



# HOW DO I DEVELOP GOOD PEOPLE?



BY **BRUCE WILSON**

**A:** If your company is transitioning in size or you're at a crossroads that's holding up growth, there are steps and actions you can take to gain traction. Here are some things you can do to nurture your leadership energy and your need for the right team.

**Q:** I've reached \$6 million and need to grow, but I'm stuck and can't build a team because of turnover. How do I improve my hiring practices to keep people longer?

Turnover can set back growth plans, cause contract losses and impact morale, so it's important to have a pipeline of people ready and able to step up.

If you've reached \$6 million you have done a lot right. It's not common, however, to reach this level in a stressful environment. The sooner you have a people development plan the better. You must identify how you will staff and train for growth.

**Q:** I need to find good people, but I'm spending a fortune on ads and getting poor results. What can I do?

Filling empty positions can cost a lot. While head-hunters can be a solution for key positions, in general recruiters are expensive and the time it takes to evaluate and select a suitable candidate can be a disadvantage.

Advertising now includes using online tools and social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Craigslist

and Monster or CareerBuilder. These popular online databases can be effective but come with uneven results.

The best solution is to have a system in place for proactively identifying high-potential people at all levels and promote from within whenever possible.

**Q:** I hire promising college grads, invest in training them and they stay for a year or so and then leave. What can I do?

The career potential in our industry is really good, but college graduates are only part of a long-term solution. There are very good manager-potential people who have little or no college education, so the key is to hire for potential and make a long-term commitment for people development.

In small, entrepreneurial companies, some employees emerge as leaders or show intuitive or inspirational qualities in spite of the fact nothing has been done to develop their leadership skills. It takes time. The larger your company gets, the less time you have. You can't wait for your future leaders to develop independently; you must encourage leadership through a culture that supports your commitment to it.

**Q:** What's the best way to train people internally so I can promote them?

For a career training and development program to work effectively, you need a company culture that

*continued on page 28*

*continued from page 26*

nurtures talent and promotes people based on merit. Your employees must know opportunities are there for them. If they gain new skills and take on more responsibility they can get promoted. Your employees need to know “training their replacement” is what will make them eligible to move up.

If your employees know you’re committed, they’ll be your most effective cheerleaders and help you promote it. Teach them how to coach and mentor their subordinates, especially high-potential and high-performing employees. Put your senior managers in charge of this initiative and make sure promoting from within is reinforced regularly.

## **Q:** How do I build a mentoring culture?

A coaching and mentoring culture will better meet the demands for improved employee performance. But it takes time to grow and evolve.

Tie coaching outcomes to your strategy for success and make it a priority. Include measurements for accountability, and a broad range of intangible benefits such as increased employee engagement, job satisfaction, morale, teamwork and professional growth.

Assign a coach to promotable employees to see they get the right exposure of training and experience to ensure they are prepared when promotional opportunities arise.

For example, field supervisors in collaboration with crew leaders could identify crew personnel who show potential as crew leaders. Set up a plan for these potential crew leaders to ensure they get the experience they need to move up. Ultimately, this approach could work for all positions.

Also, remember to “coach during the game.” Don’t fall into the trap of waiting to coach employees until review time.

## **Q:** I’m considering recruiting at our local schools. What’s the best way to get started?

Companies that have the most success in college recruiting brand their organization on campus through existing connections. They establish a relationship with key faculty members who are influential in guiding students on their careers after college and utilize employees who are alumni of the targeted schools to help recruit other students. They also seek opportunities to speak or lecture to classes in support of the curriculum.

While cultivating your relationship with the schools, don’t forget to reach out within your company. Develop internal plans to fast-track graduates to positions of incremental responsibility.

For interns, you cannot put them out in the field pulling weeds and mowing grass without a plan that gets them some varied experience. Most companies that do this well set up an eight- to 12-week plan to rotate interns through different jobs in the company, including sales and some exposure to account management so they can see what they can aspire to do as a graduate.

## **Q:** How do I integrate newly hired external talent with my company’s existing leadership?

Going outside to find and hire talent is an opportunity to balance the strength of your current managerial team and upgrade your company’s leadership pool.

Companies with a talent mindset focus their attention on the individual’s leadership capability and potential for professional growth. They hire from the outside using the same criteria for competencies they use internally.

Managers in a talent mindset company are expected to participate in identifying, attracting, developing and retaining future talent. It’s also an important factor in the manager’s own advancement.

Encourage your managers to meet competitors’ employees at bid walks, homeowners association board meetings, supplier events and seminars. They should look for people who are results oriented and who are capable of stretch assignments or fast-tracking.

This may sound contrary to having a culture that promotes from within and there is a fine balance here. First, it’s unlikely you will end up with a flood of talent through your employees, but over time you will have them develop relationships and networks so when there’s a need they can reach out to someone who they think might be a strategic hire.

If you develop a culture where your employees see opportunities and are treated well, they will want to bring on other talented people they know to benefit the pipeline. In a perfect world, they might even find their own replacement when they get promoted. **LM**

*Wilson, a consultant with the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran and a Landscape Management columnist. Reach him at [bwilson@wilson-oyler.com](mailto:bwilson@wilson-oyler.com).*



Planning pointer

**Assign a coach to promotable employees to see they get the right exposure of training and experience and to ensure they are prepared when promotional opportunities arise.**