## Spotting Typical Victim Language and Behavior-Coaching to Agency

Here's a realistic, psychologically grounded coaching conversation a manager can use. It's designed to *shift mindset*, not lecture—moving the employee from external blame ("victim orientation") to ownership and choice ("agency") through questions, reflection, and small commitments.

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**Coaching Conversation: Victim → Agency**

**Context:** Employee has been expressing frustration, blaming others/circumstances.

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**Manager:**
Hey, I wanted to check in about what you shared earlier. It sounds like things have been frustrating lately. Can you walk me through what's been going on from your perspective?

**Employee:**
Yeah, it just feels like nothing is in my control. Other teams don't respond, priorities keep changing... I can't really get anything done.

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**Step 1: Acknowledge without reinforcing victimhood**

**Manager:**
That does sound frustrating—especially when you're trying to move things forward and feel blocked.

*(Pause—let them feel heard, but don't agree that they're powerless.)*

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**Step 2: Surface the pattern gently**

**Manager:**
I'm noticing something I want to explore with you. A lot of what you're describing are things outside your control—other teams, shifting priorities. Would you say that's where most of your attention has been?

**Employee:**
Yeah... because that's what's causing the problem.

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**Step 3: Introduce agency (without blame)**

**Manager:**
That makes sense. At the same time, when everything sits outside our control, it can leave us stuck.
I'm curious—if we zoom in just a bit—what parts of this situation *are* within your influence, even if they're small?

*(Let them think. Silence is useful here.)*

**Employee:**
I mean… I guess I could follow up more? Or escalate earlier?

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**Step 4: Reinforce agency thinking**

**Manager:**
That's a good start. You just named two things already: follow-ups and escalation. What else might be in your control—how you communicate, how you prioritize, how you set expectations?

**Employee:**
Yeah… I could probably be clearer upfront about timelines instead of assuming people know.

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**Step 5: Shift identity from reactive → proactive**

**Manager:**
That's an important shift. The goal isn't to control everything—it's to operate from *choice* where you can.
If you approached this situation as someone who *owns the outcome*, what would you do differently starting this week?

**Employee:**
I'd probably set clearer deadlines, check in earlier, and not wait as long before flagging issues.

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**Step 6: Make it concrete and actionable**

**Manager:**
Great. Let's make that specific so it sticks.
What's one situation coming up where you can apply this?

**Employee:**
The project with the product team—I've been waiting on them.

**Manager:**
Perfect. What will you do differently there?

**Employee:**
I'll send a clear follow-up today with a deadline and let them know I'll escalate if I don't hear back.

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**Step 7: Build ownership + confidence**

**Manager:**
That's strong. Notice how that shifts things—you're no longer waiting, you're leading the process.
How confident do you feel about doing that?

**Employee:**
Pretty confident, actually.

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**Step 8: Close with reinforcement of agency mindset**

**Manager:**
Good. And just to be clear—there will *always* be things outside your control. But high performers focus on what they *can* influence and expand that over time.

Let's check back after you try this. I'm interested to see what changes when you take that approach.

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**Why this works**

- **Validation without collusion:** Acknowledges frustration but doesn't agree they're powerless
- **Attention shift:** Moves focus from external barriers → internal choices
- **Questions over directives:** The employee generates their own agency

- **Small wins:** Builds momentum through one actionable change
- **Identity shift:** From “things happen to me” → “I influence outcomes.”