coaches use in London to help leaders lead as themselves, not as a script. While the labels vary, the disciplines are consistent, whether one works as a Leadership Coach, an Executive Coach, or a Business Coach. Each practice is specific enough to try, yet flexible enough to fit the different realities of a global bank in Canary Wharf, a fast-growing agency in Soho, a hospital trust in Southwark, or a seed-stage fintech in Shoreditch.

## **What authenticity actually looks like at work**

Authenticity is not radical transparency at all times, nor is it a license to be blunt without care. Leaders who earn trust do three things consistently. They align words and actions, even when that alignment is inconvenient. They make values observable through decisions, metrics, and meeting rituals, not just through speeches. And they maintain a throughline of self, a recognizable stance, even as they adapt to context.

A CFO at a listed retailer once told me he lost confidence in his CEO, not because the strategy changed, but because the rationale shifted with the wind. When market analysts wanted efficiency, we heard margin talk. When employees worried about layoffs, we heard purpose talk. The narrative never rang false on its own, but the constant switching made both audiences suspicious. We rebuilt a single spine of principles, then anchored all comms and resource choices to it. Revenue did not jump overnight, but internal surveys showed a 15 to 20 percent increase in confidence in leadership within two quarters, and the next earnings call landed cleaner. Authenticity showed up as consistency under pressure.

## **The London context matters**

London asks leaders to navigate unique collisions. Team members fly in from Lagos and Lisbon, then dial in from Lewisham. Regulations change with a ministerial reshuffle. Talent leaves for a startup across Old Street at lunch. Commute time eats energy, hybrid norms shift quarterly, and your best engineer works two days in Bristol.

These conditions sharpen the need for specificity in leadership practices.



- Multicultural nuance. A direct challenge that reads as healthy debate in one culture can feel like disrespect in another. Authentic leaders learn how to signal intent and adapt their style without diluting their stance. I often run simulations where the same feedback message is delivered in three ways, then we debrief intent, tone, and impact.
- Regulatory attention. In financial services or health, integrity is a compliance requirement as much as a virtue. Authenticity here means making your guardrails explicit. A chief risk officer I coached started opening investment committee meetings with a 90-second risk frame, then closed with a trace of how decisions tracked that frame. The practice cut rework time and eased audit reviews.
- Hybrid tempo. Presence is a skill, not just a camera-on rule. Leaders learn to create moments of attention and clarity in short windows. A founder I worked with moved her Monday stand-up to 12 minutes with a three-part rhythm: one question to connect the team, one point of focus for the week, one blocker to remove today. The format stayed the same for six months, and people began to count on it.

# The role of a coach, and why labels matter less than fit

People often ask about the difference between a Leadership Coach, an Executive Coach, and a Business Coach. There is overlap, but the emphasis shifts.

- A Leadership Coach typically focuses on identity, presence, relationships, and the systems of behavior around a leader. Think self-awareness, stakeholder influence, team dynamics, and the rituals that form culture.
- An Executive Coach works with senior decision-makers on high-stakes strategy and political navigation. The sessions often include board dynamics, succession, cross-functional leadership, and the emotional load of public accountability.
- A Business Coach tends to integrate commercial performance more explicitly. You still work on leadership, but goals are tied tightly to revenue, margin, pipeline health, or customer metrics. In small and midsize firms, the Business Coach may wear a fractional operator hat at times.

All three can support authentic leadership. The London market has depth in each area. What matters is the match between your goals, your context, and the coach's craft. In practice, a good coach will shift hats but keep the aim clear: help you lead in a way that is true to who you are, effective in your setting, and sustainable over time.

## Grounding values in visible behavior

I often start with an exercise that sounds soft but proves hard: name three core values without corporate jargon, then set two visible behaviors for each. "Integrity" becomes "we keep commitments, or we renegotiate them early," and "we do not hide material risks from each other." "Curiosity" becomes "leaders ask three questions before giving advice," and "we allocate budget for small experiments monthly."

A London-based media agency used this method after a rapid growth spurt. Staff kept saying culture had changed, but no one could point to what exactly. We translated their stated values into 10 day-to-day behaviors and tied two of them to existing rituals: the weekly creative review and the monthly forecast. Within a quarter, leaders were less defensive in creative feedback sessions, and the finance team reported fewer last-minute surprises. Values stopped being wall art and turned into operating practice.

## The discipline of stakeholder mapping in a city of networks

In London, careers and deals run on networks that span sectors and neighborhoods. Authentic leadership requires clear-eyed stakeholder awareness, not people-pleasing. I ask clients to map their top 10 stakeholders with two lenses: what each person truly needs to succeed, and what they fear if things go wrong. The second lens changes the conversation.

A head of operations at a construction firm near Liverpool Street initially saw an external partner as obstructive. Through mapping, he realised the partner's fear was reputational damage from safety issues on a high-visibility site. We reframed progress updates to start with safety milestones, then tied schedule asks to those outcomes. The relationship thawed fast. "Authentic" here looked like respecting the other party's reality while holding a firm line on delivery.

## Building a feedback architecture that people trust

Feedback in London offices can cross cultures, hierarchies, and professional norms. A robust architecture does not rely on heroics. It sets up routes for praise, correction, and learning that feel routine rather than rare.

In one bank, we introduced a quarterly 360 rhythm for directors, with 10 to 12 respondents each cycle, and we trained people to give behavior-based feedback. We tracked response rates, the ratio of positive to constructive comments, and the presence of action suggestions. Starting baselines were 60 to 65 percent response rates and very general feedback. In six months, response rates climbed above 80 percent, and 70 percent of comments included a specific example. Leaders began to close the loop publicly: "Last quarter you told me I over-scheduled decision meetings. This quarter we moved three decisions to async and kept two meetings under 30 minutes. Tell me if you felt that difference." Trust grows when people see change tied to their input.



## **The art of presence: attention over performance**

Authenticity often gets confused with charisma. Presence is more precise, and teachable. We work on breath, pace, and the ability to stay with a question without rushing to fix it. In hybrid settings, presence also means technical rehearsal: mic quality, framing, and how to use silence on a call.

A senior leader at an NHS trust had a habit of over-explaining in town halls, trying to soothe anxiety with detail. We practised concise framing, then space for questions, then one empathic summary. Her weekly sessions dropped from 50 minutes of monologue to 20 minutes of framing and 30 minutes of dialogue. Staff comments shifted from "We do not get straight answers" to "We feel heard even when answers are hard." Authenticity here was less about sharing everything and more about being fully with the room.

## **Decision hygiene: pre-mortems and red teams**

London's pace can push decisions through on momentum. Authentic leaders slow down at two points: before committing, and after learning. A pre-mortem is a simple tool. Imagine the decision failed in six months. What most likely caused it? Write five reasons. Then design countermeasures for the top two.

An e-commerce scale-up in Camden used this on a major platform rewrite. The two likely failure modes were talent churn mid-project and underestimating integration with legacy systems. They ring-fenced key engineers with retention plans and staged integration spikes early. The project still slipped three weeks, but avoided the three-month overrun they had feared. There was no theatre, just clear practice.

Red teaming gets a bad name when it feels adversarial. The version that works in London's coalition-heavy environment is ethical and bounded. We set a time-boxed session where a cross-functional group challenges the decision from the standpoint of values, customers, and execution risk. The leader commits to hearing the critique, then signals what changes as a result. Over time, the ritual builds a culture where dissent is expected and useful.

## **Voice, not spin, in communication**

Many executives develop a veneer that reads as spin. In a media-savvy city, people sniff it fast. The remedy is not to stop preparing. It is to prepare differently. We script for meaning, not for polish. One rule I use: every major message should contain one sentence you could say to your team, your board, and your family without changing a word. That sentence becomes the anchor.

A fintech COO had to announce a slowdown in hiring. The line we landed on was, "We will grow headcount only where it directly serves customers this quarter, and we owe you clarity about why." He then showed a simple visual of customer lag times by segment. Staff disagreed on priorities, as they should, but they did not doubt the intent. Investors appreciated the focus, and customer service metrics improved within eight weeks.

## **Meeting redesign as culture change**

Culture lives in calendars. If your diary rewards status updates over decisions, you will grow a cautious, performative culture. Authentic leadership shows up in how you design and run meetings.

I advise clients to separate three meeting types. Decision meetings are small, pre-work heavy, and have clear owners. Learning sessions are cross-functional, with rotating facilitators and no decisions expected. Connection moments are brief and regular. A London tech company reduced its all-hands from 90 to 45 minutes but added 15-minute micro-briefs by different functions weekly. The effect was sharper decisions and more real cross-talk. Over a quarter, time spent in meetings dropped by roughly 12 to 18 percent, while staff reported higher clarity scores in internal pulse checks.

## **Coaching in the wild: shadowing and live rehearsal**

Some of the best work happens not in the coaching room, but at the edge of the job. Shadow coaching involves a coach sitting quietly in a board meeting, a client pitch, or a one-to-one, then giving focused debrief afterward. It is not surveillance. It is field research with consent and purpose.

A retail CEO invited me to shadow her quarterly review with regional heads. She tended to rescue struggling leaders mid-report. We worked on a simple swap: ask, "What do you see that I do not?" before offering solutions. In the next cycle, three regions brought clearer requests, and one solved a supply issue without headquarters help. Authenticity for her was letting people feel the weight of their role while staying present.

Live rehearsal helps with critical moments. We run three versions of the same speech: the most honest, the most corporate, and the one you would give your smartest critic. We then splice the parts that ring true and test them with a friendly skeptic inside the company. Leaders report that the final version is not just better received, it is easier to remember because it sounds like them.

## **Metrics without vanity**

You can measure authentic leadership, but not with vanity metrics. Look for signals that quality of discourse is improving and that behavior change sticks.

- Pulse survey items that track perceived integrity, psychological safety, and clarity, not just engagement. Watch trends over 6 to 12 months.
- Ratio of decisions made in the right forum to escalations that bounce around for weeks.
- Churn rates in critical roles after major changes. Expect a small spike when you change standards, then stabilization. Wild swings are a red flag.
- 360 feedback specificity and close-the-loop behavior.
- Customer trust proxies such as complaint-to-resolution ratios or net retention, interpreted cautiously and in context.

None of these prove authenticity on their own. Together, they form a picture you can steer with.



## A weekly practice that builds authenticity

Here is a compact routine I give to busy London leaders. It takes 60 to 90 minutes total [Executive Coaching](#) across the week and compounds over time.

- Monday five: write one sentence about what matters most this week and why. Share it with your team in your own voice.
- Midweek pulse: ask two people, "What is one thing I am not seeing?" Listen, do not argue, write it down.
- One hard conversation: schedule and hold it. Use observable facts, name intent, ask for their view, agree on a next step.
- Decision pre-mortem lite: for one major choice, note the top two ways it could fail, then add one countermeasure to your plan.
- Friday reflection: 10 minutes on what you did that aligned with your values and one adjustment for next week. Send a brief note to your coach or accountability partner.

Leaders who follow this for a quarter report noticeable changes in how they show up. They waste less time on posture and more on progress.

## **The craft beneath the conversation**

Behind every good coaching conversation is a set of disciplines. Assessment to understand patterns, not to label. Contracting to set scope, confidentiality, and outcomes. Session design that alternates reflection and rehearsal. Integration with real work, so that coaching is not a separate hobby. I often work in arcs of 6 to 9 months, starting with a thorough intake, two or three stakeholder interviews, and a baseline 360. Sessions run every two to three weeks, 60 to 90 minutes, with assignments that touch live projects. Midpoint reviews test whether the plan needs to shift.

One executive in Mayfair came in for “communication issues.” The assessment surfaced that the deeper pattern was conflict avoidance masked as courtesy. We pivoted from presentation coaching to negotiation rehearsals, drafted two scripts for saying no, and rebuilt his one-to-ones around clear asks. By month five, his team rated him higher on decisiveness, and he felt lighter. The presenting symptom was comms. The authentic shift was boundary setting.

## **Learning to borrow credibility, then earn it back**

If you are new to London, or new to a sector, you may need to borrow credibility from a sponsor at first. Authenticity permits this. It does not insist on lone-hero myth. A newly appointed COO in a private equity portfolio company used her backers wisely. For the first six weeks, she opened key stakeholder meetings with a brief introduction from the chair, then took full ownership. In parallel, she ran listening tours on the shop floor and delivered one early win that mattered locally: a rota change that improved weekends for a third of the staff. By month three, she stopped using borrowed introductions. Her credibility was now rooted in her own actions and the way she treated people.

## **How Leadership Training fits with individual coaching**

Leadership Training and coaching work best together when they are sequenced and designed with a common language. Training can scale core concepts across a cohort: feedback models, decision frameworks, meeting design, inclusive facilitation. Coaching then personalizes and embeds those concepts. In one professional services firm, we ran a two-day Leadership Training intensive for new partners, then paired each with an Executive Coach for six months. The training gave shared tools, the coaching addressed idiosyncratic gaps. The firm saw smoother client transitions and fewer last-minute proposal scrambles in the next cycle. The difference was not genius content. It was alignment and accountability.

## **Navigating ethics and confidentiality**

Authenticity in coaching includes the boundaries coaches keep. In London’s tight circles, conflicts of interest can surface fast. A credible coach is explicit about who is the client, what is shared, and with whom. When I am hired by a company to coach a leader, we agree on what will be reported back, typically progress themes and goal status, never session content. If lines blur, we reset or step away. The safety of the coaching space is non-negotiable. Without it, leaders perform for the coach and nothing changes.

## **Selecting the right coach for your context**

If you are considering hiring a coach, a few focused checks can save months.

- Track record in your type of challenge. Ask for anonymised examples with outcomes that resemble your goals.

- Chemistry and challenge. Do you feel both understood and stretched in the sample session?
- Method clarity. Can they explain how they work, what will be measured, and how you will know progress is real?
- Stakeholder fluency. Do they know how to engage your board, HR, or investors without crossing confidentiality lines?
- Fit with your tempo. London diaries are crowded. Can they align with your cadence and hold you to the work between sessions?

Remember that labels are pointers. A Business Coach with strong leadership chops may be ideal for a founder scaling revenue. An Executive Coach with board experience may be vital for a new CEO. A Leadership Coach embedded in your sector's realities might be the difference between insight and impact.

## The edges and trade-offs

Authenticity has edges. If you are too transparent too soon in a merger, you can unsettle people and tank morale. If you insist on your "natural" style in a context that needs formality, you can look naive. Good coaching helps you calibrate. We test messages with friendly critics. We stage disclosures with care. We adapt format and tone while protecting your core stance.

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There are weeks when speed trumps inclusivity. A cyber incident at 3 a.m. Will not wait for perfect consensus. What keeps you authentic is the after-action: explain why you acted as you did, what you learned, and how you will adapt. People are generous with leaders who own decisions and grow in public.

You will also meet resistance. A senior manager might prefer ambiguity because it preserves positional power. A coach can help you separate principled pushback from self-serving delay. We plan for both. Sometimes the authentic move is to replace a leader who will not adapt. Sometimes it is to keep faith longer than is comfortable. Judgment grows from doing the work, not from slogans.

## What you can start tomorrow

Authentic leadership is not a waiting game. You can take small, concrete steps now. Clarify one value in behavioral terms. Rewrite one agenda to favor decisions over updates. Ask one stakeholder what they fear and what they need. Run a five-minute pre-mortem before your next high-stakes choice. Close the loop on one piece of feedback, out loud, even if the change is small. If you work with a Leadership Coach or an Executive Coach, enlist them to hold you to these moves. If you work with a Business Coach, tie the behaviors to a metric that matters this quarter. If your company runs Leadership Training, help your team adopt one shared tool and stick with it long enough to feel the benefits.

London will test your stance. That is the point. The city rewards leaders who mean what they say, learn in public, and keep faith with people while holding the line on performance. With the right practices and a disciplined

partnership with a coach, authenticity moves from idea to habit, then from habit to culture. That journey is not quick, but it is available to any leader willing to do the work.