CASE STUDY

From Billable Hour Burnout to Sustainable Growth: How Summit Advisory Partners Reduced Consultant Turnover by 58% in 7 Months

Firm Profile

Firm:	Summit Advisory Partners
Industry:	Management consulting and strategic advisory
Size:	185 consultants and staff
Leadership:	13 practice leaders and project managers
Challenge:	19% annual consultant turnover driven by burnout and unclear career paths

Transformation Results

Metric	Before	After	Improvement
Consultant Turnover	19%	8%	↓ 58%
Utilization Rate	78%	82%	↑ 5%
Client Satisfaction	8.1/10	9.2/10	↑ 14%
Annual Savings	—	$3.2M	$3.2M
Platform ROI	—	733%	733%

The Inflection Point

Summit Advisory Partners had built a strong reputation over 12 years, advising Fortune 500 companies on digital transformation and operational excellence. But by early 2025, their own operations were anything but excellent.

The firm had lost 35 consultants in the previous year, a 19% annual turnover rate that was devastating their project continuity and client relationships. Senior consultants were leaving for competitor firms. High-potential associates were burning out before reaching senior roles. The firm was hemorrhaging institutional knowledge and client relationships.

Project managers were stretched impossibly thin, juggling multiple client engagements without visibility into their team members' wellbeing. The billable hours pressure was relentless. Consultants regularly worked 60-70 hour weeks during project sprints, with no clear end in sight.

> *"We were advising clients on sustainable business practices while running our own firm into the ground. The irony wasn't lost on anyone. Our best people were exhausted, and they were voting with their feet."*

> **— Richard Hawthorne, Managing Partner**

Exit interviews revealed predictable patterns: unclear career progression, no work-life balance, feeling like a cog in the billable hours machine, and practice leaders who were too busy selling to mentor their teams. One departing senior consultant's feedback cut deep: "I came here to make an impact. I'm leaving because all I do is make PowerPoint decks." The firm had tried the standard retention playbook. They had raised compensation by 12%, enhanced their retirement matching, and hosted quarterly team-building events. Nothing slowed the departures. Each exit cost an estimated $125,000 in recruitment, ramp-up time, and lost client billability.

The Clover ERA Implementation

In May 2025, Summit Advisory's leadership team made a strategic decision. They would give their 13 practice leaders and senior project managers the tools to actually lead people, not just manage billable hours.
They implemented Clover ERA for all practice leaders overseeing strategy, operations, technology, and change management practices. Each leader managed teams of 12-18 consultants across multiple client engagements.

> *"My initial reaction was skepticism. Another survey? But this was different. Within three days, I could see that half my team was flagging Opportunity issues. They felt stuck on implementation work with no path to strategic client relationships. That was actionable data I could work with."*

> **— Elena Martinez, Technology Practice Leader**

The 30-second daily reflections fit naturally into consultant workflows. Team members completed them during their morning standup routine, between client meetings, or while traveling. The questions focused on the CLOVER framework: Communication, Learning, Opportunities, Vulnerability, Enablement, and Reflection.
The practice leader dashboards provided unprecedented visibility. When four consultants on the same project flagged Communication issues simultaneously, their project manager discovered that the client had changed strategic direction without properly briefing the consulting team. He escalated immediately, preventing three weeks of wasted effort.

Seven Months of Transformation: The Results

By December 2025, Summit Advisory's metrics demonstrated a fundamental shift in firm culture:

Retention and Growth:

- Consultant turnover dropped from 19% to 8% annually
- Only 15 departures in the second half of 2025 (compared to 23 in the first half)
- Zero practice leader turnover post-implementation
- Average consultant tenure increased from 2.8 years to projected 4.6 years
- Internal promotion rate increased 42% as career paths became clearer

Team Engagement:

- Daily reflection participation averaged 89% across all practices
- Burnout indicators decreased 39% firmwide
- Communication scores improved 52% in the first 90 days
- Learning and development engagement increased 61%
- Career opportunity clarity ratings rose from 4.2/10 to 8.1/10

Business Performance:

- Utilization rate increased from 78% to 82%
- Client satisfaction scores rose from 8.1/10 to 9.2/10
- Project delivery quality ratings improved 18%
- Client contract renewals increased from 71% to 86%
- Partner satisfaction with team performance increased 44%

Financial Impact:

- Estimated annual savings of $3.2M in turnover and recruitment costs
- ROI of 733% (platform cost vs. direct savings)
- Platform investment: $45,890 annually ($295/month × 13 leaders)
- Additional revenue from improved utilization: $890,000

What Changed: Practice Leader Perspectives

The transformation came from giving practice leaders visibility into problems that had been invisible under the pressure of billable hours targets.

> *"Before Clover ERA, I managed by looking at timesheets and hoping everyone was okay. Now I have actual data. When I see Learning scores declining for my mid-level consultants, I know they feel disconnected from skill development that would advance their careers. That's something I can address before they start interviewing elsewhere."*

> **— David Chen, Strategy Practice Leader**

Chen shares a pivotal intervention. His dashboard showed one of his senior consultants had declining Opportunity scores for four weeks straight. Rather than wait for the annual review cycle, Chen met with her within 24 hours.

The consultant, a six-year veteran, felt trapped in execution roles with no exposure to client C-suite relationships or proposal development. Chen immediately involved her in the next

major RFP response and had her co-present at a client board meeting. Two months later, she led her first solo business development effort and closed a $1.2M engagement. She's now on track for partner consideration.

> *"The daily reflections take 20-30 seconds while I'm reviewing my calendar for the day. But the insights I get managing 16 consultants across four concurrent projects are invaluable. I can see patterns that would take me months to piece together from scattered conversations."*

> **— Elena Martinez, Technology Practice Leader**

Martinez credits the neuroscience education with transforming her leadership approach. Understanding that lack of autonomy suppresses serotonin and kills motivation helped her restructure project staffing. Instead of dictating assignments, she now involves consultants in choosing which client engagements align with their development goals.

The System That Worked in Professional Services

What differentiated Summit Advisory's success wasn't abandoning billable hours or reducing client commitments. It was creating visibility into team health while maintaining delivery excellence.

> *"Annual engagement surveys told us people were unhappy, but by then we'd already lost senior talent. Daily insights let us identify and resolve issues in real-time. When Communication scores dropped across our strategy practice after a major pitch loss, we held a retrospective within 48 hours rather than letting frustration fester for months."*

> **— Richard Hawthorne, Managing Partner**

The Vulnerability component proved especially critical in consulting's competitive culture. One high-performing consultant had been hiding severe anxiety about client presentations despite five years of successful delivery.
His Vulnerability scores surfaced the issue before it became a career-limiting problem. His practice leader connected him with executive coaching and arranged for him to shadow more experienced presenters. Four months later, he's mentoring junior consultants on client communication and has received multiple client compliments on his presentation skills.

Lessons for Other Professional Services Firms

Summit Advisory's transformation offers critical insights for consulting, accounting, legal, and advisory firms facing similar retention challenges:

Empower practice leaders beyond revenue targets. The platform succeeded because it gave practice leaders their own team health data, not just billable hours dashboards. Each leader could identify issues specific to their practice and respond without waiting for firmwide HR initiatives.

Daily insights prevent talent loss. In professional services, waiting for annual reviews means discovering problems after consultants have accepted offers elsewhere. Real-time visibility lets leaders intervene when people are frustrated, not after they've resigned.

Address the neuroscience of knowledge work burnout. Summit stopped treating symptoms with higher compensation and started addressing root causes: lack of career

clarity (no dopamine from progress), disconnection from firm strategy (no oxytocin from belonging), no control over assignments (suppressed serotonin), and chronic client pressure (cortisol overload).

Make reflection fit consulting workflows. The 30-second commitment worked because consultants could complete it during their morning routine or between client meetings. Longer engagement surveys had always faced poor response rates because billable time is sacred.

Give leaders authority to act on insights. Practice leaders could adjust project staffing, create development opportunities, and address team concerns within days. When consultants flagged lack of strategic client exposure, their leaders could involve them in proposals and presentations immediately.

Connect team health to client outcomes. When partners could see the direct correlation between consultant engagement and client satisfaction scores, it justified prioritizing team wellbeing alongside billable hours targets.

Where They Are Now

Nine months after implementation, Summit Advisory has become a destination firm for consulting talent in their market. The culture shift is visible in everything from internal team dynamics to client feedback.
"Consultants reference their reflections in project retrospectives now," observes Martinez. "Someone will say 'I reflected this morning about how we're not incorporating the client's feedback loop,' and it starts a constructive conversation instead of finger-pointing. It's become part of how we improve delivery quality."
The firm is attracting top-tier talent again. Candidates specifically ask about career development frameworks and work-life integration during recruitment. Several consultants who left for competitor firms have returned, citing Summit's transformed culture.

> *"We spent years trying to fix retention with compensation and perks. What actually worked was giving our practice leaders daily visibility into team health and trusting them to respond. The platform didn't solve our retention crisis. It showed us exactly where the problems were every day, which gave us the opportunity to address them before losing more talent."*

> **— Richard Hawthorne, Managing Partner**

Final Impact Summary

Investment	Results	ROI
$45,890/year	**$3.2M saved**	**733%**
13 practice leaders	**19% → 8% turnover**	**58% reduction**
30 seconds/day	**89% participation**	**Sustained**

About Clover ERA

Clover ERA empowers practice leaders and project managers with daily team insights based on the neuroscience-backed CLOVER framework (Communication, Learning, Opportunities,

Vulnerability, Enablement, Reflection). The platform replaces annual engagement surveys with 30-second daily reflections designed for billable-hour environments, providing professional services leaders with real-time data to prevent burnout, improve retention, and maintain client delivery excellence.

Contact Information

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