

Managers: Your Development Power Players

BEVERLY KAYE AND LINDY WILLIAMS

To leverage the power of busy managers, ensure they are prepared to accept their roles as employee development partners.

Managers have power. They can motivate, inspire and lead. They can develop the talent organizations need to remain competitive and face tomorrow's challenges. But managers are busy people and may need guidance to fully claim their role as development partners.

"The rate of change is daunting. The pressure is on like never before. Often, we are helping managers lead, facilitate and manage continuous change. The ability to establish a relationship with an employee, let alone talk with them about career, is a challenge," said Lynn Gauthier, vice president of human resources at Philips Healthcare, where a major career development initiative is under way.

Philips' Career Enhancement Program is designed to educate managers and employees on the "how-tos" of career conversations and to deliver a message from senior management that they advocate this responsibility globally. The initiative was developed in response to survey scores that indicated career development is key to engage and retain the organization's talent.

Explain the 'Why Bother?'

Every manager knows the business reasons for developing the workforce; most corporate value statements say something about nurturing and growing talent. Talent is, and always has been, the key to remaining competitive in a rapidly changing world. But what's in it for an individual manager? Here are four answers.

1. A manager's job becomes easier when direct reports are performing at peak, and peak performance only occurs when people have the skills and tools to do their jobs well. Performance is enhanced when employees are challenged to stretch and learn and when the right people are in the right roles.
2. Talented employees stay engaged when they know their contributions are valued and could lead somewhere. A 2011 Aon-Hewitt global study named career opportunities as one global engagement driver, and it ranked in the top three for the past three years. However, employees too often report they don't have candid conversations with managers about their careers. Further, they don't think managers appreciate what they have to offer or care about their career aspirations.
3. Job satisfaction increases when employees can see their future in the organization's future. Managers are instrumental in helping employees take a broader look at the options available to them. A 2011 BlessingWhite global survey of 11,000 respondents reported that opportunities to apply talents, career development and training are top drivers of job satisfaction.
4. Talented people want to work with other talented people. Employees who work in a learning-centric environment are often better equipped to achieve the organization's goals, mission and vision. The bonus? The word gets out. Talent will want to join the teams and the organizations being developed for the future.

Take Action

Learning leaders must educate managers on how to conduct ongoing development-focused dialogues

ON THE WEB

For more on how managers can contribute to workforce development, read "The Manager's Responsibility for Employee Learning" at CLOmedia.com/articles/view/2278.



THE ID-GAP MODEL

Managers can use the following model to provide negative or positive feedback to employees.

- Identify the behavior you would like to comment on.
- Describe the behavior in specific and concrete terms.
- Give feedback as to how this behavior affects you [or the organization] — positively or negatively. Pause and give the person an opportunity to respond.
- Assess what either you or the person might do differently. Negotiate these differences.
- Plan how both of you will follow up. **CLO**

Source: Scott J. Allen and Mitchell Kusy, *The Little Book of Leadership Development*, 2011

effectively. Building managerial competency in the following areas will pay off in increased engagement as well as commitment:

Uncover talent: Do managers know what they have? While most managers believe they are fully aware of their direct reports' skill sets, a 2009 Career Systems International survey of 1,275 respondents reported 80 percent of employees said they have skills that are not being utilized. Managers who uncover these hidden skills and learn what motivates and energizes employees have what they need to match employees to roles for which they are optimally suited and to advise employees on development options that will serve the organization as well as the individuals.

Through active listening, which is taught in every management 101 course, managers can uncover a range of hidden talents,

but they have to be curious to build an ongoing dialogue with employees. Development dialogue encourages self-discovery, and it doesn't have to take hours. A few honest, authentic exchanges can reveal a lot and build the trust necessary for a development partnership. Questions such as "what part of that project did you find most rewarding?" or "what was most challenging about that assignment?" open the door to understand more about that individual and what the manager can do to enhance that person's job performance.

Provide feedback. If active listening is taught in management 101, then its sidekick is feedback. The manager who actively and consistently provides feedback doesn't avoid the tough conversations. Employees need to know where they are hitting the mark

THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

Managers have a responsibility to create high-performing teams. To do that often requires the manager to engage in difficult conversations. Sometimes all it takes to aid team or manager development is to start a conversation with “So, how are we doing?” Other times, managers may have to ask tougher questions, such as:

- What are some obstacles affecting this team?
- What are opportunities we could take advantage of that we have been largely ignoring?
- Where can you take greater ownership on this team?
- Where have you let this team down?
- Compared to other teams with which you are familiar, how are we doing?
- When was the last time you complimented the team or one of its members?
- How open are you to giving feedback to team members? [CLO](#)

Source: Scott J. Allen and Mitchell Kusy, *The Little Book of Leadership Development*, 2011

and where they need to focus and improve, so they can assist managers in putting together an appropriate development plan for themselves. Providing feedback may not always be comfortable, but a few words of specific, actionable feedback can help an employee make the course corrections needed to stay on track.

Employees need to know how they are perceived in the organization to make informed choices about how they will manage their professional reputations and to determine which development options they may want to pursue as they contemplate career advancement. Talent-savvy managers help employees select truth-tellers — the individuals in their career audience who see them in action and can provide the feedback they need. If managers ask their employees whose feedback they most value in the organization and why, it can trigger the start of this conversation. Employees can't grow if they don't know what skills to keep and what behaviors may need to change.

Offer information. Managers can help employees make informed development decisions because they often have a wider view and access to more information about the forces and trends that will shape an organization's future. Managers who share their view of upcoming changes, point employees to information sources and invite discussion about the industry, the organization and the culture build a team aware

of factors that may impact their career decisions. If employees are expected to be proactive in a chaotic world, they need opportunities for candid discussion, guidance and the ability to tap into one another's networks.

Encourage employees to explore their options. Employees must identify and own their career goals, but managers can encourage them to explore multiple directions so they're not discouraged when a path of choice is blocked, and help them identify development opportunities to enrich their current role and performance. Encouraging employees to explore their current jobs as terrain for growth can lead more quickly to any learning interventions necessary. Providing information about upcoming opportunities and resources during informal as well as formal employee discussions also helps align plans with organizational directions and industry trends.

“If you ask a manager to define career development, they will eight times out of 10 think up,” Gauthier said. “Therefore, if I don't have a promotional opportunity for my employee, avoiding the conversation is the path of least resistance. When they adjust their mindset to the notion that career development is about many options, and their role is that of a coach, they feel relief.”

Further, offering an actionable goal includes contingencies for changes that arise and links directly to the organization's strategy.

Recommend resources. When employees know what they want and what they need, they can more easily craft solid development goals. The manager's focus becomes how to connect them to people and resources that will support goal achievement. A manager who shares a network of contacts inside and outside the organization creates an interactive web of support for development, communication and connection.

What Stops the Process?

Managers offer a variety of reasons for losing their development focus. Four common barriers include:

Lack of time: These days there is little on managers' to-do lists that is not important. The key to promote the need for learning and address the time issue is to identify ways to build development conversations into existing interactions. Multiple opportunities exist at the start and end of assignments and projects. Managers who use development questions frequently demonstrate that the organization values learning.

Unreasonable expectations: If managers provide information around expectations at the time of performance and link them to set goals, there is less chance individuals will form expectations that are off base.

An objective review of why the manager's perception differs from the employee's view opens the door to gather more input from others in the individual's career audience. Ultimately this helps individuals set more realistic goals.

Fear of the unknown: Career conversations can be unpredictable. Managers must set the stage for a discussion about possibilities before entering into development conversations. It's OK not to have all of the answers, but instead to help employees discover what is best for them and for the organization.

If talent is the ultimate competitive edge, preparing managers to build development dialogues needs to be a fundamental part of the overall learning strategy.

The relationship: Central to the talent development relationship is trust. Individuals need to believe their managers care about their growth. Although the responsibility rests squarely on the employees' shoulders, the manager's perspective, insight, network and continued dialogue is essential to their engagement.

Managers have the power to build the relationships and partnerships that will develop today's talent for tomorrow. Learning leaders will need to hold managers accountable for having these conversations, and provide the learning solutions that make the task less arduous. If talent is the ultimate competitive edge, then preparing managers to build development dialogues needs to be a fundamental part of the overall learning strategy. **CLO**

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MANAGERIAL ACTIONS

When Managers ...

Uncover talent, they:

- Match talent to business needs.
- Discover hidden or underutilized skills and abilities.
- Check their assumptions about individual capabilities.
- Motivate employees more effectively.

Provide feedback, they:

- Communicate more effectively with employees
- Prepare employees to gather feedback from a variety of sources.
- Guide employees to leverage strengths and develop in ways that support their growth.
- Offer frequent, timely guidance as part of how they lead and manage.

Offer information, they:

- Prepare employees for changes on the horizon.
- Share which skills and abilities are essential to the organization's future.
- Define organizational norms and culture more clearly.
- Help employees make informed development decisions.

Encourage options, they:

- Encourage employees to work on several career goals simultaneously.
- Connect development plans to the organization's strategy.
- Identify options to enrich jobs and careers.
- Provide reality checks as goals are defined.

Recommend resources, they:

- Provide ideas for learning on the job.
- Monitor progress and step in to help if things get off track.
- Identify barriers that might derail employees' plans.
- Offer connections that support career goals. **CLO**

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