

The Promotion That Still Needed Permission

How a new business unit head began using the authority of her role

SECTOR

Insurance

LEADER

Newly appointed head of a national business unit

CARDS USED

The Hostage, The Heir and The Architect

ENGAGEMENT

One-to-one executive coaching

COACHING PRIORITY

Move from expert contribution to enterprise leadership

OUTCOME

The leader identified inherited expectations, clarified her authority and changed how she presented decisions to senior stakeholders

01 Coaching context

The leader had been promoted after four years as finance director for the business unit. She knew the operation, had strong relationships across the company and had played a central role in its planning process.

Her appointment gave her responsibility for growth, service, operations and a workforce of more than 600 people. Her former manager moved into a group role and remained an important stakeholder.

During her first three months, she involved him in most significant decisions. She sent draft plans for comment, delayed a senior appointment until they had spoken and presented options where her executive team expected a decision.

She described the behaviour as responsible stakeholder management. Her team experienced uncertainty about where final authority sat.

The pattern also affected meeting preparation. Executives spent time anticipating the group office's response before they had fully tested their own view. Discussion moved upwards early, reducing the quality of debate within the business unit.

02 How Mirror Deck was used

The coaching conversation used three questions:

— Which role are you carrying from your previous position?

— Which role has the organisation handed you?

— Which role do you need to build now?

The leader selected one card for each question and arranged them as a sequence rather than as fixed descriptions of her personality.

The sequence allowed her to examine how a successful way of working in one role could limit her in the next.

03 The Hostage

She selected The Hostage for the role carried from her previous position.

As finance director, her influence depended on evidence, careful challenge and the support of the business-unit head. She learnt to prepare thoroughly and secure agreement before moving a proposal forward.

After promotion, the same pattern remained. She still prepared decisions for approval even when approval now sat with her. The former manager's experience gave his comments particular weight, and she treated every question as a request for revision.

The card helped her name the constraint accurately. Her formal authority had changed quickly. Her internal sense of permission was still attached to the previous reporting relationship.

04 The Heir

For the role handed to her, she chose The Heir.

She had inherited a successful business, an established leadership team and a strategy designed under her predecessor. Colleagues expected continuity and also looked for signs of how she would lead differently.

The Heir raised questions about what she felt obliged to preserve. She identified three inherited practices that remained useful and two that required review. One was the habit of sending major decisions to the group office before the business unit had formed its own position.

She recognised that respect for her predecessor's work could coexist with a leadership method of her own.

05 The Architect

She selected The Architect for the role she needed to build.

The card represented her responsibility to design the next version of the business rather than administer an inherited one. This included setting decision boundaries, shaping the executive team's work and deciding where continuity served the strategy.

She applied the card to an upcoming service reorganisation. Instead of sending several options to her former manager, she worked with her executive team to develop one recommendation. She then informed group stakeholders of the decision, its rationale and the risks being managed.

06 Actions agreed

The leader created a short authority map covering business-unit, group and board decisions. She reviewed it with her manager and her executive team.

For decisions within her authority, she would seek information and challenge while presenting the final position in her own voice. When consultation was required, she would state the decision owner and the point at which input was needed.

She also scheduled individual conversations with each executive-team member to discuss what they needed from her as business-unit head and which decisions they were ready to carry fully.

07 Evidence from follow-up

In the following coaching session, she described the service reorganisation meeting. Group leaders challenged parts of the plan, and she answered their questions while retaining the agreed direction.

Her former manager later told her that the clarity was useful and that he required visibility rather than informal approval.

Mirror Deck gave the leader a way to understand her transition through roles rather than confidence alone. She could respect what she had inherited, recognise the permission she was still seeking and begin designing the leadership system now entrusted to her.

Her working question became:

“Am I asking for insight, or am I returning authority that already belongs with me?”