

Smarter Collaboration Insights

Sharing ideas to accelerate smarter collaboration

December 2024

FEATURED THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Successful Collaboration in Professional Services

Why do some teams thrive while others struggle?

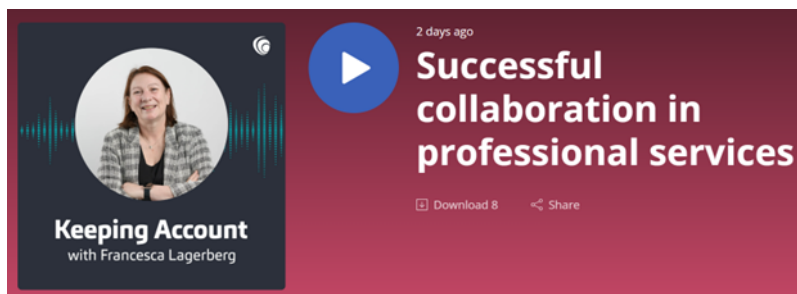
Dr. Heidi K. Gardner and Baker Tilly International CEO Francesca Lagerberg recently tackled this perplexing question on the Keeping Account podcast. Drawing from Dr. Gardner's smarter collaboration research and their joint real-world experiences, they uncovered actionable insights to help teams succeed:

1. **High-performing teams need more than talent.** Dr. Gardner once led two equally brilliant teams – one included an astrophysicist, a concert pianist, and seasoned business professionals, and the other was just as diverse. One team achieved groundbreaking results, while the other delivered competent but uninspired work. The difference? The high-performing team thrived in an environment where every voice was valued and heard (versus discounting people for their title or tenure).
2. **Purpose is powerful.** Lagerberg highlighted the importance of connecting routine tasks to a larger mission. Even something like an audit becomes meaningful when framed as critical to economic stability and client success. When teams see how their work contributes to a greater purpose, engagement and pride naturally follow.
3. **Leadership under pressure is a game-changer.** One story from a research site jumped to Dr. Gardner's mind: a leader who stormed into a meeting, slammed the table, and declared, *"We're in the hot seat now!"* The result? Amplified stress and stifled creativity. In contrast, effective

leaders inspire confidence, encourage bold thinking, and guide teams to focus on opportunities rather than pitfalls, even in high-pressure moments. And they share just enough insight into the pressure that team members know they need to step up.

4. **Culture can bridge geographic differences.** Regional and cultural differences are real, but as Lagerberg noted, a strong organizational culture can transcend borders. Dr. Gardner shared how global firms like McKinsey create shared values and goals to harmonize diverse teams – giving examples of teams she led in South Africa that had six or more nationalities. Celebrating local uniqueness while maintaining a cohesive culture unlocks a team’s full potential.
5. **Incentive systems shape team performance.** The way teams are rewarded can significantly influence their dynamics and outcomes. One of Gardner & Co.’s past client praised teamwork but rewarded only individual success, fostering competition over cohesion. This misalignment discouraged knowledge-sharing and weakened trust within teams. In contrast, aligning incentives with collaborative goals encourages trust, collaboration, and shared success.

Want to learn more? Listen to [their conversation on the Keeping Account podcast](#). They dive deep into smarter collaboration, leadership, and strategies for team success in today’s complex world.



How Smarter Collaboration Fosters Innovation and Compliance

Oil and water. White shoes after Labor Day. Innovation and compliance? Some argue these last two just don’t jibe – even though they’re co-occurring goals for most companies. Our response: it depends on whether smarter collaboration is in the mix.

Our research clearly demonstrates that smarter collaboration enhances both innovation speed and adoption – and mitigates enterprise risk at the same time.

1. That's because **smarter collaboration promotes better decision-making structures and processes**: It involves harnessing the right mix of experts to tackle a problem or opportunity, including people beyond the “usual suspects.” Done right, law firms draw on their technology and security specialists while also tapping lawyers (both early adopters and resisters) and external experts.
2. **Smarter collaboration also fosters the right culture**. It means that leaders and partners work hard to create psychological safety and “the obligation to dissent” (borrowing a phrase from my prior firm, McKinsey). This is where people speak up because they know they're valued. In one firm, a group of chief- and director-level business professionals recently told me, “We feel so disrespected. Collectively we've got hundreds of years of experience, but the partners never consider our ideas.” What a waste!

For more on smarter collaboration in legal tech, check out Dr. Heidi K. Gardner's insights in Frogslayer's new [Legal Tech Trends 2025 report](#).



EVENT RECAPS

Coaching.com Session

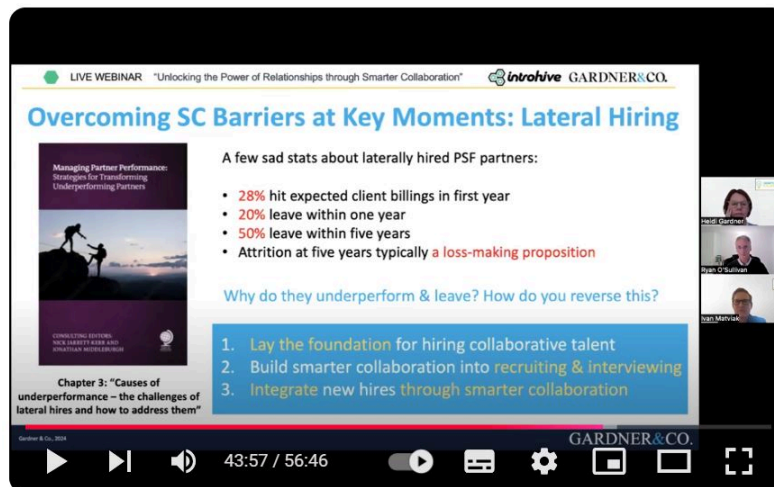
During a recent Coaching.com Membership Session, Dr. Heidi K. Gardner explored how coaches can 1) help their clients identify and avoid common collaboration traps and pitfalls and 2) harness their own smarter collaboration profile to grow and achieve. For example, self-inflicted over-commitment is often driven by the mistaken beliefs that “bigger is better” in order to find a sponsor, access more opportunities, and build a reputation. The better approach is to help coachees assess the quality of their network and make

strategic choices about collaboration. We are developing a collaborative mapping product to make this way of working much easier: stay tuned!



Introhive Client Webinar

Recently, Dr. Heidi K. Gardner and Ivan Matviak joined Introhive's Dr. Ryan O'Sullivan for a webinar on unlocking the power of relationships through smarter collaboration. More specifically, they discussed how relationships and collaboration can shape outcomes during times of change – such as before and after M&As and when lateral hiring. To watch the webinar, click [here](#).



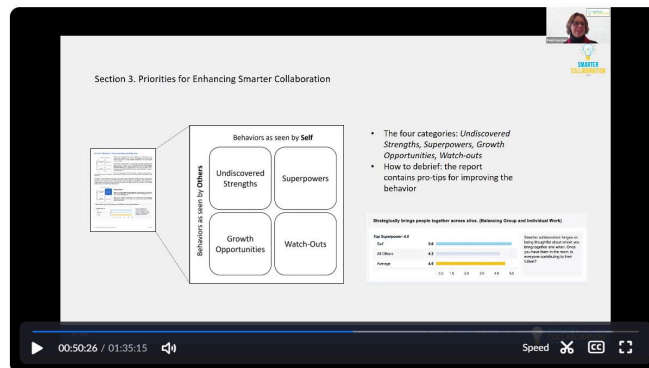
Smarter Collaboration 360 Certification Event

We have launched our first batch of certified SC360 practitioners! Dozens of professional development leaders and coaches are now qualified to use the tool to help people unleash their collaborative superpowers, overcome their capability blind spots, and learn how their colleagues experience them in the workplace.

If you couldn't attend the session, we expect to have quarterly certifications in 2025. We are now accepting SC360 orders from certified practitioners as well as professionals experienced in using 360s. To obtain pricing or place an order,

please email Lee at lee@gardnerandco.co.

We look forward to future conversations about how the SC360 – and other smarter collaboration tools – can help you in your work.



RESEARCH

Tension in the Workplace Caused by Differing Political Views

Have you felt or observed tension in the workplace caused by people's differing political views? Please select your response in the poll below..

We're conducting research on this topic following heated elections in the US – and similar political scenes around the world.

We want to make sure that our data is as representative as possible, so please share the poll with your colleagues, family, and/or friends (here's [a link for them](#)). Thank you!

Have you felt or observed tension in the workplace caused by people's differing political views?

[Strongly agree](#)

[Agree](#)

[Disagree](#)

[Strongly disagree](#)

And if you know a leader who is exceptionally skilled at managing tension caused by differing political perspectives, we'd appreciate hearing from you. Please email heidi@gardnerandco.co.

QUICK TIPS

How Outside Advisors Can Raise the Bar through Smarter Collaboration

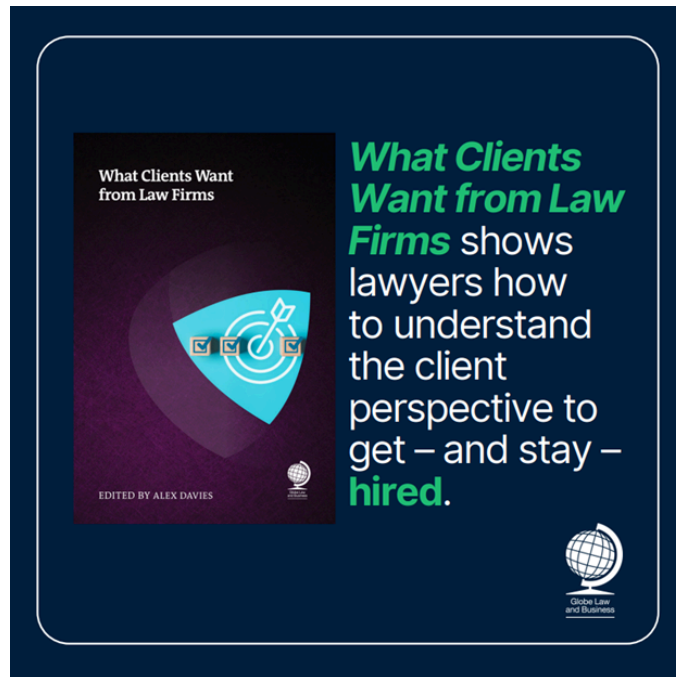
In today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business

environment, clients need more from their outside advisors than technical brilliance or fast response times. Below we outline how external lawyers can go the extra mile through smarter collaboration; these tips also apply to other types of third-party experts and consultants.

1. **See around corners.** Don't wait for general counsel to ask for advice. Offer forward-looking insights on industry trends and business risks before they even hit the radar. (Example: "We've noticed a competitor is lobbying heavily on this regulation – here's how it could impact your strategy.")
2. **Tear down silos.** Bring together the right specialists across your firm – and even from external networks – to deliver integrated, innovative solutions. (Example: "We paired our data privacy expert with our M&A team to ensure your deal doesn't hit compliance snags.")
3. **Talk business, not just law.** Dive into your client's strategy, operations, and market. Offer legal advice that aligns with their broader business goals. (Example: "After visiting your operations site, we've developed a risk mitigation plan that supports your expansion timeline.")
4. **Be the connector.** Use your network to convene roundtables or connect GCs with peers and industry experts. Helping clients think beyond their legal challenges adds immense value. (Example: "We're hosting a private roundtable for GCs in renewable energy – would you like to join?")
5. **Focus on proactivity, not just responsiveness.** Stop treating GCs like an ATM. Stay engaged between assignments by flagging regulatory changes, competitive moves, or emerging risks. (Example: "We're tracking this proposed tax law – it could have implications for your planned acquisitions next year.")
6. **Tailor thought leadership.** No one wants a generic client alert. Customize insights to the GC's specific context, business, and priorities for maximum relevance. (Example: "We analyzed how this ruling affects companies with global supply chains like yours – here's our perspective.")
7. **Make the GC's job easier.** Deliver seamless service across geographies and practice groups. Avoid duplication, confusion, or dropped balls. Make collaboration look effortless. (Example: "Our team across three offices

coordinated to resolve this, so there's no need for you to manage multiple points of contact.”)

For more tips and research on the evolving role of GCs and their supporting counsel, check out the new book "[What Clients Want from Law Firms](#)" – including a chapter from Dr. Heidi K. Gardner and Gardner & Co. Insights Director Csilla Ilkei.



TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: LEE SCHUBE

Meet Our New Operations Assistant

Lee Schube is the operations assistant at Gardner & Co., splitting her time between strengthening organizational processes and ensuring the smooth functioning of the technology-based tools portion of the business (covering the Smarter Collaboration 360, the Smarter Collaboration Profile, and various other products under development). With over 10 years of experience in operations management, and a background at research companies, her passion is streamlining workflows and enhancing organizational efficiency. In addition to her operational skills, Schube has a solid foundation in human resources — where she works on fostering a positive workplace culture and supporting employee development.



OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET

Catch Up with Dr. Heidi K. Gardner

Ready to book a client roundtable, an executive workshop, or a major offsite? Here are two upcoming trips for Dr. Heidi K. Gardner and Ivan Matviak, in case you'd like to schedule time with them.

- Kyoto & Tokyo: February 15-21, 2025
- Copenhagen: March 11-13, 2025
- Melbourne & Sydney: March 23 - April 10, 2025

STAY CONNECTED

Keep in Touch

Follow Gardner & Co. on [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#), and visit our [website](#) for extra news and insights on smarter collaboration.

Give Feedback

What else can we do together? Please send your thoughts to Christine at christine@gardnerandco.co.

Gardner & Co.

christine@gardnerandco.co



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