

## Developing Potential

Developing the potential of those in your workgroup is a key leadership outcome. It is a function of management. It is not something to be avoided or neglected. It is not something to be restricted to the annual performance review. It is a part of the ongoing coaching process effective leaders implement.

Potential is not developed through training courses. These develop competencies and skills to enable the job to be done. Potential is closely aligned to personal motivation, a desire to do better. People understand they have potential by being placed (gently) into situations where they can develop their potential.

The traditional approach to developing performance is to identify a person's position on a matrix along with titles such as 'cow' (high performers to be milked), 'shining stars' (to be developed), 'problem child' (to be fixed or exited) or 'dogs' (to be shot). This approach is simplistic and at its best achieves little more than to place people into convenient, but useless groups. Much as in the same way as the education system once streamed people into potential career types and expected they will stay in that type for the rest of their lives.

A result of this matrix-type approach is that managers may abdicate their responsibility towards everyone in their workgroup and instead focus only on those that need the least amount of leadership. A matrix fails to help understand the core issues that contribute to underdeveloped potential.

At the core of any organisation is interaction between individuals and groups. Where there is little interaction there is no real sharing of information. Where there is little interaction people are unable to sense the emerging environment. Instead of viewing the future optimistically, they view it from a negative perspective. Instead of having an opportunity to explore possibilities they batten down the hatches and focus only on themselves. This is not a problem that exists only during tough times; this problem exists all the time because leaders and managers fail to understand the core factors that contribute to undeveloped potential.

Personal motivation exists in each person on your team. Your role is to encourage people to extend themselves. Even those with apparent low motivation and low desire to contribute have something to offer. Instead of ignoring them or blaming them instead work with them, have conversations where you ask questions and encourage exploration. Instead of assuming you know what is best for this person, engage with them, present them with a desired solution and explore with them how they would approach achieving that solution. Break issues down into smaller issues, take small steps and work within the comfort zone of that person.

People that have been encouraged, that are engaged and that are drawn into the activities of a work group become more confident, they communicate more frequently, they are constantly learning and they contribute towards group decisions.

This all takes time, lots of time. It requires you, as a manager and a leader, to move away from directing and instead becoming a coach, someone who enquires, asks, explores, provides encouragement, facilitates conversation and brings people together. It is important you are a role model yourself, that people see you model the way you expect them to behave. Each individual in your work group deserves an environment whereby they can explore and discover their own capabilities without fear of failure.

Ask yourself what it is your group is expected to achieve? Then ask yourself who needs to be interacting with who, to ensure these outcomes are achieved? Examine work practices, even look at the layout of the workspace. What gets in the way of positive interaction? How do people do their work? What tasks do they do – are these necessary or just done out of habit? Nothing demotivates an individual faster than dull, boring, repetitive work; especially when they do not understand the value of their contribution.

Bring your team together frequently to share information and ideas as well as progress on projects or programs. Don't hide the issues or mistakes, instead look at the lessons learned and ensure everyone has access to all freely available information. Develop people's ability to source and utilise information as much as you develop their ability to make decisions. Create easily accessible repositories of common information. Avoid forcing people to redo work already done by others in the past.

In summary, I am suggesting to you, the development of people is less about categorising or creating labels, it is less about motivating, than it is about creating an environment which encourages and facilitates engagement of everyone in the work group that fosters dialogue and conversation, where all information is shared and where everyone works together towards commonly accepted outcomes.

Instead of viewing each person on your team in a negative manner, as an individual responsible only for their own square metre of space, look at each person in a more positive perspective, as a valuable contributor, able to offer something of value, self motivated and able to take responsibility for their actions.

*This management tip has been brought to you compliments of John Coxon & Associates. We work with management teams and managers in the health sector and not for profit sector in Australia and New Zealand to help develop leadership capacity and management competencies. We achieve this through consulting, management coaching and professional development opportunities. Telephone Australia (03)5561 2228 or NZ (0272) 583232.*

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