

"*Elevate Your Team* is the roadmap for a new generation of leaders who build organizations by helping their people thrive both personally and professionally—without burning out. Robert Glazer shares a vision for creating lasting organizations where people love to work."

—ARIANNA HUFFINGTON, Founder & CEO, Thrive Global

ELEVATE YOUR TEAM

*Empower Your Team to Reach
Their Full Potential and Build
a Business that Builds Leaders*

From *USA Today* and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author

ROBERT GLAZER

ELEVATE YOUR TEAM

*Push Beyond Your Leadership
Limits to Unlock Success in
Yourself and Others*

ROBERT GLAZER

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INTRODUCTION

I couldn't decide if I was a genius or an idiot.

It was 2017, and the company I founded, Acceleration Partners (AP), had just completed another year of double-digit growth. We had also recently won three consecutive *Inc.* 500 awards from 2013 to 2015, an honor bestowed each year to the five hundred fastest-growing private companies in America.

From the outside, we were on a fast track, but the view from inside the company told a different story.

Even though we had a healthy company culture and had even won a few Best Places to Work awards, we had an emerging talent development problem that threatened to jeopardize our growth and our culture.

The problem wasn't a fundamental failure to develop our

people. In fact, several of our hires from the early years of AP were keeping pace with our growth and would go on to take important executive leadership roles.

However, there was an increasingly large group of employees who struggled to keep pace. While they improved each year, they weren't growing as fast as the company. Despite their progress, these employees still fell behind and often hit a wall at the worst possible time.

For a made-up example of our challenge (for obvious legal and ethical reasons), imagine we hired a Marketing Manager to oversee our marketing portfolio. While the manager improved in their first year at the company, within a year or two, AP grew so quickly that we found ourselves needing director-level work on our marketing team: a leader who could build and manage a team of marketers rather than just an individual contributor who could execute marketing projects. To be fair, we needed both roles.

In situations like this one—and we had several—we had a choice to make with a relatively new manager who was talented but objectively not ready to step up to the director level and lead a team. This type of scenario presents a few options that don't feel so great:

1. Hire a director above them, wounding their pride in the process.

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2. Transition them out of the company, and replace them with a director.
3. Promote them into a director role they aren't ready for, hope for the best, and then try to find a new manager.

The first choice is logical but often turns a high performer into an unengaged employee; they believe leadership doesn't trust them to step up, and they feel disappointment going from being in charge to having someone else take over.

The second choice is efficient, but it diminishes trust throughout the company when people start to believe they'll be replaced whenever your business takes a leap forward. Plus, you lose a good manager who knows how to deliver marketing outcomes for the company, creating at least a temporary setback.

The third choice is the path companies usually take, especially with people who have performed well up to that point. Promoting from within is cheaper and faster than hiring someone new, and it boosts a business's reputation on the recruiting and retention fronts. But while this route can often yield a surprise overperformer, it can also create poor outcomes for both the employee and the company, especially if the newly promoted director finds themselves in over their head and their team suffers as a result.

We found ourselves facing these types of decisions regularly.

Our employees were improving, just not quite fast enough, and we didn't have a clear strategy to address that challenge. If you're a leader of a team, department, or organization with this type of high-growth trajectory, you've probably experienced this same conundrum.

In the moment, I was stumped. But looking back, I see so clearly that I possessed the answer to this exact problem. I just had not yet been able to connect the dots.

During the same year we were facing these challenges, I had hit a similar roadblock personally. I was struggling to get any publisher interest in my second book. Tentatively titled *Friday Forward*, the book was a selection of fifty-two short stories from my weekly newsletter of the same name, which had grown from a weekly note sent to my team of forty to a global audience of nearly one hundred thousand readers worldwide. Even though I knew the content of the messages resonated with so many people each week, every publisher gave me the same feedback: they weren't excited about a compilation.

I'm not quick to give up, but I was nearly ready to accept that the timing for the book just wasn't right. But then my literary agent gave me a challenge that changed everything: rather than pitching a compilation of the best stories from the newsletter, he pushed me to pull the key themes and ideas from those stories and attempt to shape them into a concept for a book.

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After all I'd invested in building an audience for *Friday Forward*, I figured it was worth a shot.

After nearly a year of digging through newsletters and developing a cohesive framework based on the lessons of those stories and lots of discussions, I arrived at the capacity building framework that served as the basis for my eventual second book: *Elevate*.

In *Elevate*, I defined “capacity building” as the method through which individuals seek, acquire, and develop the skills and abilities to consistently perform at a higher level in pursuit of their innate potential. That book was entirely focused on individual capacity building across personal and professional life in four key areas—spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional. One of the core principles of capacity building is the idea that each of us is the same person at work and outside it, and lasting achievement in one of those spheres is dependent on growth in the other.

The principles, tactics, and tools I articulated in *Elevate* were the same things I'd done to level up as a leader for years to that point and had started to share with our emerging leaders. But it was only once I finished my first draft of *Elevate* and had the capacity building framework laid out clearly that I had my idiot-genius epiphany: I had spent years cultivating all these ideas for individual growth and performance, but I failed to realize those

same ideas could form the backbone of our employee development strategy.

I realized the same capacity building framework for individuals could serve as a foundation for a blueprint to help our employees meet the challenges of growth. To some degree, we were already using the principle of holistic growth as a guidepost for our training process:

- ▶ As part of our management training, we had started helping new managers identify and articulate their personal core values.
- ▶ We used our fully remote model to give employees flexibility to structure their workdays around their personal passions, whether that was pursuing a performing art, training for high-level athletic performance, or even just being more present with their families.
- ▶ We had even piloted an initiative we called our “Dream Program” where we helped several employees pursue or achieve a highly fulfilling personal goal. These aspirations ranged from training for marathons, to traveling to Greece to visit distant relatives, to even tracking down a long-lost sibling.

Sometimes in life, we find ourselves unintentionally running in the perfect direction. It occurred to me that through the

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programs listed above and other initiatives, we were already dabbling in capacity building, helping so our people grow outside work and reaping the benefits during the workday as a result.

Then it hit me: the key to accelerating employee's growth trajectory was doubling down and making this unintentional capacity building strategy more deliberate and company-wide.

Today, we are focused most on helping our people grow holistically. Capacity building is a core part of our culture, aligned with one of our three core values, "Excel and Improve." It is the centerpiece of our leadership training, which focuses as heavily on building self-awareness, authenticity, and individual ability as a leader as it does on management tactics such as running a meeting, giving feedback, or delegating.

The results speak for themselves. Even though we've grown our top-line revenue by 4000 percent in the past decade and grown from 7 to over 300 employees, we've kept an employee turnover rate that is historically far below our industry average and have won over thirty Best Places to Work awards. Many of the people who have left our organization, our AP alumni, have taken on leadership roles at other companies, which is a great outcome and something we support.

This is the playbook for a talent development strategy that will build your business by building your people. It will show you how to help your employees get better holistically,

in four key areas that elevate professional and personal performance: spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional capacity. In the process, you'll be creating an ultimate win-win for your company and your employees—you'll help your people reach their career goals, and you'll build a team of high performers who help hit your organizational goals and eventually can step into leadership roles. If you're a leader at any level in a high-growth organization, you've probably experienced the types of pain points described earlier. You might be hoping to become the type of organization that promotes from within for the majority of your leadership roles. The key to doing this is to train your employees not just to excel at the job you've hired them to do today but to help them grow to take on the roles of tomorrow.

By the time you're through with this book, you'll have a clear understanding of how to implement this strategy and framework throughout your organization and a wealth of tactics you can put into action. If you find your team's growth stagnating, the key to kick-starting improvement will likely be found in one or more of the four capacities outlined in the chapters ahead.

To be clear, this is not an academic book you'd likely find on a business school syllabus. Instead of theories and studies that stem from controlled experiments run by people who are not growing and leading teams day to day, this book shares the

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proven strategies that built our organization and the organizations we've exchanged best practices with over the years.

In short, my goal is to teach you how to do something very similar to what we did: to build a business that builds people—both professionally and personally.

Elevate was eventually published in 2019 and became a *Wall Street Journal* bestseller, two years after every publisher turned me away. That same year, AP hit a major milestone: \$20 million in revenue, with nearly 170 employees. As I write this, we have over 300 employees, and we've built our leadership team by promoting 80 percent of our leaders from within.

By doubling down on capacity building, we've beaten the talent development challenge we faced just a few years ago, and we have the right playbook to avoid repeating the same cycle as we grow from here.

I think you'll be amazed at the results you'll get from building your team's capacity and will find it the most rewarding way to build and grow a business. And you also might be surprised to learn this whole journey started with a simple illustration on a fogged-up shower door—more on that in a minute.

