

Take the Shortcut to Growth

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When you meet with the managing partner of a professional services firm, there are a few things you know for sure.

First, that managing partner is accountable for growth; it's one of the central responsibilities of the position. Second, he or she needs more people in the firm who are accountable for growth. It's unlikely any-

one would disagree with that! Third, regardless of your role, if you bring ideas to the table on ways to streamline time and money investments in order to grow faster, the managing partner will likely be interested.

You can get to growth faster by taking a shortcut. Before you start down this path, however, you have to be willing to:

- ✓ **Slaughter the sacred cow:** *No matter who you are in the firm, thou must sell.* Appreciate that we are not all created equal. Instead **recognize the highest and best use of individuals**. Not everyone is cut out for, or desires to be, a growth leader. Communicate that technical skills are highly valued, and the firm will continue to support these types of contributors in doing what they like to do.
- ✓ **Free up growth leaders and help them** focus on developing skills in this area by providing training, coaching and support.



Rather than force everyone in the firm through a “sheep dip” approach (i.e., mandatory sales training where most simply attend, tick the box, then return ASAP to work that piled up during the training), try the shortcut to growth: creating a next-gen growth leaders program and focusing your investment.

Step One: Identify Your Next-Gen Leaders

Ask firm leaders to identify next-gen growth leaders on their teams. Ask line of service leaders, market sector leaders and geography leaders the same question and triangulate their answers.

Someone who has been recently admitted, or is in the pipeline, to become partner will usually be a good candidate. Others may not yet be in the partner track, but can be identified through traits and behavior. Here are some characteristics next-gen growth leaders often possess:

- ✓ Demonstrated interest in helping grow their practice, the firm and specific markets
- ✓ Open to new ideas, willing to try new approaches and coachable
- ✓ A history of good follow-through with commitments; accountable
- ✓ Already seen as a leader who influences others (this helps extend the cascade of good behaviors further throughout the firm)
- ✓ Lots of energy!

Step Two: Assess Your Identified Leaders

A great way to take the temperature of these potential next-gen growth leaders is to give them a way to assess their growth mindsets.

The Growth Leader Mindsets Scorecard was developed by Accountable Growth™ with input from hundreds of partners and senior managers from \$10 million firms to the Big Four. It takes about 15 minutes to complete and provides an anonymous evaluation that can be compared with other firms’ growth leader scores, insights and actions.

Potential growth leaders rank themselves in the following mindset areas on a scale of 1 to 12. The following descriptions are given to help guide an accurate ranking:

Mindset	Rank 1-3	Rank 4-6	Rank 7-9	Rank 10-12
Client-Led Value Creation	I stick to delivering what I know clients need, with as little discussion as possible.	I try to respond to client requests and highlight firm capabilities. There is little time for much more.	I am pretty good at getting a client to share needs, and then introduce the right firm resources and solutions.	I prepare thoroughly, but courage and curiosity is what stimulates thought-provoking questions and opportunities.
Strategic Relationships	I keep to my functional area with clients—working with people who understand what I do.	I know a few key people in some areas of my clients' businesses. It's hard to expand relationships beyond specific assignments.	I have developed a number of key decision-making relationships in most business areas of clients.	I constantly expand relationships in target markets and clients, especially with C-Suite, board and business unit leaders.
Networking	I would not describe myself as a people person. I avoid situations involving a lot of interaction.	I gravitate to people I already know at events—not as comfortable as I'd like to be meeting new people.	I am active and well-known in my community. Often introduce people to others.	My ever-growing network appreciates my connecting role. I seek the multiplying effects and rewards of connecting others.
Sales	I have focused on becoming a technically accredited professional. Not comfortable with selling.	I recognize selling skills are important but need more time, tools and guidance to sell effectively.	I have a reputation of consistently meeting personal and team growth goals.	I am a recognized sales leader who selects and grooms future growth leaders—see this is as a critical business imperative.
Innovation	I find keeping informed in my own field of expertise is a full time commitment—and I'm happy with that.	I see the world as increasingly complex—it's challenging to access the right people and time is limited.	I have learned how to stay informed about changes affecting clients and connect appropriate thought leadership.	I nurture innovation at all levels and draw on diverse talent that fuels new thinking for the firm and clients.
Measurement	I see chargeable hours as the key to success at the firm. Look after that, and the rest will be okay.	I know it takes more than delivery, but I'm not clear about metrics required to move ahead.	I have figured out how to meet the requirements of the firm and am rewarded appropriately.	I use objective measurement of data to drive ROI and make leadership decisions to drive firm-wide growth.
Accountability	I feel that, as a professional, I am accountable to myself, and that is sufficient.	I deliver to the best of my abilities but must depend on others who don't always follow through.	I have established a reputation of reliability based on years of delivering on-time and on-budget.	I consistently meet and am often told I exceed client expectations...and I propel others to do the same.
Collaboration	I am relied upon to respond to specific requests—from people at the firm and from clients directly.	I juggle multiple competing priorities—challenging when having to rely on others beyond my jurisdiction.	I have a "tried and true" network of colleagues who usually come through for my clients.	I maximize value by optimizing cross-silo internal and external resources to generate fresh ideas for clients.

This exercise helps professionals identify their current strengths and aspirational development goals in these areas. Four categories of individuals tend to emerge from the responses including:

- ✓ Growth leader mindsets are not applicable to me.
- ✓ Help! I see my development areas and want support to achieve them.
- ✓ Status quo: I'm proud of my accomplishments and am satisfied with where I am.
- ✓ Let's grow! The transformational leader who achieves much and also models and inspires growth leadership in others.

Your potential next-gen growth leaders can anonymously complete the scorecard and see how they compare to others by visiting <http://www.accountablegrowth.com> and clicking the "Growth Leader Mindsets" box on the right.

Step Three: Launch a Next-Gen Program

Now that you have identified the next-gen growth leaders in your firm, you should:

1. Have a senior leader reach out to selected next-gen growth leaders and congratulate them on being nominated for a special next-gen growth leaders program—and share the selection criteria. Make it clear that the opportunity to participate is exclusive.
2. Invite your group of next-gen growth leaders to meet and discuss their growth development priorities and expected results over the next 12 months. This is most effective when a senior leader is engaged, listening and encouraging.
3. Share the game plan in a meeting with the group of potential next-gen growth leaders (sized appropriately for the firm/business unit and for maximum learning/sharing from each other). The following are messages you may want to consider including:
 - ✓ Outline content to be shared that addresses gaps between mindset scores and aspirations.
 - ✓ Describe a monthly approach for customized individual growth coaching based on that person's priorities.
 - ✓ Explain there will be bimonthly group meetings to share stories of progress and lessons learned (with the senior leader present, engaged and listening).
 - ✓ Describe the commitment required:
 - Participate in regular meetings or phone calls with the coach focused on the individual's growth priorities.

- Receive a follow-up action plan after every conversation via email and copied to the senior leader.
- Review all actions and evaluate results and lessons captured.
- Share progress and results measured using agreed-upon metrics.

- ✓ Remind the group that they were nominated to the role of growth leader by firm leaders—this is voluntary, however, and up to the individual to opt in.
- ✓ Once you have accepted, your follow-through is expected.

As you roll out a next-gen leadership program there are two critical success factors that your program must include. First, you must have visible engagement of a senior leader from the firm. This person must show genuine interest: attending every meeting, being there on time (preferably arriving early and staying late), asking questions, LISTENING a LOT, sharing some suggestions/lessons learned based on personal experience, avoiding electronic device distractions and showing participants you care.

The other component is the use of a seasoned coach (internal or external) who has been a growth leader and has the experience, lessons and time to share, as well as a track record demonstrating the ability to lift the performance of others.

When adopting this type of growth training, your people will be excited to be part of an elite leadership training program in your firm, increasing their job satisfaction. However, you will also notice a difference in the performance of the participants. One firm saw its pipeline increase by 25 percent.

You will create a stronger firm with more involved professionals if you invest in the shortcut to growth.

About the Author

In any given month, Dennis MacGillivray, The Accountable Growth™ Coach, can be found coaching Next Gen Growth Leaders in professional service firms ranging from \$5M to \$1B+ in revenues. He shares 25+ years of hard-won sales lessons learned at the Big Four, boutique consultancies and mid-tier firms that span local, national and global reach. He can be reached at dennis@accountablegrowth.com or 847-772-1326.