



Customer Journey

Kami

Kami's journey explores building leadership confidence, managing up, navigating organizational change, and positioning herself for the next level.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY: KAMI

Meet “Kami,” a sales leader in pharma managing competitive changes and new leadership. Her journey explores building leadership confidence, managing up, navigating organizational change, and positioning herself for the next level.

Each post explores a real coaching conversation or leadership challenge from that journey.



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Speaking Up and Finding Your Voice

Do you hold back your best ideas in meetings because you're not sure you've earned the right to speak up?

“Coaching is my investment in myself. I want to take leadership beyond reading books and TED talks.”

That’s how Kami came to me, wanting to find out more about leadership presence and speaking up at work.

Kami was a pharmaceutical sales leader, managing a remote team of nationwide salespeople. Even in our first sessions, I could see that Kami was thoughtful, self-reflective, and ambitious.

She was one of two managers in charge of nationwide sales, and the two of them worked well together. A rising professional in her mid-40s, she had two kids at home in elementary school. She liked being busy, which was a good thing because she had a lot on her plate.

“I grew up overseas. My dad, who was in business, moved around a lot. As a result, I went to three high schools. Growing up like that has made me very aware of people and culture, and I know how personality and environment can really be powerful forces.”

Kami was absolutely right. **Self-awareness is powerful. People with awareness are more likely to tune into what other people need and to be able to encourage and inspire people in ways that people without it can’t.**

Without that self-awareness, many people get caught up in their own ego and their own needs, which makes them less effective as leaders and teammates.

Kami had a lot going for her. She and her counterpart reported up to a VP named John. John was at the end of his career and was looking forward to retiring.

But he wasn’t retiring yet, and in fact, had been vague about a date, thinking maybe he’d work a few years more. Other changes above John were on the horizon too, but the dates were uncertain.

At that stage, John wasn’t as open to new ideas as Kami was. He had mentored Kami and was very good about giving her opportunities, but when she wanted to make changes, he always argued against it and said they were doing fine the way it is.

But looking ahead, Kami recognized that changes were coming, and she wanted her team to get ahead of them. For one thing, the patent was running out on their product next year and they would have to start competing with generics, which was a major change on the horizon.

Also, there was talk about going over the counter with their product, but John wouldn’t even discuss it. “We have strong sales now, why dilute our focus?” he would say.

Kami was genuinely grateful to John for his mentorship and also sometimes frustrated with his resistance to new ideas.

When I asked Kami about her goals, she was clear.

Building leadership confidence was Kami’s first coaching goal. Speaking up at work was a challenge for her. Sometimes she admitted that she held back ideas in meetings because she wasn’t sure she felt good enough to speak up.

Her second goal was to learn how to navigate complicated politics. She didn’t want to step on John’s toes, but she didn’t want to be held back either. She wanted to find a way to get visibility above him and position herself in the right way for when he retired. She didn’t want to have to compete with her counterpart for that position when the time came. Her goal was to be the VP of Sales within five years.

Her third goal was to learn more about leadership and what works. She wanted to be sure she was positioning her team for success and getting the most out of the people she was working with.

Looking back, I think Kami is one of the most self-aware clients I have had, and that was the foundation of her many successes as she moved forward over the next year or so. It didn’t take her much time to grow her leadership confidence and learn to speak up more effectively.

Kami’s Leadership Values

One of the first things I ask coaching clients to do is define their leadership values. Leadership values become a compass during difficult decisions and help leaders consistently show up the way they want to be remembered.

Listening

Empathy

Alignment

Authenticity

A coaching approach to management

Humility and Learning

How to Be More Confident and Stop Micromanaging

Catch yourself redoing your team's work or telling them exactly how to do it, because it's just faster that way?

Over the first few months working together, Kami focused on building confidence and overcoming imposter syndrome.

She admitted that in conversations, sometimes a feeling rises that she's not good enough.

"I'm a perfectionist. I want to be the best at everything. I know sometimes that's my ego talking but it can get overwhelming. I need to give myself some grace."

"When you feel overwhelmed," I said, "slow down and take three breaths. It helps your body reset."

The next week she reported that she had focused on mini-breaks, just three breaths. "It really helps me refocus, so thank you," she said.

It also made her aware of her need for self-care. She wanted to focus more outward, so she encouraged her team to take breaks too. "It earns trust when I tell my team to take a lunch and breaks. We all have to have grace for ourselves."

Kami noticed that her self-doubts crept in at different moments throughout her workday.

Sometimes Kami felt self-doubt with her boss. "I feel the experience and age gap. I think I can compensate with self-awareness."

"John is focused on his ideas, but I can be more flexible. I can be more supportive and empathetic."

How to Stop Micromanaging

Kami sometimes fell into doing work for her team or telling them what to do. She didn't want to criticize them, take on their work, or micromanage. But she didn't know what else to do.

I suggested using feedforward instead of feedback. "Instead of talking about what went wrong, focus on how to do it better in the future."

Kami then admitted, "Sometimes I speak up and drive a bit hard. Then I regret it and hold back for weeks."

She decided to spend more time preparing for meetings. I suggested taking five minutes before each meeting to plan what she wanted to say.

So pretty soon, Kami had a list of things to work on.

1. Give myself mini-breaks, calm my ego down, and focus on others.
2. Take a feedforward approach and focus on options for how to do better next time.
3. Spend more time preparing for meetings and knowing what I want to say.

"Overall," she said, "I want to build trust and break down defensiveness."

Two weeks later she came back and reported that she was getting better outcomes in conversations.

"Even though results aren't always exactly what I want, I'm improving people and processes. I am more conscious and clearer about what I want to change. I remind myself to take ego out of it and drive results. If I focus on the other person, I'm in a better position to get better outcomes."

Kami made further progress a few weeks later. She came to a session noticing something important.

"I had a conversation with my counterpart, and she was asking some questions," Kami reported.

"Questions can feel negative, but instead of getting defensive, I took a few breaths and took my ego out of it. Then, I realized I agreed with her."

As she reflected on this insight in coaching, she said, "I need to be more flexible on execution."

She realized her team might have different ways of working than she had. If they were doing something that worked for them, she had to be ok with it. Not all the ideas had to come from her.

She thanked me and said it was really helpful to reflect back

Managing Up and Down at the Same Time

Managing a boss who resists change and a team that needs you to evolve, all at the same time?

A few months into coaching, Kami reported there were some leadership changes in her company. They had a new General Manager, Robert. Her boss, John, now reported to Robert. **She knew it was important to take her boss's boss into consideration as she grew.**

She started thinking about her approach to managing up and managing down.

Managing Up

First we discussed her boss, John. He came to a team meeting and made negative comments. Later he said, "they don't know what they're doing."

"I felt like he was undermining me," Kami said. "His comments were affecting morale on the team. He overcommunicates and can get abrasive."

Although John frustrated her at times, Kami made a conscious effort to see the situation from his perspective. He had seen the product succeed under a strategy he helped create. Many of the changes being discussed challenged assumptions that had worked for years.

Rather than arguing with him, Kami started asking more questions. What concerns did he have? What risks did he see? The more she listened, the more she realized that his resistance came from a desire to protect what had made the business successful.

By validating his experience, Kami found that their conversations became more productive. She didn't always agree with him, but she learned he was more open to new ideas when he felt respected.

Managing Morale on Her Team

Kami was concerned about morale on her team.

I asked her to leverage her strengths, empathy and alignment. That made sense to her.

With her team, she started with a round of

listening. Kami understood the coaching approach. "My approach has to be unique to each individual's needs, so I have to leverage my 1:1s. Even though it is exhausting, I love what I do."

She committed to listening and responding to their needs. "I'm asking a lot more questions, and I want to walk with them in their process. I want them to feel like I'm side-by-side with them, not over them."

In her meetings, she continued to stress the sense of purpose on the team. "We are saving lives, quite literally. What we do matters."

As generics started to hit the market, she helped her team navigate. "Some customers are just price customers. Each of you have plenty of other organizations to work on. So, hone your message on your differentiators—our service, our data, our track record—and go after the people who are not only about price."

She set up time in team meetings to practice their pitches, answer objections, and give peer review.

She also decided that the team needed more support. She wanted them to have someone in a supporting role, people who can talk to customers peer-to-peer, doctor-to-doctor. Not a salesperson but someone just to support decision makers.

She felt that two supporting people, each supporting three field sales directors, would make a huge difference. She started advocating for it and building out what that would look like.

As she worked to get approval, her strategic thinking about the future did not go unnoticed.

As Kami managed up and managed down better, she began to see more clearly how to influence others. **As she listened and supported others, trust grew and that helped her achieve her goals.**

How Listening Skills Create New Opportunities

Want a seat at the table on decisions above your role, but not sure how to earn it?

Soon, Kami reported that the new GM, Robert, had come to her with an exciting opportunity.

Robert was a critical thinker, and he recognized that Kami was, too, especially about the future. Robert was interested in Over the Counter (OTC) sales.

“He sees past prescription sales, and I agree with that. Even though we’re prescription now, we have a brand awareness in the public that’s valuable.”

Robert had seen Kami’s work with her team and told her: “I’d love to have you and your team brainstorm about improving the brand position.”

Kami was thrilled. So, he put her on a cross-functional team of peers working on new options.

In these meetings, Kami implemented her listening skills. She worked to slow down, manage her own ego and desire to be heard, and tune into others.

“I need to understand their perspective. Listening helps me understand and helps to get their buy in.”

She decided to schedule pre-meetings with this group. She noticed that when she helped them clarify their ideas, she had greater impact and influence.

“I truly want to build relationships.”

She made a list of the concerns she wanted to focus on in her meetings:

- What am I missing?
- How can we enhance our online presence?
- How can we make it easier for the customers to get what they need?
- What features or offers will help differentiate us?

She made time to meet with her cross-functional peers before the meetings. She wanted to find out

what they thought and where they aligned.

As she met with them, she found she liked them. They were all smart and had good ideas.

The people from the marketing team were particularly sharp. They helped Kami hone her ideas about what customers want and what triggers buying.

When she floated some of her ideas, it felt safe to try them out. People often added their thoughts. Kami took careful notes and incorporated their ideas into her thinking.

She was building influence without authority as she managed up and built relationships across the organization.

Within a few meetings, this new group agreed with Robert that they should develop a strategy to go over the counter.

“This company is small enough for me to get recognition. My visibility is good and I have proximity to key players. **Honestly, the satisfaction I have now is better than any I’ve had before.**”

Getting Noticed by Senior Leadership

Wonder how you get noticed by senior leadership when you're not the one running the meeting?

About this time, Kami came into a period of work where a lot of things were changing rapidly, and she had to navigate the changes.

“Work is so busy,” she reported, “but it’s good. I’m getting exposure. I’m having more impact and thinking through every step.”

She had made some incremental changes for the team. They were developing better training materials that focused on differentiation. The sales team needed data to support conversations with customers. She was advocating for more robust data sharing with customers to prove efficacy.

Still, Kami continued to be frustrated by her boss.

“There is so much going on, and John is just not stepping up. I have to remind myself of his good qualities before I talk to him. I don’t threaten him and I do my best to be aware of how he feels about Robert and all the changes. I know it’s hard for him.”

She said she was walking a fine line between being supportive and validating his position while not completely aligning with him. Often, this is a tough line to hold while managing up, and Kami finessed it beautifully.

“Sometimes I just have to say it’s ok if we have different opinions, and I really respect the value you bring to these conversations.”

She said it was hard when she was getting a lot of leadership visibility, and he was digging his heels in. But she was determined to maintain a supportive relationship.

A New CEO Brings New Ideas

Soon after, Kami came to our coaching session announcing that they had a new CEO.

“It is uncanny to see this guy in meetings six days

into the job. He is a turnaround specialist, and his focus is on some of the other brands that I’m not working on, but he sees the brand I work on as a flagship product.”

She watched the new CEO in a few meetings and was impressed. He asked a lot of questions and quickly cut through the noise to get to the crux of a problem.

“He kept asking: why haven’t we done this or that? And the other VPs were just saying, well, we haven’t done that before.”

Kami was cautiously optimistic. She said she was really impressed when he said, “Look, I’m new here so push back if I’m wrong.” That took guts, she thought.

Within a few weeks, Kami sat in on a meeting of senior leaders. John couldn’t be there, so he asked Kami to sit in for him. It was an amazing opportunity to get some leadership visibility.

It was a big learning experience for her hearing what leaders do, how they look at problems, and ask questions.

The new CEO said there was a lot of talking but not enough action. **Kami noticed, “He didn’t challenge them, but he did say that he wanted to see recommendations for how to move forward.”**

She seemed energized by the call. “It made me feel I had added confidence in the brand and company.”

Kami's empathy and listening skills were helping her gain visibility and confidence as the corporate landscape evolved.

Helping a New Team Member Build Trust on a Team

Have a new hire who's struggling to fit in, and a team that's already decided not to trust them?

Not long after Kami sat in on the leadership call, one of the ideas she had been advocating for finally received approval. She was given the green light to hire two supporting people for her team to help decision makers choose their product.

“The support people will have incentive compensation. Their goal is the goal of the whole team, so if the team succeeds, they are rewarded. I think it’s the right set up to help them focus holistically on sales. Everyone knows what to expect.”

She and her counterpart worked through candidates and hired two new people. One fit right in and started being productive right away. The other one, Elisa, was having trouble with her field directors.

“The problems all come down to finding a way to build trust on a team” Kami said. “One of the field directors is very territorial, so she was going to challenge anyone. The other field directors are taking their cues from her.”

She noted that in addition, Elisa had a soft personality. When she hired her, Kami thought she could handle it and stand up when needed, but now she was seeing unnecessary delays.

“Her first outreach to customers should have taken one week, not three weeks,” Kami noted.

She realized that Elisa likes to talk and comes off as overbearing. She seemed to be dismissing other people’s concerns and was having a hard time reading the room. She ended up rubbing people the wrong way.

Kami spoke to Elisa. She wanted to give her feedback, but first she listened.

Elisa admitted that she was feeling unsure of herself. She said she really wanted this job but now

she wasn’t sure if she was good enough. She came from a medical background, not pharmaceutical, so she was feeling a little out of her comfort zone.

She also wasn’t sure about coming into such a close-knit team. She was trying to find a way in, but she realized that she had been a little too assertive at first.

Kami recognized and validated all these problems and empathized with her. “It’s a process. I know how it feels to be unsure and to have a little assertiveness go the wrong way. Just try to prioritize listening more and get your ego out of the way. Try to help serve their needs and stop thinking about your needs.”

She advised Elisa: “Just think about the other person and where they are coming from. It will smooth out.”

Kami also talked to the team. She started seeing a high school dynamic, a whole group against one person, and she cautioned them against that.

“Trust takes both sides,” she said. “She has to trust you if you are going to be able to trust her.” She advised them to listen and collaborate more.

Then she called a team meeting where she asked everyone to think through their biases and get a vision for the future. The other team had embraced their support person, and they were doing really well. That helped this team get over their fears and start working together more.

Kami suggested that everyone listen more and prioritize how other people feel. That seemed to land and the team started to lower their defenses and embrace Elisa as a helpful supporter.

Preparing for Your Next Leadership Role

Finally getting the promotion you've been working toward — and wondering if you're really ready to lead at the next level?

"John is retiring on July 1," Kami announced. "I will take John's place."

We took a moment to celebrate and then turned to how she wanted to step up into that role and the complexities of moving up within a team.

Get What You Need from the Retiring Leader

She scheduled a strategy session with him focused on the things Kami didn't know about.

Re-Evaluate Your Team

"The business has evolved and how we show up has not changed."

Communicate Your Leadership Priorities

As Kami was stepping up, she wanted to be sure to communicate her priorities to her team.

The priorities she wanted to highlight were:

Innovation

I want us to be more than a drug supplier. I want to offer solutions. We can make our data more accessible, so they know what works, what makes it effective, and when people need it most."

Define the Gold Standard for Efficacy

We want outstanding research, so we need to get grant money to do the studies and see how the product works in new areas.

Be Data Driven

To be more than just a product, we need more data. Our data capability is a brand barrier.

Stepping Up

Now she would be leading 40 people. She continued to leverage her strengths—listening, empathy, and trust.

"I don't want to assume that I know their problems. Today's problems are different, and I need to respect that. I need to be attuned to what I'm hearing, and I want them to do the same."

Kami's Leadership Values

Kami recommitted to her leadership values.

Listening and Empathy

I need to start and end meetings with a check in on how they are feeling.

Alignment

"Priorities are changing and new programs are coming out quickly. I need my team to align quickly to what's coming. So, I have to listen to people's problems and make sure they have the resources they need to solve them."

Authenticity

"I have to be authentic to who I am. I have to keep up with my self-care, and make myself slow down, take a breath and make sure I'm not getting ahead of others."

Humility and Learning

"Even though I'm the one stepping up, I want to convey to everyone above me and below me that I still have a lot to learn. Like my CEO said, I'm new in this role. Feel free to push back if I'm wrong."

A Coaching Approach to Management

"As we start implementing changes, I want to help others own the process." Kami made a note to focus on questions that help them take control of their work and get in line with current priorities.

From my perspective, watching Kami develop confidence in herself and her ideas was the foundation for much of her leadership growth.

Instead of pulling back in self-doubt or trying to push forward out of ego, she listened, heard feedback, and helped others feel valued. It helped her bring out the best in others, and that is the hallmark of good leadership.

Lisa D. Foster

Leadership Coach, Ph.D., ACC

*I help people learn how to use
what they already have.*



Key Leadership Lessons

Kami's journey illustrates confidence, building relationships of trust, and using a coaching approach to management.

- Confidence grows when you learn to trust yourself.
- Listen first — it builds understanding, trust, and alignment faster than any argument will.
- Before you push for change, understand what the other person is protecting.
- People give you influence when they feel heard, not when you're right.
- Preparation and visibility open doors — keep both ready before you think you need them.
- Empathy and self-awareness help you navigate change without losing sight of your people.

Continue Learning

- [The Leadership Framework](#) — Confidence, empathy, and trust: the three foundations behind every client breakthrough.
- [Validation in Leadership](#) — The Most Important Way to Help People Grow at Work.

If any of this sounds familiar, you don't have to figure it out alone.

If Kami's story resonates with you, you may be navigating a similar leadership challenge.

I'm here to help. Book a quick call. No pitch, no pressure — just a conversation about where you are and whether coaching might help.

[Book your call here](#)

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