

Walk a few blocks in the City at 7 a.m. And you will overhear the same conversation on every corner. A founder admits the board has outgrown her. A chief of staff whispers that the leadership team is fraying. A director, fresh to a P&L, wonders if he is the only one who feels behind. Coaching gets mentioned a lot in these moments, often in the same breath as pressure, politics, and personal doubts. London rewards pace and polish, yet the roles at the top are rarely neat. The right coach becomes a quiet advantage. The wrong one consumes time and delivers platitudes.

I have coached and hired coaches across finance, technology, media, property, and the public sector in London. When coaching works here, it is because the match is specific. Not just to the leader, but to the season the business is in, the constraints of the market, and the politics on the ground. This guide offers a practical way to navigate that choice.

Start by naming the real problem, not the label

Most people begin with a label, usually “I need a Business Coach” or “We should get an Executive Coach for her.” Useful, but not enough. Two leaders can carry the same title and require completely different support. Before you search, put into words the friction you need to reduce.



Describe what is happening in concrete terms. If you run a growth stage fintech, your pain might be the shift from scrappy consensus to clear accountability at 120 people. If you are a divisional MD in a FTSE 100, your issue might be with cross border influence, not lack of effort. Perhaps a founder feels isolated and reactive with investors as the burn rate comes under scrutiny. If you cannot describe the moment in three sentences with dates, names, and outcomes, you are shopping blind.

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Labels matter, though. In London's coaching market, three terms get used with some consistency.



- Leadership Coach. Often focused on how you lead, decide, and influence. Useful for communication, presence, emotional intelligence, and team dynamics. Tends to be strong on reflective practice and pragmatic experiments at work.
- Executive Coach. Typically supports C suite or near C suite roles. The conversations stretch into strategy, governance, and board relationships. Executive coaches often bring corporate experience or have coached many senior leaders over several cycles.
- Business Coach. Tilts toward business mechanics. Revenue models, team structure, margins, and execution rhythms. Common with entrepreneurs and SMEs, and sometimes paired with light advisory input.

None of these definitions are fixed. Many coaches operate across boundaries. What helps is to decide whether you want primarily a mirror, a sparring partner, or a co designer of operating habits. Get honest about your appetite for challenge, your time constraints, and the risks in your role.

London's market reality, including price and availability

The London market is busy and uneven. Excellent coaches have full books by September and again by January. Many hold accreditations through EMCC, ICF, or the Association for Coaching, which are well recognised in the UK. Backgrounds vary, from ex operators to occupational psychologists and former consultants. The most capable do not advertise heavily. They get referred.

Fees reflect that dynamic. For senior leaders in London:

- Independent Executive Coach with a strong track record, usually £350 to £800 per session, sometimes packaged at £8,000 to £30,000 for a six to nine month engagement.
- Leadership Coach at mid to senior level, often £200 to £500 per session, with programmes in the £4,000 to £15,000 range.

- Business Coach for founders or SMEs, wide range, £150 to £500 per session. Some work on monthly retainers between £1,000 and £5,000, depending on cadence and scope.

Sector, seniority, and whether the coach is part of a boutique firm can move these numbers up or down. If you are paying far below these ranges, you are likely working with someone early in career. That can still be a match if your needs are specific and you value enthusiasm over depth. If you are quoted much higher, expect either a very in demand coach, a heavy assessment component, or embedded work with your wider team.

Availability is also shaped by cadence. In London, many leaders prefer a 60 to 90 minute session every three to four weeks, with ad hoc 20 minute check ins before investor meetings, board papers, or major presentations. Stacking four sessions a month rarely changes behaviour beyond the first two months. Sustainable progress tends to come from two things, the right cadence and visible application between sessions.

Evidence that matters, not glossy claims

A coach's website will highlight transformations. Those stories can be real, but they are often vague. Look for substance. Ask for two anonymised case examples with concrete outcomes and timeframes. The best coaches do not claim to have "fixed" their clients. They describe the work done together, what the leader tested, and the change that stuck three months after the engagement ended.

Many coaches cite tools, from Hogan and EQi to MBTI and DISC. These can help, particularly for team patterns and self awareness. They are not a magic key. In practice, the quality of debrief and the link to on the job experiments matters more than the brand of instrument. If a coach leads with tools rather than your context, you are buying a template.

Publication records and thought pieces are nice to have. The real proof shows up when you ask how they measure progress. Good answers include the use of stakeholder interviews at the start and mid point, behavioural goals stated in plain language, and a track record of clients renewing by choice, not because the engagement drifted.

Chemistry is not a vibe, it is testable

London leaders often choose fast, which can lead to choosing familiar. If a coach feels like you, speaks like you, and shares your background, comfort rises. That is not always the best indicator of impact. Challenge delivered with care beats sameness spoken softly.

You can test for the right chemistry. Ask the coach to run a sample 30 minute session on a real topic. Bring a current dilemma you have not solved. Pay attention to the quality of questions and the moments when you are invited to consider an uncomfortable angle. Better yet, notice what happens after the call. If you put a new conversation on your diary or rewrite a message to your team, the coach earned another hour. If you feel pleasantly understood and nothing shifts, keep looking.

The most helpful coaches I have seen in London do three things consistently. They notice patterns in your language and calendar that you no longer see. They calibrate your environment, so advice makes sense inside a regulated bank or a venture backed startup. They pair challenge with contact, meaning you feel their belief in you while they ask for a sharper edge.

Credentials, supervision, and ethics in the UK

An accreditation is not proof of excellence, but it is a decent floor. The ICF, EMCC, and AC each have competency frameworks and levels that signal training hours and client experience. More important are two items that London

buyers sometimes miss, supervision and insurance.

Professional supervision means your coach meets a senior practitioner regularly to reflect on their work, blind spots, and ethics. It is a sign they take their growth seriously. Ask how often they are supervised, by whom, and what themes they are exploring. You are listening for specificity. If they say, "I meet with a group occasionally," treat that as a red flag.

Insurance should cover professional indemnity and public liability. If your coaching touches sensitive HR or legal matters, confidentiality provisions need to be explicit, and the coach should be GDPR literate. In public sector or education contexts, a DBS check may be routine. Nothing kills trust faster than muddle on privacy.

Finally, clear boundaries around therapy matter. Many London leaders carry high stress, long hours, and personal strain. Coaches must know when to recommend clinical support. You do not want someone dabbling outside their competence.

What to ask before you commit

A short conversation with a coach can be polite and forgettable, or it can be decisive. Precision helps. The following checklist keeps the conversation grounded and comparable.

- Tell me about a client like me that you helped in the last two years, what changed, and what did not change.
- How will we measure progress at 6 weeks, 3 months, and at the end. What data will you collect beyond my self report.
- Describe a time a client disagreed with your approach. What happened next.
- What is your supervision setup, and what have you worked on there recently.
- If my board or HR sponsor is involved, how will you handle updates without breaching confidentiality.

Notice that the list is short. You are seeking crisp, concrete answers, not charm. A strong coach will also ask you direct questions about authority, trade offs you avoid, and how your calendar reveals your true priorities. Expect a few moments of discomfort. That is a preview of the work.

How coaching compares to leadership training

Coaching and leadership training do different jobs. Coaching is tailored to your situation. It draws out clarity, works with your energy and habits, and transfers ownership back to you. Leadership Training offers structured content and shared language. It is efficient when many people across your organisation need baseline skills, like running performance reviews, giving feedback, or managing stakeholders.

In London, the most successful companies combine both. They roll out leadership training to build foundations at scale, then layer coaching for critical roles, new leaders in transition, and high potential individuals who need concentrated work. If your budget is tight, you can still pair a lighter training module with a focused coaching sprint. For example, send three new heads of function to a two day training on strategic planning, then fund four coaching sessions each to convert their plans into operating rhythms that fit your company.

Sector nuance, and why it matters here more than in some cities

London's density makes for cross pollination, but sectors retain their seams. A regulator's tempo differs from a newsroom's. A creative agency treats decision rights differently from a private equity firm. When selecting a coach,

decide how much you need sector fluency. There is a trade off between a pure coaching stance and practical short cuts.

If you are a Series B founder who must rebalance speed with controls, a coach who has sat inside a scale up's messy middle can save you cycles. They know the potholes, like hiring a seasoned CFO who drowns your agility, or delaying the shift from generalists to specialists until it is too late. If you are a senior civil servant navigating policy, budgets, and ministerial expectations, you may need someone grounded in public sector dynamics and media pressure.

That said, perfectly matching a coach's sector to yours is not always best. Sometimes you need a mind untrained in your usual constraints. The right choice depends on how entangled your dilemmas are with sector specific rules. If 70 percent of your stuckness is about you and your team's habits, sector knowledge is a bonus. If 70 percent is about regulated processes and external actors, it is closer to a requirement.

A practical selection process that honours London's pace

Time matters. You can assemble a solid process in two weeks without slowing the business. Keep it human and minimal. Here is a step by step that works when there is pressure from above and work to do today.

- Write a one page brief. Include your role goals for the next two quarters, the top three behaviours you want to shift, key stakeholders, and any constraints on budget or timing.
- Ask for referrals from three sources who know you. One internal, one peer in another company, and one HR or talent operator. Aim for four names.
- Hold chemistry calls with two or three coaches. Use the same 30 minute real topic for each. Take notes on what changed in your thinking, not how friendly they were.
- Check references briefly. Two quick calls, ideally with clients who still see the coach's impact months later.
- Contract clearly. Agree cadence, scope, sponsor involvement, confidentiality, fees, cancellation, and data handling. Set a mid point review in the diary now.

This rhythm saves you from endless shopping while still catching the biggest risks. It also trims the social friction that often stalls decisions, since you show your sponsor a process that is fair and timely.

Contracting details that avoid headaches

The friction points in coaching engagements are predictable. People skate past them at the start, then get stuck later. A half hour invested up front avoids three hours of damage control.

Scope. Decide whether the work is individual coaching only, or whether the coach will run 360 interviews, sit in on meetings, or facilitate team sessions. If the coach touches the team, the price and confidentiality rules change.

Cadence and responsiveness. Name the default frequency, then agree emergency boundaries. Some leaders expect a coach to be on call before board meetings. That is fine if it is priced and timeboxed. It is not fine if it is assumed.

Sponsorship. When HR or a line manager sponsors, clarity on updates matters. Monthly three way meetings are common in London for senior roles. Keep them tight, focused on progress and support needed, not content of sessions. Confidentiality must hold.

Data. Coaching notes belong to the coach, not the company. If you need summary data for procurement or HRIS systems, agree what is shared. GDPR obligations apply to any personal data exchanged.

Termination. It is healthy to specify how either party can pause or end the engagement without drama. Most set a notice period of two to four weeks.

Remote, in person, and the realities of London logistics

Many executives shifted to hybrid coaching. The upside is flexibility, especially if you split your time between Shoreditch, Canary Wharf, and client sites. Video works for most sessions. That said, certain moments benefit from the room. If a founder is preparing for a tough board reshuffle, meeting in person in a quiet space can accelerate trust. If you are working on presence, how you use the chair, the pause before the ask, and the way your eyes land on the room are easier to coach face to face.

A workable pattern is mixed. Start in person, even once, then move to video. Add in person touchpoints before the most consequential meetings of the quarter. Book a neutral space if your office signals distraction. Several coaches use small rooms near St Paul's or London Bridge for that reason. Keep the travel burden sensible. If your coach has to trek across town for 60 minutes, you will see it in the fee or the fatigue.

Red flags and quiet signals of quality

Marketing polish hides weak practice well. A few signals in either direction help you cut through the noise.

Red flags include overpromising, like guarantees of promotion timelines or revenue jumps. Watch for coaches who lead with their own story, rather than your context, especially if they treat their success as a template. Vague pricing or reluctance to name a confidentiality stance often precede later friction. A coach who cannot describe a time they were wrong or changed their approach is risky.

Positive signs are smaller and steadier. A coach who asks to see your calendar and board papers seeks reality, not theatre. Someone who reflects your words back crisply, removing buzzwords and naming trade offs, likely helps you do the same for others. If they propose a simple experiment that fits your week, like running a decision audit for one month or renegotiating two recurring meetings, you are in practical territory.

When a coach should bring advice, and when they should hold back

Purist coaching emphasises questions and reflection. Advisory work offers recommendations and frameworks. The line is not binary in London's messy roles. Sometimes you need an operating cadence, not another mirror.

Here is a reasonable rule. The closer the problem is to who you are being, the more a coach should stay in true coaching. The closer the problem is to what you are doing repeatedly with low variance, the more pragmatic advisory input helps. If you are struggling to set performance standards because you avoid discomfort, no framework will fix it until you face the avoidance. If you are wrestling with a two speed product roadmap and stakeholder churn, a coach who can sketch a quarterly operating rhythm with crisp RACI might save a quarter.

Ask the coach how they balance these modes. Good practitioners state their bias and adapt by agreement, not by drift.

Measuring impact without turning coaching into a spreadsheet

Executives in London live in dashboards. You can and should measure coaching impact, yet not all value shows up in neat numbers. Aim for a mixed method approach that does not steal hours from the work itself.

Start with behaviourally specific goals. For example, shift from doing 70 percent of the talking in exec meetings to closer to 40 percent by quarter end. Or reduce decision reversals after meetings from weekly to monthly. Add stakeholder feedback at two points, a short set of questions for your direct reports and your boss, asking what they notice changing. Blend in leading indicators, like calendar analysis that shows a tilt from reactive to proactive blocks, or an increase in 1 to 1s that end with clear decisions.

Do not forget the longer arc. The most meaningful shifts tend to show up three to six months after coaching ends, when old pressures return and new habits either hold or fade. A brief follow up with your coach to review that period is worth the time.

Coaching in tricky London moments

Edge cases teach you the most about fit. Two vignettes stick with me.

A venture backed CEO in West London faced a cash crunch three quarters earlier than planned. Investors were jittery. His default was secrecy, little updates to a tight inner circle, then dramatic reveals. The coach he chose had scaled an operations team but lacked boardroom fluency. Early sessions felt good. The CEO vented, felt heard, then executed alone. When the board balked, the coach tried to help him frame a message, but it lacked the nuance to land. We switched to a coach who had worked with activist investors and nervous NEDs. Within six weeks, the CEO was running regular, sober updates, had renegotiated covenants, and reduced churn by getting honest with the team. The first coach was not bad. The fit was wrong for the season.

A public sector leader in Whitehall was promoted into a director role with intense scrutiny. She struggled to delegate under persistent media pressure. Her [Executive Coaching](#) first coach came from a commercial background and pushed for aggressive delegation targets. It backfired. The second coach understood ministerial dynamics, the fear of errors multiplying in the press, and the need to build trust with a hesitant private office. They co designed delegation in layers, with review points mapped to parliamentary cycles. Progress looked slower, but within a quarter she had reclaimed 20 percent of her week and improved her unit's hit rate on policy papers.

Both cases underline the same lesson. A Leadership Coach with the right empathy and context can unlock moves you resist. An Executive Coach with board and investor fluency can help you survive politics you cannot outwork. A Business Coach who has built and simplified operating rhythms can free up energy you waste in meetings. The labels help, but the lived fit and the season matter more.

How to involve your stakeholders without losing trust

Coaching happens in a system. The system includes your boss, your peers, your team, and sometimes your board or investors. In London, HR and talent teams are increasingly careful about setting up three way agreements that protect confidentiality while aligning on goals. That is good practice. The trap is turning those meetings into performance review proxies.

Keep sponsor check ins focused on outcomes and support, not session content. For example, tell your sponsor that your goal is to improve cross functional decision speed from two weeks to five days. Share the experiments you will run, like changing the pre read format or moving to 24 hour asynchronous input windows. Ask for help where the system blocks progress, such as removing a redundant sign off. You do not need to share the personal work behind your avoidance or emotional triggers. If you feel that boundary slipping, reset it firmly.

If you lead a team, you can extend the impact by being explicit about what you are practicing. One CTO I worked with told his directs he was changing how he ran design reviews. He asked them to hold him accountable if he

slipped into solving. That openness helped, not because it was vulnerable in the abstract, but because it was specific and practical.

Final thought, then a quiet nudge

Selecting a coach in London is less about deciphering glossy labels and more about matching today's realities with tomorrow's demands. The city rewards leaders who adapt patterns in weeks, not quarters. Coaching that bites does three things. It helps you see what you have been unwilling to see. It gives you practical moves that respect your context. It stretches your courage and consistency enough that the change holds when the calendar fills and the pressure returns.

You do not need perfection to begin. You need a clear brief, a small field of credible options, two or three pointed conversations, and the will to test. Put one chemistry session on the diary. Bring a live topic with names and dates. See whether your thinking sharpens. If it does, you have likely found your coach. If not, keep going. In this city, the right partner pays for themselves sooner than you think.