



## Helping a Leading Automation Firm Meet Global Growth and Team Alignment Challenges

**The Client:** Robert (Bob) Zeigenfuse is the Founder and President of Avanceon, an international firm that provides manufacturing automation technology for energy, food, and pharmaceutical companies. They operate in the USA, South Asia, and the Middle East and employ approximately 200 employees in five offices worldwide. The company has been in business since 1984.



**The Situation:** Avanceon was growing rapidly and expanding internationally. Bob recognized that the marketing, management, and systems that brought his company its current level of success would not be adequate to support their expansion efforts. **In short, the company was experiencing growing pains, and profits were not keeping pace with gross revenue.** “We were having problems with assimilating our strategic goals, values, and mission across the organization,” says Bob. **Executives were spending nearly half of their time sorting out customer misunderstandings and internal communications problems, and very little time on planning. As a result, they were missing out on six and seven figure business opportunities.**

Avanceon needed to become more sophisticated in communicating with employees and customers. They also needed to streamline their systems as they expanded abroad. “We used tribal knowledge,” says Bob in reference to how the culture of the organization was maintained when it was smaller. “This required way too much micro-management.”

They had engaged three consultants in years past with limited success prior to bringing in the *EnergizeGrowth*® team.

**The Process:** Over a two-year period, Lisa Nirell and her team guided Bob and the management team at Avanceon to develop their company vision, core values, and top goals. Throughout the process, the emphasis was on making sure that the strategy was grounded in reality and could be easily understood by employees at every level and across the globe. Bob was intent on having the process “stick” with employees, and implemented *Personal Strategic Plans* across the organization. “On a quarterly basis we announce our strategic goals and people pick pieces of those that they’ll help the company do,” says Bob.

“If you’ve had failures before and you really want to be successful this time...this is the way to build your company. I have used other methods that just didn’t work. I have even recommended Lisa to competitors.” - Robert Zeigenfuse, Founder and President, Avanceon

Lisa and her team also interviewed Avanceon’s clients to find out what they valued about the company. “You’d think that you’d know this, but we didn’t know,” says Bob. Having a third party talk to his clients proved enlightening. “Like most technology companies, you

think it's your technical prowess and innovative solutions [that clients value]," says Bob. It turned out that while clients were very satisfied with Avanceon's technical expertise, they were equally impressed with the ease in working with the organization. "Our ability to be flexible and keep to a schedule," says Bob, are key attributes that set them apart in the minds of their clients.

**The Results:** The quality and frequency of communication has changed dramatically within the organization. As opposed to announcing top-down directives, Avanceon now embraces a team approach. "We have workout groups where all of our messages are reviewed by respected peers before they are even delivered. Then we deliver the message and help our change agents reinforce the message. **We actually test people on a quarterly basis on new policies and our core values to see what they know,**" says Bob. Gaps in knowledge and understanding are then identified and addressed.

By focusing on strategy and employee development through the *Personal Strategic Plan* process, Avanceon is seeing a direct impact on the company's bottom line. The CFO has become more active in planning and was featured in *Inc.* Magazine for his innovative cash management strategies. **Collection time has gone from 75 days down to 45 days.**

**What it's like to work with Lisa Nirell and her team:** "Lisa sets up her engagements so that she sticks around to make sure you don't stray off the proven path," says Bob. He believes her greatest strength is her depth of knowledge. "She's almost like an encyclopedia on the different processes. **She's developed a holistic, integrated approach to [solving] problems,**" says Bob.

"As engineers, we pride ourselves on coming up with solutions, but sometimes our limited beliefs get in the way of success. Lisa and Steve help me get over my own limited beliefs on a regular basis. Once you're willing to do that, anything is possible." - Robert Zeigenfuse, Founder and President, Avanceon

Bob appreciated Lisa's team approach and benefited from her affiliation with branding expert Samantha Hartley and seasoned CEO and Lean expert Steve Ashton. "Lisa is willing to admit that she has her areas of expertise, but that some areas she doesn't have," says Bob. "Some consultants will try to be the know-it-all on every topic which is, quite frankly, not believable and insulting."

"Lisa is very selective in terms of who she works with," says Bob. "She really will disqualify people who are not committed to the holistic solution. If the client is unwilling to measure and track success, she won't waste her time. She absolutely holds you accountable as you move forward. Her approach was integrated and adaptive to our existing culture and needs which I found to be an outstanding quality of the work we did together."