Talent Builders: Lead the Way in Developing Your People

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Introduction

So, you say you want to be known as a leader who builds talent? If that sounds like a reputation that you want, then there are some time-tested actions that you should be taking to build talent in your organization. Developing talent is a long-term investment that must be executed by line leaders in an organization. HR organizations can help pave the way and increase the probability of accelerating development in an organization, but ultimately line leaders must get it done. Even if a company’s practices are robust and up to date, talent management will fail without serious commitment and execution from line leaders.

We have found that there are about a dozen critical actions that all talent builders must take to ensure the development of their people. Most of these actions are not dependent upon anyone but the leader him or herself. Over the years, we have noticed that great talent builders perform most, if not all, of these actions on a consistent basis no matter what organization they are in. What follows is an action plan that will help line leaders become talent builders.

This white paper will benefit all leaders who are serious about managing talent effectively in their organization. It also provides helpful perspective for HR Professionals and Talent Management Specialists in the field. The authors, Jim Shanley, Corey Seitz and Marc Effron, are three of the world’s most experienced and accomplished Talent Management Practitioners and have led the Talent Management Function at some of the world’s most successful talent machines, including Bank of America, Avon, Novartis and Johnson & Johnson.
Win Today and in the Future

Talent builders identify the organizational capabilities and talent that they need to have in their organization to perform at a high level in today’s environment. In addition, they also look ahead and identify the organizational capabilities and talent that they will need to win in the marketplace in 36-48 months.

This requires that they assess their talent against both today’s requirements and tomorrow’s projected requirements. It means that they must constantly ask themselves, “Am I recruiting and developing against tomorrow’s standards?” They ensure that no matter what form their organization’s talent review process takes, they are looking to the future and predicting what type of talent and how much talent they will need for the future.

Drive and Expect World-Class Performance at All Levels

They demand performance that is at a “higher standard”. Talent builders drive the mindset in their organization that performance must continually improve. They are never satisfied with status quo performance. They realize that without top performance, nothing else much matters.

Become Students of How to Build Better Leaders, Faster

Talent builders stay current on talent management best practices. They read at least one book or article a year on building talent. They invite experts to audit their talent building practices and are open to implementing new innovations that fit their business and talent development needs. They reach out to great talent developers inside and outside their organization to discuss and learn new tips and tactics to develop their team. Great developers leverage “teaching moments”. They recognize and act on memorable teaching moments, especially with high potentials. They continually ask their people two critical questions:

- What did you learn from that?

- What would you do differently next time?
Ensure that Talent Is on the Agenda

Great talent builders communicate to their organization that leadership and talent matters…they are passionate that the organizations with better leaders will drive higher results. They demand that they and their leaders are producing leaders better than themselves. They ask their direct reports several key questions:

- Whom do you have in your organization/team today who is as good or better than you and could replace you immediately?

- Whom do you have in your organization/team who has the potential to be as good or better than you and could replace you in 1-2 years?

- Whom do you know within the company but outside your organization who could replace you (and is as good or better than you?) today and in 1-2 years?

- Whom do you know externally who could replace you today and in 1-2 years?

Continually Assess and Develop Their Team to Ensure World-Class Talent

They keep a “stack rank of their direct reports”, listing those leaders that are the highest performers and have the greatest potential for the future. They constantly ask themselves these questions:

- Are my top direct reports in the top 20% of global talent for the compensation I am willing to pay them? If not, what are my plans?

- Have any of my direct reports been in role for more than 30 months? If so, what are my plans to promote them, significantly expand their responsibilities or export them to another unit in the company in the next 6 months? Or, alternatively, are they technical experts that should stay in role?

- Do I really know them? What are my direct reports’ strengths, weaknesses and career aspirations? Do I understand the situations when they are most successful and when they are most challenged?
Are my bottom third direct reports coachable to the point, that in six months, they can perform in the upper half of my direct reports? If not, what are my plans to move them out or move them into other roles where they can be strong performers?

Are my direct reports blocking any high potential below them from an opportunity to grow?

Talent builders can articulate the strengths and development needs of their direct reports in an insightful and multi-layered manner in clear language, reflecting a deep knowledge of the individual. The following section is an example of a “nuanced” assessment, which includes the type of detailed knowledge that a seasoned talent builder would have of a direct report.

**Example of a “Nuanced” Assessment**

**Towerin g Strengths**

Chris Sample is a leader that leverages his smarts, work ethic, deep industry knowledge and broad financial acumen to enable him to identify opportunities others don’t normally see and creatively solve complex problems.

His ability to process a huge amount of information and to critically think through issues and opportunities are his signature skills. He easily moves from the tactical to the strategic on most topics. He has strong conceptual skills and can break down complex concepts in ways that others can understand. His broad based knowledge of financial systems, accounting and his granular knowledge of the “plumbing” of XYZ positions him to thrive in the emerging risk environment.

Chris’s broad and deep experience in both line and staff roles has given him insight into the decision making process at XYZ that few others have. He has a deep understanding of XYZ’s formal and informal organization. His strong personal relationships with key executives help him maneuver through the political and organizational mine fields to get issues resolved. He has an uncanny ability to move issues in a way to drive closure. *(Continued...)*
Example of a “Nuanced” Assessment (...continued)

Finally, Chris’s work ethic is unrivalled. He is tireless and has demonstrated unlimited capacity. He is extremely achievement oriented and has consistently exceeded expectations over time in a variety of roles.

Chris’s towering strengths can be summed up as:

1. Critical thinker who thrives on solving complex problems. Delves deeply into problems & opportunities, makes connections, and gets to the essence. Leverages these insights to drive results
   a. Intellectually rigorous; looks deeply and broadly at many sources; hunts for parallels and contrasts. Masters complex situations
   b. Displays unrivalled complex problem solving and critical thinking skills
   c. Demonstrates a high degree of discipline and detail focus

2. Unrelenting work ethic, drive and achievement orientation
   a. Endless, tireless, and tenacious work capacity
   b. Delivers results time and time again in a variety of situations

3. Broad based and deep industry and technical knowledge
   a. Possesses a superior knowledge of corporate finance along with deep understanding of financial services industry
   b. Understands the financial levers for profitability and has a “nose” for making money
   c. Is externally focused and leverages broad and deep knowledge and experience to connect the dots to take an enterprise perspective (Continued...)
Example of a “Nuanced” Assessment (...continued)

Development Needs

For Chris to continue to grow and more effectively perform in his current role and be better prepared for his next role, he’ll need to address three key development needs. He will need to:

- Become more **transparent** in his approach
- Increase his **decisiveness**
- Improve his **communication skills**

Chris holds his **cards close to his vest** and tends to be guarded in his opinions and thought processes. While he may be formulating a hypothesis to an issue, his style creates the perception that he has already come to a conclusion and is feeling others out to see where they stand. He is also **indirect and cautious** around controversial issues and tends not to declare his position. This approach can come across as political and not necessarily transparent. The **most likely cause** of this behavior is that Chris generally **trusts only those in his “inner circle”** and wants to avoid getting his “agenda” derailed by someone else.

Chris is also regarded as **conflict averse** and **slow in making decisions**. As Chris continues to take on more responsibility and operate at the next level, he will need to get more comfortable in making decisions with less information and facts than he is currently comfortable with. He will also need to display thought leadership by staking out positions early and often. The **most likely cause** of this behavior is his **perfectionist nature** and his discomfort around publically being **“wrong”** and/or **getting criticized** by those whose opinion matters.

Finally, Chris needs to increase his **interpersonal communications and group presentation skills**. He has average dialogue skills and needs to be able to engage others in conversations in a more natural style and one in which he both draws out information and openly articulates his thought processes and positions. **(Continued...)**
Example of a “Nuanced” Assessment (...continued)

With regards to communicating in groups (whether 5 people or 500), Chris needs to project more and develop a presentation style that fits him, but also engage his audience. **The most likely cause of this is a skill deficiency and lack of practice.**

**Key Questions**

- Can & will Chris modify his personal leadership style to be more open & transparent in order to build the broad based followership?

- Can & will Chris decrease his high need for being right and get comfortable in increasing the speed of his decision making by 50%?

- Will Chris make the effort and put in the required time to improve his communication skills?

- Can & will Chris demonstrate that he can gain broad followership from people not like him or not as smart as him?

Talent builders also ensure that each of their direct reports is focused on addressing at least one developmental issue – the most important issue for their continuing growth. They require detailed specific goals and measurable actions. An example of a focused development plan is included on page 11 of this white paper.

**Continually Recruit and Export Internal Talent**

Talent builders meet with peers and ask them to identify their top 3 most talented people and ask for an introduction to those people. They create a list of the people in each city they travel to whom they want to get to know (at their direct report level and a couple levels below). While traveling, they schedule breakfast, lunch or dinner with these people to get to know them.
Talent builders are willing to offer their services to mentor talent of their peers and others. They typically mentor at least 5 high potentials outside of their business unit/function in addition to people within their business unit/function.

In addition, they continually export their high potential talent to other units because they realize they have an obligation to develop talent for the enterprise, and they know that good talent wants to go to leaders who are interested in their long-term development. In fact, talent builders measure themselves on some key indicators, such as:

- How many leaders have I brought into my organization from external companies and other internal businesses and functions?
- How many talented leaders did I promote or expand into significantly new roles in my organization?
- How many misplaced leaders did I remove or re-assign in my organization?
- How many talented leaders did I export from my organization to another business/function in order to accelerate their development?

Continually Recruit External Talent

Talent builders meet with external recruiters to better understand what the “gold standard” is for talent in their space and to ensure that their “calibration of talent” is world class. They continually recruit external talent even when they have no current openings.

They identify individuals at other companies who represent the “gold standard” for talent in their organization at their direct report level and two levels below them in the organization. Talent builders are willing to “cold call” these individuals to get to know them and establish relationships that may result in future recruits or sources of talent. They create a talent map of top talent outside their organization for future use.

Talent builders identify “non-natural” sources of talent. Looking for companies where the talent has requisite skills but brings a different/fresh perspective into the mix of talent at their organization. They also make frequent (twice a year) external presentations to industry groups to showcase their organization and create a brand for the area they lead to attract top talent.
Accelerate the Development of Talent

Talent builders identify the highest potential talent one to two levels below their direct reports. They personally and professionally get to know this group, understanding their hopes, dreams and aspirations. One effective method they use is scheduling a weekend offsite where individuals identify their core values, core talents and core purpose (“what they are playing for”). This allows the talent builder to fully involve these high potentials in their development and deepens their engagement to the organization.

They require their managers to identify two potential next assignments and the timing of these moves for all their high potentials. They ensure that the development plans accelerate the likelihood of these individuals obtaining these next assignments or “target jobs”.

To further accelerate the development of high potentials, talent builders use these approaches:

- Ensure they go through an experience where they get personal insight and multi rater feedback

- Create “action learning” experiences where they are required to solve “sticky strategic issues” in the organization

- Provide transparency with them about their status and the higher standards that will be demanded of them

- Require them to have specific development plans based on “target jobs”
  - Using the 70/20/10 approach (job experience, role model, training)
  - Provide stretch assignments
  - Create forums for exposure
  - Match them with thought leaders
Example of a Focused Development Plan

1. **Increase openness and transparency**: *Go from* being seen as one who is driving his own agenda with peers & colleagues who may not be in my perceived “inner circle” to **looking and acting more like** a confident leader who:

   a. Reaches out to broad audiences and is truly interested in drawing out the opinions of those who differ/disagree with me.

   b. Demonstrates to others that I understand and appreciate their point of view.

   c. Is comfortable sharing my emerging point of view even when it is not yet fully baked.

**Development Focus Area: Create more personal transparency in my approach and relationships.**

1. **Actions I’ll take on my own:**

   a. I’ll stop using words that may create a perception that I’m overplaying my political savvy and minimize/eliminate talking in code (i.e. “huddle”, “political winds”, “back room”).

   b. I’ll eliminate my “off-line” conversations by 90%.

   c. I’ll be willing to open up to others about who I really am. I’ll continually reflect on my reluctance to share my personal past history, my high need not to “look bad” and my high need to be “right”. I’ll remind myself that confidence is displayed by showing I’m vulnerable and may not have all the answers. *(Continued...)*
Example of a Focused Development Plan (…continued)

d. I’ll disclose more. I’ll let my thoughts come out in the open more often. I’ll sprinkle normal work conversations with doubts, what I’m thinking about and what’s getting in the way. I’ll admit mistakes matter of factly, inform everyone potentially affected, learn from it and then move on.

e. I’ll increase the quality of my dialogue skills by using conversation techniques (i.e. conversation meter, cycle of leverage, conversation prep worksheets). I’ll verbalize what I’m thinking to others.

f. I’ll be one of the first ones in group settings to declare and articulate my “point of view”. I’ll be definitive and won’t hedge.

2. Actions I’ll take by leveraging other people:

a. Jim Jones, Sally Smith, and Andy Hall are 3 successful leaders who I regard as very transparent & highly trusted by all. I will:

i. Have lunch/dinner with each of them and:

1. Share with them my assessment and my development targets.

2. Ask for their help.

3. “Interview” them to discover why/how they are comfortable being so transparent.

ii. Observe each of them in multiple settings and record in my journal the specific actions/behaviors they demonstrated that led me to the conclusion that “they are an open book.” (Continued...)
Example of a Focused Development Plan (...continued)

3. Actions I’ll take by taking on projects or “assignments”:

a. I’ll publicly lead one of Tom’s (my Boss) management committee meetings; especially one that will involve controversial topics.

b. I’ll volunteer to my boss to take on at least 2 projects in the next 6 months on topics/problems that I have little/no expertise in. I will recruit a group of “experts” smarter than me to tackle the problem. I’ll be open with them that I know little about the issue and will be seeking them out individually and collectively to “coach me.”

c. I tend to “hang with” a very homogeneous group...people very similar to me. I’ll identify 2 people a month significantly different from me (background, level, smarts, gender, ethnicity, etc.) and get to know them via lunch or tea/coffee. I’ll solicit their POV on some of the issues I’m wrestling with.

d. I’ll personally engage the CEO/CFO on the XYZ project and openly share with them my point of view (they are in the opposite “camp” from me).

e. I’ll spend 2 days in the field with Area Managers and Site Managers to better appreciate the challenges they face.

Create a Global Mindset in Their Organization

Talent builders meet regularly with small mixed groups of leaders (gender, age, country of origin and race) to ensure they are in touch with the challenges they face. They solicit ideas and suggestions on how to accelerate the development of different groups in the organization. They require development plans for everyone in their organization but pay special attention to those of leaders from different country cultures.
Talent builders ensure that the “slates” for open positions are robust and contain a good mix of talent. They take risks and commit to fill open positions to purposely increase the mix of players in areas of their organization.

They mentor across gender, age, country of origin and race to better understand their issues and accelerate the development of a mixed group. They spend at least a day a year in a local university with promising students and professors to not “loose touch” with that group. Finally, they ensure that their leadership team is global and diverse. In short, they recognize that great talent comes from all different backgrounds, and they don’t want to lose out on any great source of talent.

**Stay connected with “Regrettable Losses”**

Talent builders do sometimes lose great talent, it is unavoidable, but they find a way to stay connected to those people. They reach out at least a couple times a year to high potentials who have left the organization to see how they are doing, inquire if they want to come back, and have them identify other great talent who may want to join the organization. Talent builders often bring some of the best talent back to the organization and find other great talent through this network.

**Require Their Directs to Do the Same**

Talent builders require their direct reports to take the same actions they take with their organizations. They also spend time with their direct reports inspecting how many of these actions they are taking. In this way, great leaders create an organization of talent builders.

**Summary**

Leaders have long said that people are the company’s most important assets, but demonstrating that has been less common. Any leader who wants to grow a business globally must apply these approaches or have little hope of truly building an effective talent pipeline. Becoming a talent builder takes energy and time but the payoff for yourself and the organization is well worth the investment.
About the Authors

**Jim Shanley**, Partner of The Shanley Group and one of the most recognized global Talent Management Practitioners, had a 20 year career with Bank of America where he led a team of over 1500 professionals. Under Jim’s leadership, Bank of America earned a reputation as a benchmark company for their Leadership Development and Talent Management programs and processes. Many of Jim’s former teammates are now Chief Talent Officers in large global companies. Since beginning his consulting firm in 2006, Jim has worked with some of the most well regarded companies in the world. His consulting engagements have been in North America, South America, Western & Central Europe, Russia, India, China, and Australia.

**Corey Seitz**, President of Seitz Talent Consulting, LLC, is a recognized leader in global talent management. A trusted advisor and coach to executives, he specializes in aligning the growth of individuals and organizations. Corey brings extensive experience at Fortune 500 corporations having served as the Global Head of Talent Management for Switzerland-based Novartis International, Johnson and Johnson and EMC. His experience crosses several industries and he has had leadership roles at Bank of America, Kraft and PepsiCo.

**Marc Effron**, President of The Talent Strategy Group, and author of *One Page Talent Management: Eliminating Complexity, Adding Value* (Harvard Business Press), has served in executive roles at leading corporations and consulting firms. His consulting work focuses on creating effective talent strategies and talent management process designs. He has co-authored two other leadership books and written chapters in nine management books.
About UNC Executive Development

Our approach to program design and delivery draws upon the power of real-world, applicable experiences from our faculty and staff, integrated with the knowledge our client partners share about the challenges they face.

We call this approach The Power of Experience. We combine traditional with experiential and unique learning to ensure that all individuals gain relevant new skills that they can easily implement within their own organizations. Through action learning and business simulation activities, we challenge participants to think, reflect and make decisions differently.

Our Approach: The Partnership

Our team customizes each leadership program through a highly collaborative process that involves our clients, program directors, faculty and program managers. We are dedicated to following-up with our clients and individual participants to ensure that their learning experiences have been meaningful and impactful. This integrated approach consistently drives strong outcomes.

Our Approach: The Results

Our executive education programs are designed with results in mind, and we are focused on successfully meeting our clients’ business and academic expectations. Below are a few examples of the results our client partners have achieved:

- Leadership refocused with new strategy and cohesive vision
- Products redefined
- Strategic plans created for the global marketplace
- New markets targeted
- Supply chains streamlined
- Cost-saving measures developed
- Teams aligned
- Silos leveled

Participants leave empowered to bring in new ideas, present different ways to grow business and tackle challenges. The result is stronger individuals leading stronger teams and organizations.

Contact Us

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