Building a pipeline of high-performing general managers in aviation



Client need

An aviation-services leader with over 200 fixed base operations (FBOs) worldwide recognized the need for a standardized approach to hiring, training, and evaluating its general managers (GMs). With operations spanning five continents, the company needed to ensure consistent leadership at each location to drive overall success.

Facing challenging market dynamics, including industry consolidation and rising customer expectations, the GM role had evolved significantly. GMs were now expected to act as mini-CEOs for their FBOs, accountable for driving revenue, managing talent, ensuring safety protocols, maintaining customer satisfaction, and nurturing external partnerships. This expanded role demanded a diverse skill set, including the ability to make strategic decisions, foster profitability, lead collaborative teams, and inspire high performance.

However, the company struggled with a lack of structured career paths or formal development opportunities for GMs, often promoting individuals from operational or commercial backgrounds without consistent criteria. There was no unified definition of what made a successful GM or clear development path to prepare future leaders for the role.



Solution

The organization partnered with BTS to create a leadership framework designed to clarify expectations and build the skills needed for GMs to thrive in their expanded roles, aligned with the company's strategic goals.

The framework consists of two main components:

The playbook: This foundational guide includes:

- **GM profile:** Defines key capabilities and behaviors for optimal GM performance.
- **GM pivotal moments:** Identifies 11 critical, on-the-job scenarios that require strong leadership.
- **GM experience map:** Recommends developmental experiences for aspiring, new, and seasoned GMs to help them build capabilities aligned with pivotal moments.

The assessment: Designed for current and aspiring GMs, as well as external candidates, the **assessment** serves three purposes:

- Evaluate current GMs to identify areas for development in alignment with the GM Profile.
- Assess aspiring GMs to define the development they need to prepare for the role.
- Screen external candidates for their suitability for the GM role

The Assessment includes several tools for evaluating skills, mindsets, and preferences:

- **Moments-based assessment:** Candidates navigate a simulated environment, demonstrating how they would handle job-related scenarios.
- **Mindset explorer assessment:** Assesses candidates' alignment with key leadership thoughts and beliefs.
- 360-survey: Allows participants and their colleagues to evaluate performance against the GM Profile.
- **Work preferences assessment:** Explores individual work style preferences to identify optimal roles.
- **Panorama assessment:** Involves puzzle-based tasks to evaluate critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The Assessment results help the company pinpoint development needs, readiness for promotion, and inform hiring decisions for GMs.



Results

The Playbook and Assessment have enabled the company to identify and elevate high-potential leaders, previously challenging in its distributed structure. Since implementing the program, numerous GMs have been promoted to leadership roles such as Area Director, with expanded responsibilities across multiple FBOs.

Participants report that the program has increased their self-awareness, helping them address performance gaps and accelerate career growth. One GM shared, "The assessment helped me uncover blind spots. The 360 feedback confirmed areas to focus on. I now have a clear development plan and the tools to achieve it."

After completing the GM Assessment, one experienced GM followed a personalized development plan to address performance gaps and was recently promoted to Area Director, managing 12 FBOs. They commented, "You are given the tools to succeed, and your future is in your hands. The assessments and the courses offered are outstanding and can be life-changing."