



SUMTOTAL  
WHITE PAPER

# Roadmap to a High-Performance Culture: Talent Development at its Finest

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## Roadmap to a High-Performance Culture: Talent Development at its Finest

The creation of a high-performance culture could be considered the pinnacle of any talent development initiative. In this kind of environment, you implement a set of workplace values and behaviors that drives your employees to succeed. Your organization successfully rewards its star performers, reduces turnover, responds faster to opportunities and threats, and substantially improves customer service. And the best part? By truly maximizing the productivity—and consequent value—of your individual employees, you can realize a collective boost in overall company performance. In other words, when your workforce excels, it's worth more to your business than the sum of its parts.

This may sound straightforward, but the reality is that building a high-performance culture requires planning, diligence, and effort. Why? Because your workforce is not comprised of a single kind of employee. You can't motivate, manage, or develop everyone in the same manner. Your task is to identify the types of workers you are dealing with, and then implement talent development plans that engage those employee types accordingly.

This paper shows you how to classify employees by performance level and then apply a functional roadmap toward creating a culture of performance. Built effectively, this culture could deliver serious returns on your talent development investments.

### Star Performers

Do you know who the stars are in your organization? Generally, they are the top 15 percent of your employees, the ones who regularly go above and beyond their obligations to produce quantifiable results that often exceed expectations. You could be tempted to feel that employees of this caliber require little management, but don't forget about them. You need and appreciate this group of workers—so how do you motivate them?

Because these are your stars, you need to enable them to shine wherever possible. Clearly acknowledge their value to the business. Go out of your way to share company objectives and strategy, and compensate them fairly for their contributions. Don't bury them in simple or mundane tasks. Instead, give them interesting work that challenges and stimulates them intellectually. Find out what drives them and then set them to work, so they won't jump ship. And remember, these workers thrive around other star performers, and they can grow frustrated when forced to pick up the slack for others.<sup>1</sup>

### Roadmap to high performance:

- **You are here:** Right now, focus on evaluating compensation to ensure your star performers are fairly paid. Don't risk losing a quality employee over an easily reparable compensation issue.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/5617.html> "[T]op performers rely on high-quality colleagues in their organizations to improve the quality of their own work and to deliver it effectively to clients." "The Key to Managing Stars? Think Team." Boris Groysberg and Linda-Eling Lee, Harvard Business School.

- **Around the bend:** Over the next few months, begin scoping out potential skills development for future roles. Engage your top performers in forward-looking conversations to see who might aspire to take on a management position. Who is interested in leading a part of the organization? Who would prefer to remain a high-level individual contributor?
- **Plot your course:** Over the long term, make sure your top employees clearly understand their paths for career advancement. This means ensuring they consistently have the development tools and learning resources available to achieve success.
- **Other tips:** Through mentoring or rotational assignments, HR or senior executives can give star employees visibility into other parts of the organization. No single manager should hoard their valuable resources—tempting as it may be to do so. Bear in mind that, despite their current successes, your star performers might have undiscovered potential.

## Standard Contributors

Generally considered to be the middle 75 percent of your employee population, your standard contributors are vital to the business. Without their steady efforts, your company would not survive long—so don't ignore these employees completely to focus only on top performers.

Your primary objective with this group is to identify skills gaps and develop competencies in order to increase performance and productivity. Never settle for the bare minimum from any of these workers. Instead, direct them to stretch and hone their skills. Look for new areas where their effective contributions can help meet organizational demands.

### Roadmap to high performance:

- **You are here:** Right now, you need to systematically identify practical ways to get the most out of these employees. The status quo is never enough. Instead, press these employees to raise the bar slightly higher each year. What are their performance goals? Can you help them better align goals to company objectives?
- **Around the bend:** Over the coming months, consider how you will expand the roles of these employees to fully engage them and grow their potential. What skills will they need? Narrow your focus for greater clarity. Your development efforts should center on one or two skills or competencies.
- **Plot your course:** Confirm the career paths for these workers as the year progresses. Your long-term plan is to conduct ongoing evaluations to ensure these employees are in the right roles for their skill sets. Remember, while an employee may be underdeveloped for his current position, he could have the necessary skills for greater productivity elsewhere in the organization.
- **Other tips:** Your job is to help this group of employees increase their value. When certain workers exhibit strong potential, seize your opportunities. Ramp up their motivation, and give them the tools they need to become your newest stars.

## Poor Performers

No one wants to be in the bottom 10 percent of an organization's workforce, but these employees exist—and you need to deal with them. After all, they are low on the productivity totem pole for a reason. Your job? Figure out why, and then fix the problems.

When you enable these employees to improve their skills and obtain the competencies necessary to meet expectations, you might resolve existing performance issues right away. If not, consider that these employees might simply be in the wrong roles. See if other areas of the company might be more suitable to their available skills—and then redeploy as needed. You want these team members in a position to make the greatest possible contribution for the business as a whole.

### Roadmap to high performance:

- **You are here:** Your first immediate job is to implement Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) that help these employees better define goals and focus their activities. Clearly communicate your expectations, so these workers know precisely what they need to do to succeed in their current roles. Remember, performance issues rarely disappear on their own. Identify and address the issues proactively.
- **Around the bend:** In the intermediate term, give poor-performing employees the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to meet expectations in their current positions. This means providing training as needed, and ensuring appropriate resources are available to enable growth.
- **Plot your course:** Throughout the year, check your progress. If you are not seeing the desired results with a particular employee, explore your options. Are there other roles in the company that provide a better fit for the individual and the organization?
- **Other tips:** Not seeing improvements despite your best efforts? Don't allow poor performers to stagnate. If they become a detriment to overall team morale or productivity, cut your losses and part ways.

## Conclusion

Talent development can be an intricate process when you consider the variety of workers most businesses employ. Some individuals seem to shine naturally, while others require significant hands-on management. And some employees seem to perform only what is asked of them, without a drive to extend their skills or their contributions for the good of the company.

Transforming this amalgam into a cohesive team that is unified in its desire to succeed is, no doubt, a tricky endeavor. If you want to encourage a high-performance culture, however, you must ironically work to pull your workforce together by segmenting employee groups and then managing them accordingly. Overall, your objective will be to leverage a unified approach to talent development—one that includes learning, performance, and compensation management—to maximize the productivity and subsequent value of each individual. Not only will your employees feel more loyal and engaged, but your business will reap the ongoing rewards.

## About the Author

Richard Oyen directs the SumTotal Customer Value Program, giving customers the practical advice they need to get the most from their talent development initiatives. Richard has over 20 years of experience in HR and Performance Management with renowned companies such as Oracle, Walgreens, and Keynote Systems. Richard has also worked as an Adjunct Professor of Human Resources Management at the University of San Francisco. He is SPHR certified and has both a BS from the University of Minnesota and an MBA from the University of San Francisco.



## About SumTotal

SumTotal Systems, Inc. is a leading provider of proven talent development solutions that automate and integrate learning, performance, and compensation management to drive business results on a daily basis. Our solutions strengthen and develop employee skills to accelerate time-to-market, close skill gaps, and reduce the risk of business disruptions. With more than 1,500 customers and 18 million users worldwide, we have increased performance at some of the world's best-known companies, organizations, and government agencies. Our category leadership and applied insight help us understand the critical success factors for businesses of all sizes. For more information, visit [www.sumtotalsystems.com](http://www.sumtotalsystems.com).

To learn more about how SumTotal can work with you to help strengthen business performance, please visit our Web site at [www.sumtotalsystems.com](http://www.sumtotalsystems.com)

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