

Stronger Together: How Coaching Aligned Two Senior Leaders

This story is based on a real coaching engagement. Certain details have been changed to protect confidentiality while preserving the core dynamics and outcomes.

From Tension to Trust: How Alignment Coaching Repaired a Critical Relationship

The Challenge

Two experienced leaders, Taylor and Sam, had worked closely together for years. Sam originally advocated for bringing Taylor into the organization and had served as her mentor and key supporter.

As the organization evolved, so did their roles. Taylor stepped into a broader leadership role and became formally responsible for Sam's performance. What had once been an easy, collegial partnership now carried new expectations, accountability, and power dynamics.

Because the shift in roles wasn't directly addressed, the tension grew quietly. Communication became strained and sporadic. Both Taylor and Sam felt misunderstood and alone in the situation. The lines between their long-standing relationship and their new reporting structure were blurred, and small misunderstandings began to harden into ongoing friction and quiet resentment.



Sam and Taylor both remained deeply committed to the organization and its mission, but the weight of the tension made collaboration harder than it needed to be. Conversations took more effort, key topics were avoided, and both leaders were spending energy managing the discomfort instead of focusing fully on their work.

The situation was emotionally charged and increasingly high-stakes for the broader team: if they couldn't repair the relationship, there was a real risk of ongoing misalignment, stalled decisions, and burnout for everyone involved.

They needed a way to reset the relationship without losing the history they shared.

The Solution

The coaching engagement began when an executive sponsor, Edward, noticed that the strain between Sam and Taylor wasn't resolving on its own. He saw that the tension was starting to ripple beyond their one-on-one interactions and wanted to address it before it led to bigger consequences for the team and the organization. Sam and Taylor were invited to participate in alignment coaching focused specifically on their working relationship.

They agreed, even though neither could clearly see how to move forward. Like many leaders in similar situations, they had fallen into a pattern of silence: avoiding difficult conversations, second-guessing each other's intentions, and hoping the tension would just resolve on its own.

Before the first session, each completed a short reflection about the relationship, the recent breakdown, and what they hoped might be different. When they saw each other's responses, they were struck by how similar their experiences were. Both felt the loss of trust.

Both missed the ease they once had. Both wanted more clarity, more directness, and less guesswork.

In the initial session, they worked with their coach to define shared goals for the engagement. They agreed to:

- Address conflict directly instead of avoiding it
- Rebuild a foundation of trust and psychological safety
- Improve collaboration for the sake of the team, not just the two of them

Over a series of structured conversations, the coach guided them through:

- Sharing how each had interpreted key moments that led to the breakdown
- Naming the unspoken expectations that had come with the role changes
- Identifying what a “healthy” version of their working relationship would actually look like

Together, they introduced simple practices and agreements, including:

- Regular check-ins focused on the relationship and not just the work
- A shared set of cues and phrases to use when emotions started to rise
- Clear agreements about how to surface concerns early, before they turned into resentment

The focus was not on rehashing every past hurt, but on understanding the pattern and designing a better way forward.



Why Alignment Coaching Works in Situations Like This

This kind of tension rarely comes from a single incident. It usually builds slowly, fueled by changing roles, unspoken expectations, and good intentions that get lost in the middle. Traditional performance conversations or one-off interventions don't often get to the heart of it.

Alignment coaching is designed for exactly these high-stakes relationships. It brings both leaders into the same room with a neutral coach, a clear structure, and a shared goal: move from defensiveness and avoidance to clarity, accountability, and partnership. Instead of assigning blame, it creates space to understand each person's perspective, reset expectations, and build concrete ways of working together going forward.



The Results

By the end of the engagement, Taylor and Sam's day-to-day experience of working together was noticeably different. They had moved from avoiding certain topics to addressing them calmly and directly. Instead of guessing what the other was thinking, they designed regular touchpoints to stay aligned.

Their check-ins became a reliable space to reset expectations, clarify priorities, and raise issues before they escalated. The shared language and agreements they created gave them a way to pause, step back, and re-center when conversations became tense. This reduced the emotional energy they spent managing the relationship and freed them to focus on leading their work and their team.

Most importantly, their mindset shifted. They no longer approached each interaction braced for disappointment. They saw each other as partners again—distinct in style and perspective, but on the same side. They were able to:

- Give each other clearer feedback without fearing that it would damage the relationship
- Extend more grace and curiosity when something lands poorly
- Separate past history from present behavior and focus on what they could change





The tools they used were straightforward: regular connection points, more explicit communication, and small working agreements. What made the difference was their willingness to practice these consistently and to stay engaged even when conversations felt uncomfortable.

Alignment coaching did not hand them a script or dictate decisions. It provided the structure, neutrality, and support they needed to do the hard work themselves. What began as a breakdown became the foundation for a more honest, resilient working relationship that now supports not only the two leaders involved but the entire team around them.

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Schedule a call to learn more

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