

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE CAREER ACCELERATION

Lead from Behind. Lead from Up Front.

Conference session for AP professionals seeking practical career acceleration strategies

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SESSION PROMISE

A practical playbook for accelerating your AP career

Career growth in AP is not only about doing more work — it is about turning the right work into visible business impact.

1

Target the next seat

Name the role, scope, or influence level you want — then work backwards from the capabilities it requires.

2

Lead from behind

Influence outcomes before you have authority by connecting people, data, process, and follow-through.

3

Lead up front

Step into moments that require a clear point of view, a recommendation, and a confident ask.

AP context: invoice exceptions, supplier experience, controls, cash discipline, close deadlines, automation, and the cross-functional work that makes procure-to-pay perform.

Today: Three in-person table activities + one 30-day action sprint

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FRAMEWORK

The AP career acceleration flywheel

Visibility follows impact. Impact follows intentional choices about what you learn, where you contribute, and how you communicate results.



Choose the outcome

Pick the business result that matters for the environment: fewer exceptions, faster cycle time, stronger controls, better supplier trust.



Build capability

Close the skill gap through projects, shadowing, analysis, certification, or cross-training.



Create proof

Lead a manageable improvement that produces evidence: data, adoption, time saved, risk reduced.



Make it visible

Share the story in the right room with a clear recommendation and next-step ask.

Acceleration question: What AP problem can I help solve that also proves I am ready for the next level?

Two leadership postures AP professionals need

Career acceleration requires both quiet influence and visible leadership. The strongest AP professionals know when to use each.

LEADING FROM BEHIND

Influence without waiting for authority

- Clarify the process problem before the meeting.
- Bring data, options, and a low-friction next step.
- Coach peers; connect AP, procurement, receiving, and suppliers.
- Make the team's work easier, safer, and more reliable.

LEADING UP FRONT

Use visible moments to advance decisions

- Frame the issue in business language: cash, control, risk, service.
- State the decision needed and why now matters.
- Recommend a path instead of reporting only the problem.
- Ask for sponsorship, resources, or agreement.

Both count as leadership — one builds trust before the room; the other creates momentum in the room.

Leadership range: from behind = credibility and coalition | up front = clarity and confidence

Breakout Activity Prep: Career Target Map

Purpose: turn “I want to grow” into a specific AP career direction.

At your table, choose one target role or capability.

1. What work would you be trusted to own?
2. What evidence would prove readiness?
3. Which relationships would need to know?
4. What gap can you close in 30 days?

Suggested timing: 10–12 minutes + quick table share-out



Share-out prompt: What is one evidence point that would prove you are ready?

SET THE OBJECTIVE

Breakout Activity 1: Career destination scan

10 minutes • pairs or triads • practical skill drill

Prompt

Choose one AP career destination for the next 12–18 months. It can be a formal role, a broader scope, or a leadership behavior you want to be known for.

Role

Scope

Reputation

Example: AP Team Lead, AP manager, supplier enablement owner, controls partner, P2P project contributor.

Worksheet steps

- Pick one target role or influence level.
- List three skills the next seat requires.
- Circle two gaps: technical, process, stakeholder, or communication.
- Write the objective: 'I am building toward ___ by proving ___.'

Deliverable: one career objective you can explain in one sentence to a manager, mentor, or sponsor.

PATHWAYS

AP career paths: turn daily work into leadership evidence

Use the work already around you — exceptions, controls, vendors, close, automation — as proof that you can lead at the next level.

Career direction	Leadership evidence	AP proof project	Visibility channel
AP Lead / Supervisor	Coach accuracy; prioritize work; stabilize handoffs.	Run an exception-reduction huddle and publish a weekly trend.	Team SOP, scorecard, or close update.
AP Manager	Improve controls; develop people; manage service levels.	Reduce cycle time or duplicate-payment risk with a measurable result.	Monthly stakeholder review.
P2P / Finance Ops	Connect AP, procurement, receiving, ERP, and suppliers.	Support automation, supplier portal, or workflow adoption.	Steering update or demo.
Audit / Controls / FP&A	Translate risk, data, cash, and policy into decisions.	Analyze discounts, holds, accruals, or compliance exceptions.	Readout with recommendation.

Career acceleration move: select one direction, then choose a proof project that gives leaders evidence — not just effort.

Breakout Activity 2 Prep: Lead from behind

Influence when you are not the decision-maker: make the next right action easier for others to take.

Observe the system

Where does AP work slow down? Look for repeatable friction: late approvals, duplicate work, unclear ownership.

Frame the issue

Translate the pain into business language: cost, risk, cash flow, supplier experience or close timing.

Recruit the coalition

Name the decision-maker, allies, data source and next nudge that would unlock progress.

**Table challenge: Pick one AP friction point and build an influence map.
Capture the people, data and first conversation that would move it forward.**

Share-out prompt: What will make your recommendation feel low-risk to the decision-maker?

Breakout Activity 2: Lead from behind with an influence map

12 minutes • groups of 4 • peer coaching

Choose an AP issue

- Chronic PO mismatches before month-end close.
- Supplier escalation caused by unclear payment status.
- Automation adoption stalls because teams work around the process.
- Duplicate-payment control needs stronger front-end discipline.

Map stakeholders before the meeting

Stakeholder	What they care about	Quiet influence move
Procurement	Clean orders; supplier leverage	Bring top mismatch reasons + simple policy ask
Receiving / Ops	Speed; minimal rework	Clarify handoff and timing impact
Supplier	Payment certainty	Share status path and escalation rule
Finance / Controls	Risk, cash, compliance	Translate issue into control or cash impact

Deliverable: one behind-the-scenes influence move you will take before asking leaders for a decision.

Breakout Activity 3 Prep: Lead from up front

Turn AP expertise into a concise leadership brief: clear situation, clear impact, clear recommendation, clear ask.

Situation	Impact	Recommendation	Ask
What is happening and why now?	What does it cost, risk or delay?	What should change and why this option?	What decision, support or access do you need?

Practice: prepare a 90-second leadership brief on an AP improvement idea. Pair up, deliver it, and get one piece of feedback on clarity and confidence.

Share-out prompt: Which word or phrase made the ask stronger?

Breakout Activity 3: Lead up front with an executive-ready moment

15 minutes • triads • scenario simulation

Scenario prompt

A supplier escalation exposes repeated invoice exceptions two days before close. Procurement says the PO is correct; receiving says the service was not confirmed; finance needs the accrual risk explained.

Triad roles

- Speaker: makes a 2-minute recommendation.
- Sponsor: asks one clarifying question.
- Observer: gives feedback on clarity and confidence.

Use the 3-part talk track

1

Decision needed

What do we need from the room today?

2

Business impact

What is the cash, control, risk, or supplier impact?

3

Recommendation

What is the next best step and who owns it?

Deliverable: a concise recommendation you can say out loud — not just a status update.

Make visibility a habit—not a self-promotion event

Visibility grows when leaders can connect your AP work to business outcomes and repeat your story to others.

Leadership mode	What it sounds like	Career signal it sends
From behind	"I noticed invoice holds cluster by approver. I can map the handoff and propose a pilot."	Systems thinker; trusted problem solver; improves work beyond their own queue.
Up front	"Here are two options, my recommendation and the decision needed by Friday."	Executive-ready judgment; communicates impact; makes decisions easier.

Weekly visibility log: problem noticed | action taken | business result | partner or leader informed

ACTIONABLE TAKEAWAYS

Breakout Activity 4: Convert insight into a 90-day acceleration plan

10 minutes • individual reflection + table share

End the breakout with one proof project, one visibility moment, and one sponsor conversation.

30 days

Clarify your objective

Select target role/scope; confirm the capability gap; ask for feedback.

60 days

Create visible proof

Lead a small AP improvement and measure the result.

90 days

Share impact + ask

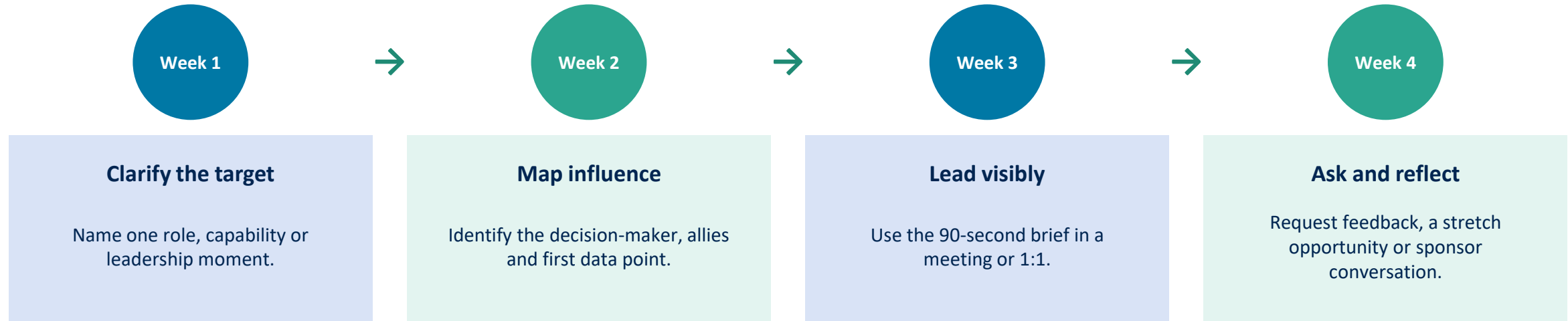
Present the outcome; ask for the next opportunity, sponsor, or stretch assignment.

Takeaways

1. Set the objective • 2. Shape the influence strategy • 3. Execute visible proof • 4. Repeat the flywheel

Personal acceleration sprint: your next 30 days

Leave with a small experiment that creates evidence—not just intention.



Commitment sentence: I will lead from _____ on _____ by _____.

Pair share: exchange one commitment and one accountability check-in.

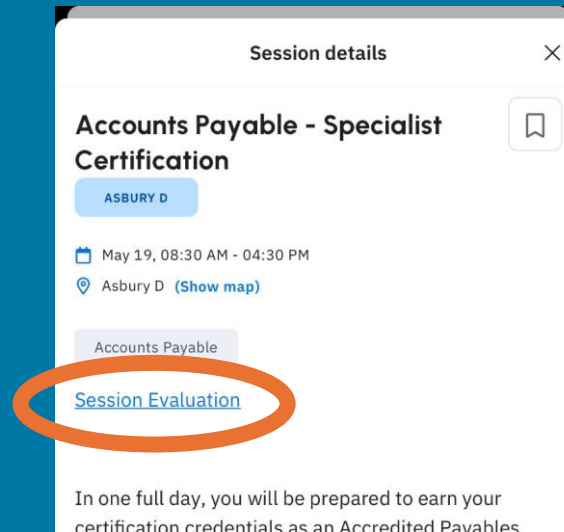
Actionable Takeaways

1. **Be specific about the outcome:** Target a role, capability or leadership moment—and define what readiness looks like.
2. **Lead from behind before you have authority:** Reduce friction, align stakeholders and make the work easier for others to support.
3. **Lead from up front with a clear ask:** Name the impact, recommend a path and request the decision or opportunity you need.

Acceleration starts when you turn insight into one visible action.

Please tell us what you think!

- Please scan this QR code using your mobile to access a short feedback survey →
- Also accessible via the mobile app



QUESTIONS?

What will you lead next?

Bring forward a question, a career target, or an AP challenge you want to translate into visible leadership.

Where can you lead from behind this month?

What front-room moment should you prepare for?

Who needs to see the impact of your work?

Before you leave: write down one action you will take within 7 days.

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