

The most productive ninety minutes in a London leader's month rarely happen in a boardroom. They tend to take place in a quiet office, a borrowed meeting room near Liverpool Street, or a glass cube off Paddington. Phones parked face down. One calendar invitation that is not about delivery or optics. Just a leader and an Executive Coach, working on the knot that is costing the most time, revenue, or sleep.

I have coached founders balancing investor demands with product crises, CFOs prepping for activist questions, and public sector directors wrestling with staffing gaps. In this city, where diaries are built in ten minute increments and the Jubilee line can upend best laid plans, ninety minutes offers an honest window. Long enough to do deep work, short enough to fit before lunch or between site visits. What happens in that time is less about pep talks and more about sharpening the leader's operating system.

Why ninety minutes works in London

A one hour slot often compresses reflection. People spend twenty minutes arriving, literally and mentally, then rush to action. Two hours can sag. London leaders, especially at Series B to FTSE 250 scale, fight calendar entropy. The ninety minute format respects their tempo, but still allows for a full cycle: surface, diagnose, design, rehearse, and commit.

Practicalities matter. London traffic, an unexpected ministerial briefing, or a board committee overrun can squeeze the best intentions. I notice higher attendance and lower rescheduling when sessions sit at 90, not 120. There is also attention span. After about seventy five minutes, leaders who wake at 5:30 to train, scan inboxes before breakfast, and carry a load of decisions begin to hit cognitive limits. A well-run ninety keeps engagement high and leaves them sharper, not drained.

What leaders bring into the room

Early-career managers tend to seek skills. Senior leaders bring decisions, politics, and identity. The list never repeats, but familiar themes recur.

A fintech COO arrives with a revenue target and a platform latency problem, plus a marketing head who keeps missing cross-functional handoffs. An NHS trust lead comes in with a morale trough after rota changes and a growing backlog of Freedom to Speak Up cases. A media agency MD wants to stop being the bottleneck for every new pitch and finally replace a mediocre but loyal account director.

The work is not therapy. It is not a substitute for Leadership Training. Those matter, and a good programme equips people with models and practice. Coaching picks up where training leaves off. It is about context and choices in real time. A seasoned Leadership Coach or Business Coach will draw on that training toolkit, then tune it to the leader's current terrain.

Anatomy of an effective session

The scaffolding hides inside the conversation, but it exists. Virtually every productive ninety minute session follows a shape that protects time and keeps outcomes tangible.

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The first five to ten minutes are devoted to contracting. Not the legal contract, the agreement for today. What is the single outcome that would make this session worthwhile? Vague inputs give vague outputs, so the coach pushes for specificity. Instead of "I need to be more strategic," we work toward "I need a decision on whether to sunset Product X before the October roadshow, and a way to bring the head of sales onsite."

Once we have the outcome, we gather data. This is not an audit. It is the leader's version of events, including how they think, what they have tried, who is involved, and what sits under the surface. In London, with its layered governance and stakeholder mosaics, unspoken constraints can be decisive. A council CEO will name the local press editor they cannot alienate. A PE-backed CEO will sketch the partner whose text messages matter more than the board pack.

Then comes framing. A coach helps the client choose a lens. Is this a decision quality problem, a prioritisation problem, a relationship problem, or a self-regulation problem? Switching frames is often half the value. I remember a retail COO certain that a supplier squeeze was killing margins. After ten minutes of framing, we saw it was actually an issue of decision rights. Category managers were afraid to say no because he rarely held the line, so costs crept in.

Intervention fills the core thirty to fifty minutes. Techniques vary. We might map stakeholders with power and interest on a two by two, rehearse a difficult conversation using a three-step assertion model, run a quick pre-mortem on the downside case, or use the ladder of inference to catch the stories driving the leader's reactions. If a decision is on the table, we will often use a one page decision brief with criteria, options, risks, and triggers for reversal.

Rehearsal moves learning from theory to muscle memory. A good Executive Coach will not let a leader leave with vague intentions. We practice the opening line with the CFO. We script the questions to ask the product lead without slipping into solution mode. We test the short answer for the BBC journalist who asks why your digital project is over budget.

We close with commitments. Not five, just one or two. The leader states what they will do, by when, and how we will know. I often ask for a friction audit. What could derail this? What support is required? Ninety minutes is short. The world rushes back in after you leave the room. Better to bake in a prompt or a calendar nudge that helps them follow through.

What London leaders actually learn

A single session rarely changes a career. A series of well-aimed ones can shift patterns leaders have rehearsed for years. The learnings fall into a handful of useful buckets.

They learn how to trade time for impact. Most senior leaders misprice their attention. They pick up legacy work, sit in meetings to keep an eye on things, and accept every external coffee because "it might be useful." In coaching, we run a hard audit. We put numbers to it. If a managing director spends six hours a week in pitch prep because the team fears losing and wants her aura in the pitch room, what is the cost? What else goes undone? Often, by the third session, we have reclaimed 10 to 20 percent of their week. Not by working faster, by pruning.

They learn to speak to interests, not positions. A head of operations squares off with a head of sales about implementation timeframes. Each takes a position and digs in. Coaching helps reframe toward interests. Sales fears

missing quarterly bonus triggers. Ops fears customer churn from rushed rollouts. Once those sit on the table, deal space opens. We craft language that recognises both without papering over risk.

They learn to separate signal from noise in board dynamics. London boards range from collegiate to adversarial. The same review can feel like interrogation or insight depending on how prepared you are. I teach clients to expect patterns. Every board has a risk hawk, a strategy romantic, a numbers purist, a customer voice. Rather than react to the loudest, isolate the criteria they value and prepare short answers with evidence. This sounds minor until you watch a CEO stop defending and start directing the conversation.

They learn to prepare one level higher. A central Civil Service director once came with a thick pack for a ministerial. We cut it down to a three page crisp. We wrote the first paragraph the minister would need if called to the dispatch box. We flagged the two lines likely to land in the Telegraph. He left lighter, and more confident, because he had shifted from subject mastery to framing mastery.

They learn where they get hooked. Every leader has triggers. An ex-consultant who equates pace with value will overfill the agenda. A founder who still sees herself as the scrappy underdog will bristle at process, even when the company needs it. Coaching surfaces these stories [Business Executive Coaching bronwynleighcrawford.com](https://www.bronwynleighcrawford.com) and tests them. I often ask, what would be true if the opposite of your story held? What evidence supports that view? Over time, leaders spot their own hooks sooner and choose differently.

They learn to manage energy as a strategic asset. This is not yoga talk. It is arithmetic. You cannot show up well for a 7 a.m. Investor call, a 10 a.m. Union briefing, and a 4:30 budget wrangle if you have burned through glucose and goodwill by lunch. In practice, this leads to pragmatic changes. One client moved all one-to-ones that required empathy to Wednesdays, after his long Tuesday exco drained him. Another adopted a rule of three: no more than three high-stakes interactions in a day. Sessions give permission to make these adjustments without guilt.

The London texture: sectors and stakes

Coaching in London differs from coaching in Leeds or Lisbon because the density and diversity of sectors collides in one city. There are patterns across sectors, but the flavour shifts.

Financial services leaders live with regulation as background radiation. Risk and compliance sit in the room even when the topic is talent. The Executive Coach working with a bank COO will keep an ear for those rails. When we script a message to a technology partner, we build in the approvals calendar and the thresholds that trigger extra scrutiny.

Tech scale-ups swim in cash runway and headcount charts. Their leaders often cross thresholds fast, from a team of 20 to 200 in twelve months. A coach becomes a second brain that notices where yesterday's successful behaviour becomes tomorrow's choke point. A founder who knew every engineer's birthday must learn to lead through layers without being accused of going corporate. Tension shows up in streaks on Glassdoor and whispers in Slack. Sessions zero in on those inflection points.

Creative industries mix personality brands with client pressure. A media agency MD can lose a flagship client over one misjudged pitch. The work in coaching here includes calibrating presence. How do you project conviction without crowding your team? How do you debrief a loss without triggering defensiveness? We build rituals that sustain resilience over the pitch season, not just tactics for the next meeting.

Public sector leaders face asymmetric scrutiny. A procurement misstep can sit on the front page longer than a major success. They also carry duty of care for large staff bodies in underfunded systems. Coaching in this context is about boundary clarity and political craft. What do you escalate? How do you speak plainly about constraints

without sounding defeated? Ninety minutes allows enough room to acknowledge the emotional toll and still equip for the next committee.

The difference between coaching and training, and how they reinforce each other

There is value in formal Leadership Training. Programmes give you case studies, language, and a peer cohort. They lift basics to a shared standard. Coaching handles the unscripted parts. A Leadership Coach sits next to you metaphorically while you decide which lieutenants you can genuinely trust, or how to handle a founder who wants to stay in the product weeds while you try to scale.

Many organisations in London do both. They send a cohort through a training series, then offer six to twelve Executive Coach sessions to their top quartile. That mix works because it avoids asking coaching to teach fundamentals, and avoids asking training to resolve messy, personal decisions. A Business Coach can also be the right call when commercial models, unit economics, or go-to-market strategy sit at the heart of the issue. The titles overlap in the market, so assess the person in front of you more than the label.

A compact preparation checklist leaders actually use

- Choose one outcome that makes the session a win, written in a single sentence.
- Bring the stakeholders map in your head, and be ready to update it in the room.
- Pull the data you will need to make a decision, not the data that proves you are right.
- Note your fear or hope about this issue, and be prepared to name it early.
- Block fifteen minutes after the session to write and schedule your commitments.

A little discipline before you arrive saves twenty minutes of meandering. The last item might be the most important. You will leave a good session with clarity. If you then sprint into a quarterly review, much of that work evaporates. The best clients guard the liminal space after the session as carefully as the time during it.

Coaching techniques that work in ninety minutes

I do not carry a magic toolkit. I use familiar methods flexibly. The difference lies in knowing when to use which, in what sequence, and with what tone.



GROW remains useful in sprints. You can cover Goal, Reality, Options, and Will in a well-paced ninety minute arc. The danger is treating it as a form instead of a flow. Reality chews most of the clock if you let it. I often push reality into the first fifteen minutes and move to options sooner, then loop back to fill any gaps that show up.

The ladder of inference earns its keep in London's high-velocity settings. We trace the leader's leap from data to meaning to action. A chief of staff who reads a brief email from the chair as disapproval can unpick that jump, see alternate explanations, and choose a calmer response. It saves reputations and email drama.

Nonviolent communication principles, stripped of jargon, help with tough conversations. Observations without evaluation, feelings without blame, needs without demands, and clear requests, not hints. I once had a CFO rehearse this format for a conversation with a mercurial CEO. We wrote: "When you change the hiring plan in the meeting without notice, I feel blindsided and concerned about our runway assumptions. I need predictability in headcount decisions. Would you agree that any changes go through ExCo by Friday noon?" He delivered it cleanly. The CEO did not love it, but he respected it. The pattern changed.

Pre-mortems defuse optimism bias around launches and restructures. In forty minutes, we imagine we are six months into the future and the initiative failed. We list plausible reasons, then build mitigations into the present plan. It is a faster, more engaging risk workshop than most project templates.

Accountability between sessions

Ninety minutes pay off when the period between sessions carries the work forward. I ask for experiments, not generic actions. Instead of "improve delegation," we define a one week experiment to give a senior engineer full ownership of a feature with a fixed outcome, a private mid-week check-in, and a Friday review of what the leader held back out of habit. We will track the time saved, the errors made, and whether the team member stepped up.

Most clients carry two to three such experiments over a month. The next session then starts with data, not stories. Did your month include fewer ad hoc approvals? Did the head of HR handle the board comp question without you in the loop? If not, what was the friction? We edit the system, not the person.

Measuring impact without gaming it

Reductionism hurts coaching. Not everything that matters can be graphed. Still, executives answer to results, so we agree a small set of measures.

Time reclaimed is a sturdy metric. Over a quarter, many senior leaders claw back five to eight hours a week by exiting meetings, creating better decision rights, and training lieutenants. Decision cycle time is another. If it used to take three weeks to greenlight a pilot, can we make it one without compromising risk? Feedback pulses from direct reports, done anonymously and sparingly, add texture. I have seen leaders move from a 6 to an 8 on "My manager creates clarity" over three months with targeted work.

Revenue or cost outcomes can be linked when the coaching focuses on bottlenecks in sales or operations. Here, caution helps. Markets move. A coach should not claim credit for a macro tailwind, and a leader should not hide behind a headwind to excuse weak follow-through. We talk ranges and contributions. Better is to choose the one or two levers where the leader's behaviour clearly touches results, such as sales pipeline hygiene or on-time project delivery.

When coaching does not work

There are hard edges to this craft. Coaching does not fix a broken business model. If your gross margins do not make sense, a coach will not rescue you. That is a job for ruthless financial analysis and a sober strategy reset. Coaching also struggles when authority is missing. If you run a division but the group CEO reverses your decisions, sessions can help you influence better, but not give you power you do not hold.

Sometimes the mismatch lies with the person. If a leader will not share the real problem, or is seeking validation rather than change, progress stalls. I have paused or ended engagements when that became clear. The worst use of budget is to sponsor someone who does not want to do the work.

There are cases where therapy, not coaching, is appropriate. If a leader is in acute burnout, or trauma is active in the room, a responsible Executive Coach will set boundaries and refer. London's pressure can push people close to the line. We can and should talk about sustainable performance, but we are not clinicians.

Fees, cadence, and the market reality

London's pricing reflects its economics. For senior leaders, expect to pay per session somewhere in the £300 to £700 range for experienced coaches, with boutique firms and ex-C-suite operators charging more. Corporate contracts can run higher, especially when they include stakeholder interviews and 360 processes. Early-stage founders may find high-quality coaches at lower rates, but availability is tight.

Most leaders book six to twelve sessions over six to nine months. Ninety minutes monthly is common, with a faster cadence during crunch periods such as fundraising, post-merger integration, or major reorgs. Internal sponsors usually want a light-touch check-in each quarter to ensure alignment with business goals, without breaking confidentiality.

Picking the right partner

Titles overlap, but clarity helps. Ask yourself what problem you are trying to solve and what chemistry you need. In a city with abundant choice, you do not have to settle for a mediocre fit.

- Choose a Leadership Coach when the focal point is how you lead through others: building a top team, creating culture, establishing decision rights, and managing your own patterns under pressure.

- Choose an Executive Coach when you want a strategic thinking partner around board dynamics, complex decisions, stakeholder management, and the identity shifts that come with scale or role changes.
- Choose a Business Coach when the heartbeat of the work is commercial: pricing, pipeline, product-market fit, unit economics, and go-to-market execution, often with an operator's lens on process and metrics.

The best practitioners move across these domains, but they will have a center of gravity. In the first chemistry session, test for that. Bring a live issue and watch how they work. Do they listen and ask incisive questions, or download frameworks? Do they challenge you without posturing? Do you leave clearer and a little braver?

Real cases, with the serial numbers filed off

A private equity backed CFO in Shoreditch came with a cash compression problem and a brusque CEO. DSO was hovering at 62 days. We mapped the order-to-cash process in twenty minutes, found two handoffs that sat with sales ops, not finance, and designed a pilot that cut days by 8 within six weeks. The coaching piece was less about process and more about influence. He learned to sell a change without waving a stick, which made the wins stick.

A healthcare charity CEO in Southwark struggled with a trustee who loved operational detail. Board meetings spilled into line-by-line debates. In two ninety minute sessions, we rebuilt the board pack with clear RACI markers and elevated discussion prompts, and we rehearsed a private conversation that reset roles. By the next quarter, meetings finished on time, and the exec team reported higher clarity. The trustee, to her credit, found a new way to add value without crowding.

A product head at a listed travel company found herself unable to say no. Her roadmap was a Christmas tree, wired to blow the budget. Coaching focused on prioritisation language with sales and region heads. We prepared a one-slide trade-off view for ExCo that forced either more funding or fewer items. She delivered it without apology. The slide did more for her credibility than three years of overdelivery did.

What changes in the leader over a season of sessions

Early sessions often sound tactical. Give me the sentence to start this conversation. Help me plan this meeting. As trust builds, the work deepens. Leaders begin to name the fear under the busywork, the need to be liked, the impatience that looks like decisiveness but burns goodwill. They practice new ways of showing up. Their teams feel it first. Then the board comments. Finally, you hear it in the leader's own language.

Confidence shifts from bluster to groundedness. Boundaries get cleaner. The calendar looks different. You see more white space, an odd thing in this city. Decisions move faster, not because the leader learned a hack, but because they now separate what only they can do from what they must let go.

The best part, for me, is when a leader uses the same tools with their people. They start asking sharper questions in one-to-ones, offering feedback with less sugar and more kindness, running pre-mortems before launches without sounding like doom merchants. Coaching, done well, scales through behavior, not decks.

If you are considering it

Ask for references from leaders like you in sector and scale. Agree on outcomes that matter to your context, not someone else's template. Treat the ninety minutes as a meeting with your most important supplier, the one who supplies your judgment. Protect the time. Prepare one clear outcome. Bring the messy version of the problem to the room, not the polished one.

London will keep moving at London speed. Trains will be delayed, budgets tweaked, papers splashed, markets chilled and warmed. A solid relationship with a thoughtful Executive Coach does not slow the city, but it makes your path through it steadier. In ninety minutes, with the right focus, you learn to trade noise for signal, posture for purpose, and urgency for impact.