



# BUILDING HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAMS IN 2026

Why experience, structure, and collaboration matter more than ever

In professional services, the conversation around talent often starts with constraints: fewer graduates, stretched seniors, funding changes, and growing delivery pressure. By now, none of this is new. What is changing is how firms are choosing to respond.

Through our partnership with *Menzies*, one thing became increasingly clear: high-performance teams are no longer built by reacting to short-term gaps. They are designed intentionally across experience levels, locations, and time horizons.

This shift requires moving away from capacity thinking and toward team architecture.

## **Performance is a system, not a headcount**

One of the strongest themes to emerge from our conversations was that performance doesn't improve simply by adding people. In fact, doing so without structure often creates more friction. What made the difference in



this partnership was not the presence of remote professionals, but *how* they were integrated.

Senior professionals embedded through GCO were not treated as overflow support. They

operated inside the same systems, followed the same review standards, were integrated into performance feedback processes, and contributed across the same client portfolios as onshore team members. Over time, this reduced the coordination burden on managers and improved consistency across engagements.

Benjamin Jones, Senior Manager from Menzies, reflected during the interview that the real value came from stability rather than speed: *“The team knows exactly our methodology, how we want to operate, so it’s almost just enhancing that and building more of a long-term strategic alliance.”*

That sense of belonging changed how work flowed, particularly during high-pressure periods.

### **Why junior development still needs proximity**

Another insight that surfaced repeatedly was around training, especially at junior level. While experienced professionals can operate effectively in distributed models, early-career development behaves differently.

The partnership reinforced a belief that many firms arrived at during the pandemic: training graduates remotely, without structure or supervision, is far harder in practice than it appears on paper.

This is why GCO’s ACCA trainees are trained in-office, supported by an on-site team and guided by leaders who understand both the technical standards and the expectations of UK audit environments. This physical environment allows for immediate feedback, peer learning, and exposure to how experienced professionals approach judgement and client work.

One comment from Tom Woods, Partner at Menzies, captured this distinction clearly: *“The fact that you obviously have an office where the guys can sit together, share ideas, learn from each other, help each other out, help with that training and development, all that type of thing is really important for us. We’ve just hired our first manager here; we’ve got our first ACCA grads as well coming through.”*

Importantly, trainees aren’t isolated from real delivery. From early on, they are exposed to live audit work and interact with senior team members already embedded with clients. This pairing of hands-on delivery and structured development accelerates readiness in ways that purely academic pathways cannot.

### **Integration beats oversight**

A further lesson was the importance of integration over control. Rather than managing remote professionals as a separate function, the most effective approach was to remove the distinction altogether.



Remote team members worked in the same tools, joined the same meetings, and were held to the same performance expectations as local staff. This reduced the need for oversight and created space for managers to focus on coaching and progression rather than administration.

Over time, this approach also reshaped succession planning. Juniors were no longer viewed as future problems to solve once qualified. They became part of the firm's operating rhythm early on, building institutional knowledge long before promotion decisions were required.

### **Designing teams for the next five years**

What this partnership ultimately highlighted

is that the most resilient firms are no longer solving for the next busy season alone. They are asking harder questions about continuity, knowledge transfer, and leadership pipelines.

High-performance teams in 2026 are not defined by where people sit, but by how deliberately those teams are designed. They balance experience with development, flexibility with structure, and short-term delivery with long-term succession.

The lesson is simple, even if the execution is not: teams that are built with intention outperform teams assembled under pressure.



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