

# Talent Management: twelve top tips for great learning and development

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The Talent Audit has been complete - high potential employees are armed with their development plans and enthusiasm is high to action development in the business. So what happens next? Frequently, the answer is not an awful lot. The reasons for this may be many and varied but here are some pointers to ensure that your organisation gets the best bang for its development buck.

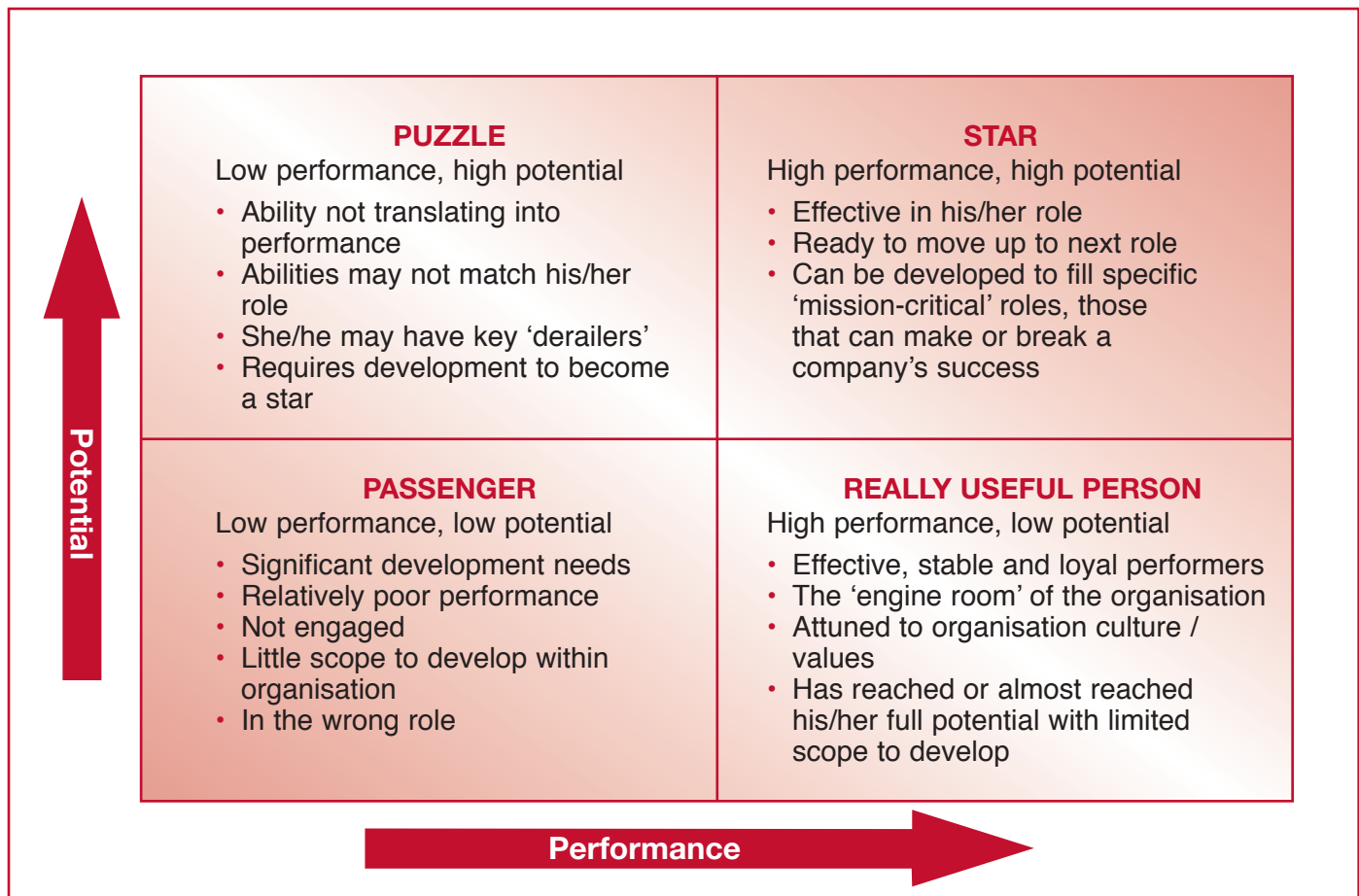
## HOW TO GET TALENT MANAGEMENT RIGHT

1) **Have a Learning and Development Strategy.** This may sound obvious but many organisations do not have this, and even those that do may not take time out to align this strategy with their Talent Management strategy to ensure a coherent and integrated approach. This is no a simple process and involves gathering information to address the following questions (Hughes and Beatty 2005):

- What is it (in behavioural terms) that your talented people need to think, do and be in order to execute the strategy, and how best should they do this?
- What types of learning and development activity will best attract, retain and develop the Talent it needs for commercial success?
- Will the senior management both support publicly and champion learning and development initiatives?
- How will the organisation provide learning and development for teams as well as individuals?

2) **Provide a fertile culture for learning to flourish and develop.** This means encouraging managers to be self directed learners. In other words, less the passive recipients of information from others and more the independent, self determining and self directed learner who makes development happen within the cultural confines of an enabling learning environment. Such an environment is created (in part) through ensuring that learning and development is on every team agenda; that those who attend to their development, and so do things differently and better, are publicly recognised and rewarded. The organisation can help self-directed learners by providing trigger lists of good reference and research materials, articles and books. Finally, it also means senior managers modelling their own learning and development through sharing publicly their needs with their teams and seeking feedback on progress as their development starts to impact.

3) **Segment your workforce.** This means understanding the interaction of performance and potential for each employee. Some organisations use the nine box grid as a means to understanding this relationship better. At Norman Broadbent, we simplify this to a two by two matrix as shown below in Box 1. In this grid, talented people have been segmented according to their position on a 2 X 2 matrix plotting performance (x axis) against potential (y axis).



*Box 1: Talent Management Matrix segmenting the workforce by performance and potential*

Simply put, we advocate investing little (if anything) in the Passengers (low potential and low performance), 25% percent in both Really Useful People (low potential and high performance) and Puzzles (high potential and low performance), and 50% for the Stars (high potential and high performance).

4) **Plan developmental activities in advance of any Talent Audit.** A common mistake is to wait until the audit has finished and then take an overview of the main areas of development. It is too late by then. The motivation and enthusiasm will have dissipated and the learning log gathers dust on the office shelf. Speed is of the essence here in leveraging high levels of motivation to project the managers into development that will effect behavioural change.

- 5) **Remember that managers learn best from practical, on the job work, one-off projects and secondments, supported by coaching and mentoring arrangements.** Therefore, development need not be expensive. Business schools can supply the context and environment to learn more theoretical or esoteric constructs (e.g. financial modelling and business strategy) but in this case it is critical that these sessions are reinforced with practical, on-the-job tasks within the workplace, that allow managers to hone their newly acquired skills and thus embed the learning. The development of key talent needs to be done in an integrated way and managed from the top down.
- 6) **Involve the line manager in the process.** (S)he is key in ensuring that development has commercial benefits. This means that (s)he needs to be fully aware of what is being learned and developed, and use every opportunity to recognise, reward and celebrate new and different behaviours that achieve a commercial goal. It may be that the development goals form part of the quarterly or half yearly appraisal system. In this way, development is aligned with other forms of performance criteria.
- 7) **Consider group learning activities.** Not every learning opportunity has to be done individually and some topics are indeed best learned as a group. Research suggests that cooperative learning is more effective than direct instruction; but unstructured group work is less effective than both.
- 8) **Do not omit to train 'thinking' skills.** Much of what is developed in organisations has concentrated on interpersonal or attitudinal skills – much less on critical thinking skills. The Royal Navy takes its Principal Warfare Officers out for four months to shore-based establishments to teach them tactical decision-making skills under stress. Such investment is infrequently found in the civilian world and yet, as we move from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge economy, there is a growing premium on superior cognitive skills. It is still the case that brighter people do better in senior level roles. Do not pass up opportunities to develop your High Potentials in high level reasoning processes.
- 9) **Check both the capacity and motivation of the employees to complete their learning and development.** This means prioritising development needs to ensure that managers working flat out attend only to key developmental issues. Managers will be more motivated to learn if they both understand and buy into their development requirements. They will also feel motivated if they perceive that positive outcomes will emanate from successful completion of that development and that they have the inner self confidence to use development to improve performance.
- 10) **Embrace new technology.** This is the medium through which Generation Y has been educated and they will expect to continue learning through it. There is a growing industry of e-learning and development providers selling bona fide products that, when blended with practical work, provide excellent and cost effective learning solutions.

11) Ensure that your own Human Resource staff has the knowledge, skills, abilities and motivation to effectively manage the processes of developing talented people.

12) **Evaluate.** This is easier said than done but the learning and development function will only flourish if it can provide quantifiable evidence of improved performance attributable (in part) to learning interventions. Traditional models of evaluation (e.g. Kirkpatrick 1994) are outmoded and need to focus on a learning outcomes approach to training. Learning outcomes (that are not the same as learning objectives) are behavioural statements describing what a manager should know, understand, or be able to do at the end of a programme or module.

## References

Hughes, R. and Beatty, K. (2005) Five Steps to Leading Strategically TD: 46-48

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr Mike Rugg-Gunn is a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and Director at HADIL (sister organisation to Norman Broadbent). Mike has worked with a number of blue chip global organisations, mostly in the areas of executive assessment and development helping organisations to identify their best talent, develop it and retain it within the business. Mike has a degree in Psychology (BSc. Hons) from the University of London; a masters degree (MSc.) in Occupational and Organisational Psychology from the University of East London and a Doctorate in Occupational Psychology, also from the University of East London. He is also an assessor for the Division of Occupational Psychology within the British Psychological Society.