

**SELF-COACHING STRATEGIES  
TO LEAD *YOUR* WAY**

**Be Your  
Own  
Leadership  
Coach**

**KAREN STEIN**

## Praise for *Be Your Own Leadership Coach*

‘There is no such thing as a born leader. We all have to learn, both from our own experiences and the wisdom of others. Exercising leadership, in any field of endeavour, can be challenging, and sometimes even daunting, but there are few privileges greater than being given the opportunity to lead others and to make a difference. Karen Stein has written an invaluable book, full of wisdom and practical experience that will help you to be the leader who inspires others to reach their potential. I wish I had been given such insights as I travelled on my own leadership journey. I recommend it highly.’

**Lieutenant General David Morrison AO (Retd)**

‘Karen Stein has written one of the most comprehensive and practical guides for leaders I’ve ever read. Through engaging, evidence-based and high-impact practices, you’ll learn to lead yourself, lead others and leave a lasting legacy. *Be Your Own Leadership Coach* isn’t a book you simply read, it’s a book you *experience* and become better because of it.’

**Zach Mercurio, PhD**, author of *The Invisible Leader: Transform Your Life, Work, and Organization with the Power of Authentic Purpose*

‘*Be Your Own Leadership Coach* is full of practical advice and tools that I have already started applying to my life. The backpack metaphor works for me. I recommend this book to anyone who is seeking to improve their personal and professional life.’

**Sergio Duchini**, Chair, Lymphoma Australia

‘Written by a wise and gentle leadership coach, *Be Your Own Leadership Coach* is an easy to read and comprehensive self-help guide for anyone wanting to become a better version of themselves at work. Drawing on research, stories and a wealth of personal experience, Karen provides the why as well as the how-to of self-development, with lots of practical exercises.’

**Dr Juliet Bourke**, advisor, board member and Professor of Practice,  
School of Management & Governance, UNSW Business School

‘In a world calling for leaders who can simultaneously hold space for courage and kindness, *Be Your Own Leadership Coach* disrupts the traditional dominance and power of what it means to ‘lead’ and makes the compelling case for ‘whole human’ leadership development that starts from within. A must-read for anyone driven to create real impact in today’s ever-changing world!’

**Mariane Power**, clinical psychologist, female founder – The Posify Group

‘I could not think of a better person to write a book on coaching than Karen. Her characteristic warmth resonates on every page and in every strategy and story. Karen has reminded us that we can lead and learn to be and do better in any given moment.’

**Kelly Irving**, book coach, editor and Founder of The Expert Author Community

# Contents



Preface	vii
Introduction	1
<i>Practice 1</i> Leading as you	15
<i>Practice 2</i> Setting your goals	28
<i>Practice 3</i> Being motivated	42
<i>Practice 4</i> Leading with self-awareness	53
<i>Practice 5</i> Managing your time	70
<i>Practice 6</i> Managing your energy	84
<i>Practice 7</i> Building your personal board of directors	103
<i>Practice 8</i> Exploring your leadership impact	119
<i>Practice 9</i> Empowering your team	135
<i>Practice 10</i> The best leaders listen	150
<i>Practice 11</i> Conscious communication	166
<i>Practice 12</i> Leading with kindness	183
Conclusion	201
About Karen	203
Note of thanks	205
References	207

## Practice 1

---

# Leading as you

Arrie respected and enjoyed working with Dave. Dave was dynamic and inspiring and had built his followership by focusing on all things innovation. He was creative and a risk-taker, and as a result he engaged in what looked like exciting yet challenging projects. Dave had built his brand over many years. Arrie was motivated to be ‘just like Dave’.

‘What does that mean?’ I asked in our coaching session. Arrie went on to describe Dave’s personality, working style, strengths, clients and more, and reiterated what an awesome leader Dave was.

Yet Arrie struggled to enjoy his leadership role. To him, leadership felt awkward and had a sense of pretence. Leadership was a persona, which Arrie perpetuated during working hours. It took a lot of energy to act like Dave, sound like Dave and try to think like Dave. And although Dave appeared to have much success, Arrie did not feel he reached the same heights.

Arrie and I discussed an alternative stance. ‘What if you could lead just like *you*? Lead as your best self?’ I asked.

Arrie was curious and intrigued, and keen to explore what this could look like.

Leadership is complex, and more so when you don’t have a great sense of self. Leading just like you requires you to initially engage

with yourself to understand who you are as a leader. This allows you to lead more authentically. Rather than trying to be just like Dave, or any other impressive leader, you can be just like yourself: your *authentic* self.

Leading as you liberates you. It releases you from the pressure of trying to emulate someone else. After all, we are all diverse human beings, with different ways of communicating, different perspectives and different views of the world and its complex problems. We have different values, motives and preferences. We are challenged and excited by different pursuits and adopt different ways of leading. Yes, there may be some similarities between yourself and other leaders, but it is simply impossible to be identical to others. There are just too many variables and moving parts that distinguish us from each other.

Leading just like you consumes less energy. It takes less effort to be yourself than it does to try to be someone else. It's also fascinating and affirming to discover more about yourself and draw on those attributes and strengths to support you in your leadership, rather than mimicking someone else's style and approach. It builds your confidence as you become more at ease and accepting of who you are and what you can bring to your leadership.

Seeing your strengths and attributes with clear eyes will support you in being the leader you wish to be. You'll have a clear vision of the things that support and enable you. You'll see what excites and orientates you. You'll be more self-directed and alive to what will bring you pleasure in your work. And with those insights, your experience of leadership will be more positive and impactful.

Once I explained the benefits of leading with authenticity, Arrie agreed to focus on leading just like Arrie – rather than just like Dave. We agreed to a coaching approach that would support Arrie in self-discovery, enabling Arrie to explore what leading as his authentic self might look like. We started by exploring three areas, which I will now share with you as self-coaching strategies to add to your virtual backpack. They are: values, strengths and purpose.

## Your values

Throughout your leadership journey it is important to be attuned to the values you wish to honour. Values are the principles that guide you in living your life. They provide you with a frame of beliefs to assist you with your decision-making.

Understanding which values are important to you provides a central premise for you to calibrate against in relation to your behaviours, emotions and thoughts. The more you mindfully connect with who you are and what you stand for, the easier it is to lead as yourself. The more in sync you are with your values, the easier it is to thread them through your life to support your leadership decisions and actions.

My values are very much shaped by my parents, who have strong values themselves. My parents were actively involved in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa in the 1960s (in the days of Nelson Mandela and Joe Slovo). As a result of the values-based choices they made they had to flee South Africa avoiding arrest, only to discover they were then banned from returning for 30 years. My Mum is a descendant of those impacted by the Holocaust. Both of her parents escaped the most tragic events of that time, yet not without losing multitudes of family members and friends to the death camps. This certainly shaped her values, and mine.

The values my parents instilled in me were those of humanity, compassion, equity, respect and attention to assumptions and biases. They taught me about curiosity, kindness and the strength of family. I have tried to live my life by these values and lead through my professional career with them in mind. These are the beliefs that centre me in the leadership decisions I make. I haven't always got this right; for example, sometimes I've been overcommitted with work, yet other times I've managed to integrate work and family time more effortlessly and mindfully. Because I know family is one of my values, this gives me a compass to guide my decisions and a touchstone to assess my choices against.

I'm always interested to learn which values my coachees wish to honour, as it provides us with a basis for reflection in our coaching conversations. As you step forward with a focus on leading as you, the first thing to consider is which of *your* values you wish to honour in your leadership.

Take some time now to think about the values or beliefs that are meaningful to you. You might want to reflect on your life experiences and what has shaped you. What do you feel strongly about? What shapes your decision-making? What do you feel as truth deep in your core? What informs you as to what is right and wrong? What is meaningful to you in how you live your life and how you show up as you lead? These are the values that guide you.

### **Self-coaching exercise**

Use Table 1 as a prompt to identify your key values. Circle your top five or add additional values to those listed, and then write them in your notebook so you can be mindful of the values that will shape you as you lead your way.

Knowing what you value at your core will assist you in leading as you. The more you are conscious of your belief structure, the easier it will be for you to shape your leadership decisions with these beliefs in mind. The practice of leading as you encourages increased connection with your values, which in turn increases your self-belief and self-assurance. You become more aware of who you are and what you stand for and are able to reflect this through your leadership actions, inspiring and motivating others around you. It also creates a more sustainable leadership model for you to enact. You represent yourself as you.

Be active in becoming more conscious of your values. Write your values on a sticky note and pin this to your desk, notice board, bathroom mirror or another other chosen space where you can read them daily. Hold your values close to the surface of your mind as you

## Leading as you

lead your way. In a short while you'll be amazed at how positively minded you feel as you connect with your values and lead as your best self.

Table 1: Values

Abundance	Achievement	Adventure
Affiliation	Altruism	Authenticity
Care	Challenge	Collaboration
Commitment	Community	Compassion
Connection	Control	Cooperation
Courage	Creativity	Curiosity
Discipline	Diversity	Drama
Empathy	Engagement	Environmental conservation
Equality	Equity	Fairness
Family	Financial wellbeing	Flexibility
Forgiveness	Friendship	Fulfilment
Fun	Generosity	Grace
Gratitude	Happiness	Harmony
Health	Honesty	Hope
Humanity	Independence	Individuality
Influence	Integrity	Kindness
Leadership	Learning	Love
Mattering	Meaning	Musicality
Optimism	Passion	Politics
Power	Presence	Purpose
Recognition	Respect	Security
Service	Sharing	Spirituality
Spontaneity	Support	Tradition
Trust	Wisdom	Wonder



## Your strengths

Strengths differ to values. Strengths are the things that feel effortless. They energise you and allow you to be at your best. When you are working to your strengths as your best self, you are more positively minded and resilient, and more open to possibilities. Your wellbeing improves. You are better able to solve complex problems and inspire, motivate and engage with yourself and others. You are better placed to lead as you – to lead with confidence and as your best self.

I love to encourage my coachees to draw upon their strengths to build their confidence. Typically my coachees are quick to tell me what they are *not* good at. However, once you focus on what strengthens you, on what supports you when you are at your best, you'll have a better understanding of yourself and draw positive energy from utilising your strengths.

When you recognise your strengths, you will increase your capacity to face differing situations. You can dial your strengths up or down when appropriate to support yourself. The first step is to establish what your key strengths are.

### Self-coaching exercise

In your notebook, fill in the columns in Table 2. Be generous with yourself. Fill the page with as many examples as possible. This is your truth!

What you have listed represents you at your best – your expertise, your key experiences and your best interactions and relationships. Reflecting on this, identify your key strengths, which should now be apparent. Complete your own version of the example in Table 3 in your notebook. This reflects your key strengths that come to mind when you are at your best. You can use the table of strengths (Table 4 overleaf) to help you identify your corresponding strengths.

Table 2: My expertise and powers

What is my expertise?	What are my experiential powers?	What are my social powers?
List all of your qualifications, diplomas, degrees, courses and key certificates.	List the experiences that represent you at your best (for instance, promotions, particular roles you have fulfilled, winning proposals, great presentations, awesome reports you've written, successful negotiations, times you have delivered tough feedback, complex problems you have solved, successful teams you have built and so on).	List the interactions and responsibilities that represent you as your best social self (for instance, you're a great parent, fun partner, kind friend, volunteer, sportsperson, artist, singer, community member and so on).

Table 3: My strengths – example

My strengths	Examples of when my strengths arise
Sound judgement	This arises during key negotiations and interactions with my stakeholders. It has helped me position myself for opportunities.
Driven	I am able to achieve goals, as represented by the completion of my masters degree.
Kindness	My kindness comes through in setting kind business objectives, and also being available to help family and friends in need.
Rapport-builder	I quickly build rapport with those I coach, both in a professional and voluntary capacity, which supports relationship formation.
Organised	My organisational skills have supported me with my many roles and goals.

## Be Your Own Leadership Coach

Table 4: Strengths

Able to see the big picture	Accountable	Adaptable
Agile	Approachable	Cautious
Coach	Collaborative	Commercially minded
Compassionate	Competitive	Considered
Courageous	Culturally aware	Curious
Decisive	Detail-oriented	Diligent
Driven	Effective communicator	Empathic
Enabler	Energetic	Generous
Good memory	Heavy lifter	Honest
Hopeful	Humorous	Ideator
Inclusive	Influencer	Innovative
Inquisitive	Inspirational	Instinctive
Intellectually astute	Intuitive	Kind
Listener	Market-maker	Mentally tough
Mentor	Motivator	Narrator
Observant	Optimistic	Organised
Patient	Persuasive	Playful
Pragmatic	Proactive	Problem-solver
Rapport-builder	Relatable	Relationship-builder
Reliable	Resilient	Responsive
Risk-alert	Self-aware	Self-confident
Sociable	Sound judgement	Storyteller
Strong leader	Strong work ethic	Team-builder
Technically proficient	Trustworthy	Values-driven

Once you have completed this exercise, grab your phone and take a photo of the page in your notebook. Create an album in your photos app called 'me' and relocate the photo to this album. We are always on the go, so the likelihood of you finding this photo in the future will diminish unless you are deliberate about filing it. Having it located on your phone helps you access your view of you at your best, your list of strengths, as frequently as you need to boost your confidence and remind you of all the great things you have done and represent. This page of strengths is a factual representation of you as your best self. When you have a shaky crisis of confidence as a leader, use it to remind yourself of the person you are. You should be proud of what you have achieved and what you represent!

## Your purpose

If you really want to take big strides as a leader you must consider and articulate your purpose. When you approach your leadership role knowing what is important to you, why you choose to do what you do, why you are significant and why you matter in doing what you do, you will increase meaning, self-efficacy, motivation and capacity for engagement. You will experience increased positive emotions such as hope, optimism and inspiration. You will be better placed to tackle the complex problems you exist to solve as you will be more open to possibilities.

In my experience, people find it quite challenging to define their purpose and why they matter. Not many of my coachees jump up and say, 'I've got this!' before rattling off their purpose. More often than not, coachees will skip over their *why* – their purpose – and talk instead about *what* they do. The *what* is important, but it has more impact if you can give it meaning – if you can lift it from the tactical, operational day-to-day to something more intrinsic and meaningful to you.

I take inspiration from the work of leadership expert Zach Mercurio, who helped me better understand how to determine my purpose. Mercurio speaks of identifying the world problem you exist

to solve, which will help you determine why you matter.<sup>4</sup> He defines authentic purpose as your ‘genuine and unique reason for existence that is useful to others in society.’<sup>5</sup> He further explains that when you believe you matter in fulfilling this reason for existence, you take responsibility for achieving the resulting impact on the world, and that’s where your purpose lies.

When I thought about it from this perspective, I discovered I knew my purpose the whole time. I had been working towards fulfilling my purpose, yet I hadn’t articulated it very well. As a result, my purpose sat well below the surface of my consciousness and I focused too much on ticking off my goals, rather than approaching my work in a meaningful way. Once I stopped to realise why I coach and why I matter, the way I led changed. Articulating my purpose helped me shape my goals to support me directionally towards what was most meaningful to me.

Using your systems mindset and following Mercurio’s work, you can recognise that everything you do, every job you hold, every company that operates, every government that legislates is focused on solving human problems. Once you realise that you exist to solve a human problem, it becomes easier to articulate your purpose – why the work you do, the leadership you bring, is of significance and matters. Your ‘mattering’ is connected to your purpose.<sup>6</sup> You can then curate your goals to reflect the importance of the problem you are trying to solve.

For example, my problem statement sounds something like this: ‘Globally we experience inequity in the designation of male and female corporate leaders. Women’s participation in corporate decision-making is not on par with their male counterparts.’

My leadership coaching supports women’s full and effective participation in corporate leadership. It encourages equitable opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, social, economic and public life. My coaching work supports the creation of improved work practices and helps develop kind leaders who create

opportunities *for all*. The ripple effect of this makes the world a better place. This is why I matter. This is my purpose. I am significant in fulfilling this given my leadership and coaching expertise; I can bring unique insights and perspective, be empathic and compassionate, and act in support of others towards resolving this human problem.

Let's play with some more examples to further illustrate purpose.

It may be that your job is to lead a consumer business organisation. You are ensuring the creation of goods for consumption by the community. You are fulfilling a demand for a human need, whether that be food, cleaning products, packaging products or other consumer goods. Your organisation is helping the community live a better life through access to quality, safe and reliable goods, and is improving people's wellbeing. This is the human problem you are solving. You are significant in solving this human problem given your understanding of the industry, your strategic thinking, your support of research and development and your leadership skills. This is why you matter.

Perhaps you lead a financial services organisation. You are ensuring the community's financial wellbeing through the safe and effective distribution of funds, allowing for a functioning economy, which provides financial stability and wellbeing. This is the human problem you are solving. You are significant given your financial background, your deep understanding of global financial instruments, your ability to solve complex problems and your leadership skills. That is why you matter.

### **Self-coaching exercise**

Ask yourself the following three questions, as Mercurio suggests, to determine your purpose:

1. What is the human problem that exists that you are here to solve?
2. Why are you significant in solving this human problem?
3. Why do you matter?<sup>7</sup>

You have just described your purpose. Write it down in your notebook.

Now that you know your purpose – the particular direction in which you are headed and why it is meaningful to you – your focus will be sharpened. You will use your precious time more effectively, devoting more energy to the things that matter and less to the things that don't. You will build your confidence by understanding the reasons you're doing what you plan to do.

If you know your purpose you can share why your goals are meaningful and impactful, which is likely to inspire others and create a deeper understanding of why you lead your way. It will assist you in leading others, providing a navigational focus that others may be inspired by and motivated to work towards with you.

## Your leadership shadow

All leaders cast a leadership shadow. Your shadow is a reflection of how you act, what you represent and what you role model. It's what people around you notice of you, and it can affect them positively or negatively. Your leadership shadow reflects your leadership intention. It is shaped by your values, strengths and purpose and how you bring all of them together in your behaviours, emotions and thoughts.

Now that you have a clearer understanding of what you stand for, the strengths you can draw upon to be your best self, and what matters to you, you can be more conscious of the shadow you cast. You can role model what it means to lead as you and positively influence, inspire and motivate with this in mind.

You can set the stage. You can demonstrate what it means to lead with authenticity, making values-based decisions and setting purpose-based goals. You can become more deliberate in how you lead. You can lead with greater consistency as you now better understand the basis from which you lead. Better still, you can lead with more confidence and as you lead as *you* – as your best self.

## Self-coaching summary

- ◆ Leading as you allows you to lead with your values in mind, towards what matters most to you, using your strengths to support you.
- ◆ It's *your* leadership journey. Empower yourself to make choices about where you are headed and why. You can lead *your* way.
- ◆ Recognising what matters to you and why gives you meaning and can support you in selecting meaningful, purposeful and fulfilling goals.
- ◆ Once you understand your purpose you can mindfully cast your leadership shadow and positively influence, inspire and motivate others as you lead as your best self.