Shifting the strategic priority
When GE’s current CEO, Jeff Immelt, took over in 2001, the global business environment was volatile, constantly shifting, growing, and contracting. In this new landscape, the old corporate focus on operational excellence was no longer enough. As a company, GE needed to evolve a new corporate mind-set built around innovation and growth.

To do this required additional investment in research and development. It required a more external, customer-oriented approach across all businesses. And it required that growth be the central theme of our annual strategic review, which was subsequently renamed the “Growth Playbook.”

All of these moves were important steps toward making growth a top priority at GE. But to make a corporate imperative like that effectively stick, it was critical that our leaders throughout the company understand, embrace, and promote growth on a daily basis. As Immelt himself said in the 2007 annual report, the idea was “to embed growth into the DNA of our company.” And that’s when GE’s corporate leadership institute, known as Crotonville, created a four-day course called Leadership, Innovation & Growth (LIG).

The growth curriculum
LIG is a unique course at Crotonville in that it takes an intact leadership team from a given business unit and removes them from their daily responsibilities for almost an entire working week, giving them precious time to think. In the past, when leaders completed courses at Crotonville, they would sometimes struggle to apply what they had learned when they returned to their business unit, because their coworkers had not shared the same experience. But the thinking behind LIG is that if entire management teams experience the curriculum together, and arrive at insights and conclusions together, the teachings have a better chance of making an impact. We also believe that this intact teams-based approach accelerates strategy in that it enables a faster and higher rate of learning transfer. These leadership teams participate in a LIG session every two to three years.

The curriculum at LIG consists of lectures conducted by a blend of external experts and GE leaders. Every case study is grounded in reality; each reflects actual problems that actual GE business units are struggling with. And participants spend between 15 and 20 hours examining their own business units with brutal honesty, applying creative thinking techniques and generating new insights.

LIG design principles
The six key design elements of the LIG curriculum are as follows:

• Intact teams complete course.
• Lectures are delivered by world-class thought leaders.
• Breakout sessions constitute bulk of curriculum.
• Reports on key learnings are required from all teams.
• Personal commitments to CEO are required from all teams.
• Academic director directs content and programs.
The purpose is to encourage the teams to reexamine capabilities, processes, organizational structures, and most importantly, the way they lead—all within the context of growth.

At the end of the course, each leadership team gives a 20-minute presentation to Immelt in person. The presentation is designed to articulate a simple, clear, and realistic vision for growth, the resources needed to achieve it, and a time line for its completion. Throughout the presentations, Immelt asks questions, challenges assumptions, and redirects thinking as needed. But the real challenge begins after the LIG course has ended, when the focus shifts from learning to execution and accountability. Accordingly, each team is required to send a letter of commitment to Immelt no later than six weeks following the program, and the execution status of those letters is reviewed as part of the company’s operating cycle.

Growing leaders
In 2011 alone, 59 different teams with 737 participants from 46 countries completed the LIG program. The curriculum continues to evolve, adapting to current market realities and expanding to add classes on such subjects as scenario planning, customer orientation, globalization, organizing for growth, and social media.

Together with the advent of GE’s Growth Values—external focus, clear thinker, imagination & courage, inclusiveness, and expertise—the LIG program continues to infuse growth deep within the corporate culture. In fact, the percentage of revenues that come from organic growth at the company has increased steadily since 2001. “LIG gives me an opportunity to drive change and develop our leaders at the same time,” says Immelt. “It has shown me how leaders inside GE can participate in the type of company we want to create.”