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INSIGHTS, IDEAS, INSPIRATIONS

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PRESENTS



TO

AYEESHA S. KANJI

FOUNDER,
CHESTNUTS COACHING & CONSULTING

FOR BEING FEATURED AS

MOST INSPIRING BUSINESS WOMAN 2026



Sarath Shyam
SARATH SHYAM
Managing Editor



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BUSINESS WOMAN
2026**

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A2D Hospitality

Ayesha S. Kanji
Founder,
Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting

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BUSINESS LEADER
2026**

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Managing Partner,
Gershon Consulting



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AI Data Center Integration,
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Santander Digital Services

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STANDARD BANK GROUP**

**THE DISCIPLINE OF
BECOMING A LEADER**



CXO OUTLOOK

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March 2026

Vol - 7 Issue - 3

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**MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS WOMAN
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Ayeesha S. Kanji

FOUNDER, CHESTNUTS COACHING & CONSULTING

HELPING LEADERS FIND CLARITY, CONFIDENCE AND GROWTH IN MOMENTS OF CHANGE

Leadership rarely begins with strategy documents or boardroom presentations. More often, it begins in quieter moments of reflection, when leaders pause to examine how they think, decide, and show up for others. For Ayeesha S. Kanji, those moments of reflection eventually led to the creation of Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting, a leadership advisory firm dedicated to helping executives and senior professionals develop clarity, resilience, and authenticity in the way they lead.

Ayeesha founded Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting after years of working closely with leaders facing demanding transitions in both their professional and personal lives. During

that time, she noticed a recurring gap. Many accomplished professionals had access to strategy, data, and technical expertise. What they often lacked was a space to think more deeply about their own leadership.

Through years of conversations with executives confronting complex decisions and organizational change, Ayeesha began to recognize an important truth about leadership development. Real progress rarely started with frameworks or planning documents. Instead, it emerged from a deeper understanding of oneself and one's values. As she explains, "The most meaningful change in leadership rarely begins with a spreadsheet or a strategy deck. It begins with self-awareness."



AYEESHA S. KANJI,
FOUNDER, CHESTNUTS COACHING & CONSULTING



Today, Ayesha partners with executives around the world, helping them face complex leadership decisions with greater clarity and purpose while encouraging a more grounded and authentic approach to leadership within their organizations

That realization became the starting point for a different kind of leadership practice. Ayesha set out to create a platform where senior professionals could explore the internal side of leadership in a structured but deeply human way. Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting was built on a simple belief: lasting leadership growth happens when people reconnect with clarity, purpose, and courage. “My work centers on supporting leaders as they navigate complex decisions, organizational change, and the personal demands that come with positions of influence and responsibility,” Ayesha says.

Even the firm’s name captures this philosophy. “Chestnuts evoke warmth, resilience, and nourishment, qualities that mirror the kind of growth I hope to cultivate in leaders,” she shares. The image also carries a deeper meaning. Just as a chestnut develops quietly before emerging strong and sustaining, leadership growth often unfolds beneath the surface before it becomes visible in action.

That perspective now informs the work she does with leaders across industries. Today, Ayesha partners with executives around the world, helping them face complex leadership

decisions with greater clarity and purpose while encouraging a more grounded and authentic approach to leadership within their organizations.

Building Leadership from the Inside Out

When Ayesha launched Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting, her goal was clear. She wanted to address a gap she had observed repeatedly in leadership development. Many leadership programs focused on performance metrics and standardized frameworks. Ayesha believed leadership development needed to go deeper.

“Many coaching and advisory services focus on performance metrics or surface-level leadership frameworks. While those tools have value, they often overlook the internal dynamics that shape how leaders make decisions, communicate, and build culture,” she explains.

Ayesha’s work was designed to help leaders move beyond managing results and toward developing the emotional intelligence, resilience, and self-awareness required to lead with authenticity. For her, the objective was never simply to produce more efficient managers. “The goal was not to produce better managers,

but more conscious leaders,” she says. That belief continues to underpin the philosophy behind Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting.

Her approach has also been honed by experience across international environments and diverse professional contexts. Working with leaders from different industries and cultures has given Ayesha a broad view of the pressures executives face in rapidly evolving organizations. She partners closely with executives, entrepreneurs, and leadership teams to strengthen self-awareness, refine leadership presence, and develop the emotional intelligence required to lead effectively through uncertainty.

Establishing credibility in a competitive coaching and consulting market was not easy. Large firms already occupied much of the space, supported by brand recognition and expansive service offerings. Ayesha chose not to compete on scale. Instead, she focused on depth.

In the early stages of the firm, she invested significant time in building genuine relationships

with clients and demonstrating results through the work itself. Trust, thoughtful engagement, and real transformation became the foundation of her reputation. Over time, word of mouth carried the story forward, helping Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting develop a distinct identity within the leadership advisory landscape.

Ayesha also made a deliberate choice about how the firm would position itself. Rather than operating as a traditional consulting practice built on standardized models, she designed Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting as a partner in leadership evolution. The work is intentionally personal and adaptive. Much of it takes place in focused one-on-one engagements with leaders and small executive teams, where conversations often extend beyond strategy into the deeper shifts required to lead effectively.

That human-centered approach allowed the firm to occupy a space that blends executive coaching, leadership advisory, and personal transformation. This is a model of self-



Ayesha works closely with leaders to help them examine their leadership patterns, navigate pressure with greater clarity, and cultivate healthier organizational cultures

awareness, dialogue, and practical insight. It resonates with leaders who are looking for a different way to lead, rather than just another framework.

Coaching Leaders Through Clarity and Change

Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting operates on a coaching philosophy rooted in introspection, thoughtful strategy, and practical leadership application. Ayesha works closely with leaders to help them examine their leadership patterns, navigate pressure with greater clarity, and cultivate healthier organizational cultures. Her approach does not rely on rigid formulas or prescribed leadership models. “Rather than offering prescriptive formulas, I work alongside leaders to uncover insights that lead to sustainable and meaningful growth,” Ayesha explains.

For many of the executives she coaches, the results appear first in subtle shifts. Leaders begin

to communicate more clearly, make decisions with greater confidence, and create stronger alignment within their teams. Over time, those changes translate into stronger collaboration, improved decision-making, and more cohesive leadership structures.

Yet Ayesha believes the most significant transformations often occur beneath the surface. Leaders become more aware of how their behavior influences others. They gain a clearer understanding of their values and how those values shape their decisions. She notes, “I am deeply committed to helping leaders lead with purpose, integrity, and confidence. My coaching supports individuals who want not only to succeed professionally but also to lead in ways that positively shape the people, teams, and organizations around them.”

One engagement in particular stands out in her experience. A senior executive approached Ayesha during a period of intense organizational growth. On paper, the company was thriving.

Revenue was strong, and expansion was moving quickly. Internally, however, the leadership team was struggling with pressure, fatigue, and communication breakdowns.

Through their work together, the focus expanded beyond operational strategy. Ayesha encouraged the executive to examine their personal relationship with responsibility, delegation, and trust. Those conversations gradually helped the leader clarify their own leadership philosophy.

Over time, the shift became visible across the organization. The executive began rebuilding stronger connections with the leadership team, improving communication and redistributing responsibility more effectively. What began as a leadership challenge evolved into a deeper transformation.

The results were not limited to operational improvements. The change was personal, and that shift ultimately reshaped the organization's culture. It also reinforced a lesson that continues to guide Ayesha's work today. When leaders grow in self-awareness and clarity, the impact rarely stays confined to the individual. It spreads through teams, decisions, and the culture of the entire organization.

Understanding the Human Side of Leadership

When Ayesha begins working with senior leaders, she does not start with frameworks or performance dashboards. Her first focus is observation. Over the course of early conversations, she watches closely how leaders respond to pressure, uncertainty, and conflict. "Leadership often magnifies personal habits. How someone handles conflict, feedback, or ambiguity can reveal underlying patterns that

influence their effectiveness," Ayesha explains. For her, these observations are not meant to critique. They are starting points for reflection.

Ayesha also pays close attention to how leaders engage with the people around them. She listens for cues in how they describe their teams and observes whether they create space for open dialogue. Do they truly listen, or do they simply wait to respond? Do their decisions uphold the values they speak about publicly? These small signals often reveal where meaningful change can begin.

Resistance is another dynamic she frequently encounters. It rarely appears as open disagreement. More often, it surfaces quietly. Many accomplished leaders understand the importance of reflection and personal growth, yet they struggle to slow down long enough to engage in it. High achievers are accustomed to solving problems externally. Turning inward can feel unfamiliar.

Ayesha approaches that hesitation with patience. Rather than pushing leaders toward immediate answers, she creates space for thoughtful exploration. "My role is to create a space where leaders feel safe examining their assumptions and habits without judgment," she says. Through careful questioning and honest dialogue, resistance often begins to soften. Curiosity takes its place, and that is where meaningful change begins.

Ayesha's outlook on leadership has also been informed by her experiences across different cultures, industries, and professional environments. Working with leaders from varied backgrounds has reinforced a clear insight for her. Leadership cannot be reduced to a single model or universal framework. "Leadership is rarely one-dimensional. It is



shaped by context, identity, values, and personal history," Ayesha says. This perspective guides how she approaches her work. Instead of relying on rigid frameworks, she engages leaders with empathy and curiosity, recognizing that each leader's journey is distinct and that meaningful development must account for those differences.

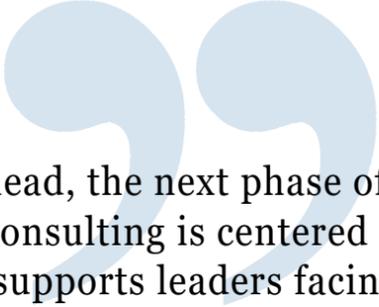
In many ways, this philosophy defines the work she does today. Leadership development, in her view, is not about correcting weaknesses. It is about helping leaders understand themselves more clearly so they can lead others with greater intention.

Expanding the Impact of Leadership

Since its founding, Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting has steadily evolved. What began as a practice focused primarily on individual executive coaching has grown into a broader leadership advisory platform. Today, the firm supports leaders and organizations as they meet the challenges of transition, expansion, and cultural change.

With that growth has come a shift in perspective. In its early stages, the firm concentrated on helping individual leaders find clarity in their roles. Over time, Ayesha began to see how those personal shifts often extended far beyond the individual. When leaders develop deeper awareness and intention, their decisions begin to influence the culture of entire organizations.

This realization gradually influenced the direction of the firm. Leadership development is no longer viewed only as a matter of personal growth. It is now approached as a catalyst for cultural transformation across organizations. One decision played a defining role in determining that trajectory. From the



Looking ahead, the next phase of Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting is centered on expanding how the firm supports leaders facing increasingly complex environments

beginning, Ayesha made a deliberate choice to prioritize depth rather than scale. Instead of expanding services rapidly and building a large consulting infrastructure, she focused on creating meaningful engagements where leaders could experience genuine transformation.

“One of the most pivotal decisions was maintaining a deliberate focus on depth rather than scale,” she explains. Instead of rapidly expanding, she concentrated on creating meaningful engagements where leaders could engage in honest reflection and sustained development. The pace was intentional. Transformation, she believed, could not be rushed.

Another important shift came from broadening the conversation around leadership itself. Ayesha began integrating discussions of purpose, well-being, and long-term sustainability into her advisory work. Leadership, in her view, cannot be separated from the human experience of those who practice it.

Looking ahead, the next phase of Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting is centered on expanding how the firm supports leaders facing increasingly complex environments. Ayesha is exploring new initiatives that combine executive coaching with immersive leadership retreats

and reflective learning experiences. These settings are designed to give leaders the rare opportunity to step back from daily pressures and reconnect with the deeper questions that shape how they lead.

At the same time, she hopes to extend these conversations into broader communities of leaders who are seeking thoughtful, values-driven approaches to leadership in a rapidly changing world. Ultimately, the legacy Ayesha hopes to build is rooted in a simple but powerful idea. Leadership should be both effective and deeply human. Organizations often reward speed, efficiency, and measurable outcomes. Yet lasting impact tends to come from leaders who cultivate awareness, empathy, and courage alongside competence.

“If Chestnuts Coaching & Consulting can help leaders build organizations where people feel respected, inspired, and aligned with a meaningful purpose, then the firm will have achieved something worthwhile,” Ayesha says thoughtfully. This vision embodies the philosophy behind her work from the very beginning. Leadership, when grounded in clarity and humanity, possesses the power to transform not only organizations but the individuals within them. ■