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Leaders at all Levels

By Doug Williamson

There are only a few talented people out there who are able to run a major organization.

Your company's standard, talent management program likely isn't finding them.

It's great that your company offers wonderful pay and above-average benefits. Congratulations! You're likely ATTRACTING the best of the best.

Perhaps your company has an exceptional corporate culture. In that case you are likely RETAINING the best of the best.

But what are you doing to LOCATE and ELEVATE your finest?

The fact is most organizations have leaders scattered throughout their ranks. These people know who they are. They are quietly seeking a path to the top. These leaders are looking for opportunities, mentors and challenges.

The problem is these leaders are embroiled in a rat race with everyone else in the organization. You're not putting them on the right track.

The outcome is that your leaders rise to prominent roles more slowly than they should be. Your organization may end up losing them altogether.

The solution is to identify leaders at all levels. Commit a disproportionate quantity of resources to this group and take their career destinies into your own hands. Yes, we mean YOUR hands, Mr/Ms. VP of HR or CEO... Not the HR coordinator or manager... YOUR hands.

Blanket assumption

The first assumption we make is that everyone has executive leadership in their genes.

Perhaps people have some elements of leadership, but running a large organization requires a unique ability to analyze, understand, plan and act on a global scale. This is what some call the "CEO nucleus".

Leaders and managers have financial goals, efficiency targets and cost-cutting plans. But no one talks about leadership creation goals.

A central part of leadership is creating a backbench of future leaders. Companies need to give responsibility for organizational development to these managers, and hold them accountable for building leaders. And don't forget to reward the managers for finding and creating leaders, just like it's done for other aspects of the business.

So just relegate leadership development to your managers, right? Maybe you – VP of HR or CEO can deal with loftier things.

I disagree! Early identification and leadership development still needs to be your responsibility. Once you know who the "big picture" leaders are in your company, give them ACCESS to your time.

It sends a message.

Leadership isn't mass produced

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YK: WorkFutures Website to Assist Yukoners with Career Planning and Job Search

MB: Doubles Investment in Workplace Injury, Illness Prevention

SK: Workers Earn More

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It's wonderful that your company is setting up a performance management tool to handle performance reviews. I wouldn't suggest otherwise, but please don't use it as a career planning device and coaching tool all-in-one for your best leaders.

They need customized challenges and unique career paths. This goes back to placing the responsibility of developing leadership into YOUR hands. Make sure you take the time to personally address the growth of your leaders.

Leadership isn't mass produced.

I suggest you pick and choose your leaders from the beginning. You can't give career customization and personal attention to all high performers in a company. Spreading your training and development resources across thousands of people in the hopes that someone will emerge, Messiah-style, is ineffective.

Pick and choose.

Here are some thoughts on methods to get the ball rolling on developing your leaders at all levels within your company.

1. Don't confuse training and development with real world experience: Leadership training is indispensable for your organization. However, it needs to be combined with real-world apprenticeships and challenging assignments for your leaders.

2. Failure is OK: Give your leaders room to fail. You want them to be out there taking risks and adapting to new challenges. If they're not tripping up, they're likely not being sufficiently challenged. If this sounds scary, remember it will only be a select number of leaders you will be pushing to the limit at select moments. Everyone else can operate normally.

3. Leadership is about leadership: Make it a requirement for managers and directors to actively dig in and identify leaders in their group. Create leadership quotas, whatever you want to do, but make it known that leadership development is just as important to business as cost-cutting and everything else.

Doug Williamson is President and Chief Executive Officer of The Beacon Group, a Toronto-based firm that specializes in Organizational Transformation, Effectiveness programs as well as Talent Identification and Leadership Development.

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