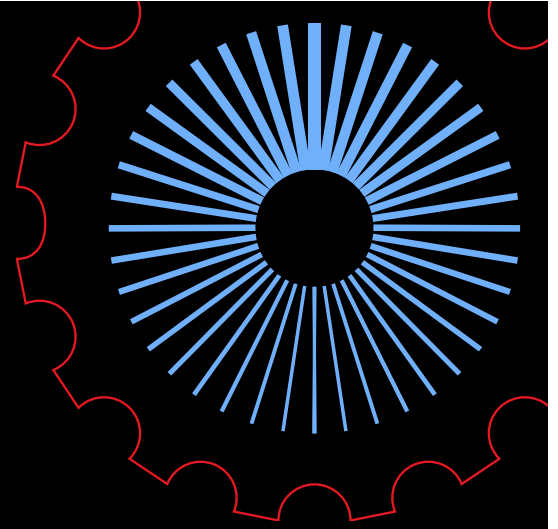**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

The Early Transformer's Guide to Building Digital-First Talent

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Kickstart Your Digital Transformation Journey With Your People

Congratulations!

You're starting your transformation journey.

Between consumers' accelerated adoption of digital behaviors and a permanently-changed working culture, the inevitable digital transformation of every industry took leaps forward in the last two years. Business leaders across the board are trying to get ahead of the transformation imperative that digitization requires and the economic pressure it adds to their businesses.

At GA, we've worked with over 270 clients in 25 countries to guide companies through the four stages of digital maturity. With 70,000+ employees trained, 85,500+ course alumni, and 600,000+ workshop participants, we know the steps it takes to break through each level — and to set your company up for a successful journey.

YOU ARE HERE

1
Explored Digital Landscape

Dabbling in digital, adhering to traditional skill sets and norms.

2
Built Digital Competence

Baseline digital skills gaining traction and operating in silos.

3
Integrated Digital Culture

Boost fluency at all levels, including leadership and non-technical functions, to reduce silos

4
Scaled Digital Business

Increase pace of adoption, shift brainpower to higher cognitive functions, and enable talent mobility.

The early stages of transformation are the hardest. How do you know where to begin?

In our highly-connected reality, digital skills are not only pervasive, they are necessary — regardless of discipline. Gone are the days of "technical" and "nontechnical" roles. Instead, skills and capabilities that previously were isolated to technologists, creatives, and managers have made their way into job descriptions across disciplines.

- **83%** of all retail postings mention at least one digital skill.

- Data-related skills dominate operations roles, appearing in **46%** of all postings.

- **All** postings for marketing jobs mention at least one digital skill.

As existing jobs become increasingly hybrid, business leaders are struggling to enable teams to mix human and technical skills to keep up with this evolution. This is most intimidating at the start of the transformation journey, with the scale of change looming across all levels and disciplines. The possibilities for where you can go are endless. It doesn't help that 75% of digital transformations fail to generate returns that exceed the original investment, adding pressure to the challenge of prioritizing a phased rollout and setting challenging but realistic goals.

GA helps make this complex problem manageable. This guide aims to give leaders who are early on in their talent transformation journey a place to start, showcasing best practices alongside real-life examples.

The Early Transformer's Path

Through our deep experience across many types of organizations, General Assembly has seen leaders' transformation challenges boil down to four key goals:

Create digital mindsets across the company. This includes understanding digital trends, growing digital mastery, and building a product-driven organization.

Upgrade data literacy to reflect modern technical skills in working with data.

Identify what modern marketing looks like and adapt to the behaviors and expectations of the digital-first customer.

Accelerate technical hiring by upskilling and reskilling current employees and new hires.

This guide unpacks each of these four steps, providing actionable and practical recommendations that organizations can put into practice to help set their businesses on the path to sustainable digitization and success.

Create Digital Mindsets

For those embarking on a transformation initiative, often the first problem we hear is "I need to transition to a digital-first culture." As with many challenges, you will find in your transformation that the process begins with resetting mindsets.

A digital mindset is a way of thinking about how humans connect, share, and learn in response to new technology and the digital age. There are six key components of this mindset, each stemming from digital practices like design thinking, agile, marketing, and data:

Customer-Centricity

Establish a vision that revolves around customer's need, and keep customer value props top of mind in decision-making.

Experimentation in Business

Adopt an experimental approach to reduce risk and drive faster, cheaper innovation to meet customer needs.

Agile Methods

Leverage Agile methods to quickly respond to new information, such as changes in the market and customers' needs.

Activate Growth

Understand the levers a business can use across the customer journey to grow product usage and accelerate success.

Data-Driven Mindset

Learn to acquire, analyze, and visualize data to generate and communicate actionable insights.

Evaluate Trends

Identify how specific trends are changing customer expectations.

Encouraging a digital mindset begins with digital literacy and competency for using digital technology to find, create, evaluate, and communicate, across the organization. This is the stepping stone to developing comfort with — and ultimate adoption of — digital practices such as experimentation, iteration, and antifragile working practices that incorporate continuous learning and growth into everyday work.

This creates a positive feedback loop: innovation breeds innovation, and according to BCG, companies that focus on digital culture are 5x more likely[1] to achieve breakthrough results than companies that don't.

[1] https://www.bcg.com/capabilities/digital-technology-data/digital-transformation/how-to-drive-digital-culture

Where to encourage a digital culture within your organization.

Digital literacy doesn't work in silos. A workforce that excels in a digital-first context requires engagement of all levels in the organization:

- **Leaders** need to role model digital behaviors and create a culture where teams thrive in adopting a digital mindset to set goals and hold teams accountable to digital KPIs.

- **Teams** need to be able to lead by example with their digital mindset, empowering each other to make more autonomous decisions as the business scales.

- **Individuals** across the company must have basic digital literacy to understand priorities, be motivated by business milestones, and have opportunities to advance.

Digital Mindset in Action: BNP Paribas Cardif

A great example of digital mindset transformation is BNP Paribas Cardif. Anticipating the rise of automation, the executive team began a bold initiative to train its workforce in the skills of tomorrow and actively drive the company's transformation.

Cardif wanted to have a culture of being a learning company, with a vision of its international workforce connected with an entrepreneurship mindset. To drive this digital mindset forward, Cardif's strategic workforce planning team worked with GA to identify and plan training in critical skills across UX, product, and data analytics for teams across France, Luxembourg, Taiwan, Asia, and LATAM.

As a result, Cardif boosted new agile ways of working and a digital mindset across functional teams and business projects, driving ROIs. Moving forward, they're working with GA toward a goal to upskill and reskill more than 1,000 people between 2018 and 2022.

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE SPONSOR:

"There are always new players coming in, so we wanted to have a culture of being a learning company. When I say a learning company, it includes having people learn new skills. This is what we did with the Skill Up program we built with GA."

— Nathalie Doré, Chief Digital & Acceleration Officer, BNPP Paribas Cardif

Upgrade Data Literacy

Once transformation initiatives are underway, we've found that the majority of companies need to learn to **harness data as a strategic asset** early in transformation to enable employees to adopt data capabilities and mindsets that unlock digital frontiers.

Adopt a data mindset to grow your capabilities.

Data is power. That's why 97% of executives are investing in Big Data and AI initiatives[2]. As you progress into becoming a digital organization, properly-leveraged data will make you more efficient, more focused in your planning, and more effective against your priorities.

But first, you must invest in data literacy across your organization to **help employees understand how to use and drive results with data**. In a digital world, this is the key to improving with time, and every team — regardless of advanced analytics skill set — will need basic literacy to be part of the data-driven culture that you are building. That looks like proficiency across five foundations:

Data Culture
Identify democratization opportunities and describe the methods associated with each phase of the data lifecycle.

Everyday Statistics
Recognize common types of statistical fallacies, spot trends in data visualizations, and calculate descriptive statistics.

Interpreting Visualizations
Interpret the information represented in visualizations and spot common misleading tricks.

Data Ethics & Privacy
Respect the rights and privacy of your users when collecting and using data.

Practical Applications of AI
Identify situations where common artificial intelligence disciplines could be useful in an organization.

Data literacy matters not just across the organization — but with leaders too.

Leadership needs the vocabulary to set the data vision. To effectively manage data or AI-driven teams, leaders play a key role in laying the groundwork for a successful data transformation by mapping the ideal flow of data throughout the organization — and prioritizing data investment opportunities to make that flow a reality.

[2] Sources: NewVantage Partners

Kick continuous, data-driven improvement into motion.

Once you've established data literacy, you can ultimately **incorporate advanced skills** to solve increasingly complex data problems by building systems to collect, refine, organize, and analyze your data. Often, companies also invest in upskilling employees with data modeling and visualization, machine learning, and Python programming to enable them to be higher-leveraging.

It all starts with data literacy.

Data Transformation in the Real World: Sage AI Labs

When it comes to data transformation, Sage had a big goal: connect the accounting and business management side of its business with Sage AI Labs, a team of individuals working with AI, machine learning, and infrastructure.

Sage partnered closely with General Assembly to bring data literacy to the business outside of the Sage AI Labs team. Upskilling participants from Canada, Washington, Oregon, California, and India, their remote data literacy training program brought together engineers from different Sage product lines and teams that wouldn't have had the opportunity to work together otherwise.

Just five weeks into their course, two participants won a Hackathon at Sage with the skills they gathered in training, and Sage is already building that feature into their product. Long-term, by upskilling engineers who didn't yet have AI and machine learning training, they have enabled teams to work in concert with tenured AI and machine learning resources to innovate more broadly across the business.

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE SPONSOR:

"I was very picky when selecting a vendor and did a lot of due diligence since it's such an important decision. When I found General Assembly, it was a natural fit. Working with the GA team feels like a partnership — and I sensed that immediately."

— Kimberly Graham, Director of AI Transformation, Sage AI Labs

Identify What Modern Marketing Looks Like

Once you've established a digital mindset and data literacy, companies embarking on transformation are ready and excited to build more modern channels to interact with their consumers. Many companies struggle with this part of the transition, however, because marketing skills tend to be highly siloed. This is because marketing was not considered a digital role, traditionally.

Today tells a different story. Marketing is now a complex, data-driven field with a wide variety of specializations that modern marketing teams need to master as part of digital transformation:

Customer Insight

Leverage digital tools for market research, audience segmentation, developing and using personas, and mapping the customer journey.

Creative Development

Set data-savvy objectives, writing briefs adhering to brand, content strategy, and content creation adapting to audience.

Marketing Channels

Learn the omnichannel environment, including social media, display advertising, digital video, traditional media, direct, SEM/SEO, and owned/earned media.

Measurement & Analytics

Measure and optimize for business impact with data, KPIs, cohort analysis, testing, optimization, and multi-touch attribution.

Marketing Technology

Tools: CRM and personalization, analytics, testing and optimization, CMS, marketing automation, ad tech, and data management.

The foundations of marketing still apply, but much has changed with how those strategies get into action. In this complex landscape, it's challenging to know where to begin.

The gold standard: adapt your training plans with data-driven assessments.

Leveraging data helps you equip your marketing team with the right tools in a number of ways:

1. **Identify skills gaps in existing teams to develop your learning goals.**

2. **Prescribe personalized learning paths** that target the specific strengths and areas for growth of each member of a team.

3. **Benchmark the skills your teams have compared to the industry**.

4. **Track improvement of skills over time.**

5. **Guide hiring and staffing decisions.** As you grow your digital practice, quantitative assessments to your interview processes help remove bias from candidate evaluation.

Marketing Assessments in the Real World: L'Oreal

One great success story of implementing an assessment into a marketing talent pipeline is L'Oreal. In partnership with General Assembly, **L'Oreal launched an assessment-led program** to vet new candidates and encourage continuous learning among its global marketing workforce.

Leveraging the Certified Marketing 1 Assessment, L'Oréal defined a company-wide standard for evaluating marketers, which is now fully baked into their talent system. The assessment helps them onboard new hires who meet their 70% benchmark, upskill 85,000 employees worldwide, and identify high-growth candidates for deep-dive training. This approach has driven results in their digital transformation, growing eCommerce sales to 25% of total sales.

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE SPONSOR:

"With CM1, we have a unique opportunity to develop a widely recognized marketing expertise standard. This is, for us, a powerful assessment and empowerment tool."

– Jean-Claude Le Grand, Chief Human Resources Officer, L'Oreal

Accelerating Technical Hiring

Once you set your business up for success by mastering digital foundations, you will unlock new digital ways of working and want to grow. But scaling these new digital systems introduces one of the greatest challenges of the transformation: **acquiring the right talent.**

Buying talent is a zero-sum game.

[Fierce competition has created a tragedy of the commons](#) where good technical talent is hard to come by (and afford). A small group of elite talent with skyrocketing salaries is certainly not a winning strategy for the marketplace as a whole, but it's especially rough for companies ready to accelerate transformation.

Recent studies have shown a [$136k potential savings per person from reskilling](#) tech talent in-house instead of laying off and hiring. Contrary to the common fear many companies share of investing in talent only to see their high performers leave to work for competitors, these "talent donors" get an [incredible boost in employee engagement and loyalty](#) as a result of their upskilling training.

Invest to grow further.

Building talent is the answer to the vicious cycles of talent shortages we see today — and the answer to the urgent push for talent that transforming companies require. Investing in talent helps you:

1. **Build a talent pipeline** to attract and retain high-potential talent.

2. **Make tangible progress** on your DEI goals.

3. **Lower the cost of talent acquisition** for valuable tech and data roles.

4. **Reduce the risk that you won't be able to hire enough** to meet projected talent needs.

5. **Reduce the financial and morale impact of large restructuring efforts** by reskilling laid-off workers to re-enter the job market with competitive skill sets.

Reduce the financial and morale impact of large restructuring efforts by reskilling laid-off workers to re-enter the job market with competitive skill sets.

As the shifts in digital innovation only accelerate, growing the funnel of talent is the most effective strategy for your employees, your bottom line, in the labor market, and the future of business.

Accelerating Technical Hiring in the Real World: Guardian Life Insurance

Once you have developed basic digital and data literacy, opportunities for more specialized upskilling open. This was just the case with Guardian Life Insurance. To thrive in a rapidly changing industry, Guardian embarked on a firm-wide digital transformation aimed to build new data capabilities from within.

Guardian's people transformation was two-pronged: reskilling actuaries as data scientists and equipping new leaders to take advantage of newly expanded data capabilities. Against these goals, GA helped assess talent and craft learning around their needs, deploying a robust data curriculum tailored for company-specific use cases.

Guardian's Data Science team now works hand in hand with the other data professionals throughout the organization, accelerating Guardian's ability to leverage predictive analytics to capitalize on business opportunities. Newly expanded data capabilities — including improved integration among data science teams and other data professionals throughout the organization — have accelerated Guardian's ability to leverage predictive analytics to capitalize on business opportunities.

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE SPONSOR:

"Now we have a core set of data scientists that have industry institutional knowledge, and they work with our business partners to identify opportunities where they can drive business value."

– Dean Vel Vecchio, Chief Information Officer, Guardian Life Insurance

So what's next?

This booklet has talked about the top challenges leaders of digital transformation efforts encounter in their early stages. Whether you are beginning to build the broad digital fluency that is a foundation of digital culture or investing in upgrading the technical ability of your teams and expanding top talent, we hope you found valuable tips to help guide your way.

As you cross key milestones in your transformation journey, we've created a checklist to help you monitor your progress against the skills and behaviors covered in this booklet.

Talent Transformation Checklist

Are you ready for the next stage in your digital transformation? Here's a checklist to help you find out. *Check off the skills you're confident your organization has to reveal areas to invest in.*

Digital Mindsets

☐ Customer-centricity: We solve customer problems through a seamless, consistent experience.

☐ Experimentation: We take complex problems and break them down into smaller parts to test assumptions early and often.

☐ Agile methods: We are nimble, flexible, and good at working across multiple departments.

☐ Growth activation: We design tactics to target your customer across each stage of the funnel and spot opportunities.

☐ Data-driven priorities: We navigate the proliferation of data and use data at the heart of all decision-making.

☐ Trend evaluation: We evaluate the action required when emerging trends change customer expectations.

Data Literacy

☐ Data literacy: Individuals across our organization speak the language of data.

☐ Setting a data vision: Leaders can lay the groundwork for the ideal flow of data throughout the organization.

☐ Advanced skills to solve complex problems: We fully harness data as a strategic asset.

Modern Marketing

☐ We drive sales through digital channels.

☐ We know how to reduce wasted digital spending.

☐ Our go-to-market process is customer-centric.

☐ We have the tools to reduce creative agency spending.

☐ Our team makes data-driven decisions.

Got 'em all? We can help you transition from legacy technology systems, design experiences that customers love, and continue to help you reinvent as a digital-first business. There's always so much more to learn — no matter where you are.

Get Started With General Assembly On Demand

SELF-PACED | ONLINE | ~12 HOURS

Digital Foundations On Demand

Increase digital literacy, helping individuals across your organization learn the mindset and language of digital transformation.

Business Outcomes:

- Develop fluency in key digital topics such as user research, agile, and data frameworks.
- Adopt a digital mindset that supports your business goals and transformation initiatives.
- Create a shared language to increase collaboration amongst your teams.

SELF-PACED | ONLINE | ~7 HOURS

Data Literacy On Demand

Builds a data-driven mindset within your org by arming employees with the skills they need to interpret and tell stories with data.

Business Outcomes:

- Develop a data-driven mindset throughout your organization.
- Make more impactful decisions by removing bias from the data analytics workflow.
- Use data insights to propel business initiatives forward and make better decisions.

TIMED | ONLINE | 1 HOUR

Certified Marketer Assessment

Provides an objective measure of marketing skill to benchmark talent and guide training decisions.

Business Outcomes:

- Get an objective view of your team's skills.
- Give marketers lessons that are relevant to their skill sets.
- Allow team members to understand their personal strengths and weaknesses.

SELF-PACED | ONLINE | 10+ HOURS

Certified Marketer Learning Paths

Match skill profiles to tailored training, helping teams level set core marketing principles and build fluency in critical areas.

Business Outcomes:

- Fill in employee knowledge gaps with a scalable solution.
- Customize learning paths to meet the needs of beginner and advanced marketing practitioners.
- Enable learning in a convenient, self-paced format.

Meet Your Training Partner
General Assembly: On Demand

General Assembly is a global upskilling and reskilling company with unmatched scale. Our programs enable teams to grow, compete, and thrive in the digital economy.

The Skills of Tomorrow, Delivered Today

A stunning 53% of organizations can't identify what skills they need for the future of work. With our finger firmly on the pulse of what's next, we partner with businesses to unlock the internal skills they need to fuel transformation. We build learning solutions in key practice areas across your business and org chart.

Why General Assembly?

Hundreds of companies partner with us to train their employees on digital-first skills to meet their loftiest transformation goals and capture the most value from digitization and automation.

- **Deep industry expertise.** Our programs are built and taught by experts, with industry guidance and validation from C-level executives on our standards boards.

- **End-to-end partnership.** We upskill and reskill talent, continuously assessing and aligning your workforce strategy with emergent needs.

- **Flexible and scalable.** Our expert-led training and talent solutions can be delivered worldwide, with flexible onsite or remote formats that scale for teams of 10 or 10,000.

Booz | Allen | Hamilton   L'ORÉAL   **Bloomberg**

SHISEIDO   BNP PARIBAS CARDIF   Guardian

Learn More

Ready to start building digital-first mindsets throughout your organization today? Get in touch.

enterprise@ga.co | ga.co/enterprise