



# How to Unleash the High Potential Talent in Your Organization

Business & Talent. Aligned.®



Right  
Management®  
ManpowerGroup



# CONTENTS

## 04 INTRODUCTION

## 07 CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

- 08 How to Avoid the 3 Most Common Pitfalls in Managing Your High Potential Program
- 10 No Time to Get It Wrong: High Potential Development in Asia
- 12 Red Flags: Is Your High Potential Program Sending the Wrong Signals?
- 14 **Client Reference Story:** Creating a Prescription for Leadership Success

## 17 CHAPTER 2: IDENTIFICATION

- 18 Stocking the High Potential Talent Pool: Are You Selective Enough?
- 20 Defining Success: A Behavioral Approach to High Potential Identification
- 22 **Client Reference Story:** Reducing Risk in the Leadership Pipeline

## 25 CHAPTER 3: DEVELOPMENT

- 26 Set Your High Potentials Up to Fail. Really.
- 28 The Missing Link: Top Executives and High Potential Programs
- 30 **Client Reference Story:** Reducing Churn with Stronger Development Methodologies

## 33 CHAPTER 4: SUSTAINABILITY

- 34 What High-Potential Profiles Can Reveal About Your Leadership Culture
- 36 How to Keep Top Executives Engaged in Your High Potential Program
- 38 **Client Reference Story:** Building Robust Global Centers for Leader Development

## 40 CONCLUSION



High potential talent is the critical business differentiator in the Human Age. Organizations that successfully identify and develop high potential leaders gain measurable financial performance advantages over their peers.



# INTRODUCTION

Alarmingly, only **13%<sup>1</sup>** of senior executives and human capital managers today believe their organizations **have ample leadership pipelines.** To resolve this gap, the number one strategy of businesses worldwide is to “grow talent internally.”

What is the best way to achieve that goal? Are there proven practices around high potential development that every organization can leverage?

This e-book is a compilation of blogs and case studies from talent development experts at Right Management that address issues around the identification and development of High Potential talent. They offer practical insights on how to **identify, assess, develop,** and engage high potentials to create a **steady pipeline of “ready now” candidates** capable of moving into leadership positions of greater scope and responsibility.

Because our consultants work with a wide range of clients in more than 50 countries, from small to mid-sized businesses to global Fortune 100 multinationals, their views are informed by the very real challenges encountered when developing individuals and organizations today. Challenges that, undoubtedly, you face in leveraging top talent to achieve your organization’s performance goals.

**We hope this resource can be of value in your efforts.**



# 07



## FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

To compete effectively, companies need a strategic, structured approach to talent development. Those with well defined leadership development programs routinely outperform their peers in the marketplace.

*This section offers best practices for creating an effective talent identification and development program – insights that you can customize to your organization's unique culture and strategic objectives.*



# How to Avoid the 3 Most Common Pitfalls in Managing Your High Potential Program

Three common practices around high potential identification, development, and follow-through can derail the success of the program. Do any of these ring true for your organization?



Ensuring the success of high potential programs is more important than ever, as companies struggle to identify, assess, develop and manage the careers of top talent to fill leadership gaps. Here are three of the most common traps in managing a high potential program and how to avoid these pitfalls.

### 1. Confusing high performance with potential

All high potentials are high performers but not all **high performers are high potentials**. In fact, research indicates that **only about 20%** of high performing managers are rightfully considered to have high potential for advancement. So the first common pitfall lies in the identification of high potential talent and the criteria used by organizations to do so. Yes, past performance is important, and companies need to take this into account, but it is not sufficient. Also, excluding high performers from the high potential list is not an easy decision to make from a management point of view as it often requires providing disappointing feedback to valued employees.

#### > Trap avoidance

*High potential identification requires a two-step process: first, solicit management input to draw up an initial list of candidates and then confirm with a multi-trait assessment of the individuals to assure accurate selection. Gut feelings, observations and intuition are fine, as long as they are matched by proven high potential assessment methodologies that can measure for essential characteristics such as career drive, aspiration, agility, flexibility, and organizational confidence.*

### 2. Using outdated success profiles

Very often, a company's high potential success profiles – the required knowledge, experience, personal attributes and leadership capabilities – are not regularly revisited and checked for validity and relevance. We frequently encounter companies using selection criteria that were created up to five years earlier. Also, it can take some companies so long to agree on the success profile that when they finally reach consensus, the business situation or internal issues to be addressed have changed. As a result, organizations may be identifying, assessing and developing their future leaders on capabilities better suited for the company's present than for its future.

#### > Trap avoidance

*Define the critical traits for success in key roles over a three to five year horizon. Focus on four to seven*

*essential requirements – the core criteria that, if possessed by a critical mass of leaders, will propel the organization toward success. Revisit your model every year to account for new challenges, and look for external research as food for thought to build your success profiles.*

### 3. Failing to create a credible, trustworthy and structured development program

Some companies spend considerable energy, time and money to identify and develop future leaders but, when the need for succession arises, they do not choose an individual from within the high potential pool to fill the position. This jeopardizes the credibility and trust that high potentials may have in the process. When high potentials are not managed under a structured development process that provides meaningful assignments, consistent feedback, and development and career opportunities, many lose faith in the company and may leave to pursue their careers elsewhere.

#### > Trap avoidance

*Three success factors are important to avoid this pitfall. **First**, to develop trust and confidence in these initiatives, companies **MUST** rely on their deliverables and results when managing the careers of their high potentials. Succession plans cannot allow exceptions when nominating individuals for new leadership positions – they must come from the high potential ranks. **Second**, top executives should be meaningfully engaged with the leadership development programs so they can be confident that participants are being developed with the required capabilities. **Third**, in addition to educational activities, high potential development programs need to include job-based exposure and stretch experiences so that future leaders are prepared to function in new positions as they become available. That requires the organization to have the mindset and the process to support experiential learning activities.*



# No Time to Get It Wrong: High Potential Development in Asia

With a burning need to fill leader ranks, Asian companies are a proving ground for methodologies that accelerate leadership development. Experience trumps theory in Asia and the largest investments are being directed toward action learning and executive coaching.



By Gary Schmidt

*Ph.D., MBA, M.S., Practice Leader  
for Talent Management, ASEAN, Right  
Management*

Companies worldwide are challenged with a talent gap, particularly in leadership roles. In no part of the world is the shortage of leaders more pronounced than in Asia, and with the fast past of growth taking place there, nowhere is there greater pressure to identify and develop high potential talent faster.

According to a Right Management – Conference Board survey of 210 executive-level human capital professionals in Asia, **45 percent** of respondents indicated that their **leaders are not prepared** or only marginally prepared to address the business challenges ahead. That really means 45 percent are willing to admit they may not be prepared, so I suspect the number may be higher. But even if the percentage is accurate, that still sounds like a lot of risk for organizations to manage.

Since my arrival in Singapore and working with companies throughout the region, I have heard many HR leaders ask how to accelerate talent development to: A) keep pace with organic growth and expansion, or B) prepare local leaders and high potentials to replace the traditional expats. Of course many Asian companies have tackled this issue, and they are learning through trial-and-error what works best for them. So how are they addressing this problem? And what can other companies learn from their best practices around high potential development?

This research, including interviews with executives, revealed three driving forces shaping the decisions about leadership development in Asian companies.

**Emphasis on global issues** – Leaders in locations like Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul and Singapore are accustomed to working in a global marketplace, but that is not the case for leaders in many of the emerging cities and industries. The definition of leadership and the evolving content and methods for accelerating leadership development are therefore being shaped by the business realities of operating in an increasingly complex and competitive global market.

**Experience over theory** – Our research shows that companies are emphasizing experiential learning and job experience in their acceleration programs rather than theoretical discussions or classroom learning. Leaders want **practical solutions** they can put into practice next week. They want to talk to and share perspectives with others facing similar issues. They question the applicability of theory, especially if not tried and tested in an Asian context.

**Speed and acceleration** – In Asia, the Western timetable of giving a leader three to five years to accomplish job steps is often collapsed into less than one year. Accelerated development depends on rapid job rotations,

stretch assignments, and appropriate support structures, as well as demanding that leaders at headquarters take a risk on talent. Many high potential development programs are more like a progressive dinner party with each course served as bite-sized canapés in different venues as compared with a full six-course meal served over several hours in a single location. You need to be pretty agile with chopsticks!

Although the companies we spoke with were facing different business challenges and therefore configured their high potential programs to help meet particular needs, there were similarities across the more mature programs. Each included a structured process emphasizing:

- **Assessment** with clear articulation of the selection criteria
- **Development** with a detailed roadmap of developmental opportunities
- **Measurement** with a tracking mechanism to monitor progress and impact

If you suspect that Asian companies find it easier to poach high potential talent from others, you are correct. Talent retention is a key concern. The question, then, becomes: is it cheaper and more effective to buy external talent or build internal talent? Most Asian companies are opting for the latter – both to replace expat leaders but also to build a sustainable bench of future leaders. This can be seen by looking at their intention to invest in the development of internal high potentials. Our results revealed that the vast majority of human capital leaders in Asia are either maintaining or increasing their leadership development budgets and directing the largest investments to action learning (e.g., business challenges and simulations) and executive coaching/mentoring.

This strategy has a two-fold benefit. One is an increase in the commitment and motivation of internal talent who may aspire to higher roles, knowing they have a future with the company and a pathway to get there. The second benefit is the retention of high potentials through the investment in their development, and the thrill they get from seeing potential turn into a reality for them. The message – ignore the care and development of your top talent and high potentials and you risk losing them quickly to an organization that is ready to invest time and resources in their growth.

Interestingly, your company doesn't have to be headquartered in India or China to feel urgency around developing your top talent to lead effectively in the global business economy.



# Red Flags: Is Your High Potential Program Sending the Wrong Signals?

Strategic candidate selection, advancement follow-through, and transparency are critical to a robust high potential development program. Is your program configured for success?

Despite the best intentions, many organizations sabotage the success of their high potential programs by not thinking through some of the basic processes associated with candidate selection and development. As a result, key talent in the organization may become discouraged and disengaged – and your investment of time and resources in their growth may not deliver the return you expect. Here are some common missteps.

### Trying to be fair at the expense of being strategic

In selecting candidates for high potential programs, some organizations mandate that available slots be distributed equitably across their business units. For example, if the company has four divisions and room for 20 participants, then five participants have to be chosen from each division. In our experience, this may result in program participants who are talented performers but lack the required skills to fill vital leadership roles in the future.

Optimally, **high potential selection** criteria should flow from the **organization's business strategy and vision**. I recently worked with a company that followed the equitable allocation approach despite the fact that some divisions were cash cows that could essentially run themselves and did not figure prominently in their strategic growth plans. Several other divisions, however, represented targeted growth areas and had a far greater need for talented leaders. As such, these key business segments deserved a larger share of the developmental resources.

High potential development is a business decision and the most **effective leadership pipelines** are configured to meet enterprise objectives rather than satisfy all constituencies. When creating capital improvement or marketing budgets, available money is strategically allocated based on perceived impact to the business. Why not do the same with your allocation of leadership development resources?

### Providing a ladder without any rungs

When suitable leadership openings arise, are your high potentials being moved into roles identified as important for their continued development? Or, are the promotions being given to employees who “deserve it” or “have put in their time” or are favored by certain managers? Often we see high-potential development road-blocked by promotions made as a reward for past service rather than to expand the skills of top leadership candidates. This jeopardizes the credibility and trust that high potentials have in the company. Unless high potentials are managed under a structured and consistent development process that provides meaningful career opportunities, many will become disengaged and may leave the company altogether.

Organizations with an understanding of key experience and roles required to prepare individuals for higher level leadership can use that information to monitor career paths and prevent blockages by individuals without advancement potential. Having **succession management** talent review meetings at the business or enterprise level can be useful to **ensure opportunities are available for high potentials**. Additionally, organizations can evaluate the experiences gained in critical roles and look for alternatives such as short term assignments, serving on task forces, and other means to replicate those experiences without having to put the high potential into the role.

### Assuming everyone “gets it” (or wants it)

It's critical to delineate the goals and structure of your high potential development program and make this information known throughout the organization. Recently I was talking with employees at one company who were not pleased with the annual reassignment of responsibilities in one business. Although designed to broaden employees' experience and exposure to different facets of the business, the practice was seen by most as just a necessary evil at best. As the famous movie line goes: “What we've got here is failure to communicate.” Leaders could have positioned the moves as favorable by talking with each high potential employee about the experiences and capabilities that the leadership team saw as critical for his/her continued development and advancement. In some cases an individual might not want to move to another role for various reasons. Unless the development conversation takes place, those concerns cannot be aired and discussed; as a result, neither the organization nor the individual is well served.

**Building leadership capacity** is perhaps the **most pressing strategic imperative** in business today. In a global survey of business executives conducted by Right Management and The Conference Board, one finding that stood out is the collective concern over the growing leadership vacuum with over 80 percent of companies reporting that they intend to grow talent internally versus hiring leaders from the open market. Given this strategy and the need for talented leaders to navigate today's dynamic business environment, it's more important than ever for organizations to take a critical look at how their high potential development processes are structured, implemented and communicated in order to **optimize success**.



# Creating a Prescription for Leadership Success

---

## Client Industry

Pharmaceutical

## Situation

In order to support a new growth strategy focused on expanding their product portfolio in both emerging and mature markets, the organization wanted to ensure that existing and future senior leaders had the right mix of capabilities to meet business requirements now and in the future. They sought a partner to help define success for their high potential roles and implement a global program to identify and develop future senior leaders.



## Workforce Solution

Leveraging consultants from the US, Asia and Europe, Right Management created a global team to deliver the multi-national company's enterprise-wide high potential program. In collaboration with the client, this team:

- **Developed a holistic success profile** based on interviews with senior stakeholders, providing the framework for a robust proprietary assessment protocol.
- **Designed a three-day development center** to provide an immersive learning environment and to improve focus structured around assessment, feedback, and development planning. Prior to attending, participants completed the Hogan Suite and a Leadership 360° feedback assessment, as well as a Career Aspirations questionnaire.
- During the development center, participants experienced a program designed by Right Management to deliver a rich experience and meaningful business impact through:
  - Right Management's business simulation – a customized "day in the life" experience with activities to identify individual strengths and development areas oriented to current business issues.
  - Feedback via group and individual activities to raise participants' self-awareness through the evaluation of their assessment results and performance in the business simulation.
  - Analytical reporting that reflected key strengths and development areas extrapolated from the various data sources and activities.
  - Peer coaching and one-on-one sessions with a Right Management executive coach to support crafting personal development plans.
  - Structured activities with members of the company's senior management, designed to foster communication and support networking across the organization.
- To maximize return on investment, **individual coaching** was provided by the Right Management consultants after the program to support implementation of individual development plans.

## Results

Company sponsors say the program has had positive impact in three key areas:

- **Strengthening the leadership pipeline** – percentage of "ready now" and "ready within 12 months" successors
- **Retaining top talent**, particularly in emerging countries
- **Increasing the diversity of the high potential pool**, with regard to gender, geography, and other factors

Sponsors also praised the quality and diversity of the Right Management team in response to the global nature of the leader population. Participants gave very positive feedback about their overall experience, rating it 3.9 out of 4, and a score of 3.7 out of 4 for the support in defining their strategic development plans. Participants also rated the professionalism of the coaches and assessors a perfect 4 out of 4. Deployment of the process is underway targeting 1000+ high potentials worldwide.





# 17

## + IDENTIFICATION

The number one priority for businesses today is to create a robust pipeline of “ready now” talent with the relevant capabilities to move into positions of greater scope and responsibility.

*In this section, you'll find advice on tackling the complex challenge of identifying the high potential talent in your organization and determining the competencies required for success.*

# Stocking the High Potential Talent Pool: Are You Selective Enough?

High potential programs are often filled with employees who don't belong there. Does your organization fall victim to the three Rs when nominating candidates?

By Shelly Funderburg

*Ph.D., Vice President, Principal Consultant*

One talent management problem that I frequently encounter in my work with global companies is a **flawed nomination process** for entry into high potential programs. High performance is often conflated with high potential when, in fact, the two are radically different. An employee can register off-the-chart performance in a current role, but still lack the aspiration, drive, interpersonal skills, or mobility to succeed at higher levels. In fact, it's estimated that only two in ten high performing employees are also legitimate high potential development candidates.

A key contributor to poor candidate selection is that **“potential” is measured subjectively** in many organizations and rarely defined according to detailed requirements. Lack of established criteria and the absence of gatekeepers with the authority to reject nominees lead to high potential programs that are a grab-bag of employees, many of whom are there for the wrong reasons. The three most common misuses of high potential programs are:

**Retention** – Admission is used frequently as a “carrot” to entice a valued but restless employee to stay with the company. This is usually a results-focused worker who is highly favored by the line manager because of consistent performance. However, when benchmarked against other high potential candidates and vetted against leadership criteria, the employee does not belong in the program. A better approach? Provide such employees with other development opportunities, such as one-to-one career coaching, or additional challenges to engage their interest.

**Remediation** – Sending an employee to a high potential program can also be a substitute for confronting performance issues directly. Some managers misunderstand the purpose of the program; others hope to avoid the responsibility of working one-on-one with the employee to rectify problems. A case that comes to mind is a high performing early career manager with a history of pushing too hard for results. Jane (not her real name) was known for coercing others to get what she wanted and had offended many. Her supervisor nominated her for the high potential program in the hopes

that Jane would learn interpersonal skills. With no gatekeeper for the nomination process, she got into the program. As you might expect, Jane did not perform well with her peers and was given considerable developmental feedback. Shocked and distressed by the experience, Jane became disengaged and left the company one year later. The organization lost a talented leader who, with the right performance management support system, may have contributed significantly over the long term. Strict criteria, improved education for line managers on employee remediation, and a gatekeeping structure that prevents political selections can help prevent such situations.

**Reward** – This is a tough call for a manager: admitting that a highly valued performer does not have the “right stuff” to advance into a leadership role. Often such employees are nominated as a reward for past performance and, unconsciously, in the hopes that leadership potential will somehow “rub off” on them during the program. A better course is to find opportunities to show high performers how their contributions are valued and have one-on-one career discussions that assure them of continued growth opportunities and rewards.

A high potential program represents a significant investment of time and money. Does your organization have a selection process designed to make that investment truly pay off by focusing on the right candidates? Are you successful in avoiding the Three Rs?

# Defining Success: A Behavioral Approach to High Potential Identification

Having objective processes to define and assess for the distinct leadership behaviors required at each level in the organization is critical for a successful high potential program.

A high potential employee is typically defined as one with the capabilities to climb at least two levels in the organization within a few years, given proper development and stretch assignments. Given the resources and time that organizations commit to developing high potentials, I wonder why some resist the idea of **creating objective processes** with a high hit rate to assist in identifying these individuals?

The process begins with creating a success profile for each key role. A success profile acknowledges the fact that there is a set of behavioral prioritizations that leads to a higher probability of reaching the organization's strategic goals. These priorities are related to common workstreams, but are expressed differently at different tactical or strategic levels.

Creating a success profile for a leadership position requires discussing and agreeing on shared expectations for a role; failure to define the essential requirements typically leads to misunderstandings, wrong decisions and potential value lost for the organization.

When I talk with clients about creating **distinct success profiles** for each of the layers within the leadership hierarchy to guide selection of high-potential candidates, I sometimes get pushback. Usually along the lines of: "Well, customer orientation and strategic mindset are very important capabilities for us, whether the leader is level 2 or level 5 in the pyramid." Or "are we back to making stringent job descriptions like in the 1980s?"

My response is that you may call a required trait by the same name, but each level requires a radically different set of behaviors attached to that trait. A leader with the skills and the historical achievements to fulfill a role as a team leader for a group of experts may be unable to summon the strategic capabilities required to be successful as Director of R&D. If a company fails to define the selection criteria in sufficient detail at each level, most candidates won't meet the expectations.

Here is an example from an organization that has been thorough in working with the expectations to their leaders.

Trait	Behavioral Requirements	
	Level 3 – Regional Director	Level 2 – Team Lead
Strategic Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses knowledge of the company's business to identify and take action on key issues</li> <li>• Thinks more broadly than their role</li> <li>• Challenges or adapts current approaches/ways of doing things</li> <li>• Identifies opportunities and develops solutions that impact beyond their role/function</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examines macroeconomic forces operating in the external environment</li> <li>• Anticipates changes in the legislation and/or accepted industry standard to determine departmental adjustments required to stay on track with accomplishing objectives</li> </ul>

Another common reason for rejecting success profiles is that "we believe in diversity and wouldn't like to have 'one kind of leadership' among our leaders." Diversity is (probably) a useful thing if the company can utilize the creativity coming from different perspectives in a productive manner. However this argument misses the point. Establishing **clear expectations** for its leaders enables a company to **assess individuals** for behavioral requirements more accurately and **customize their developmental plans** accordingly. People are naturally not one dimensional and although we select and develop towards an ideal, we still value 'different ways to Rome.' However, having no system or objective process reflects a laissez-faire approach to talent management that neither leads to diversity nor aids in building an effective leadership pipeline.

# Reducing Risk in the Leadership Pipeline

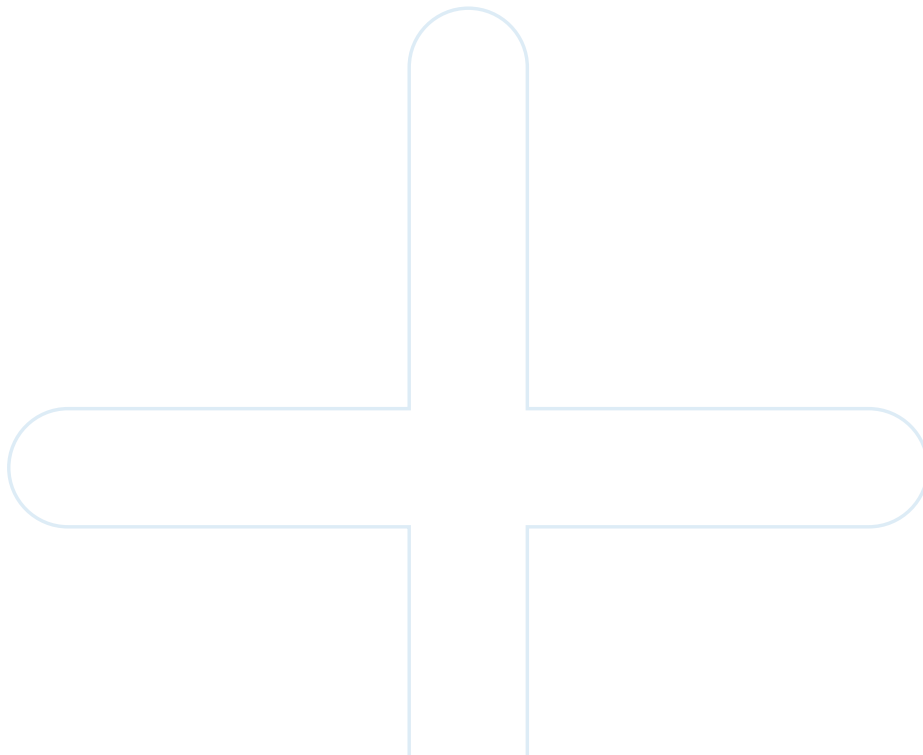
---

## Client industry

Insurance

## Situation

Key people were retiring and leaving the organization with a huge gap in talent. Also, the culture that emerged from years of focusing on strategy execution had stifled innovation and creativity. The organization was desperate to identify high potential talent in the ranks to drive succession planning for the future and ensure they had the ability to address new issues.



## Workforce Solution

In collaboration with the client, Right Management designed an assessment program that **widened** the potential **talent pool** to include all employees within the organization, a process that helped uncover “hidden gems” within the organization. Key elements included:

- A customized high potential assessment process
- Communications to facilitate the process before, during, and after the assessment
- Standardized yet individualized feedback reports for each manager, outlining their ratings, describing his/her results, and comparing the assessment results to industry norms

Right Management also provided managers with the training to interpret these reports including guidance on handling the stressors associated with providing feedback to others. Tools included a High Potential Assessment Interpretation Guide, which included tips for providing constructive feedback, a description of each tool, and guidelines on how scores are calculated and interpreted.

In addition, Right Management provided high-level analysis of findings for each manager and each functional group. This data furthered the organization’s succession planning by enabling leaders to identify talent gaps as well as groups within the organization rich with high-potential managers.

## Results

With help from Right Management, this major insurance company now has an objective and standardized high potential assessment process in place. Also, it has invaluable and comprehensive benchmark data available.





# 25



## DEVELOPMENT

Even when correctly identified, individuals identified as key talent may fail to realize their potential value to the organization due to the lack of a well-defined, relevant and customizable development path.

*This section presents a range of developmental best practices that have been shown to accelerate the growth of leadership talent.*

# Set Your High Potential Talent Up to Fail. Really.

┌ The best thing you can do for your high potentials is to give them learning experiences outside their comfort zone. Failure and feedback in a controlled setting will help drive successful behaviors in real pressure situations when effective leadership matters most.



By Gary Schmidt

*Ph.D., MBA, M.S., Practice Leader  
for Talent Management, ASEAN,  
Right Management*

OK, so “fail” may be a strong word, and I’m not advocating sabotage. What I mean by this advice is to stretch your high potentials’ learning capacity beyond their comfort and capability zones. Stretch it to where failure is an option. Ah – that changes the rules doesn’t it?

Think back to the lessons or experiences you had in the past that have stuck with you over time. What most people remember best is a failure – a failure in the “school of hard knocks” perhaps. Winners can’t recall every competition in which they won a trophy, but they rarely forget the ones they failed to win. The same is true for your high potentials, and I bet even for you. Think of the lessons that have impacted your life the most. Did they arise from successes or from failures? Did you learn more from your correct decisions or from your mistakes?

This topic is important because, to fill critical leadership gaps, studies show that organizations worldwide are more likely to grow talent and promote internally, rather than hire externally. That begs the question: what is the best way to develop high-potential talent so that these nascent leaders are prepared for the rough and tumble of today’s complex global marketplace?

### Ranking of key strategies for leadership development

Respondants selected top three choices.

Grow talent internally by identifying high performing leaders	78%
Provide learning opportunities (i.e., experimental learning, formal classroom programs)	62%
Provide coaching, mentoring, job shadowing, rotational programs	55%
Improve leadership succession planning	45%
Identify high potentials earlier in their careers	31%
Hire more leaders from the open market	15%
Use special tools and systems that rely on technology	4%

N=654

Source: The Conference Board, Inc.

Right Management’s joint research with The Conference Board – as well as our years of experience in helping companies address this issue – tell us that **experience-based learning methods**, such as action learning projects, simulations, coaching or mentoring, and rotational programs have significant impact on a leader’s development.

With experienced-based activities, such as business simulations and challenge labs, participants have the opportunity to make decisions, take initiative, learn from their actions, and be held accountable for results. That latter part is important – holding them accountable for results. This includes failure. By the way, failure does not mean punishment. True high potentials don’t take setbacks lying down, and they are quick to examine what they did right and wrong, and draw important lessons from failure. Typically, more is learned from failure (and re-examination) than from success.

To prevent failure turning into punishment, safety nets and governance policies are set up to protect the individual person and his or her engagement. That means risks are acknowledged up front and coaching and mentoring is provided along the way. Risk mitigation is also a key element, but even so, high potentials are allowed to make mistakes. The point is we want them to **fail in a controlled setting** rather than later when they are leading a business or a function.

Almost by definition, failure hurts. For many the hurt is due to punishment provided by others, but many self-demanding people are often harder on themselves. These people often learn quickly and don’t make the same mistakes twice. By creating a controlled setting in which participants are allowed to take risks and potentially fail, you have the opportunity to modify or reinforce behaviors “in the moment” without the negative risk of punishment, and impart learnings that will stick with participants long after the program has ended.

Blended with other methodologies – including executive coaching, mentoring, and self-directed study – experiential learning can be powerful tool to help your top talent gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their current leadership behaviors, adopt more effective approaches as needed, and sustain those new behaviors over time.

# The Missing Link: Top Executives and High Potential Programs

Business strategy has to be the guiding principle of your high potential development program. For that, you need the active involvement of your top leaders.



While there are many important success factors in creating a high potential development program, perhaps none is more critical than ensuring the program has a **clear and well-articulated alignment to your business strategy**. At the end of the day, these leaders will be expected to deliver against that strategy, so this is where program design discussions need to start. Important industry trends, key strategic business objectives, and critical leader capabilities that are required to achieve these objectives are just a few of the issues to explore.

So who should take part in these discussions? Who is best qualified to make the link between business strategies and leadership competencies and capabilities?

Clearly, human resources leaders play a key role but I believe you need to actively involve other business leaders in several important ways.

Typically, human resources and leadership development professionals are tasked with program design. While these individuals need to drive the process, most companies would benefit by generating more **active involvement of key executive stakeholders** before, during, and after the program. The fact is you need to engage the people who are running the business to make sure you get their perspectives and their alignment, in order to design a high potential program that will truly deliver the results the business needs. This requires a concerted effort and a series of meaningful conversations, both one on one and in groups, focused squarely on the needs of the business, rather than starting with a discussion about competencies. In short, this needs to be executive alignment activity first and foremost.

Executive involvement and alignment are not only required for effective program direction and design, they are also essential to the long-term success of the program. Even programs that are appropriately designed around the requirements of the business with executive input can fail to have the desired long-term impact (or even be funded past the pilot stage) if executives are not actively engaged throughout the program.

Look for best practices for maintaining executive involvement throughout the high potential development process in the sustainability section.

# Reducing Churn with Stronger Development Methodologies

## Client industry

Dairy Products (Dairy Crest)

## Situation

Dairy Crest had a robust talent identification process in place to identify high potentials but lacked a process for this group to effectively advance and develop their careers within the company. Consequently, retention and engagement of this high value talent group was suffering. “The key for us was retaining individuals who were critical for our business,” says Sue Blight, Head of Leadership and Development, Dairy Crest.



### Workforce solution

Right Management partnered with Dairy Crest to design a process that would help **high potential talent** become **more effective in their current and future roles** within the company. “Right Management was very flexible, working with our models and competency framework to develop a program that people in our business would really understand,” says Blight. The program included:

- **A development center** that tailored business simulation and career focused exercises to the company’s unique business priorities, operating culture and desired leadership capabilities.
- **Career planning workshops** to help high potentials explore their options and apply their skill sets in ways that aligned best to company goals and their own aspirations
- **Mentoring training** to educate selected individuals within the company on how to support high potentials’ development
- **Comprehensive reporting** process to benchmark and track the leadership development progress

### Results

Hundreds of employees have gone through the program and the company reports **higher engagement** scores and **increased retention of key talent**. “We have objective data on people’s potential whereas before it was very subjective,” says Blight. The mentoring process in particular has helped the company retain several key talents who are critical to the business.



Watch the Video







# 33



## SUSTAINABILITY

Retaining talent can be a challenge because of the high premium placed on human capital in today's business economy and the highly competitive labor market.

*In the section, you'll find best practices for how to build sustainability into your high potential talent program to achieve the desired return on your investment.*

# What High Potential Profiles can Reveal about Your Leadership Culture

High potential aggregate profiles yield insights that can help you refine your recruiting processes, better understand the corporate character.

By Jacques Quinio

*EMEA Leadership Development Solutions  
Director & UKI Talent Management  
Principal Consultant, Right Management*

Trait-based assessment data from your high potential population can be a gold mine of information about your organization, from recruiting practices to how leaders are likely to operate under stress.

High potential programs bring value to the individual participants, by helping them reflect on their leadership strengths and areas for development. Such programs impact all the teams and communities the participant works with, and have a **positive impact** on the **efficiency** of the participants in their **current or future role**.

These programs are also a rare opportunity to consolidate data related to the high potential population of the company and offer “food for thought” to the organization on its leadership culture. Many high potential programs use personality or behavioral questionnaires to assess how participants are likely to behave as leaders. One way to leverage these programs on an enterprise-wide scale is to analyze the collective trait-based data gathered on the participants to gain insights into the character of the organization and its talent development efforts.

For example, let’s assume that Company X has 300 high potentials and when this group completes a leadership assessment questionnaire, the highest aggregate score is on the Prudence scale. Prudence measures the degree to which a person seems conscientious, rule abiding, and dependable. Such employees tend to be inflexible about rules, resistant to change, and poor at delegating. Frequently, high scores on Prudence will be paired with low ratings on Inquisitive. So even though your high potentials have many other attributes, their strongest tendency is to play by defined rules. Is this good for your company? Is it an asset or a liability? Why is this happening? Is it because you recruit prudent people; or does working in your organization cause people to become prudent; or when you identify high potentials, do you rightly or wrongly focus on these two dimensions? Looking at such results can help spur conversations around the **character of your workforce** and the **needs of your organization**.

Another example illustrates the value of such data in forecasting how leaders may act when under stress and challenged. Let’s assume that a majority of the participants in the high potential program score high on the Dutiful scale. A group of up-and-coming leaders that scores high on Dutiful will tend to do what their bosses expect and continually check with their managers for instructions. When a high-dutiful organization is under stress, there tends to be little thinking outside the box; people do not act with autonomy but, instead, turn to the boss to find out what to do next. Is this what is the most beneficial to the company?

Making aggregated data on top talent available to the organization can highlight the strengths and weaknesses in everything from recruiting practices to high potential identification processes. This information, in turn, can lead to very valuable discussions about **values, mission, and workplace culture**. When a company uses all available data to step back and reflect, it becomes a true learning organization.

# How to Keep Top Executives Engaged in Your High Potential Program

Having senior leaders visibly and actively involved in high potential development is unparalleled in engaging and motivating top talent.

By Steve Towers

*Vice President, Principal Consultant,  
Right Management*

It's critical to keep top executives engaged in the high potential development process. As previously described, the value of executive input in the early stages – to align the development priorities with the business strategies and goals – and in rolling the program out to the enterprise where the **strong visible backing** of company **leaders** is essential to **building support and engagement**.

Here are some additional ways that executives can maintain meaningful involvement in high potential programs: Show up and open up. A high potential development process has many moving parts. Often there are people all over the world working on various elements. Generally speaking, however, there are certain times when all the stakeholders – participants, program leaders, mentors – come together physically in one place. **Key executives** need to be **visible and actively involved** in **delivering content** at those meetings. A major part of high potential programs is helping talented employees understand more about how the business really works. When top leaders come in and talk candidly about issues like business strategy, finances, and competitive positioning, then true knowledge sharing takes place. Strategic thinking, understanding the business, and business acumen are common priority areas for high potential development. Your senior leaders play a singular role in helping future leaders gain access to the information they need to steer the ship in years to come.

At one company I worked with, I remember participants saying that it was the first time that they were exposed to such in-depth information about the organization and they considered it a privilege to learn from, speak to, and network with the company's leaders. Such meetings give high potentials the opportunity to start building networks with senior people across the organization. In order for high potentials to advance two to three levels beyond their current position, they need to develop relationships outside their current span of control.

Guide action learning projects. One way to ensure that developmental activities are tightly aligned with business needs is to have senior executives personally select the topics for experiential learning projects. We'll often have leaders outline the top two or three strategic issues of greatest concern to the organization and ask program participants to come up with new ideas. Sometimes it's about improving process or operational issues. Other times it's about ways to drive innovation, grow revenue or accelerate expansion in certain markets. At some point in the program, the high potentials typically present their plans to senior leaders, who may then approve one or more initiatives to move to the implementation stage. Witnessing company leaders become excited about a new idea the high potential team has developed and then committing resources to its implementation can have a tremendous impact on young talent, lighting a fire that will sustain their engagement for years to come.

# Building Robust Global Centers for Leader Development

**Client industry**

Healthcare, agriculture, and high-tech materials

**Situation**

Following a change in executive leadership and an organizational restructuring, the client recognized that a critical factor in achieving their aggressive business objectives was to establish a globally shared leadership framework capable of identifying and developing future leaders. They established a core set of leadership values as the foundation for that framework and looked for ways to include those values in a global talent management strategy that would validate the potential of future leaders and enable them to develop the required knowledge and skills for success.

## Workforce solution

Right Management partnered with the client to implement their high-potential strategy through:

- **Creation of Development Center programs** to assess the developmental needs of leadership candidates and plan the optimal approach to help them attain the proficiencies necessary to function successfully two or more levels above their current position. Each Development Center was designed around an international case study, multiple assessment exercises, personality assessments, and client observer teams led by Right Management Senior Consultants to provide a comprehensive evaluation of a leader's potential
- **Comprehensive reporting** on each participant's strengths and development needs – reviewed during individual participant feedback sessions at the close of the Development Center
- **Individual coaching sessions** with Right Management Senior Consultants to prepare participants for a development plan discussion with their manager and HR Business Partner
- **Facilitator training program** to support the expansion of the Development Centers in various regions

## Results

Participants have consistently rated the content, benefits, value and quality of the Development Centers at least **4.5 out of 5** on average. A number of **participants have been promoted** into broader, more complex, international leadership roles, and many veterans of the program request to return annually as observers to share their own leadership expertise with the next generation of leaders. The Development Centers have been conducted globally since 2007, and are considered an integral part of the client's talent management initiative.

# CONCLUSION

High potential talent is critical to business growth and transformation. We help organizations around the world create successful programs for the assessment, and development of top talent, and help them measure the impact on both the individual and the organization. Our approach is:

- **Global and scalable** – Right Management has robust talent assessment and development resources in place worldwide. We can design and support high-potential programs on any scale
- **Collaborative** – We tailor solutions for our clients by applying our expertise working with high potentials to their unique business and cultural needs
- **All-business** – By tightly linking high-potential development to your business drivers and priorities, our business-savvy consultants and executive coaches deliver solutions that engage your top talent and move your organization forward in tangible ways



# Join the Conversation



Blog



LinkedIn



Twitter



Facebook



YouTube



# About Right Management

**Right Management** is a global leader in talent and career management workforce solutions within ManpowerGroup. We design and deliver solutions to align talent strategy with business strategy. Expertise spans Talent Assessment, Leader Development, Organizational Effectiveness, Employee Engagement, and Workforce Transition and Outplacement. With offices in over 50 countries, Right Management partners with companies of all sizes – including more than 80% of the Fortune 500 – to help grow and engage their talent, increase productivity and optimize business performance.

[www.right.com](http://www.right.com)

©2014 Right Management. All Rights Reserved.



Right  
Management®  
ManpowerGroup