

Career Development Tips

Top Performers need to be continually challenged. Career planning is therefore a key factor in managing them.

When a Top Performer starts a new job, the challenge is high. They have a lot to learn and they are, as yet, far from their peak production levels.

As they scale the mountain of their new challenge, they master the major peaks and finally **reach a plateau**.

See it in Their Statistics

Watch the production performance of a Top Performer as they settle in to a new position and you will usually see three stages in their development.

- 1 They spend some time **finding their feet**. This is evidenced by their production statistics going up and down a bit – all at a reasonably low level.
- 2 Having settled in, you will then see a **steady rise** in results. These will climb well above the initial levels in a (sometimes) dramatically steep curve.
- 3 The final stage is when the **production results level off** and stay consistently in this high range (well above the general level they were running at when they first started).

In some cases, you will see all three phases develop over just a few weeks. In others, it may take months, or even a year.

When to Look at Careers

From an internal planning point of view, you may well have looked at some future career possibilities before you even hired the new person.

If you have made no plans of this sort, however, the time to look at this for a particular employee is when they maintained that third stage – the plateau – for some time.

Top Performers, by their very nature, always want to be challenged by the job they perform. That's what keeps them fired up.

The trick here is to develop a career path that will continually challenge their abilities, in order to retain them longer.

Is Promotion the Answer?

Developing a career path for a top performing employee does not always mean promotion. In many instances (particularly in smaller businesses) there is actually no upward management movement possible.

The good news is that most Top Performers are not necessarily looking for a management promotion. In fact, in some cases, such a move may well prove disastrous.

Consider the Customer Service Representative who is really good at (and who really enjoys) their job. They are great with customers, have developed excellent relationships with other parts of the business so as to facilitate service to

their customers, and they get on really well with their co-workers.



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If you take that employee and make them the Customer Service Manager, their new role will demand a **totally different set of skills**. They may or may not have those skills. And they could end up falling flat on their face and failing.

This is not to say that promoting people from within is not a good idea, because it is. But in your discussions with such an employee, you should probe the other alternative available — that of expanding the scope of their current role.

In many cases, career planning should have much more to do with finding ways to expand the current role of an employee, rather than promoting them to higher levels.

It *is* true that there will be times when you do need to fill higher management positions, and the best place to look is usually inside your own organisation.

But if promotions are the only career opportunities you offer to your Top Performers, you will undoubtedly lose some of them over time.

- Some will leave because they failed to fit in to the totally different new role you thrust upon them.
- Others will leave because promotions did not come up often enough and they remained stuck on their plateau for too long, and got bored.

Growth Within the Job

Many Top Performers are very happy remaining at their current level because they can develop a truly professional approach.

Expanding and improving the current job can enhance this desire for professionalism. To accomplish this you can:

1. Add new areas of responsibility

By reorganising the structure within a team of people, you can **beef up the challenge** for your Top Performer. At the same time, you can remove activities from poor-performers who are not doing their part well.

2. Expand the territory

For a Sales Rep, Customer Service Rep, Service Engineer, etc, you can gain a lot by increasing their territory or assigning more important clients to their care.

3. Improve the support functions

If you realise that a Top Performer is turned on by achieving results, then you will see that giving them better support will increase those results and **keep them interested for longer**. Such things as better tools (computers, etc) and added administrative support fall into this category.

4. Remove barriers that slow them down

There is nothing more frustrating for a Top Performer than things which **stand in the way of their production**. Find out what these are and remove them, if possible. These could include unnecessary paperwork, or other employees who are jealous of their results and try to pull them down.



The Top Performer Plateau

When you have someone who becomes really good at what they do, they reach a point where they do

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it with ease and professional acumen. Watch them working and you will see how they handle things (that others would find difficult or complex) with a deftness and speed that is a wonder to behold.

This is the mark of a Top Performer who is in total control of their job. It also indicates that the Top Performer has reached a plateau.

Now, this does not usually happen quickly. Eventually, however, if they are left on this plateau, they will get bored. They will begin to find less challenge in the job and they will yearn for something with “more meat” in it.

What happens next is that they start to look around for something where their talents can be put to the test again. And, if they don't see that in your organisation, they will begin to quietly look elsewhere. It's not a frantic scouring of the job ads every day. It's more like a casual glance through the papers every few weeks over a period of months. And, once started on this path, if left unchecked, they will eventually leave.

Decide Which Way to Jump

When you see this, you need to sit down with that employee and have a discussion about their career path.

The objective of this discussion is to firstly determine which category they fall into:

- 1 Are they seeking (and can they handle) **promotion** to a higher management level?
- 2 Or would they would be happier and more productive remaining in their current role,

but with **additional responsibilities and challenges**.

If they are fall squarely into the first category, you have an excellent prospect for promotion. They have already proven themselves to be a Top Performer and they will take those talents with them into the new position. And when you do need good management material, this situation is a real blessing.

If they are looking for promotion and you don't have a position to move them into, however, your only option is to expand their current role (as covered earlier in this article) and realise that one day you may still lose them.

In most instances, expanding their current role is actually the employee's preferred option, so the second objective of the interview is to find out how this can best be achieved.

Career Planning Interviews

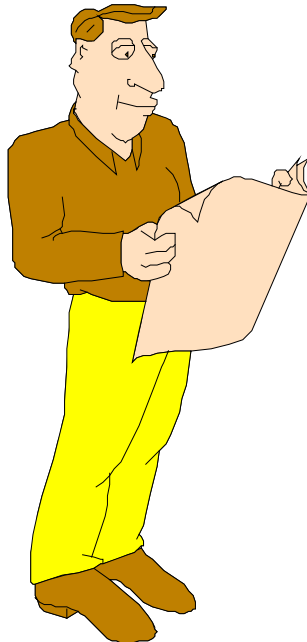
It's good management practice, of course, to sit down with your employees every so often and discuss their job.

When the employee is one who has performed well and reached a plateau in their performance, you need to find out, from their perspective, how the job could be enhanced.

You may well have your own ideas on this, but you should also listen to your Top Performer, as they are the expert in their area.

Ask them questions such as:

- **How could the results be increased?**
- **What's needed to streamline this?**
- **What's slowing you down – getting in the way?**
- **What frustrates you about the job?**



- How could we do it better?
- What administrative aspects slow you down?
- What else could you take on that would make your job more complete?
- Is anyone stopping you from performing?

You may be surprised at what you learn from this. You should not go into such an interview with preconceived ideas about how to make their job more interesting — listen first!

And remember, the key principle involved here is that you have a Top Performer who is a great asset to your operation.

By making it even easier for them to produce will not only improve your overall production, it will ensure they stay with you longer.

