

LEADING FORWARD



COACHING TRENDS 2025



**THE EXECUTIVE COACHING
CONSULTANCY**

THE TOP LEADERSHIP
CHALLENGES OF 2025

THE 2025 LEADERSHIP
PRESSURES

WHAT WILL SHAPE
LEADERSHIP IN 2026?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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CEO of the Executive
Coaching Consultancy

2025 tested leadership capacity more than any year in recent memory. The 2025 Coaching Trends report reveals that leadership this year was shaped by unprecedented external pressures that left many leaders overwhelmed and re-evaluating what effective leadership truly requires. Across industries, leaders navigated a perfect storm of organisational ambiguity, economic strain, rapid technological disruption, and cultural fragmentation. These forces eroded internal clarity, leaving leaders expected to deliver more with fewer resources, less certainty, and diminishing support.

Within this volatility, Executive Coaching became a stabilising force, helping leaders regain clarity, confidence, and agency by reconnecting with essential inner capacities: self-awareness, authenticity, and influence. These qualities provided direction when external guidance was uncertain.

Looking ahead, Executive Coaches agree that leadership in 2026 will belong to those who balance technology with humanity, strategy with compassion, and focus with resilience. The leaders who thrive will be those who can anchor themselves when their environments cannot. Leading with purpose, clarity and connection in a constantly shifting world.

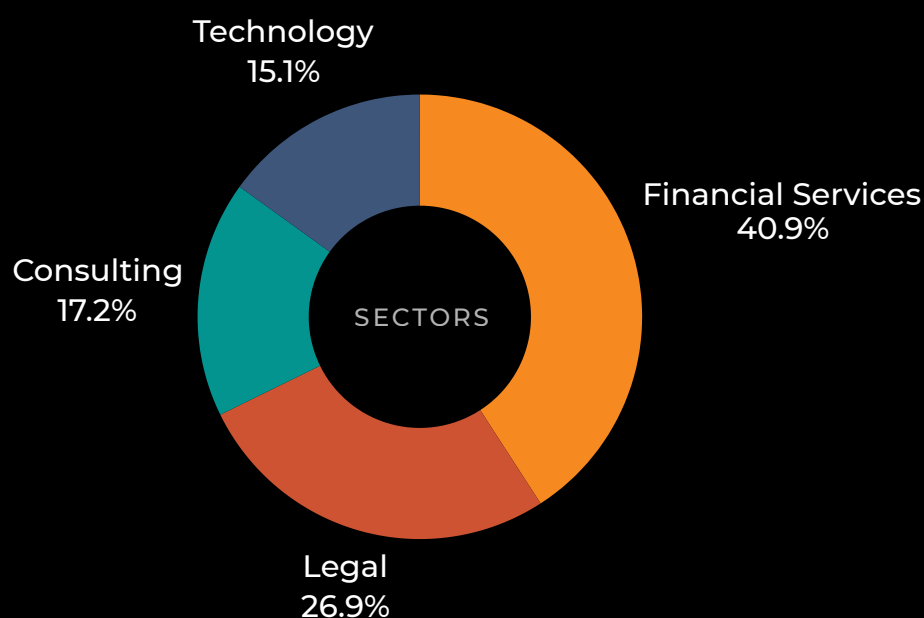
METHODOLOGY

This report reflects frontline insight from experienced executive coaches working with senior leaders across globally. It is based on a mixed-methods study combining qualitative and quantitative insights from their professional practice. The **45 global Executive Coaches** operate across **EMEA (84%), APAC (7%), and North America (9%)** and work extensively with leaders in the financial services, legal, consulting, and technology sectors, providing a broad and informed view of the leadership landscape.

Collectively, the participating coaches supported **141 senior leaders** across **46 organisations** through The Executive Coaching Consultancy (ECC), drawing on insights from **461 ECC coaching sessions** conducted during 2025. However, many of the participating coaches also work extensively with senior leaders outside of ECC. As such, the insights captured in this report reflect their full coaching practice throughout the year, informed by a significantly broader range of leadership engagements than the ECC figures alone.

This dataset offers expert insight on the leadership challenges and organisational dynamics that shaped 2025. Data was collected through a survey in which Executive Coaches reflected on the key leadership behaviours, challenges, organisational pressures, and development patterns they observed during their sessions this year. All responses were anonymous to ensure candour and protect confidentiality.

Qualitative insights were thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes, while quantitative data was aggregated to determine the prevalence of specific challenges, macro pressures, and coaching outcomes. Together, this methodology provides a rich, multi-dimensional view of the leadership landscape, grounded in frontline observations from experienced Executive Coaches across industries and regions.



TOP 3 LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES OF 2025

1

OVERLOAD OR BURNOUT

Leaders grappled with shifting expectations from younger generations alongside growing external and internal pressures, while being asked to deliver more with fewer resources.

2

HANDLING UNCERTAINTY AND CHANGE

Ongoing shifts in organisational focus and a lack of clarity over strategic direction, left leaders struggling to manage uncertainty under the relentless pressure to deliver.

3

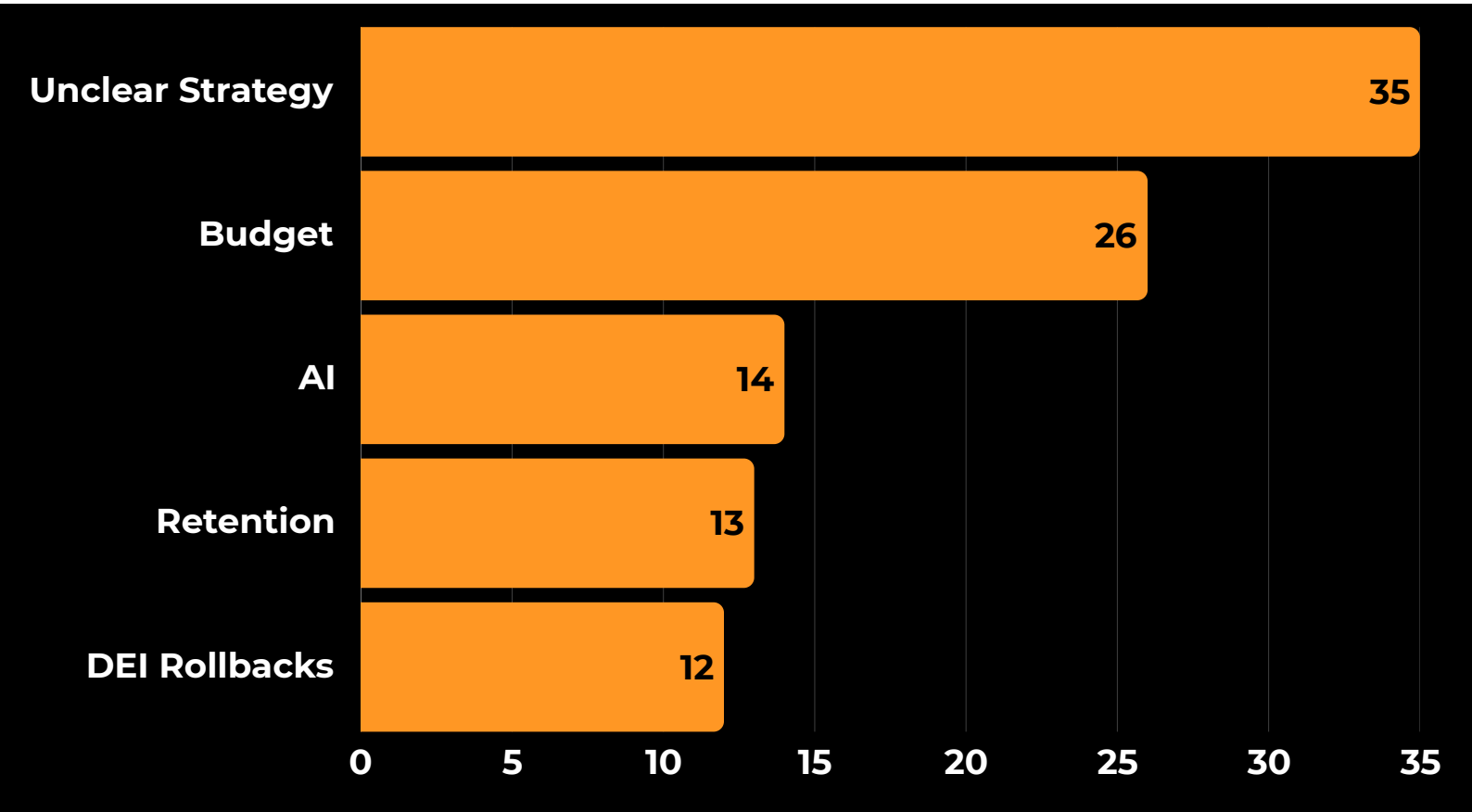
CULTIVATING INFLUENCE AND STAKEHOLDER TRUST

Leaders struggled to sustain trust and psychological safety as they communicated across diverse and often misaligned stakeholder groups in rapidly changing environments.



TOP OF MIND FOR LEADERS IN 2025

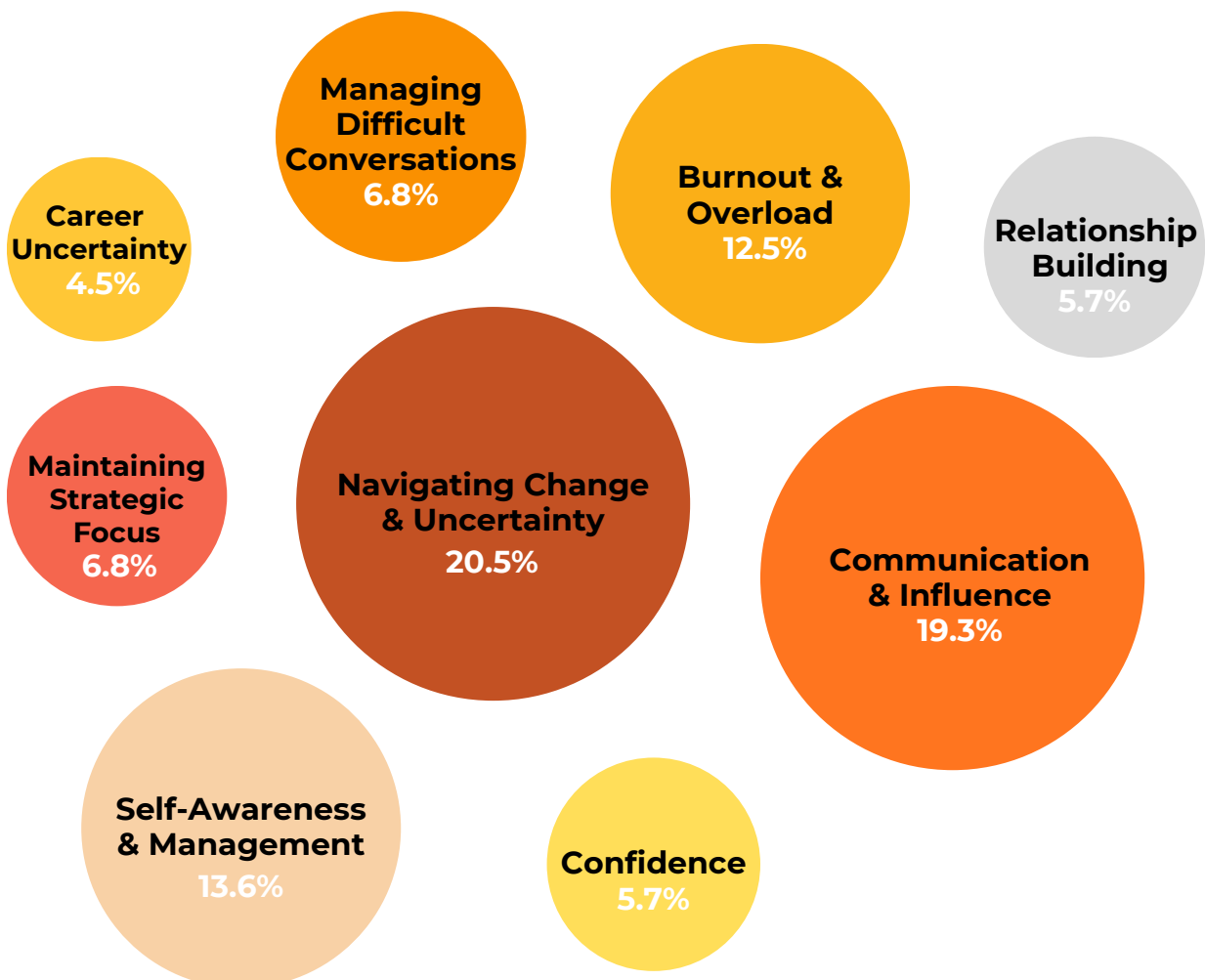
When asked which external influences were shaping the leadership landscape, the global cohort of Executive Coaches identified the following top macro factors:



WHAT WAS THE FOCUS OF EXECUTIVE COACHING?

When asked which behaviours and skills were most commonly the focus of coaching sessions, the global cohort of Executive Coaches reported that the most prevalent themes emerging across sessions were **Navigating Ambiguity (20.5%)** and **Communication and Influence (19.3%)**. This signals that leaders are under significant pressure to support others through organisational turbulence while simultaneously managing complex stakeholder landscapes.

Themes related to self-management, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, and personal grounding, accounted for **13.6%** of responses, while burnout and overwhelm contributed **12.5%**, reflecting the emotional and cognitive load leaders face in increasingly volatile environments.



**Executive Coaches responded to an open-ended question on leadership behaviours observed in 2025; responses were thematically coded to identify recurring patterns.*

HOW DID COACHING HELP LEADERS WITH THEIR FOCUS AREAS?

When asked what behaviours and skills were the focus areas of coaching sessions, the global cohort identified...

1

Navigating Change and Uncertainty

Leaders faced continuous disruption across VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity)/ BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible) environments, including restructures, ambiguity around future operating models, duplicated roles, geopolitical shifts, economic pressure, and accelerating AI adoption. Many feared career missteps, particularly women navigating visibility and risk. This year wasn't just about managing change, but leading through uncertainty with clarity, steadiness, and empathy.

How coaching helped:

Coaching equips leaders to step out of reactive “autopilot” and operate with greater clarity, confidence, and control. By strengthening their ability to navigate complexity, leaders focus on what matters most, make grounded decisions under pressure, and communicate with calm, empathetic authority, rooted in strong self-awareness, personal values, and emotional intelligence, with a clear emphasis on listening.

2

Communication & Influence

Communication gaps were a major barrier to effectiveness, with many leaders needing to strengthen upward influence, empathy and listening, difficult conversations, and strategic stakeholder alignment.

How coaching helped:

Executive coaching helps leaders communicate with clarity and confidence by strengthening self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and listening skills, enabling greater influence, trust, and alignment across teams and stakeholders.

CONTINUED

When asked what behaviours and skills were the focus areas of coaching sessions, the global cohort identified...

3

Self-Awareness and Authentic Leadership

Coaches reported a growing number of leaders struggling with identity, purpose, and authenticity. Many were operating on autopilot, disconnected from personal purpose, to align with organisational focus. Ultimately, resulting in leaders “sleepwalking” through career decisions without meaningful reflection.

How coaching helped:

Coaching strengthened self-awareness by helping leaders clarify their values, identity, strengths and blind spots; recognise stress patterns; understand their leadership impact; and accept that they do not need all the answers. This self-awareness became the gateway to greater authenticity, confidence, and grounded leadership.

4

Burnout & Overload

Burnout dominated 2025. Leaders were stretched across too many priorities, working with fewer resources and reduced psychological safety. Overload, firefighting, and lack of boundaries were common. Resilience is now seen as a core leadership competency, not a “nice-to-have.”

How coaching helped:

Coaching helped leaders manage their energy more intentionally and sharpen how they set priorities. By gaining a clearer understanding of their strengths, leaders made better decisions about where to focus their time and effort.

CONTINUED

When asked what behaviours and skills were the focus areas of coaching sessions, the global cohort identified...

5 Managing Difficult Conversations

Managing difficult conversations emerged as a significant challenge for leaders in 2025. Many wanted to develop their ability to navigate difficult conversations and communicate change with clarity and empathy.

How coaching helped:

Through guided reflection and practice, coaching supported leaders to regulate their emotional responses, clarify the message they needed to deliver, and communicate with both empathy and authority. Coaches supported leaders in reframing avoidance patterns, preparing for high-stakes discussions, and developing language that balanced honesty with compassion.

6 Maintaining Strategic Focus

Leaders struggled to maintain strategic focus amid complexity, needing stronger emotional regulation, systems thinking, adaptive leadership styles, and growing AI literacy to navigate beyond day-to-day demands.

How coaching helped:

Coaching provided the reflection and challenge leaders needed to strengthen their sense of identity and purpose, giving them a stable anchor in times of rapid change and complexity.

7 Artificial Intelligence

The acceleration of AI brought pressure and ambiguity, causing leaders to feel overwhelmed and uncertain about its impact on roles, workflows, and team confidence.

How coaching helped:

Coaching helped leaders reclaim agency, stay grounded in human judgment, communicate transparently, and integrate technology thoughtfully without losing authority, empathy, or strategic clarity.

NEW PRESSURES LEADERS FACED THIS YEAR

1

DOING MORE WITH LESS

The single most cited challenge: To deliver more with fewer people and less budget.

2

AI ADOPTION AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Leaders struggled with:

- Understanding AI's implications
- Integrating AI safely and ethically
- Balancing speed with regulatory and security considerations

AI literacy is rapidly becoming a leadership prerequisite.

3

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

Budget freezes, unclear strategies, and shifting priorities created widespread fatigue.

4

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AND COMPLEXITY

Constant restructuring fractured culture and made employee engagement harder to sustain.

5

LEADERSHIP AND PEOPLE CHALLENGES

Intergenerational tensions, psychological safety issues, and wellbeing concerns surfaced as significant pressures.

6

SPEED, AGILITY, AND DECISION-MAKING

Leaders were expected to pivot rapidly with limited information, often without strategic clarity from above.

2026 PREDICTIONS: WHAT WILL SHAPE LEADERSHIP?

1. Agility and Adaptive Leadership

The next wave of leadership will be defined by the ability to pivot rapidly, operate fluidly across functions, and respond decisively to shifting organisational and market conditions. Agility becomes a strategic advantage as volatility becomes the norm.

2. AI Integration and Tech Fluency

Leaders will need to integrate AI seamlessly into decision-making, workflows, and team dynamics. The emphasis shifts from competing with technology to augmenting leadership effectiveness through it, balancing innovation with ethical and secure application.

3. Self-Awareness and Inner Work

As external complexity intensifies, internal clarity becomes non-negotiable. Leaders who cultivate self-awareness, emotional regulation, and reflective capacity will navigate uncertainty with greater resilience, confidence, and authenticity.

4. Human-Centred Leadership

Empathy, psychological safety, and trust-building will differentiate high-performing teams in an era of hybrid work, cultural fragmentation, and rising burnout. Leaders must demonstrate humanity as intentionally as they demonstrate strategy.

5. Critical Thinking and Judgement

With ambiguity increasing and information quality fluctuating, leaders will require sharper judgement, independent thinking, and moral robustness. The capacity to cut through noise, articulate strategic choices, and make courageous decisions will be essential.

6. Communication and Influence

The ability to set a clear vision, communicate compelling narratives, and engage stakeholders through honest, timely dialogue will remain central to effective leadership. Mastery of difficult conversations becomes a competitive capability.

7. Resilience and Wellbeing as Strategic Priorities

Sustainable leadership will depend on advanced stress and energy management, both personally and organisationally. Leaders must model resilience practices and cultivate cultures that protect psychological wellbeing while maintaining high performance.

8. Inclusive and Collaborative Leadership

In increasingly global, hybrid, and multi-generational environments, leaders will need to cultivate curiosity, embrace diverse perspectives, and distribute leadership across teams. Collaboration, shared ownership, and inclusive decision-making will become critical to unlocking innovation, trust, and collective performance.

2026 LEADERSHIP

The insights from this year's report paint a clear and timely picture: 2025 demanded more from leaders than any recent year.

When external systems become unstable, internal leadership becomes the true differentiator.

Leaders who cultivated self-awareness, authenticity, resilience, and influence were the ones able to bring clarity to chaos, steadiness to their teams, and agency to situations that felt increasingly uncontrollable. Coaching played a crucial role in this shift, offering leaders a reflective space to rebuild confidence, reconnect with purpose, and navigate complexity with intention rather than reactivity.

As we look ahead, 2026 will reward leaders who integrate technology with humanity, pace with perspective, and strategic discipline with compassion. The next generation of leadership will not be defined solely by technical expertise or operational efficiency, but by the inner capabilities that anchor people in times of uncertainty.

Now is the moment for organisations and leaders to:

- Invest deeply in human capability : self-awareness, emotional regulation, judgement, and authentic influence.
- Build cultures of psychological safety and resilience to support high performance without burnout.
- Embrace AI and technological literacy as essential complements to human leadership.
- Prioritise reflective space for leaders to think, realign, and make decisions with clarity.
- Champion inclusive, values-driven leadership that creates trust and cohesion across global and hybrid teams.

The leaders who will thrive in 2026 are those who recognise that their greatest competitive advantage is not certainty, but capacity, the internal resources that enable them to stay grounded, human, and decisive in a world that refuses to slow down.

2026 is the year to lead from within, with **clarity, courage, and compassion.**

EXECUTIVE COACH ENDORSED READING FOR TODAY'S LEADERS

Executive Coaches Recommend Leaders Should Read These Books:

Self-Awareness, Identity & Authentic Leadership

- The Let Them Theory: Mel Robbins & Sawyer Robbins
- Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader: Herminia Ibarra
- Working Identity: Herminia Ibarra
- What Got You Here Won't Get You There: Marshall Goldsmith

Confidence, Courage & Personal Power

- Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead : Brené Brown
- Wolfpack: Abby Wambach

Emotional Wellbeing & Resilience

- Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals: Oliver Burkeman
- Man's Search for Meaning: Viktor Frankl
- Positivity: Barbara Fredrickson

Leadership Skills & Conscious Practices

- The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership: A New Paradigm for Sustainable Success : Jim Dethmer, Diana Chapman & Kaley Warner Klemp
- Compassionate Leadership, How to Do Hard Things in a Human Way: Rasmus Hougaard, Jacqueline Carter

Future-Focused & Adaptive Thinking

- Tomorrowmind: Gabriella Rosen Kellerman & Martin Seligman (PRISM skills for uncertainty)
- Think Again. The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know: Adam Grant
- Hidden Potential: The Science of Achieving Greater Things: Adam Grant

EXECUTIVE COACH ENDORSED MEDIA FOR TODAY'S LEADERS

Top Five Most Referenced Media from Executive Coaches

Podcasts

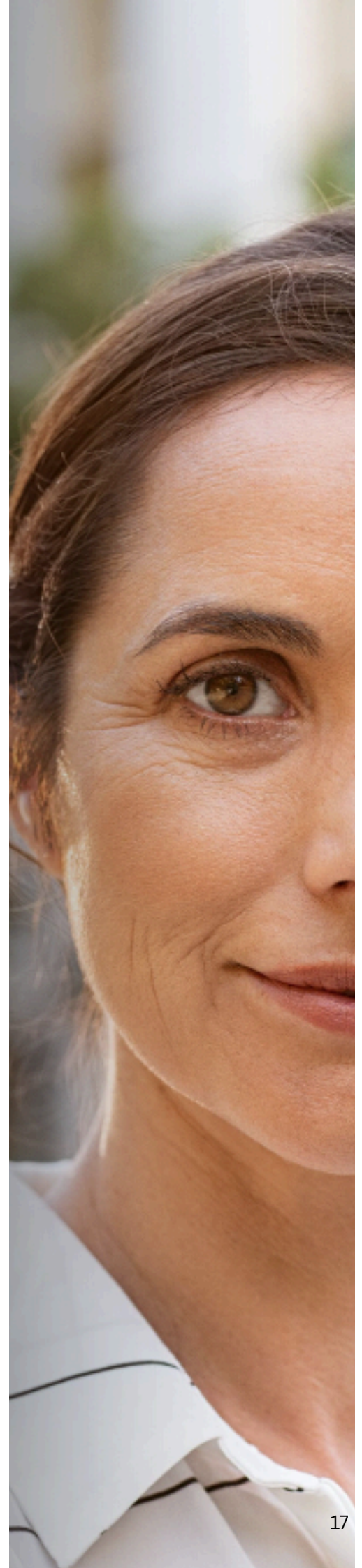
- The Mel Robbins Podcast- Mel Robbins
- Hidden Brain Podcast- [Shankar Vedantam](#)

Ted Talks

- Three Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Die - Luyi Kathy Zhang
- The Key to Navigating Change with Confidence - Kristy Ellmer
- How to Ask Better Questions- Mike Vaughan

Articles

- *"Using AI to Make You a More Compassionate Leader"*- Harvard Business Review
- Your Brain on Chat GPT- MIT Media Lab
- AC's *'AI in Coaching'* Series- Rebecca Rutschman



ABOUT THE EXECUTIVE COACHING CONSULTANCY

For over 30 years, we've coached women, working parents and senior leaders through transitions that have defined careers - and shaped cultures. Our focus is on the kind of leadership that transforms not only individuals, but the systems built around them.

We help organisations to strengthen their leadership capabilities across all levels, embed inclusive behaviours into their culture and elevate their underrepresented talent.



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