



Customer Journey

Marcus

Marcus's journey explores self-leadership, resilience, confidence, and learning to take ownership of his own growth.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY: MARCUS

Meet "Marcus," a tech executive who came to coaching during a career transition. Over the years that followed, he navigated new roles, organizational change, difficult bosses, and periods of uncertainty.

Marcus's journey explores self-leadership, resilience, confidence, and learning to take ownership of his own growth.

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



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From Moving Laterally to Moving Up

A few years in, still moving sideways instead of up — and wondering if something about how you come across is holding you back?

Marcus reached out to me when he was looking for a new job.

He was a Senior Director of Operations in New York at a large, competitive tech company. He already had over 20 years of experience in his industry.

As the only son of immigrant parents, he was an overachiever and a go-getter. He had two kids in middle school, and he was the main breadwinner for his family.

He had worked in this organization for ten years, at first moving up, but for the last five years, mostly moving laterally.

"I work hard, I have good networks, and I always find a new post or position when my team is reorganized."

Looking back, that instinct to keep adapting would become one of Marcus's greatest strengths.

But at the moment, he wanted to move up and was applying out to a competitor's firm. **He had an interview the next day and could I help him prepare?**

The first thing we did was identify his strengths. We identified his core technical skills. Then I asked him to tell me a story about how he developed or used these skills to bring value to the company. He worked on a story for each one and a story of his leadership, developing a talented team member who was promoted twice in two years.

I suggested he practice the stories a few times. The next day, he was ready, and he got the job.

In a New Job, Deeper Concerns Emerge

He came back two weeks later. He was thrilled, but he also had some concerns.

In particular, he admitted that he was assertive. He knew it was important in tech to be strong, but he was worried that **sometimes maybe he was too assertive. How would he know?**

I asked him for an example. In a recent meeting, he said, someone took an opposing view from him. He didn't want to back down, so he asserted his position. Soon, it was just Marcus and the other guy going back and forth. At the end, there was no agreement.

I asked, "how do you think the other people felt watching this dynamic?"

"I think they didn't want to get in the middle of it. They might have felt uncomfortable, maybe even a little afraid to speak up."

"Is that how you want to be seen?" I asked.

"Well," Marcus said, "not really. I don't want people to be afraid of talking to me or speaking up around me."

He was silent for a moment, thinking about how others might perceive him.

This is often how coaching works. A question can change your perspective of a moment and lead to deeper insights that help you consider your effect on others and how you want to be perceived.

Then he said, "The truth is that a few people have told me that I'm unapproachable. I'm not really sure how to be any different than I am, and I want to be authentic. But I think I want to be more approachable. Can you help me with that?"

"Absolutely," I said.

So, Marcus stayed in coaching because he wanted to address some of the things that would help him be more successful in his new role.

Marcus'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.

Marcus learned a lot about leadership during the time I worked with him. His leadership values reflect his career maturity.

Build my network. I need others to see my value and know my work. Focus on building relationships and visibility above me.

Be confident in my abilities. Control my insecurities when I report up to people at my boss's level and above. As a first generation American, I sometimes feel I don't belong, and I need to control that. I've earned my place here.

Maintain high work ethics. Go above and beyond. Challenge myself and bring new ideas to the team.

Take time to help others. Mentoring others helps my own visibility and adds value to the team.

Be respectful and treat everyone fairly, even when things are stressful. Be empathetic and compassionate for whatever they are going through.

Learning How to Be More Approachable at Work

Been told you're 'unapproachable' or 'too assertive' — but you're not sure what you could possibly change?

As Marcus continued coaching, we explored why some people thought he was unapproachable.

"Tech is a competitive industry. You need sharp elbows and a thick skin. It can be rough."

I asked him to describe a rough moment, and he recalled being pushed out of a team and needing another post fast. He got reassigned, but laterally. He was frustrated by not moving up. He thought it might have to do with being unapproachable.

I asked, "what do you like about your new boss?"

"He makes time for me weekly, compliments my work, and encourages me to stretch a bit and try new things. He really listens to what I have to say."

I asked him if he would describe his new boss as having sharp elbows or a thick skin.

Marcus thought for a moment. "No," he said, "he is positive and encourages everyone. He finesses things, unlike me. I run right into things."

I told him about a classic Zen exercise. In round one, one person comes toward another, and the second person lays down like a doormat.

In round two, a person advances and the other engages their arms in front of them. There is usually a struggle and sometimes one wins. Rounds one and two usually leave people unsatisfied.

In round three, when the person approaches, the other person takes one hand and turns to walk alongside them. This is agreeable to both parties.

"It's really a story about alignment," I said. "My guess is that your boss finds a way to align rather than to oppose people."

Marcus liked that. "How do I do that at work?"

I asked Marcus to describe a situation where he had opposed someone. He said recently he told a colleague he should do something another way. The colleague clammed up after that and resisted his suggestion.

"I was just trying to help," he said.

"Yes," I said, "but in this case, **instead of feeling helped, he probably felt you were judging him.**"

I explained that the word should is judgy. Should implies you know better. It creates inferiority.

It can also feel controlling, like you want to tell them what to do. They can feel micromanaged.

"Wow," Marcus said. "I say should all the time."

For his coaching homework, I suggested he go two weeks without the word should. Instead, try being curious. Ask why they want to do it that way.

Marcus started at home and immediately noticed a difference in his daughter. Her attitude improved, and she became more confident.

"I just worked to understand what she was trying to do and how she felt. It was hard at first, but when I saw how much happier she was, and after I practiced a few times, it got easier."

Then he tried it with his direct reports. He stopped judging and started being curious and encouraging. He made suggestions lightly.

They started opening up about where they needed more help. **"It's so much better to help when they ask than to tell them they need help."**

The team started performing better. His boss complimented him on his leadership skills and noticed their good attitude.

Just becoming aware of how he was being judgmental helped Marcus find ways to be more curious and encouraging. Within a few months, he was pleased with his progress.

During one of our sessions around that time, Marcus celebrated. "I'm approachable!" he said with a smile.

Learning to Lead Yourself

Ever get a lukewarm review from a boss who was never around enough to help you develop your skills?

After his first full year in his new post, Marcus had a setback that taught him how to lead himself.

This is an important transition that many people miss. At higher levels, you need to generate ideas and show you can drive a team forward.

Your boss doesn't wait for someone to tell them what to do. In many roles, your growth is your responsibility.

At this point, we shifted coaching to once a month, as he was still encountering new situations.

Handling a Distant Boss

Marcus had expected some reshuffling at the beginning of the year. Often people stayed in an organization for 20 years or more, so annual reshuffling gave people new opportunities and kept people challenged.

This year, his boss was promoted, and Marcus got a new boss. He was based in London.

He was very nice but, to Marcus, he felt disengaged. He signaled that he was very busy. Marcus got little feedback from him and almost no guidance.

It was the opposite of his prior boss with whom he had weekly 1:1s. It was hard to get 1:1 time with this boss at all, even once a quarter. He said, "You know what to do. Just do it. I trust you."

So, he did what he had been doing before. He managed his team well. He administered the systems he had put in place.

But he didn't feel appreciated and he didn't feel challenged. Over time, he got into a rut.

His team did what they had done before, but he didn't challenge them much. He appreciated them, but eventually, without input from his boss, he wasn't sure where to go from there.

The year went by uneventfully.

Doing Fine Is Not Good Enough

At the beginning of the following year during performance reviews, Marcus was surprised to find out that his boss had rated him average in all areas: leadership, collaboration, strategy, and execution.

Two others who reported to him were rated a level higher, as Above Average.

"I could see why he rated me as average," he admitted. **"I didn't push myself." Marcus was honest, even though it was a painful insight.**

"But I would have pushed myself if I'd had some feedback and some encouragement. It's hard to know where you are if there is just a leadership void above you."

He reflected further. "I didn't want to be seen as a complainer, so I didn't ask for more. Now, I feel I'm sidelined again. I feel like my boss was prioritizing his needs and didn't help me be my best."

I knew he needed some encouragement so I asked him to reflect on what more he could be doing. "What could you be doing better?"

"I had an idea that would improve our results," he said. "What I need to do is put together the material, socialize it with my network to get feedback and input, and then bring it to a meeting."

As soon as he had a project and direction for growth, he perked up and regained his energy.

"When are you going to put the material together and socialize it?" I asked.

"By the end of February," he said. "I need to make the best of this situation. I can motivate myself if that's what it takes."

He bounced back because he had confidence in himself and knew what he could do. Now, he was ready to show them how he could lead himself.

Learning from Hardship: A Bad Boss

Surviving a boss who yells, micromanages, and emails you at midnight — and wondering what you can possibly learn from it?

The next year, Marcus faced his biggest challenge of all. There were layoffs. About 2,000 people were let go, and his team was broken up. Half his team was let go. Marcus was grateful he had not lost his job.

But soon he was reassigned to a different division where his skillset didn't match at all.

His new boss turned out to be a bully. He started commuting at 5:30 AM, and Marcus often had 20 emails before 8 AM. Demanding emails would continue until midnight, and often on weekends.

He seemed haphazard and unpredictable. He would come into the office yelling. He discouraged everyone. He was judgy, telling people what they should do or if their work was good or bad.

The experience was demoralizing. Marcus started applying out, anything to get out of this division.

"For my own sanity, I have to make the best of it," he said, trying to salvage his attitude.

Marcus became a sounding board for other unhappy teammates. They trusted him.

He listened, empathized, and encouraged them to do the best they could so they could move out of this division. They would be judged by their performance. Even if they don't like the work or the boss, it was in their best interest to do their best.

Sometimes the team would solve problems, and the boss would take credit for the solution.

Even the boss recognized Marcus as a leader. He asked him: why do they come to you and not me?

He shrugged. Marcus had come a long way since he worried about being unapproachable.

After a few months, it was clear that the boss was having a hard time keeping track of where projects were. One day, he called Marcus into his office and admitted: "I'm drowning here. I need help,"

Marcus became his de facto right hand, helping him organize projects, create score cards and

progress milestones.

But even after he started helping him out, the boss continued to yell at him often and demean him.

He told me more than once that coaching was the hour he looked forward to most.

Most leaders learn from hardship, and this was no different. I helped Marcus see what he was learning, even if he was learning what not to do as a leader.

He learned about the effects of bad leadership, the emotional contagion of how a boss's bad mood can ruin everyone's day.

He learned that leadership is not a title but an attitude about helping others be their best.

He learned about burnout and how to pull back effort in order to make time for himself. He established boundaries by not returning emails after 8 PM or before 8 AM.

He learned how demeaning micromanaging is. Being told what to do made him feel disrespected and treated like a child. It was a year of just surviving under the worst circumstances.

To help him maintain his spirits, I offered three suggestions:

1. At the end of each day, write down 3 things you did well or got done that day.
2. In the morning before work, write down 3 things you're grateful for, even if it's just your dog.
3. Remember every day: You are good at your job. You are not the problem.

I reminded him that he wasn't let go. They needed time to reorganize and build that function back.

Sure enough, around October, a senior manager reached out to him and encouraged him to apply for a team he was restructuring.

Career Resilience: Rebuilding and Moving Forward

Finally landed somewhere you feel valued again — now figuring out how to lead without getting lost in the weeds?

Marcus stuck it out with his bad boss for another five months while the team that he was asked to apply for came together. He was finally reassigned in March. This team was solidly in the same function where he had built skills for years.

He had matured as a leader. He knew how to challenge himself. He knew how to challenge his team. He knew not to complain but when to ask for what he needed.

As he started getting back to work where he felt more valued, I asked him what lessons he wanted to take forward from the last year:

Build my network. We have shake-ups every year, and I need others to see my value and know my work.

Be confident in my abilities. Control my insecurities when I report up to people at my boss's level and above. I've earned my place here.

Maintain high work ethics. Go above and beyond. Challenge myself and bring new ideas to the team.

Take time to help others. Mentoring others helps my own visibility and adds value to the team.

Be respectful and treat everyone fairly, even when things are stressful. Be empathetic and compassionate.

These leadership values helped him stay productive, approachable, authentic, and challenged. He knew how he wanted to show up for others.

"My boss needs me to push the agenda, and I'm learning to get out of the weeds," he said. His first task was to close out a compliance review. It was very complicated technically and had to comply with a number of data privacy regulations.

Instead of doing the work himself, he managed his

two team members and reviewed their work. He encouraged them to improve where he found errors or omissions. He praised their good work.

By staying out of the weeds, he was able to keep track of a lot of different pieces of the puzzle while getting the work done.

Once the review was done, he compiled a list of other projects he wanted to push forward and brought it to his boss to ensure alignment.

He wanted to start working on an understanding of processes and controls in APAC and LATAM.

He also wanted to understand procedures for how to escalate. He felt that a lot of people had problems and didn't know where to check. He added training for other departments to his list.

His boss also noted that he wanted him in charge of conflicts of interest. He suggested that he develop some scenarios and training for that area too. He was excited to dig in.

Marcus continued to coach once a month. It was helpful for him to feel like he had someone solidly in his corner, encouraging him to grow, stretch, and believe in himself.

"Sometimes when I get into a situation where I'm second guessing myself, I hear your voice in my head encouraging me, helping me feel confident and stay curious, pushing me to push myself. It helps me keep going especially when things get rough."

"Overall," he said, "Even though I'm being pulled in a lot of directions and I'm busy, I'm happy. I know I'm in the right place and I can bring value and feel like I'm contributing something of value to the world."

Finding Confidence in Yourself

If you've been waiting for someone else to boost your confidence, here's how to build it on your own terms.

When Marcus first came to coaching, he wanted help preparing for a job interview.

What neither of us knew at the time was that the interview would be the easiest part of his journey.

Over the following years, Marcus would navigate new roles, new teams, new bosses, layoffs, reorganization, uncertainty, and periods where he questioned himself more than he wanted to admit.

Looking back, the most important lesson was not about the technical work.

It was not about interviewing.

It was not even about leadership.

It was about learning to trust himself.

To sum it up, he learned that no one was coming to manage his career for him. If he wanted to grow, he would have to advocate for himself, challenge himself, and continue developing regardless of who happened to be his boss.

At different points in his journey, Marcus learned:

- How to be more approachable by becoming less judgmental.
- How to replace certainty with curiosity.
- How to lead himself when his boss wasn't providing direction.
- How to survive difficult leadership without losing himself.
- How to create boundaries during stressful periods.
- How to keep growing even when the environment around him was unstable.

Most importantly, he learned that confidence is not the absence of doubt. Confidence is trusting yourself to keep moving forward despite the doubt.

Over time, Marcus stopped looking for external validation to tell him he was doing well. He still appreciated encouragement, feedback, and good leadership. But he no longer depended on those things to know his own value.

He knew he was capable.

He knew he could learn.

He knew he could adapt.

And he knew that even when circumstances changed, he could find a way forward.

That's what made him successful. His success wasn't about a title, a promotion, or a boss.

It was the ability to stay grounded in his values and continue growing through whatever came next.

Marcus's journey reminds me that leadership growth usually isn't a straight line. Promotions, reorganizations, supportive bosses, difficult bosses, successes, and setbacks all shaped his development.

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



Key Leadership Lessons

Marcus's journey illustrates self-leadership, resilience, confidence, and learning to take ownership of his own growth.

- Leadership growth begins with self-awareness and understanding how others experience you.
- Curiosity builds trust faster than judgment ever will.
- When support above you is missing, your growth can't wait for someone else.
- A difficult boss can still teach you exactly the kind of leader you don't want to become.
- Confidence comes from trusting yourself to handle whatever comes next.

Continue Learning

- [The Leadership Framework](#) — Confidence, empathy, and trust: the three foundations behind every client breakthrough.
- [How to Appear More Confident and Speak with Authority](#) — anyone can grow real confidence in just a few months with focused effort.

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

If Marcus'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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