



SUCCESS ISN'T THE SUMMIT: WHY HIGH ACHIEVERS MUST REDEFINE CAREER GROWTH

By Lisa L. Baker

For many high achievers, the path to success is clear — and relentless.

We were taught to climb.

To set goals, crush them, and move on to the next.

To measure our worth by output, our impact by visibility, and our growth by how far we've ascended.

And for a while, it works.

The promotions come. The accolades

follow. The calendar fills with meetings that prove we're important.

But then something quietly shifts.

The summit we worked so hard to reach doesn't feel like we've arrived. It feels like we hit a plateau.

And the question we've been too busy to ask finally catches up:

Is this all there is?

As an executive coach, I work with high achievers who've done everything 'right.' They've built careers, led teams, and gained influence.

Yet many wrestle with a secret truth: **After all the sacrifices, hard work, long days, and late nights, success isn't as meaningful as they thought it would be.**

Not because they failed, but because the definition of career growth they were chasing was never theirs to begin with. Rather than taking the time to align who they are with what they do — and why — they followed the well-worn path they 'should' to achieve the success they're 'supposed' to desire.

The Problem with Performance-Driven Growth

Most high achievers are conditioned to equate career growth with achievement in the form of doing more to have more.

More power.

More visibility.

More money.

However, performance-driven career growth has limitations.

It's externally validated, often reactive, and rarely reflective.

It rewards endurance, not alignment.

And it leaves little room for the essential internal shifts that actually change how we lead, live, and relate.

A recent Deloitte study found that **only 23% of executives believe their organizations are prepared to support a shift from traditional career paths to more dynamic, purpose-driven growth models.**

That means most leaders are operating in environments that reward performance — but rarely encourage reflection, balance, or evolution.

I've coached executives who can run a global division but struggle to name what they want outside of work.

Entrepreneurs who built seven-figure businesses but feel disconnected from their own voice.

Leaders who are praised for their resilience but are privately exhausted from holding it all together.

These are signs that it's time to evolve.

And that evolution requires a new definition of growth — one that honors who they are, not just what they do. This new definition is about alignment. It's about aligning your career goals with your personal values, your work with your passions, and your success with your happiness.

The Courage to G.R.O.W.

In my coaching practice, I use a proven process called G.R.O.W. It helps leaders shift from autopilot to awareness, creating the clarity they need to envision what's possible, break through barriers, and lead boldly while living fully.

Here's what G.R.O.W. means, and the questions you can ask yourself to begin a purposeful growth journey:

- Gain Insight: What do you know deep down but haven't made space to explore?

- Realize New Possibilities: If you had no fear or limitations, what would you be curious to try or create?

- Overcome Obstacles: What thought patterns, beliefs, or habits are keeping you stuck?

- Win at Life: How would things change if you defined success by what matters most to you right now?

You're not abandoning ambition. You're aligning it with what you value.

It's giving yourself permission to pause and ask better questions before chasing bigger goals.

When leaders begin to live from this purposeful place, meaningful growth is inevitable. And the impact is undeniable.

They start leading conversations with presence instead of pressure. They delegate without guilt, rest without apology, and reconnect with the parts of themselves they once set

aside until "later."

Career Growth Redefined

Redefining career growth means letting go of the idea that it always looks like forward motion.

Sometimes, meaningful growth is pausing, pivoting, or setting a boundary.

It could be having a crucial conversation you've been avoiding. It could be deciding to do something that makes sense only to you.

I've seen clients grow more in a single moment of honesty than in a year of strategy.

I've watched leaders reclaim their voices — not by speaking louder, but by finally saying what they mean.

I've witnessed transformation that didn't come from a promotion, but from the courage to say, "This isn't working anymore."

That's real growth.

And it's not always visible. But it's always significant.

Why This Matters Now — for Every High Achiever

If you're reading this and feeling the tension between who you've been and who you're becoming, know that you're not alone. Many high achievers feel the same pull.

According to Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc., **in 2024, CEO turnover reached an all-time high of 2,221**



departures, the most recorded since tracking began in 2002.

Are some being pushed out?

Yes, but many chose to step away voluntarily. It reflects a more profound trend I've noticed: Leaders are choosing personal fulfillment over status or positional power.

That's not to say that you can't have both. But even at the highest levels, leaders are reevaluating their roles, identities, and next chapters.

Success isn't the summit.

It's a milestone — a meaningful one — but not the final destination.

If you've reached it, you already know: growth doesn't stop here.

It shifts and asks new questions.

And the most important one might be this: *Are you ready to grow on your terms?*

Not by chasing more. But by aligning your ambition with your values. By leading from who you are — not just

what you've achieved.

That's the kind of growth that changes everything. It's not just impressive; it's intentional.

It starts with one brave decision to stop climbing and start rising with purpose.

Lisa L. Baker is the Founder of Ascentim, an award-winning executive coaching and leadership development firm that helps high-achieving professionals lead boldly and live fully.

Backed by 20+ years of Fortune 500 experience and her signature G.R.O.W. coaching process, she guides clients to align strengths, passions, and purpose to discover their Area of Greatness.

A member of the Forbes Coaches Council and a sought-after speaker, Lisa believes, "When we lead from our greatness, we are our most powerful, authentic selves."