Unlock Your Company’s Hidden Talent

How to Develop Your People and Have Them Stay

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0 often we identify talent by a pre-determined “shopping list” of physical and performance attributes without realising that we can personally make a difference to others, if we just know how.

For example, in the Australian Football League, we may look for a centre to be strong, tall, with a large jump height, whilst a forward may need to be quick, agile and have a physical presence. Great for the mature adult game, but at the youth sports level, coaches often overlook or eliminate those players who are slow to mature because they don’t fulfil the shopping list.

Just like in sports, so many companies lose their staff only to realise later on that the person was really an asset to the organisation. In addition, they are also left to pick up costs and find the disruptions associated with their departure.

With so much emphasis on leadership development, why are companies still failing to recognise and develop, or keep, the talent they have?

There is a myth that goes “goldfish only grow as big as the size of their tank”. If you increase the tank size, then a goldfish will grow in accordance. But if you keep a goldfish in a small tank, they will eventually stop growing or die. Unfortunately, this is what some leaders do to the people they lead.

Great leaders can bring out the best in people, taking their ability to another level. These leaders realise it is hard to change people, but by developing a mindset within them that consistently drives better performance, they can help them realise their true potential.

Following are ways you can develop the talent in your organisation.

Things smart leaders do every day are:

**TRANSFORM THE MINDSET**

Leaders who cultivate an inquiry mind will drive optimal performance. For example, research shows that just by developing curiosity, there is both improved learning and increased performance. If we are curious about our work, our interactions with others, and our day-to-day experiences, we can learn a great deal more than if we are “uncurious”.

A study conducted by the G.C. Tanner Institute found that the highest performers were more curious and they were prone to asking more thought-provoking questions, such as: “What do you think this says?”

**DRIVE COMMITMENT**

Our brain is naturally wired for self-improvement to drive commitment when the opportunities are given. Great leaders allow people to express their thoughts, insights, and observations, and also respect their opinions. They genuinely care about people, and treat them as a whole person NOT just another staff member.

Take for example, Costco’s chief executive officer, Jim Sinegal, who has no hesitation to speak with any of his employees (and actually answers his own phone), and as a result, his employees love him for his ability to engage with his staff. Costco’s employment turnover rate is now the lowest in the retail industry, significantly less than its rival, Wal-Mart.

**RECOGNISE AND BUILD THEIR COMPETENCY**

The best leaders are always giving credit to others for their contributions, regardless of how small it is. They are then energised to reinforce this growth by making it a desired behaviour.

They know how to “jump-start” the behaviour by reinforcing it with tangible items, social interactions, activities, sensory stimuli and escape from aversive events. They back it up by creating positive consequences such as feedback, support, results or rewards.

The latter are all-important in setting long-lasting patterns. In fact, studies show that positive consequences have about four times more direct effect on behaviour than the precursors.

**BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER**

Talent development has a huge part to play in companies trying to sustain performance at the highest level. Bottom line, as leaders we can bring out the best in our people by using positive interactions, challenging them regularly, and reinforcing the behaviour you want to see through acknowledgement. When this is done well, everyone’s job becomes easier.

Joanne is a speaker, author, mentor, and coach. In all that she does, she helps her clients live by the words “lead by example”. At Leaderonomics, we can help your organisation find purpose with programmes such as “Coast-setting” and “Values-driven Organisation”. Contact training@leaderonomics.com for more information.

How to make the training stick

By KARIN HURT
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JOHN glanced excitedly at the conference room walls filled with easel sheets, plans and ideas. And then sighed deeply as he shuffled through his deep pile of notes and action items.

“Karin, I guarantee you, I’ll be a better leader tomorrow morning as a result of your Winning Well boot camp. And I’m almost certain I’ll still be a better leader the following week, and maybe even the week after that.”

“It’s week three that worries me. How do you keep it going? I want to see the return of investment (ROI) and that I keep applying these Winning Well techniques when real life hits the fan?”

John’s question is real. If you’re like most leaders, you’ve grown more than one training programme with good intentions, only to fall back into old behaviours.

So how do you make the training stick?

1. **FOCUS ON ONE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE AT A TIME.**
   When you learn game-changing leadership techniques, it’s tempting to try everything all at once. After all, if these techniques produce results, you owe it to your team to use them. Right? Perhaps. But not all at the same time.

   Pick one specific behaviour or approach you know will make the impact and integrate it into your leadership approach. Practice it consistently. Track it. Make your own ask for feedback. Once you feel confident and competent in that behaviour, the timing might be right to add in another technique.

   Too much change all at once will overwhelm both you and your team.

2. **FIND AN ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER.**
   Change is hard, and it can be lonely. It’s much easier to give up when no one’s looking. Find someone you trust who understands what you’ve just learned (someone else in your training class is a great choice). Share the behaviour you’re working on and make a commitment to check in with one another once a week to see how things are going and discuss challenges and brainstorm next steps.

3. **INVITE YOUR TEAM ON THE JOURNEY.**
   Tell your team what you’ve learned and what you’ve chosen to work on and why. Invite them to notice when it’s working and offer suggestions as to what you can do better. Your team already knows you’re not perfect, and they’ll be delighted to know you’re working on becoming a more effective manager.

4. **TEACH WHAT YOU’VE LEARNED.**
   One of the best ways to become a rock star at a skill is to teach it. Consider sharing some of the tools you’ve learned and teach them to others.

5. **ASK FOR FEEDBACK.**
   Make it a point to ask for feedback on the impact your new approach is having on the people you’re leading. Ask open-ended questions about what you can do to improve.

6. **WHEN YOU SCREW UP, APOLOGISE AND TRY AGAIN.**
   New habits don’t come easy. If you slip back into old behaviours, apologise and try again. Your team knows you’re not perfect. They just want to know you’re trying. Training is important, but what matters most is what you do when you get back to your team. With just a bit of focus, you can ensure the strongest ROI for you and your team.

Your turn. What tips do you have for making training stick?

Karin Hurt is a leadership consultant and MBA professor with decades of experience in sales, customer service and HR. She also co-authored “Winning Well: A manager’s guide to getting results without losing your soul”. To engage with her, email us at editor@leaderonomics.com.