



Fall 2007

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Team Work: Empowering Managers to Develop Talent

At the most successful companies, corporate leaders understand the importance of talent management, and recognize that talent management strategies can help the organization grow and reach its business goals. Their leadership teams support and reward managers and employees who successfully implement these strategies throughout the organization. Managers aren't just held accountable for developing employees in their charge, they are empowered to do so.

Company leadership not only creates the roadmap for talent management strategies, but also puts the strategy into action, thereby setting the example for the company that talent development is a priority. Individual line managers are then responsible for the day-to-day implementation of corporate strategies. These supervisors are more likely to be successful when there is buy-in from the top; if talent management is presented as a substantial part of their job responsibilities; and if they are given the necessary tools to implement the plans. Managers should be encouraged to assess talent, identify key employees early, provide constructive feedback and coaching to their team members, and to lead by example.

Talent management is a process. Here are some tips managers can take to develop their employees and teams:

Assess each individual on the team. What drives and motivates each person? Meeting with each employee to discuss his or her job and career objectives is a good place to start. It is important to look at both short-term and long-term goals. In the short term, what does the person need to do his or her current job well? What support can the manager and organization provide? How can the manager help develop their team members?

Managers should also encourage individuals to look to the long term. This is especially important for high-performing employees, those who the organization have identified as retention risks or key talent. By helping these top performers reach their career goals, managers can aid the company in retaining this important pool. What does the employee want out of his or her career? What are the individual's plans and aspirations? How can the company—and manager—help meet those goals? Some managers erroneously make the assumption that everyone wants to move up, but that's not always the case. It is important to have a series of real conversations to find out what team members want.

Look at the teams as a whole. Does the team need development? Is the group a true team or merely a collection of individuals? For example, a sales team may work in the same department, but each person is responsible for his or her own goals and they may even compete with each other. Does this group need some support from the organization to become a cohesive unit? A true team has some

sort of interdependency, even though some group members may work autonomously.

If it is a true team, what skills are needed to strengthen or further it? How can the team become more productive and high performing? What are the team's goals? What are the skills and talents needed to improve the team? Successful teams have a common purpose, have clearly defined roles and open communication. Take stock of the roles of the current team members and clarify the responsibilities. Managers want to make sure that they have complementary skill sets on their team, and should be careful not to overlap or overdevelop certain skills.

Determine how the talent management strategies for individuals and teams fit into the broader business context. All managers and business unit leaders know what their department or divisional goals are, but may be unclear on the overall organizational strategy. What are the company's mission statement and business issues, and how do the talent management strategies further these objectives? How does the talent in each business line fit into the overall organization? Are career development strategies set by managers complemented and supported by those put in place by the overall organization?

Managers who successfully develop their teams and produce top talent should be rewarded for their efforts. Too often, managers are reluctant to develop staff members because achieving their talent management goals may propel gifted individuals off their teams. Losing staff is difficult to deal with, however it is beneficial for the individual and company, and ultimately in organizations where this is supported, good for the manager as well. This is where leadership buy-in is so important: these managers should be recognized by the company for their work, and the best way to do that is through incentives. There should also be a plan in place to replace individuals who "move up" so effective team supervisors don't suffer because of their success. When there is support from the top, managers are far more likely to encourage team members to reach their full potential.

The C-suite provides the framework and tools to allow talent management strategies to be successful. By practicing the strategies they preach, senior management will encourage managers to cultivate talent. If managers feel properly supported and rewarded for their efforts to help develop staff, organizations will reap the benefits of better retaining the best and brightest—and will always have a bench full of future superstars.