



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 **Doing Fine Is Not Good Enough**

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HOW DOES MARCUS TAKE OWNERSHIP OF HIS GROWTH?

Continue Reading

If this sounds familiar, you're not the only leader dealing with an unsupportive boss.

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

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

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