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How to Cultivate and Lead Top Junior Talent



Every company needs to cultivate top junior talent to ensure a steady pipeline of future leaders. However, even some of the most iconic companies don't think about succession planning until a crisis happens, the current CEO decides to go elsewhere, or the top tier of leadership is about to retire.

What can you do to make sure you are helping newer employees develop their talents, skills, and abilities and contribute to the organization?

1. Incentivize Senior Leadership to Mentor Subordinates

There is never a shortage of junior employees looking for a mentor. The difficulty in developing a strong talent development program is building a pool of engaged mentors. While some executives are happy to participate and share their knowledge, many are so busy that they don't consider mentorship to be a priority.

Senior leaders need to be incentivized to matriculate more junior leaders.

One effective tactic to encourage participation is to include mentorship goals in the annual performance objectives of senior personnel. These goals can be detailed, or as simple as meeting with a mentee monthly and offering guidance. This places pressure on senior leadership to engage with top junior talent and build a relationship that evolves over time.

The carrot version of this is to offer tickets to sporting or community events for mentors and their mentees, pay for a monthly shared meal, allow junior leaders to work for more senior people outside of their normal job for a specified time period, such as 4 hours a month, and provide paid time off.

2. Effective Succession Planning

Succession planning is critical for any company to execute a transition that ensures continued business growth. However, according to Forbes, [even the most well-known companies may not think about succession planning until the current CEO is close to retirement](#).

An effective succession plan includes an evaluation of all the key competencies needed for a successful chief executive. It is [necessary to identify top talent](#) that could eventually fill that or other C-suite roles.

I recently worked with an organization that was doing the right things to transition to a new leader. However, when the current CEO introduced "Bob" as the heir apparent to the board and other stakeholders, there was significant resistance. They did not believe that Bob was the right choice, simply because they didn't know Bob. The CEO needed to regroup and find opportunities to showcase Bob's abilities so that the decision-makers could move forward to appoint Bob with confidence.

When developing leaders it is helpful to rotate the talent through leadership positions across the company to ensure they obtain the appropriate breadth of knowledge to truly understand the organization. Not all candidates start with the same skill set, making this an incredibly important aspect to creating a comprehensive plan.

3. Creating a Development Roadmap

Mentorship is a great opportunity for junior employees, but there needs to be a clear roadmap and objective benchmarks. Without a way to evaluate growth or productivity, a mentorship program becomes a lot less valuable.

A good development roadmap highlights key skills junior talent should develop before reaching their next career milestone. Those skills may be functional or may involve leading teams across a variety of business lines. A good talent development program also allows for effective comparison of young leaders to determine who is most suitable for future executive roles.

While these ideas may seem simple on paper, developing a robust talent development program is a difficult process that requires buy-in from across the organization. Also, a talent program without senior positions to fill is just a development agency for headhunters. However, when it's done right, a good program can help businesses thrive, regardless who is in the corner office.

I would love your thoughts on the next generation of leaders [here!](#)

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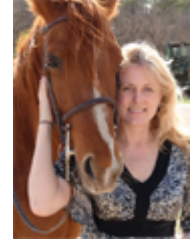
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