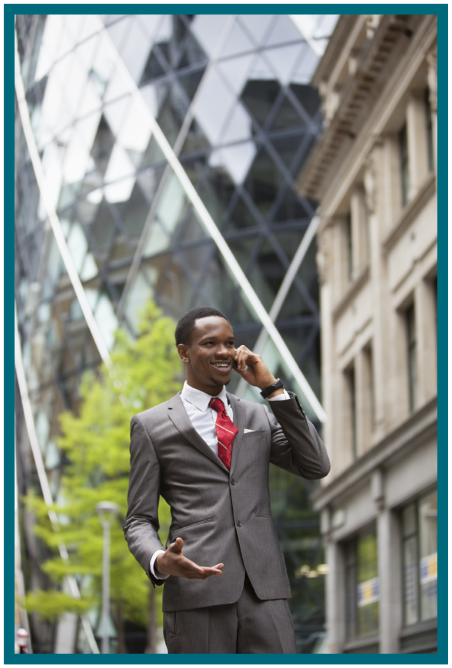
Whetstone GROWTH Academy

Career-Spanning Business Development Training



The Whetstone Group

Growth Tools for a Competitive Edge

The Whetstone Growth Academy (WGA)

Career-Spanning Business Development Training

Overview

In recent years CPA firms have been looking for ways in introduce more soft-skills development programs in their firms. These soft skills have become the critical differentiator among CPA firms. Firm leaders realize the value of skills such as relationship building and communication while at the same time young CPA professionals are expressing a desire to contribute to the firm in a meaningful way. CPA firms of all sizes also recognize that while attracting new client relationships is important to the firm's growth efforts there is significant opportunity to generate revenue, improve loyalty and grow the top line by focusing on client service skills and behaviors that clients recognize and value.

The most successful CPA firms have embraced the idea that everyone in the firm plays a significant role in growth – but that the role evolves over the course of a professional's career. They are transforming their culture into one that rewards client development, values continual learning and ultimately fosters a cohesive environment in which everyone works together to achieve the firm's vision of the future.

Recognizing that this was the future of the CPA profession The Whetstone Growth Academy, a career-spanning business development training program, was created to give firms tools, language, processes and skills to support this venture.

Objectives

- To shed light on every professional's roles in growth for the firm and build the skills necessary to fulfill their roles – both with existing and prospective clients.
- To help firms integrate the critical skills usually associated with new business development – like assessing needs – into the way they work with their existing clients.
- To prime eager young professionals in CPA firms to become effective partners by building their ability to develop new business with both existing and prospective clients.
- To evolve the role of client server into the role of trusted advisor.
- To increase levels of accountability for the behaviors associated with uncovering and meeting needs with both existing and prospective clients.
- To give CPA firms an option for providing their staff with vital "soft-skill" CPE in a convenient manner at a reasonable rate.

General Description

The Whetstone Growth Academy of individual as well as bundled recordings. There are a total of 24 hours in the entire program, but the program is not designed for all enrollees to participate in all courses. However, it is feasible that participants at a given level may wish to take a few courses at the next level, or get a "refresher" by taking courses one level below where they currently are.

The training modules are NASBA-certified and qualify in most states for CPE credit (subject to specific state rules) and are divided into levels that align with the various career points of professionals in CPA firms:

- Level 100 - New Staff (1-2 years with the firm)
- Level 200 - Senior Staff (3-5 years with the firm)
- Level 300 - Managers and Sr. Managers (5-8 years with the firm, includes any professionals with responsibility for managing client engagements)
- Level 400 - Partners (>8 years with the firm, including all partners and those who are on track to be partner in the next couple of years)
- Level 500 - Firm Leaders (Managing partner, partner in charge of business development, niche team leaders, etc.)

The sessions each last one hour and include a combination of presentation, practical examples and exercises. Multi-part classes include homework assignments. Each "module" in the 100-400 levels of the program are offered via recording. Recordings of all sessions are available.

Why This Program?

There are many options for business development training in the market. The Whetstone Growth Academy offers a number of advantages over other options:

- Concepts that work: Because the program was developed by a former practicing CPA working with business development professionals and experienced trainers/educators, the concepts in each session have been proven effective in actual practice.
- Partners ready from day one: No need for a "crash course" in responsibilities once an individual makes partner. The career-spanning approach develops future partners who understand their role in business development and have developed the skills, networks and relationships to be effective, contributing partners.
- New talent orientation: New employees at every level can be brought up to speed with immediate access to the entire program. Whether they are first-year staff or senior managers, this training program will provide the common vocabulary and tools they need to quickly identify their role in the firm and contribute to business development.
- More staff participation in growth activities: This unique program is offered for all levels of staff with modules targeted for each level's appropriate role in growth – this gets more staff involved and allows everyone to start contributing to firm growth immediately upon completing their first session with activities and tools that are appropriate based on their job function.
- Better client retention and satisfaction: The consultative selling concepts featured in this program will help firms solve more of their clients' problems. This will improve their overall client service, increasing both client satisfaction and longevity making it easier for the firm to achieve top-line growth.
- Easy, convenient, affordable: There is not a large investment in fees, travel or time to implement the program. The cost is reasonable, and the classes are taught in short, manageable sessions that participants can attend right in their own offices.

Career-Spanning Program Modules

New Staff Level 100	Senior Staff Level 200	Managers/ Sr. Mgrs Level 300	Partners Level 400	Leadership Level 500
101: Basic Business Development Concepts and Your Role	201A: Basic Client Marketing I	301A: Client Cross-Selling I	401 A: Prospecting and Closing: What it Means to be a Business Developer	501A: Managing Growth and Accountability I
102: Client Service Communication Skills	201B: Basic Client Marketing II	301B: Client Cross-Selling II	401B: Prospecting and Closing: Assessing Needs and Influencing Perceptions	501B: Managing Growth and Accountability II
103: Introduction to Social Media for Professionals	202: Working Events	302: Generating Effective Referrals	401C: Prospecting and Closing: Working the Decision Cycle	501C: Managing Growth and Accountability III
	203: Intermediate Social Media Usage	303: Personal Marketing Methods and Skills	402A: Mastering the Proposal Process I	502: Managing Online Marketing for Your Firm
		304: Using Social Media as a Prospecting Tool	402B: Mastering the Proposal Process II	
			403A: Determining Goals and ROI for Your Book of Business I	
			403B: Determining Goals and ROI for Your Book of Business II	
			404: Specializing and Focusing Your BD Efforts	
3 CPE hours	**4 CPE hours**	**5 CPE hours**	**8 CPE hours**	**4 CPE Hours**
Basic	**Intermediate**	**Intermediate/ Advanced**	**Advanced**	**Advanced**

NATIONAL REGISTRY OF CPE SPONSORS

The Whetstone Group, Inc. is registered with the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) as a sponsor of continuing professional education on the National Registry of CPE Sponsors. State boards of accountancy have final authority on the acceptance of individual courses for CPE credit. Complaints regarding registered sponsors may be submitted to the National Registry of CPE Sponsors through its website: www.learningmarket.org.

The Program – Sessions, Hours and Course Descriptions

Level 100: New Staff (1-2 years with firm)

101: Basic Business Development Concepts and Your Role

Description: Setting a foundation for business development efforts, this session establishes a common approach and language within a firm. The session explains how business development works in an accounting firm and how each individual can effectively play a role in growth. Participants will be introduced to the concepts of brand, market focus and strategic growth alternatives. They will also understand how business development responsibilities will build throughout their careers and why it is important to prepare for their future roles.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Recognize the difference between marketing and sales activities and understand how to balance the two
- Define the strategic growth alternatives and realize their importance in setting goals
  and identifying appropriate activities
- Identify several “soft” skills and explain how they apply to specific business development roles
- Understand the importance of becoming known in their communities and the need
  for focus in building individual networks
- Inventory their personal business development strengths and weaknesses
- Estimate what skills will help them fulfill their business development responsibilities as they progress to senior staff

Format: 1-hour webinar with exercises
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Basic

102: Client Service Communication Skills

Description: Effective communication skills are essential for client retention in the increasingly competitive accounting profession. Staff who can fully understand AND clearly communicate will prove themselves valuable as they advance within their firms. This session illustrates the elements of successful business writing, and one-on-one conversations and online communications as they pertain to client service. Participants will learn how to select the most effective form of communication and develop a straightforward message.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Assess their audience and respond in the appropriate medium accordingly (e-mail, written report, phone, etc.)
- Practice proper email etiquette to favorably represent themselves and their firm
- Employ active verbs and eliminate unnecessary details for clearer written communication
- Anticipate questions and prepare responses to improve the efficiency of their communication

Format: 1-hour webinar with exercises
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Basic

103: Introduction to Social Media for Professionals

Description: While everyone is likely using social media in some manner, there are some important guidelines as to how to use it appropriately as a member of a CPA firm. From preparing an effective profile to utilizing the valuable features of specific social media outlets, this course will help participants learn how to focus their efforts and make better use of their time spent on social media.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Professionally represent themselves as part of their firm on the appropriate social media outlets
- Develop a professional online profile
- Spend the appropriate amount of time on the right social media activities
- Understand how they can use social media to prepare for their future role in growth

Format: 1-hour webinar with exercises
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Basic

Level 200: Senior Staff (2-5 years)

201 A&B: Basic Client Marketing

Description: Identifying client needs is the first step to cross-selling firm services. Since senior staff often spends the most time in the field with client employees, they are well positioned to recognize signs of frustration or inefficiency in an organization. This session will train participants to listen and observe while working on an engagement, develop and maintain beneficial relationships with client personnel and start conversations regarding additional solutions their firms can provide. Participants will also learn how to talk “benefits” instead of “features” and how to report observations to supervisors who can best follow-up with a client.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Identify key information needed for marketing a service
- Differentiate between service features and client benefits
- Develop and ask clients open-ended, high gain questions to explore needs
- Report observations regarding potential cross-selling opportunity to appropriate firm contact
- Identify with whom in the client organization they need to network to be effective

Format: Divided into two sessions (Part I and Part II), this module consists of two webinars with exercises
CPE: 2 credit hours
Level: Intermediate

202: Working Events

Description: This session will help participants become professional representatives of their firms at community and industry networking events. Senior staff will learn how to prepare for a potential networking opportunity and receive tips to make them more comfortable and effective during an event. The session will also illustrate how to maximize the value of each event through effective follow-up activities with new contacts.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Determine event objectives based on knowledge of typical attendees
- Prepare an accurate, brief response to the question: “What does your firm do?” and/or “What do you do?”
- Initiate conversations and effectively circulate throughout an event
- Report the results of an event internally to their superiors
- Plan external follow-up activities with supervisor direction

Format: 1-hour webinar with an exercise
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Intermediate

203: Intermediate Social Media Usage

Description: Beyond the basics of setting up a profile -- there are many opportunities for professionals to use social media tools for relationship building and networking. This session expands on how young professionals can proactively connect with referral sources and clients online and the dos and don’ts of communicating via these channels. This course also helps professionals understand the implications of their social media usage on their firm’s branding efforts.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Evaluate requests to connect
- Proactively build their professional network
- Learn how to support the firm’s branding efforts using social media tools
- Support building relationships with clients and other professionals

Format: 1-hour webinar with exercises
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Basic

Level 300: Managers and Sr. Managers (5-8 years)

301 A&B: Client Cross-Selling

Description: With a consistent cross-selling strategy, CPA firms can not only develop new business but also improve client service. This session illustrates how to view a client roster as a valuable asset and source of continuous revenues. Participants will learn ways to increase awareness of client needs throughout their firm, approach clients regarding specific services and employ follow-up activities that solve client needs and expand their relationship with the firm.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Utilize provided tools to evaluate clients for potential cross-selling opportunities
- Implement a standard process to train staff and colleagues to more effectively position firm services during regular client interaction
- Compose more effective management letters
- Initiate high gain, benefit-oriented conversations with clients
- Quantify the value proposition for clients to purchase additional services
- Plan appropriate follow-up activities to continue sales cycle with clients

Format: Divided into two sequential sessions (Part I and Part II), this module consists of two webinars with exercises and homework
CPE: 2 CPE credit hours
Level: Intermediate

302: Generating Effective Referrals

Description: Even with a variety of marketing opportunities at a CPA firm's disposal, a significant amount of new business can be traced back to positive referrals. This session will help firms save time and money by focusing on the right Centers of Influence (COIs) and communicating a clear value proposition for potential referral sources. Participants will learn tips for getting client referrals as well, including which clients to ask, and how to approach them and when to make the requests. The session will also provide strategies for managing and evaluating existing referral sources.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Identify promising referral sources within their communities and targeted industries
- Assess the value of a COI relationship and determine objectives
- Develop a communications plan to build mutually beneficial COI relationships
- Apply techniques to effectively request referrals from clients
- Track the progress of referrals and measure the overall ROI of a referral program

Format: 1-hour webinar with exercises
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Intermediate

303: Personal Marketing Methods and Skills

Description: Individuals can maximize their contributions to a firm's business development efforts by selecting activities that best match their professional strengths. This session will explore a variety of techniques, including article writing, speaking engagement and group memberships, which can be employed to advance the image of the individuals and their firms. Participants will learn how to choose methods that best fit their personalities and how to transition from marketing to sales when appropriate.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Transition effectively between marketing and sales activities
- Enhance firm visibility and level of involvement in their community and/or targeted industry
- Estimate potential ROI of individual business development efforts
- Utilize personality traits and professional strengths to attract new clients

Format: 1-hour webinar with exercises
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Intermediate

304: Using Social Media as a Prospecting Tool

Description: Social media savvy is becoming more and more important as the industry adopts these communication channels. This session will discuss the various forms of social media, which ones are worth your time, how to develop effective profiles, and how to use social media to actually generate new business leads and get an ROI on the time invested.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Develop effective profiles for various social media outlets
- Stay consistent with firm brand messages
- Link various social media channels to maximize effectiveness
- Optimize the time investment in social media to maximize ROI

Format: 1-hour webinar with exercises
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Advanced

Level 400: Partners (>8 years)

401 A&B&C: Prospecting and Closing New Business

Description: A firm-wide culture of growth and accountability depends on a shared approach to business development. This session will provide techniques to help partners more effectively work the sales cycle, such as preparing for the first sales meeting, speaking to prospect needs, creating urgency and working through objections. Participants will also receive tools to advance prospects through the sales cycle and track their firm's progress.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Understand the steps and length of a typical sales cycle
- Identify a prospect's decision-making process and adjust messages accordingly
- Differentiate their firm from the competition
- Convey urgency by communicating risk and opportunities
- Anticipate and effectively respond to prospect objections
- Manage leads and track results with tools provided

Format: Divided into three sequential sessions, this module consists of three webinars with exercises and homework
CPE: 3 credit hours
Level: Advanced

402 A&B: Mastering the Proposal Process

Description: Whether responding to an RFP or working with an internally generated lead, a CPA firm must take the time to understand the situation before producing a winning proposal. This session will illustrate how to evaluate the merit of an opportunity, assemble an appropriate sales team and assess the needs of the prospect. Participants will receive tips for key aspects of the document, including effective organization, firm differentiation, fee presentation and the use of pre-set copy blocks. They will also learn ways to effectively deliver the proposal, follow-up with the prospect and adjust their process for the best results.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Streamline their proposal process to improve quality and efficiency
- Acquire valuable insight into a prospect's decision process with a needs assessment meeting
- Anticipate the competition (or other obstacles) and positively position their firm
- Apply effective interview techniques when they deliver proposals
- Utilize provided tools to evaluate the success of their firm's process

Format: Divided into two sequential sessions (Part I and Part II), this module consists of two webinars with exercises and homework
CPE: 2 credit hours
Level: Advanced

403 A&B: Determining Goals and ROI for Your Book of Business

Description: Partners can maximize their contributions to firm growth by effectively managing their own books of business. This session takes planning to the micro level and illustrates how individuals can identify growth opportunities, set effective revenue goals and plan specific activities customized to their area(s) of concentration. Participants will receive tools to set a growth goal (net and gross), measure progress and evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Select strategic growth alternatives with the most opportunity for growth
- Set realistic growth goals for their book of business
- Align business development activities to accomplish established goals
- Track individual progress with the tools provided
- Calculate overall ROI of their business development efforts

Format: Divided into two sequential sessions (Part I and Part II), this module consists of two webinars with exercises
CPE: 2 credit hours
Level: Advanced

404: Specializing and Focusing Your Business Development Efforts

Description: Business development activities that are integrated and focused on a specific market will generate better results. This course will help participants understand what "specialization" means and the value it carries relative to business development. Different options for specializing will be presented as well as ideas for focusing your business development activities on your area of specialization.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Understand how specialization plays a role in business development
- Identify the specialization options available and the benefits to each
- Determine methods for selecting the appropriate area of specialization
- Integrate and focus business development activities towards an area of specialization

Format: 1-hour webinar with exercises
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Advanced

Level 500: Leadership - These courses are offered via recorded sessions.

501 A&B&C: Managing Growth and Accountability

Description: Ideal for managing partners and/or business development partners, this session illustrates how to build a sales culture to realize a firm's growth potential. Participants will receive strategies for holding partners accountable, coaching staff in their business development roles and evaluating the ROI of their efforts. The session will also explore ways to effectively organize for growth, develop strategic alliances and address merger opportunities.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Understand key elements of a successful sales culture
- Evaluate the pros and cons of different organizational structures
- Coach partners and staff to improve their business development skills
- Employ tools provided to hold partners accountable
- Improve efficiency of the sales team by tracking return on time invested in business development
- Assess the merit of merger candidates and potential strategic partners

Format: Divided into three sequential sessions, this module consists of recorded webinars with exercises
CPE: 3 credit hours
Level: Advanced

502: Managing Online Marketing for Your Firm

Description: As your people start using social media, you need to establish policies and manage usage so your firm's brand is protected and time isn't wasted. This session will provide guidelines for social media policies and discuss the important activities to monitor to minimize ineffective time investment and maximize ROI.

Learning objectives: Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Develop an effective social media policy
- Determine the best online marketing tools for their firm
- Monitor social media usage to maximize ROI
- Help your staff be more effective with online marketing

Format: 1-hour webinar with an exercise
CPE: 1 credit hour
Level: Advanced