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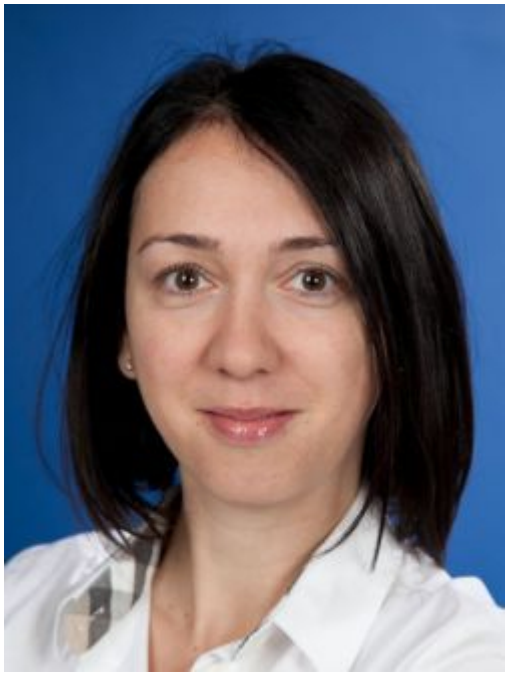
Employment: Inspiring Your HiPos

By Dasha Solovyeva

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Mature corporate learning & development agenda no longer comes as a surprise to the market or employees. Companies find it relatively easy to compile a range of training solutions and produce individual development plans, engage highly sought trainers and experts, experiment with training formats, come up with creative concepts and promptly attract just the right audience.

It is harder to guess the relevant subject matter in demand by a specific groups and identify what will enable this particular offering to captivate participants with new and challenging topics and truly educate them, facilitate changes in relations, behaviors.

It is even harder to surprise and effectively educate so-called "HiPos" ("high potentials"), "the talent pool" — employees recognized in many respects as the cream of the crop. Which developmental opportunities can enable them to achieve their ambitious and increasingly complicated objectives?

I propose here personal observations on five key talent development trends.

Educate me. Now!

Traditional classroom-based training is losing appeal for such employees. However, the "audience, lecture-based" format will remain important for technical or expert training courses. HiPos are skeptical about invitations to long programs. Highly sought employees are indeed busy and prefer spending their time productively, as time is a valued resource. Even a business meeting should not distract them longer than half an hour. As for training, they tend to respond well to master classes or workshops, as a rule, three or four-hour sessions delivered by invited experts offering specialist knowledge, approaches or opinions, instead of courses that can last the whole day. HiPos can digest rapidly new and useful knowledge

delivered professionally by an expert. A mix of traditional training and laconic workshops is a more balanced and attractive prospect for such individuals.

Educate me. One-on-one!

What will be the profile of your ideal employee several years from now? What skill sets are required now and in future? A personalized approach is often the best option in work with HiPos, as few standard solutions will fit. Personal development plans should meet the needs of the specific employee — from developing public speaking or negotiating skills to enhancing emotional competence or engaging in individual coaching sessions. One alternative is to adapt standard products to the requirements of a small group, while tailoring certain aspects to individual needs and paying sufficient personal attention to each participant. There is an increasing demand for small group or one-on-one formats.

Give me a project!

More and more companies seek project teamwork as means of challenging HiPos. Such projects aim to develop recommendations and elaborate strategic objectives, optimize internal processes and increase effectiveness, and identify the requisite solutions to be implemented for clients. Key to success is the personal interest and responsibility of the participants, and close interaction with the project sponsor — from establishing the team to presenting the results. Employees participating most in the formation of the project agenda are far more committed and perform better. HiPos want to be part of the management team and see firsthand implementation of their ideas at the company, thereby gaining assurance about the significance of their ideas, and management's readiness to adopt their fresh, economically effective solutions that are relevant for the business. The complexity of the challenge is also key to success — HiPos want to invest in solving issues where there is no simple or clear-cut solution.

Eliminating boundaries!

Many companies are expanding regionally or already have a stable regional footprint. As a result, some HiPos are located outside of the head office. It is essential when proposing development opportunities not to exclude key employees in remote locations. Development programs are becoming more universal, including state-of-the-art information technologies, work in virtual teams, social networks and on-line platforms. Many quality on-line resources offer an additional advantage — receiving training where individuals have an opportunity to work on a specific topic. Leveraging the maximum number of methods to include the entire target group is justified, as the main objective is to offer equivalent and unique talent development opportunities.

Unique opportunities. For unique individuals!

A key element of talent training is a platform that can bring such people together, as they stimulate each other's development. Given an opportunity to work together, they become energized and benefit from the support of talented peers. They often generate new ideas that they are ready to share. This group can also assess unique development opportunities only available to such a group. In other words, status is key. For example, they work closely with

management on strategic projects, or are invited to workshops with interesting people, are the first in line for promising roles in the company, or have access to useful knowledge that is not directly related to their technical role, but will help them become more successful leaders. The key is to demonstrate the high quality of the development proposal — they will appreciate the prestige and exclusivity of what is on offer.

I have mentioned some observations to be considered when working with employees with evident potential for the company. Such employees often proactively seek dialog with business, articulating what could be most useful for personal development. They communicate a great deal in the professional community, monitor market trends and have extensive contacts. You need to hear their contrarian ideas, as they may well inform or substantially enhance your firm's approach to managing talent.

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