



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

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HOW DO YOU BUILD THE CONFIDENCE TO LEAD AT THE
NEXT LEVEL?

Continue Reading

If this sounds familiar, you're not the only leader positioning yourself to move up.

Continue Kami's journey in the Customer Journey Library. You'll receive:

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

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