

Giving High Performers a Runway

White Paper



review**sn**ap

It's tempting to want to focus your training efforts and budget on the high potentials in your company as an easy fix to long-term talent planning. These are the future leaders of the company, so why not focus your efforts on them? They're going to take flight and propel your company to the stars.

But you don't want to think too far ahead and forget about today. A pool of very important people keeps your company running so that it's there in the future. These are your high performers. Just like mechanics, they are also important to making sure that the jet takes off; but don't leave them in the hangar. Develop a high-performer talent strategy for today as well as tomorrow.

High Performers Need a Runway

High performers and high-potential employees are two different concepts. High performers are employees who are considered key contributors, demonstrate high performance, are capable of a lateral move, may be qualified for a broader role within the same profession, and have reached the potential to move "upward" to a management role.¹ High potentials, on the other hand, are employees who have been identified as having the potential, ability and aspiration for successive leadership positions within the company.² A high potential is usually also a high performer, but a high performer might not necessarily have his heart set on being promoted to CEO one day.

It's important to understand this distinction because it can have a big impact on your company's bottom line. Development planning, for all employees, can result in twice the median revenue per employee.³ Unfortunately, it's become pretty easy to overlook high performers. When budgets are tight, high-potential programs grab more dollars because leaders perceive that there are greater returns on those programs. High-performing employees, however, keep the business running, so forgetting them can cost the company much more.

In order for high performers to contribute to the bottom line, they need a runway for success. That includes dedicated development plans and budgets. It also means continually assessing their contributions to make sure the company can plan for the future.

¹ Bersin & Associates. Lexicon: Definition of "High Performer" <http://www.bersin.com/Lexicon/Details.aspx?id=12844>

² Bersin & Associates. Lexicon: Definition of "High-Potential or HIPO" <http://www.bersin.com/Lexicon/Details.aspx?id=12845>

³ Garr, Stacia. *High-impact Performance Management: Improving Development Planning*. Bersin & Associates. 2012. To purchase the report, visit <http://www.bersin.com/Practice/Detail.aspx?docid=15294&mode=search&p=Talent-Management>

High-performance Development for the Team

High-performing teams look different across the company. There could be a high-performing team where people all in the same role are rock stars, such as the sales representatives on the East Coast. Or there could be a mixed team where just one or two functional specialists are the high performers, such as a social media manager and a copy editor on the marketing team. Regardless of the structure, performance can make or break a team. These three management tactics for high performers can help the team achieve liftoff:

- **Plan your strategy proactively:** Managers should have a clear understanding of what high-performance behaviors look like. Sharing these expectations makes it much easier to identify high performers if everyone understands what “performance” means for their team. After identifying these high performers, managers should also communicate back up to executive leadership who those individuals are, build out development plans and anticipate what productivity will look like with further development.
- **Make a difference day to day:** Then it’s all about the development. “Keep up the good work” isn’t acceptable feedback to give a high performer if they are making a big difference for the team. It marginalizes their contributions. Continuous performance management includes being a proactive manager — providing feedback, rewarding success and understanding the challenges that the employee faces. When managers do longer-term development planning, utilize options that help the employee continue to be great at their job today. Skills classes on computer programs could speed up production; simulations can give an employee more confidence to handle tough situations. Development doesn’t always have to focus on future roles and promotions.
- **Keep everyone on track:** High-potential programs can become a disruption if they distract employees from their daily duties. Rotational assignments or regularly changing teams have an impact on productivity. Help make sure that high performers are getting the support they need if the work environment is becoming chaotic. The manager should focus on his own team’s performance first, and then manage external factors appropriately. Managers who put performance first can also build trust with their team. The high performers aren’t feeling left out and know their manager is looking out for them.

High-performance Development for the Company

Companies can gain a significant advantage by understanding how these pools of high performers affect not only team success, but also company success. Being able to guarantee a high level of quality consistently can help a company plan. For example, a marketing manager can experiment with a new digital strategy knowing that the rest of the team will keep things running smoothly. That new strategy could help set the company apart during its next product launch, but that experiment might never have happened if the rest of the team wasn't made up of high performers. These three maneuvers can help the company reap the benefits of high performers taking flight:

- **Start with a new kind of succession planning:** Companies spend a lot of time on succession planning and development programs to maintain a pipeline of talent for leadership roles. Planning for this high-performer group is just as important. What if a critical high performer leaves? The company could suffer knowledge drain, losing productivity until the replacement gets up to speed. Succession planning for high performers includes mapping out the critical skills and knowledge that these employees have. Then you can create training programs to backfill the skills gaps so knowledge is never lost.
- **Identify success profiles:** High performers could look different depending on their function, but there are going to be similar attributes across this pool of employees. These employees could have excellent time-management skills, be quick to adapt to change and consistently work at a high standard of quality. Identify these successful behaviors and build a success profile. Share these profiles with managers to better help them identify the high performers on their teams. HR will be able to support high-performer development now and also aid in helping managers identify high performers in the future.
- **Measure the impact:** High performers can have a big influence on the company's success, but measuring that impact helps executive leadership know just how much. Match performance results with financial results on a regular basis. You can start at the team level, then build across departments and regions. You'll be able to illustrate the impact of high performers on the bottom line and support budget requests for future programs. This information can help executive leadership plan for the long term and understand the most productive and profitable parts of the company. When executives have insight into the performance of the company, they can realign objectives and proactively manage strategies.⁴

⁴ Jan, William. *Enterprise Performance Management for SMBs: Aligning People, Process, and Tools to Ensure Success*. Aberdeen Group. 2012. <http://www.aberdeen.com/Aberdeen-Library/8010/RA-enterprise-performance-management.aspx>

Reach the Stars with Reviewsnap

Building a high-performer development strategy starts with understanding performance. Your company's performance management strategy should make it easy for you to identify the right behaviors. Once you know what success looks like, you can then cultivate it through development planning and training.

Reviewsnap helps you give high performers a runway, with a streamlined performance management process. Use Web-based performance reviews that help you set company, department and individual goals. Track progress throughout the year and get real-time reports on strengths and weaknesses. Get the most out of your employees with streamlined processes. Use 360-degree feedback to capture a wider view of your employees' performance. Then link compensation with performance to incentivize and reward the most successful behaviors. Finally, when you're building the bench strength to support these high performers, integrate your learning programs into your development plans so you reduce the chance for skills gaps and knowledge drain.

We want to help you improve the performance of your organization and your people. Count on Reviewsnap for expertise on how you can start seeing benefits when you let your high performers fly.

About Reviewsnap

In times like these, growth is *earned* by companies that align their people behind shared goals. If you are working to get everyone on the same page, Reviewsnap is with you. More than performance management software, we offer true partnership through genuine customer service and support. And unlike those other guys who care more about shareholders than customers, we can't sleep at night unless you can. We are all together now. We are your performance management partner. We are Reviewsnap. Visit us on the Web at www.reviewsnap.com.



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