Demystifying Talent Management and People Development

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People want to be successful. They don't drive to work hoping that 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 filing 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?

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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/measures) 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 expectations (also referred to as goals or objectives), your review process becomes simply a question 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

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employees and the company. A direct link of what is paid to what is achieved is a basic tenet of human nature. Positive reinforcement drives behavior.

Development

You wouldn't expect your 401(k) or investment 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 investment 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 person is working against, a succession plan an organization has, or from skills needed to execute against current performance expectations.

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., succession 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 achieving 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

direct reports or are poor managers. People in positions of power, stewards of the organization, need to find the courage to move people out of managerial roles for which they don't have any passion or commitment to being excellent managers. Unfortunately, there is a stigma and some shame for managers to be taken out of such roles, and this is a barrier to allowing or requesting people who are not suited to the position to step down.

For example, an executive who was fantastic at business development and had extremely productive relationships with banks was a train wreck as a manager. He didn't enjoy his role as a manager, and people hated working for him. But the people in power were hesitant to move him because he was difficult to deal with, and they were concerned about the backlash. By driving more of a learning culture that helps people succeed in roles that are the highest and best use of their talents, it's possible to change this stigma. Think of it simply in terms of impact. Moving one person who shouldn't be a manager from his or her managerial role affects one person, whereas not doing so affects many. Laid out in these terms, courage should be fortified to do the thing that is right for everyone in the long run.

Think about how people are considered for managerial roles in most organizations. These folks typically have done the best job in a functional area and as a result have caught the eye of management. However, the fact that you are a good plumber and adept at getting the job done in setting the pipes for a new kitchen doesn't mean you are going to be good at laying tile in that same kitchen. But we make moves like that all the time by promoting people to the role of manager who were, for example, great marketers or great accountants. These roles have completely

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

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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 quality, 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 person any different from who he or she was the day before in terms of skills. Acknowledging that should make clear the necessity of working with every employee to formulate a concrete 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 fundamental and pervasive lack of understanding exists about the important elements regarding managing and developing people. It's epidemic. The lack of effort and commitment 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: managers are not doing their jobs properly, HR is not driving the right set of skills for development, 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 perpetuating 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 management 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 excellence in these areas because with time, focus, and commitment, people's lives could change and, in turn, drive the business to tremendous success.

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