There is nowhere quite like London property. Even seasoned developers and asset managers, who have worked cycles from Canary Wharf to Clerkenwell, admit the city never stops surprising them. Planning varies not just by borough, but by conservation area and street. Yields compress and decompress quickly when overseas capital changes course. A tube map extension, a school catchment shift, or a new food hall can reroute footfall and raise ERVs by double digits. The leaders who thrive here combine decisiveness with patience, and they keep a learning posture even after a decade or two in the chair.

As a Leadership Coach focused on real estate, what I see most often is not a lack of intelligence or capital. It is friction. Decision loops that take too long. Teams waiting for perfect data. Negotiations where everyone loses a little faith each week and the deal dies from timeline slip rather than price. The antidote is not another spreadsheet. It is better leadership operating systems, clear rituals, and an unflinching view of trade offs.

## A London frame of reference

Markets write the rules. London writes them in pencil. In the Central Activities Zone you can watch office ERVs diverge by 30 percent within a ten minute walk. A Grade A, small floorplate building near a high amenity cluster with strong transport links can still command premium rents, particularly if the landlord invests to hit EPC B or better and offers flexible space downstairs. Two blocks away, a 1980s spec, deep floorplate asset with limited natural light may struggle unless repositioned to life sciences or media friendly layouts.

On the residential side, the story is equally granular. The same build to rent scheme can outperform if it wins planning for a roof terrace with views and a dog wash station, or underperform if bin stores and cycle parking eat into lettable space without a matching uplift in achievable rents. Developers chasing permitted development rights from Class E to residential still have to meet daylight, noise, and space standards. It is doable, and in some fringe office locations it is the best exit, but the underwriting needs to respect what tenants will accept in a 36 square meter studio versus what looks good in a valuation report.

London leaders who do well read these details, then set up their teams to act on them with speed.

## The cadence problem

I sat with a CEO in Marylebone not long ago. Strong assets, strong lenders, weak rhythm. Monday management meetings ran to two hours, covered everything, and moved nothing. The transactions director would talk in generalities about three offices in Victoria, a retail asset in Hounslow, and a JV in Stratford. The leasing team, waiting for guidance on incentives, went back to agencies with vague messages. Two weeks lost. Then six.

We threw out the agenda. We built a pipeline room with a physical war board that showed, asset by asset, the next two constrained decisions. Rent free months on Floor Five. Whether to accept a green lease clause that pushed through more capex in year one. Whether to spin out an SPV to bring in a family office on the Stratford JV. Suddenly meetings were 35 minutes. Decisions landed on the day. The board stopped rerunning the same debates. Within a quarter, average void down by four weeks across five buildings. That is the work of leadership, not luck.

## What an Executive Coach watches for

Real estate firms grow lopsided. The development arm can become heroic while asset management atrophies. Or the capital raising machine gets ahead of delivery and internal trust suffers. An Executive Coach who knows property reads the pattern before it turns into a story about culture.

I will often shadow two or three meetings, not to critique content, but to map flow and authority. Who speaks first when a letting falls through. How your head of leasing briefs the agent on valuation versus cash flow. Whether your CFO has permission to push back on glossy capex plans with a hard NPV and a stress test at 100 basis points wider exit yield. If I see good people swallowing their point, I know your IRR is already lower than your spreadsheet suggests.

## Leadership Training that fits the asset

Generic leadership courses fail because they ignore the asset class. Training that moves the needle for a London office REIT looks different from what a build to rent operator needs. For offices, your leaders must be excellent at skewing spec toward target occupiers, and they need comfort with green clauses, EPC trajectories, and fit out responsibilities. They also need to understand that energy performance is not just a compliance box, it is a leasing lever. Achieving EPC B is still a moving policy conversation in the UK, but many corporate occupiers already require high ratings in their internal policies, and some list it in their RFPs.

For residential, customer service and community programming drive renewals. A block with 91 percent occupancy at year one can lift to 95 percent by year three with the right events, maintenance response times under 24 hours, and a digital portal that actually works. Leadership Training for that team should focus on operational cadence, frontline empowerment to solve problems on first contact, and local marketing that resonates in that postcode rather than generic national campaigns.

## A coaching lens on planning

You can be the bravest leader in London and still get planning wrong. The fix is not to become a planner, it is to create a leadership pattern that hears constraints early, brings in the right advisors, and stages capital sensibly.

I remember a mixed use scheme in a Zone 2 conservation area. The principal wanted a rooftop pavilion with panoramic views for a members club anchor. Romantic, bankable in a brochure, and a non starter at the committee unless massing and sightlines respected adjacent heritage assets. We ran a pre app, accepted a slightly smaller pavilion, invested in superior materials on the lower levels to win the design praise we needed, and leaned hard into active frontages. The pavilion came back in a later phase after we had delivered public realm improvements and built credibility. The lesson was not aesthetic, it was governance. Take the win that gets you on site, pitch for the cherry once you are a known quantity.

Leaders who react emotionally to planning risk tend to create a culture of wishful drawings and adversarial meetings. Leaders who convert planning into a staged negotiation protect time. They set planning risk budgets, not just fee budgets, and they demand scenario analysis that shows how the scheme holds if the second staircase guidance tightens or if unit mix shifts toward dual aspect requirements.

## Agency is not a substitute for leadership

Agency relationships matter in London. The best leasing agents can save you months and help you avoid tenant covenants that look fine until the first market shock. But too many executive teams hand them a brief that would confuse a saint. If you want top quartile outcomes, brief like a top quartile owner.

That means writing a one page proposition that spells out what we are and what we are not. We are a design led, amenity rich office building within a three minute walk of two lines, with concierge and showers, and we will target media, tech, and boutique finance. We are not a price leader. We do not accept strip out clauses that leave us with dead CapEx. Your rent free points are pre authorized within a corridor. Your marketing budget is ring fenced and not a debate for each viewing. Then you run weekly check ins that measure qualified tours, second tours, and offers received, with reasons for loss logged and learned.

A Business Coach can build this discipline with your leasing lead in a month. The point is not control for its own sake. It is trajectory. A building with a narrative, clear incentives, and decision rights at the right level moves faster than a building with a board that wants to be consulted on every T and C.

## Capital partners and the politics of patience

If your equity is local and your debt is from a UK clearing bank, you know the cadence. If your equity sits in Qatar or Canada and your debt is a debt fund priced off SONIA with a margin spread that bites if covenants trip, your leadership challenge is different. You manage not only returns, but expectations across time zones and governance cultures.

One client running a mixed portfolio in outer London missed three quarterly updates in a row because the numbers were uncertain. The instinct was defensible. Do not report until we are sure. The consequence was a drop in trust. We rebuilt reporting as a range based practice. If ERVs are in flux, present P50 and P10/P90. If yields are widening, show what a 25 basis point shift does to equity. Send the slide deck 24 hours early. Take the pain of the conversation today, buy breathing room for the decision you need next month.

An Executive Coach can help an MD rehearse these conversations. Not because the MD cannot do maths, but because pressure narrows tone and posture. The goal is to build a leader who can be calm, precise, and transparent even when news lands badly.

## ESG, MEES, and the leasing leverage of performance

Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards have teeth. Since April 2023, most commercial properties in England and Wales cannot be let if they are below EPC E, subject to exemptions. The policy path toward higher standards, including proposals discussed to reach EPC B by 2030, has been fluid. Regardless of the final regulatory endpoint, occupiers are already using energy ratings and operational performance in their selection criteria.

This is not just a capex story. Leaders who treat EPC and operational energy as a leasing thesis outperform. We built a program for a mid market landlord with twelve buildings. We prioritised deep interventions on four, where the cost to reach EPC B looked efficient, and targeted C or better on the rest with smart controls, LED, and fabric upgrades. In parallel, we trained leasing teams to tell the energy story in tenant language. Estimated annual energy cost per square foot. Carbon intensity paths. Green lease clauses framed as shared value rather than landlord burden. Within eighteen months, the four flagship buildings let faster with less incentive drift, and renewals elsewhere improved because tenants saw a plan, not promises.

## The discipline of pricing and incentives

London tenants are savvy, and agents are paid to test your conviction. If your rent free corridor is 12 to 18 months on a five year term with break at year three, decide where you want to land for each tenant type before the first tour. Tie higher rent free to specific commitments, like green fit out standards or a longer term. Link capital contributions to work that improves the building in an enduring way. Insist on a modest service charge narrative that will not collapse at the first roof issue. Most of this is unglamorous. It is also where you make or lose the second percent that moves your IRR from acceptable to strong.

A coach can run table Business Executive Coaching top simulations with your leasing and legal teams. We run mock negotiations on a whiteboard with a plausible counterparty. We track where you concede first, and we build playbooks so your defaults align with strategy. After three sessions, patterns emerge. Some teams over index on rental headline and give away dilapidations. Others panic at quiet periods and over extend incentives. Getting conscious of these tendencies is half the fix.

## A short field checklist for London real estate leaders

- Prepare a one page proposition for each asset that your team and agents can recite from memory.
- Decide rent free and capex contribution corridors in advance, with clear triggers.
- Run pre app planning meetings early, then stage capital to match planning risk, not optimism.
- Publish a monthly pipeline board with the next two decisions per asset and exact owners.
- Build a simple ESG plan per building, including a narrative your leasing team can sell.

## Recruiting and building a bench

The London market will expose weak benches. You need people with judgment, not only credentials. When I interview heads of asset management, I ask for three micro decisions from their last quarter. Not the heroic repositioning, but the call they made on a 500,000 pound capex line item, the negotiation they led on a service charge dispute, and the way they handled a late rent escalation review. If they answer with generalities, they do not yet have a hand on the wheel.

Bronwyn Leigh Crawford Leadership Training and Coaching
43 Upper Park Rd
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 2EG
United Kingdom

Phone: +44 7503 082377

Training sits next to recruiting, not behind it. Too many principals hire a head of development, assume excellence, and step back. Then twelve months later, a design and build contract has soft spots, the PC date slips, and claims soak up attention. Leadership Training for that head might include contract walk throughs with your legal advisors, site meeting role plays where they push back on schedule optimism, and sessions on cash flow phasing and bank reporting. You do not diminish seniority by offering training. You raise the game.

## Where data helps and where it hinders

I like data. I also like speed. Leaders get paid to know when more data adds clarity and when it adds comfort. For lettings, we track tour to offer ratios, reasons for loss, incentive drift by quarter, and days between first tour and HOTs. For development, we track change order volumes and causes, design freeze integrity, and variation costs as a percentage of contract value. For finance, we watch interest cover and debt yield headroom with a stress test slider for SONIA.

What I resist is the false certainty of overly engineered dashboards. I watched a team build a 60 metric reporting pack that no one read. They were doing the work of reassurance rather than management. We stripped it to eight vital signs. Meetings improved within a week.

## Negotiation as a core leadership skill

London teaches negotiation. You negotiate with planners, with lenders, with tenants, with neighbors, with your own board. The mistake is to treat each negotiation as a separate theater. Style should be consistent, adapted only for audience. You want a reputation for being quick, fair, and unbluffable.

A simple practice helps. Before any material negotiation, write a one page brief that sets your BATNA, your tradeable variables, your must haves, and your likely pressure points. I coach leaders to do this out loud with their number two, then we flip the table and argue the counterparty’s case. Half the surprises in negotiation are self inflicted. Once you hear your own weak points from the other side, you prepare better.

There are London specifics worth noting. Noise and servicing hours can kill a retail deal near residential blocks. Rights of light can halt or reshape a scheme long after you thought it was safe. The Construction Logistics Plan can sink goodwill with the borough if you disregard school routes. These are not details to delegate entirely. A director who visits site, who knows the deliveries schedule, who shakes hands with the local trader who worries about dust, will handle objections faster and with more grace. Teams copy that behavior.

## When to use external advisors, and how

Bring in specialists early, then lead them. Energy consultants to map EPC paths. Rights of light surveyors before you fall in love with massing. Planning consultants who can read the mood of a committee, not just the letter of policy. But make sure your team owns the brief. Advisory teams work best with clear questions and a sense of how their advice will be used. I have seen too many owners abdicate, then grow resentful when advice hedges. Advisors hedge because reality hedges. Leaders translate hedges into decisions.

An Executive Coach can run the tender process for you once, set standards, and teach your team to run it after. We design scoring matrices that weight local track record, speed of response, and clarity of deliverables. We time box the pre contract phase. We agree on communication cadences. Then we step back.

## Risk, resilience, and the cash cushion

Cycles always arrive on their own schedule. The leaders who sleep better keep a cash cushion that is real, not theoretical. Debt maturities get attention, but covenant headroom and interest rate hedging need equal focus. If you have a large floating rate exposure, map your sensitivity to 50 and 100 basis point moves and decide what pain you will accept versus what you will hedge. If your debt fund has a cash sweep clause that activates on ICR, plan for it. Do not treat it as a remote risk. On one portfolio we simulated two quarters of lower rent collection and a 25 basis point outward yield shift on valuation. The sweep tripped in the model, not the real world, because we revised leasing targets and protected free cash earlier.

Resilience is a team sport. You want the finance lead, the leasing lead, and the development lead telling the same story internally. If one of them is optimistic while another is guarded, teams receive mixed signals and slow down.

## The human side of speed

The most subtle leadership skill in London property is pacing. Too slow and you get gazumped by the market. Too fast and you make promises your team cannot deliver. The mark of maturity is the ability to create clean sprints with real recovery. On a live repositioning, we run six week cycles. Week one sets plan and constraints, weeks two to five deliver, week six reviews and resets. We track two decisions per asset per cycle. The effect is cumulative. Staff stop saving hard questions for the board. They bring them forward, because the cadence promises a decision point soon enough to matter.

Burnout is real in this city, particularly during planning crunches and financing sprints. I watch for eye contact drifting in meetings, for brittle responses to minor queries, for the telltale Monday morning fatigue that follows a weekend of unstructured firefighting. The fix is not a meditation app. It is better scoping, fewer meetings, and clear authority lines. The way you run a Tuesday decides how healthy your Friday is.

## A five step coaching cadence that sticks

- Diagnose the decision system, not the people. Map who owns what, where delays live, and how information flows.
- Install a visible pipeline. Two decisions per asset, owners named, dates locked.
- Rehearse key negotiations. Build playbooks, practice tone, and review after action.
- Align capital narratives. Range based reporting, sent early, with scenarios pre discussed.
- Refresh the bench. Clarify roles, upgrade where needed, and invest in focused Leadership Training.

## A note on culture that pays

Culture looks fluffy until it shows up in a tender. One client ran a design competition for a difficult site near a station. The winning architect did not have the longest credentials, but the team understood the neighborhood, listened well, and presented trade offs plainly. We picked them because we trusted them to be partners through committee and value engineering. Twelve months on, planning was secured with conditions we could live with, and design intent survived the contractor's cost plan. That is culture paying a dividend.

Internally, the owner set a tone I have come to admire. They run short, frequent stand ups. They write short memos. They celebrate shipping, not talking. They treat mistakes as tuition they would like to pay only once. Staff retention sits high, agency relationships are healthier, and lenders pick up their calls. That is leadership exercised daily, not demanded at quarterly offsites.

## How a Business Coach earns their keep

The return on a Business Coach seems soft until you list what the work touches. Faster decisions reduce voids. Better negotiations improve net effective rents. Cleaner planning pathways lower professional fees and contingency draws. Stronger capital communications protect options when you need them. In London, where a week lost can cost six figures across a portfolio, speed with judgment becomes quantifiable.

A capable coach will bring frameworks, but they will also bring the muscle memory of deals they have watched rise and falter. They will remind you to insist on noise and dust management plans early to protect neighborhood goodwill. They will ask for a rights of light update before you spend money on a CGI that no longer reflects likely massing. They will help your CFO tell a story about hedging that a private investor in Dubai or a pension fund in Toronto understands without a second read.

The work is practical. It smells of meetings that end on time, of term sheets that close, of plans that get built. It shows up in the smile of a leasing agent who knows what they can trade, and in the nod of a councillor who has seen your project team walk the high street and listen. It is not magic. It is leadership, trained and practiced, in a city that rewards it.

## Closing thoughts from the field

If I had to compress two decades of lessons for London real estate leaders, they would sound like this. Do not let planning chase perfect drawings into late capital. Respect energy performance because tenants already do. Give your agents a proposition that travels from Shoreditch to Soho without translation. Keep your board brief honest, early, and range based. Measure the work that predicts outcomes, not simply the outcomes that flatter reports. And, perhaps most important, build a cadence that turns smart people into a smart team.

The city will keep moving. New lines will open, demand will tilt from one cluster to another, and policy will evolve. Leaders who handle that movement with clarity and steadiness will keep finding good ground to build on. The craft is not in guessing the future. It is in creating an organization that moves well when the future arrives.