



Customer Journey

Jim

Jim's journey explores leadership presence, empathy, decision making, managing low performers, and helping talented employees grow.



CUSTOMER JOURNEY: JIM

Meet “Jim,” a VP of Research and Development in a multi-national pharma company navigating shifting organizational demands, rapid leadership changes, and pressure to keep his team functioning.

His journey explores leadership presence, empathy, decision making, managing low performers, and helping talented employees grow.

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



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Leadership Starts With the Little Clues

You pride yourself on being logical and data-driven — so why do the small emotional signals at work keep catching you off guard?

Jim was smart, focused, and spoke at a fast clip that matched the pace of change at the Fortune 500 pharma company where he worked.

A VP of Research and Development, Jim was very clear about his coaching goals.

“My goal is better leadership presence. I’ve been here for five years and I’ve just been promoted. I now manage a team of 20. We have constant change and pressure. Better leadership presence will help me keep them performing highly while shielding them from the chaos from corporate.”

Yet, over the course of the months we worked together, **Jim came to see that effective leadership is not all about presence. It’s more about the fundamentals of dealing with human beings**, giving people what they need to succeed, tuning into their state of mind, understanding their problems, and making communications more personalized.

Together those fundamentals result in a leadership style that exudes a polished executive presence.

Moving From Logic to Empathy

When we started, Jim admitted that emotional intelligence wasn’t a strength. “I’m a scientist, so I’m very logical. I expect others to be the same.”

After our first session, I asked him to keep a journal for two weeks noting emotional shifts. What is happening when you feel your emotions go from negative to positive or the other way around? Try to articulate what you are feeling and why.

Jim approached this exercise like a scientist. He kept excellent data for two weeks.

“The first thing I noticed was that I was annoyed with one of my direct reports, Abishek. It was a clear pattern. It happened when he put me and my boss on email with an external partner.

Jim explained that it was inappropriate to cc his boss. At a company of this size, it was important to limit emails to the people impacted.

He talked with Abishek and noted that he didn’t do

that with other projects. Abishek replied that Jim’s boss had a vested interest in the project.

“Abishek was right, but still, if everyone emailed Charlie with details about the things he’s interested in, what would happen to his inbox?”

Abishek understood. It’s better to include Charlie only when we have results. Jim said he would let Abishek email Charlie when they had news.

Jim was pleased that the problem was resolved in one conversation.

“When I thought about it from Abishek’s perspective, it made sense. So, I helped him see it from Charlie’s perspective. Then we agreed and aligned on how to include Charlie.

“What helped was taking care of the annoyance when it was a small thing, and before Charlie got annoyed. I think paying attention to those little clues will help me get ahead of situations better.”

This would be a theme that we would come back to throughout his time coaching. Jim paid more attention to little emotional clues and spent more time thinking from the other person’s point of view.

Jim’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.

Here are Jim’s leadership values:

- Slow down and be patient, take a breath
- Be self-aware of my own emotions, be aware of my impact on others
- Listen first, empathize, have an open mind
- Collaborate, solve problems together, be curious
- Use a coaching approach to management: use the GOOD model of conversation

Managing Amid Chaos: Anticipate Questions

Leadership keeps shifting above you, and now you're responsible for recommendations on the call nobody else wants to make — how do you prepare someone new for a decision that can't be undone?

Jim's organization was global and vast, with constant leadership changes above. New leaders often brought new perspectives and priorities. And teams often found themselves with projects left behind by leaders who had moved on.

In one session, Jim wanted to make sense of the experience of one leader he had seen who had moved around a lot.

"Getting an international assignment is an important part of moving up here, but it doesn't always work out."

Jim had watched as Marie came from France to the US two years ago. She assumed she would get a promotion on coming back to France. But she went back last fall, and two people above her had changed. A new guy got the job she was expecting. She was furious. Now she's back in the US so her kids can finish high school.

"What do you learn from that?" I asked.

"Well, two things," he said thoughtfully. **"First, if you get an international assignment, make sure it's going to work for you and your family because you might stay longer than you think. And second, even if you do get the assignment, travel home at least once a quarter and know what's going on."**

"Great lessons," I said. "What changes are affecting you now?" Jim was getting ready to make a trip to France soon. That team had a new leader, Pierre.

Besides building a relationship, Jim needed Pierre to resolve a researcher contract with a very prestigious professor in France. He had missed deadlines and hadn't produced anything of value.

"We have 30 days until the next payment, and it's up to Pierre to decide. I have to recommend that we cancel the project or keep paying him".

I said, "What questions will Pierre ask?"

"Right, I'll need answers for him."

1. What are the financial implications? I'll get

budget scenarios for if we pull out or if we don't.

2. How will this impact our relationship with the research partner we worked so hard to get?

Looking back, Jim said they should have made separate contracts for the different projects. There are several researchers involved. But they were so eager to get it, that everything is in one contract.

At this point, Jim had lost trust that this professor in particular will ever deliver. After some consideration, Jim decided to recommend to withhold payment.

"If we don't pay, it will go to legal for renegotiation. It will be painful, but I think it's our best path forward."

The worst-case is that they lose what they paid and have to get the research done another way.

The best-case scenario would be that they renegotiate and get timelines and deliverables.

What's your goal with Pierre?

"To convey that this is an important financial decision he must make in his first weeks. We are all frustrated, but we have a glimmer of hope. If the researcher can deliver, it's very valuable to us."

Also, Jim wanted to be sure to convey that whatever Pierre decides, it will not be held against him. Ultimately, it will go back to legal and Business Development and be a collective effort.

"If we do pull out, we need to call the professor to make clear how much we want to work with him before we send the legal letter out. We don't want him to be shocked."

At the end, Jim said, "I'll lay out his choices so they'll be clear and compelling. It's good that Pierre is new because the old leader was really frustrated. Maybe Pierre will bring fresh energy, and we'll find a better way forward."

Managing a Low Performer Through Encouragement

A talented employee has quietly stopped delivering — do you crack down, or is there a better way to bring them back?

Jim came to a session in early December thinking

“What does your gut tell you?” I asked.

about performing low performers

“My manager put me forth on Julie, partially because

Julie is a very good beginning of her performance sponsor who

Jim interrupted interesting means to solve really a big the results

A couple months the project more delivered

This was a good projects had communicated



WHAT DOES JIM DECIDE TO DO ABOUT JULIE?

Continue Reading

If this sounds familiar, you're not the only leader dealing with rapidly shifting priorities. Continue Jim's journey in the Customer Journey Library. You'll receive:

- ✓ Jim's complete six-part coaching journey
- ✓ All six complete Customer Leadership Journeys
- ✓ Leadership insights drawn from each coaching conversation

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