People want to be successful. They don’t drive to work hoping that they won’t be. The reality is, however, that many people don’t get to contribute to their fullest or work to their potential. Organizational culture plays a big role in how much effort, contribution, and results are offered by employees. Pull any research on high-performing cultures and you’ll find that the cultures with the right things in place far exceed other organizations on employee productivity, revenue, profitability, and the like. Can you imagine the power that could exist if everyone was poised to do their utmost, their best, every day? This isn’t a fantasy idea. It’s actually achievable.

The disappointing reality is that the relationship that an employee has with a company can be filled with complexity, confusion, ignorance, or poor behavior from many sources, but it doesn’t have to be that way. The power of having a positive impact on and with employees is incredible, and it’s not that hard to do. The way for companies to achieve great results is through the people who are actually doing the work. Nothing great happens if the people piece isn’t right. If the people filling positions in companies are mediocre, mediocrity will result. To achieve the best results, you put the best people on the job, give them the best support, and do everything you can to enable them to be successful so, in turn, the company can be successful.

So what do we need to do to be better? There are many areas of opportunity, but we focus here on five. First, many people don’t understand how all of the HR/people pieces come together and therefore don’t understand the value of what needs to be done and why. Second, people are in jobs they shouldn’t be in. Third, people in these jobs don’t have the right skills or skills at the right level. Fourth, there is little accountability and little reward in being a good manager. Finally, managing and developing take tremendous time and lots of effort.

**OPPORTUNITY 1: UNDERSTAND HOW ALL THE PIECES FIT TOGETHER**

The pieces actually do fit together. Succession planning should relate to development plans. Goals should relate to incentives and the like. In many organizations, activities related to people management or development are conducted in isolated ways and thus seems unrelated. When I see this disconnect, I often say that the people in these organizations are experiencing death by a thousand HR cuts. We are killing the spirit of people across the world with how we are engaging or not engaging them. So let’s change it!

It’s essential to consider this from the employees’ perspective in order to engage employees in ways that result in higher focus, productivity, and quality. We should be asking the questions employees are asking: what am I expected to do and why? I often do an exercise with groups of leaders, asking them to give me every HR-type term they have
heard. The list is pretty long. It contains words such as goals, coaching, annual incentive plans, and 360s. Once I have the long list, I draw an umbrella to show the relationship of all of these things.

On one side is performance; on the other is development. Essentially, everything else is an input or output of those two buckets. Inputs to a person’s performance (e.g., goals and objectives) include company strategy and role profile. Outputs are deliverables whose quality is determined by good measures that are summed up in a performance review and compensated against accordingly. In its simplest form, this is the performance cycle: what do people need to do to be successful this year, and then when it is over, did they do it, do more or do less, and what do they get or not get for it?

When an employee’s talents and desires intersect with the long-term needs of an organization, a succession plan is born.

Inputs to a person’s development are competencies, 360s, career plans, and current and future goals organized into a plan that shows how the person will develop in the short term as well as the longer term. Outputs are promotions, stretch assignments, or additional development. When an employee’s talents and desires intersect with the long-term needs of an organization, a succession plan is born.

To successfully develop engaged and productive employees, coaching, feedback, and an understanding of people’s style and motivation are necessary. However, none of this needs to be complicated. The simplest terms and succinct ideas coupled with repetition and reinforcement create a formula for success. Every day, people are bombarded by too much information; a strong commitment to simplicity will help to ensure that messages are understood and employees stay engaged.

Managers and employees should have five conversations throughout the year:

1. The “what you need to do” conversation (goals)
2. The “how you are doing” conversation (coaching and feedback)
3. The “how you did” conversation (review)
4. The “money” conversation (incentives)
5. The “how you need to grow” conversation (development)

Goals

On the performance side, setting really good direction (goals) with great clarity on what good looks like (targets/measure) is necessary. The more specific you are and the more realistic you are in communicating what needs to be done, the more likely you are to achieve the result. This work isn’t hard; it just takes practice. The power of doing this work, especially when you start with the company’s strategic direction, is limitless.

Coaching and Feedback

It’s unfathomable to me that people don’t receive good feedback on how they are doing and, in turn, good coaching on how to be even better. In every professional sport in the world, athletes receive coaching and are better for it. Having an external calibration of what the performance looks like and assessment on how to make it better allows even the best to get better. Yet, in the workplace, coaching is completely underutilized. When it is done in the workplace and done well, the difference in people’s performance is exponential. Coaching
is not difficult, but there is a definite way of
doing it and necessary skills to help you be
successful at coaching.

**Review**

By setting very good performance expecta-
tions (also referred to as goals or objectives),
your review process becomes simply a ques-
tion of whether employees did what they
were supposed to do or did more or less.
It should be that straightforward. Specific
examples and data should support the answer
to this question. Gone are the days that
people should fret the performance review. It
should become inconsequential and merely
the period at the end of the sentence that was
started at the beginning of the year and written
throughout the year.

**Incentives**

People have the right to be equitably compen-
sated for the job done. When their compensa-
tion is designed to motivate them to stretch
and do more, it’s good for both the individual
employees and the company. A direct link of
what is paid to what is achieved is a basic
 tenet of human nature. Positive reinforce-
ment drives behavior.

**Development**

You wouldn’t expect your 401(k) or invest-
ment account to be the same at the end of
the year as what it was at the beginning of
the year. We should think of people as invest-
ment accounts. They should be robustly more
than they were at the beginning of the year.
Development should be manager led and
employee driven. The agreement of what
is being worked on and how it will happen
should be captured in a development plan
to ensure clarity. People need input on what
should be worked on in their development plan. This input can be captured from key
clients, a 360-degree behavior assessment, or
other assessments. Input can also be obtained
from a longer-term career plan that the per-
son is working against, a succession plan an
organization has, or from skills needed to
execute against current performance expecta-
tions.

Typically, an individual development plan
(IDP) is for a year or less. It should be part
of a larger plan a person has for his or her
career evolution. Sometimes there is some
confusion about who is on point for career
development. Essentially, the employee is.
Employees have careers; organizations don’t.
It is ideal when career interests and desires
intersect with company plans for growth and
talent needs relating to that growth (i.e., suc-
cession planning). But it has to be good for
both the company and the employee.

**OPPORTUNITY 2: DETERMINE WHETHER
PEOPLE ARE IN THE RIGHT JOBS**

Being a great manager is a choice. It takes
work and dedication. You need to care. You
need to be committed. You need to be willing
to trade the exhilaration you get by achiev-
ing results for the exhilaration you feel when
someone who works with you gets great
results. Not everyone finds fulfillment in that
and, as such, end up doing the work of their

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different skill sets. Add into the mix that people are usually ill prepared and put into a job with little or no training.

Creating good managers should be an intentional process of incremental steps over time provided to only the people who have a real and true passion to be great managers.

Creating good managers should be an intentional process of incremental steps over time provided to only the people who have a real and true passion to be great managers. If people have passion to manage and manage well, they will add in all the discretionary effort needed to actually be successful in those roles. When managerial roles have been filled by individuals who clearly shouldn’t be in them, get them out! The lasting negative impact a manager can have on an individual or team is significant. It also sends many unintended messages about how a company feels about people. Because of the prestige, pay increase, and the career trajectory that often accompany a promotion to manager, it is difficult to later remove someone from that role. However, it is only when we take this role more seriously and remove poorly performing managers that we actually will see the intended results across the board of having great managers. I often talk in terms of skill and will. If people don’t have the true will to be amazing in these roles, get them out of the role.

**OPPORTUNITY 3: DEVELOP MANAGERIAL AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS SETS**

People want to be successful but often lack the experience, skills, tools, and effects of conditioning that help them be consistently successful. This is very true when it comes
to the effectiveness of managers. Typically, employees leave organizations for one of three reasons: (1) they aren't getting developed, (2) they don't see how they contribute to the bigger picture, or (3) the relationship with the manager is not a good one. In actuality, all three of these reasons have to do with the manager. This is true at all levels in the organization. This conclusion isn't new. It's obvious and reinforced with data in many places.

Being a great manager can be a challenge because it requires competence in a number of areas—all of which are learnable: great communication skills, ability to diagnose situations, conflict management, understanding and tailoring things to people’s styles, working with groups of people to get exponential results, time management, resource management, and so on. It is truly a robust set of skills that is required to manage well. Leading is an even higher-level skill set. The biggest area of opportunity for managers to spend time to help employees is in the area of coaching. If a manager does nothing else, being a terrific coach will have a positive impact, but the focus should be on coaching who the person is, not on something the person does. So first determine the skills necessary, then develop a plan with the individual on how to acquire or improve those skills.

**OPPORTUNITY 4: HOLD MANAGERS ACCOUNTABLE AND REWARD GOOD RESULTS**

Just as with employees, when managers are motivated to do a good job and are held accountable for doing a good job, they are more likely to do a good job. If they don’t, provide the right development and hold them accountable again. If they don’t do a great job, then remove them from role. Require managers to have strong successors, and make developing top talent for delivering great results the ticket to promotion. The greater the responsibility that managers have to perform effectively, the greater the likelihood that they will obtain good results. Companies need to make management excellence as important as delivering financial results, so companies can experience sustained results through a strong pipeline of talent.

**OPPORTUNITY 5: TAKE THE TIME AND PUT IN THE EFFORT**

Take a look at the results of almost any employee-engagement survey. You will find that the top employee concerns relate to a desire for more coaching, better feedback, input on career development, and better guidance on expectations. To manage people, you need to be fully present and engaged. You also need to have firsthand data on whether someone is performing well and make yourself available to solicit secondhand data on how people are experiencing others. Managers have the ability to create environments where people strive to be their best, add to their skill sets, and accomplish great things. They also have the ability to create environments where people feel badly about themselves and are frustrated, stagnant, and underutilized. Be mindful and make deliberate choices on where and how you spend your time to ensure that you get the results you want from your employees.

Developing leaders and managers to be great is hand-to-hand combat. It’s eyeball-to-eyeball work. You need to put in lots of effort over a great deal of time to realize results. Think about writing with the hand you usually don’t write with normally. What would
the quality look like? How long would it take
you to do it? How much mental effort would
you have to use to get it done? Are the qual-
ity, time, and effort the same as when you
wrote with the hand you usually use? No.
For some bizarre reason, we expect adults to
be great at things they have never done, and
we expect that in a short amount of time. A
promotion to manager does not make a per-
son any different from who he or she was the
day before in terms of skills. Acknowledg-
ing that should make clear the necessity of work-
ing with every employee to formulate a con-
crete development plan and outlining specific
areas that need to be worked on to achieve
specific goals, including the goal of becoming
a manager.

A CALL TO ACTION

Having worked across many companies in
over 40 countries for the past 20 years, my
bottom-line assessment is that a fundamen-
tal and pervasive lack of understanding
exists about the important elements regard-
ing managing and developing people. It’s
epidemic. The lack of effort and commit-
tment to do these things and do them well is
rampant. In almost every company I have
worked with, I would replace at least 30
percent of the people in the organization
because they don’t have the required level
of talent to drive the business forward. That
condemnation sits squarely at the feet of
managers, HR, and senior leadership: manag-
ers are not doing their jobs properly, HR is
not driving the right set of skills for develop-
ment, and senior leadership is not driving
the right level of accountability and results.
It’s all very fixable and, if addressed, would
be transformational.

The HR group plays a big role in perpetu-
ating this as well. I have found that many HR
organizations are filled with people who lack
business knowledge, courage, and forward-
thinking skills. Most of these people don’t
have the ability to look at the macro view,
look at the big picture, and influence things
at that level. There is an interconnectedness
of all things related to people that should
be obvious, but, unfortunately, few people
have the whole picture, and the result is that
many activities stay just that—activities. The
potential effects of this dysfunction include
missed business opportunities, a lack of
needed talent, interrupted career paths, and
business failures. Much more emphasis needs
to be placed on HR’s role in talent manage-
ment and development and in making sure
the best people are in the job with the right
skills. HR and every other function must
assume responsibility in striving for excel-
ence in these areas because with time, focus,
and commitment, people’s lives could change
and, in turn, drive the business to tremen-
dous success.
Kimberly Janson is the CEO of Janson Associates (www.jansonassociates.com), a firm dedicated to helping teams, individuals, leaders, executives, and organizations be incredibly successful. Prior to establishing Janson Associates, she was the chief talent-management officer at the H. J. Heinz Company, where she was responsible for leadership development, organizational effectiveness, learning, diversity, change management, performance management, succession, and executive coaching. During her five years at Heinz, the company was recognized as the industry leader for top talent with more than 30 quarters of consecutive growth. Prior to her work at Heinz, she served as the senior vice president of leadership development for the Global Wealth Investment Management Business at Bank of America. She also had significant management and development experience at Hasbro, Inc.; Bank of Boston; and BancBoston Mortgage Corporation. During her tenure at Hasbro, Inc., she was recognized for her efforts in building a top-tier people and organizational-development function and was given the Society for Human Resources Innovative Practice Award and was the feature cover story in HR magazine for the leadership-development program she built in partnership with Tuck Business School. She has presented at a number of conferences for ASTD, SHRM, Linkages, and others, and is the author of Demystifying Talent Management: Unleash People’s Potential to Deliver Superior Results (Maven House Press, 2015). She may be contacted at info@jansonassociates.com.