

## Helix Top Tips - for developing the capability of your managers

### **Recruit well and promote wisely**

Choosing the right managers is a crucial skill. These people are going to help shape your company and motivate your staff towards high achievement. So put the effort in at the recruitment stage. Be clear about the skills, capabilities and talents required in your managers. Do you want a good sales person, or do you actually want someone who can lead, manage and inspire a team of sales people? Then do whatever you can to find them. You'll need good interviewing and recruiting skills to find the evidence that candidates can do what you want. If you don't have these skills in house, make it a key objective to develop them, or enlist the help of external HR professionals.

The same applies to internal promotions. Only promote on the basis of capability to manage others. I've come across many managers who have been promoted seemingly because they are technically excellent at what they do – for example accountancy, engineering or sales. When asked to manage a team, they don't always have the right skills or the desire to learn them. In some organisations, managers have been promoted simply because 'they've served enough years and they're next in line'. This might not be good enough. Make sure the people you promote to manage others have at the very least the potential and drive to develop the right skills, and the right support from the business.

### **Make the roles and responsibilities of management transparent to *all* staff**

People need to know what to expect of their managers. Make it absolutely transparent. Manage expectations. Clearly there will be differences in management style, and individuals need to be managed in different ways. That said, the role of management needs to be clear. What degree of challenge is acceptable? How is poor performance managed? What degree of empowerment is commonly given? What constitutes acceptable behaviour should be understood and adhered to by staff and management alike. For example, how people communicate with each other, with customers, with suppliers; how poor performance is managed and how rewards are distributed. Inconsistency leads to uncertainty – for many people this leads to inefficiency.

There is a strong argument that management should "butt-out" more often – give people clear goals and challenges, offer the support mechanisms required, and then allow people to get on with it. For this to work effectively, people need to know where they stand – for example when mistakes are made or projects go over budget. Management needs to know too.

### **Support skills development**

Here's a key requirement. If you've invested the time, resource and effort into recruiting talented managers, you've set the expectations that they are going to manage others to a very high standard – now keep these skills and talents up to date. And I'm talking

about their management and leadership skills – not their technical skills. The ambitions of managers will evolve as their careers progress. For some this means moving upwards because that's where their talents take them. For others it may not mean increased seniority, but instead, responsibility for more complex teams or larger projects. Whatever the progression, skills need to be developed. This is important, because as managers progress, so will the expectations of those working for them. And I think it is right to expect good things of a good manager.

Robust management development programmes will help build capability at all levels – including senior management; a group who frequently receive precious little skills or capability development.

### **Start developing managers early enough**

All too often I meet managers embarking on some management development training, when they have already been struggling with their management responsibilities for many months. Many of the answers slot into place at this point and the individuals go back to their teams with a whole new approach. But what of those wasted months – for the manager struggling with no support, for his reports lacking effective leadership and for the business with the possible impact on results?

Start early enough, and you'll have people with the skills and the motivation ready for action – a good platform from which to develop further.

### **Manage your managers**

Like everyone, managers need managing. How is it that in an organisation struggling with poor business results, where teams are de-motivated and under-achieving, that come performance review time, managers can still be given a 'good' performance grading? And this does happen – quite often. The same principles apply to management as to anyone else in the organisation; set challenges, offer the necessary support, and then hold people accountable for those things they have agreed to deliver. With the obvious caveat that people will fail sometimes... deal with it!

### **Manage talent**

Talent is a wonderful thing. Everyone has it. All jobs require it. I really don't believe that there is such a thing as 'unskilled labour'. It's a misnomer. When I was managing hotels, I'd commonly hear people talking down jobs like housekeeping. "She's just a chamber maid..." and the like. Two things spring to mind. Firstly, having well cleaned and serviced bedrooms is a foundation stone to running a good hotel. Secondly, some people were inherently better at it than others. Some excelled at it. They could service more rooms to a higher standard quicker than others. Change the job – the people skills of an exceptional waiter, the creativity and profit making skills of a great chef. Change the organisation – mechanical engineering – it doesn't matter. Talent is talent, and it is well worth looking out for and nurturing.

Look for talent in management too, for example a manager with the ability to resolve conflict, or to motivate and inspire teams, or to give constructive feedback to staff in the most challenging circumstances. It's worth its weight in gold. I've said it before and will inevitably say it again – the fact that someone is a good computer programmer for example, doesn't necessarily mean they'll be good at managing teams of programmers. Different roles require different talents.

Find out what those special talents are, and be creative about developing them. Consider seconding managers to different project teams or departments. Build talent development into personal objectives. Being given the time and support to develop a talent is very motivating. And view those talents as an asset to your business.

### **Look for interdependencies**

These really matter – for employees, but particularly for customers. I don't know about you, but if I ring up a company with a query or complaint, I find nothing more frustrating than a customer service representative blaming another part of their organisation, management, or their computer system. To me, the customer, these components are all part of the same service provider. I want them to collectively sort out the problem.

There are many interdependencies – managers need to operate on this basis, working collaboratively with managers of other teams and heads of other departments or divisions. A manager who has to deliver bad news to his or her team, and hides behind a head office directive is operating independently, and is looking for a scapegoat.

Manage as a whole. Work together. Share responsibility. You'll achieve more.

### **Turn managers into coaches**

Managers are closer to their teams than anyone else. They know the challenges that face their teams. They understand the pressures... don't they?

If so, they are in a really good position to coach their teams; to utilise talent and to build capability. And they need the coaching skills to do so. They also need the time and encouragement to use these skills – for example, many managers when asked by a member of their staff for help with a decision, will give them the answer. It's understandable that this happens – it is polite, and gets quick results, but it has the unfortunate effect of limiting the development of staff who are probably perfectly capable of working out a solution themselves.

Coach staff to find their own solution. It might even be a more creative, dare I say it, a better solution. If managers are consistent in this approach of coaching through dilemmas, it is possible to build a culture where coaching and on-going development are part of normal day to day activity. Again – results will be noticeable.

**Be tough**

Hold your managers accountable. If they have the talents you value, nurture them, praise them and reward them. If they don't, then support them to develop those skills. If they can't or won't do this, then help them find a job where their talents *can* be used – where they'll thrive (within your organisation, or outside). Management is not easy. If it were, anyone could do it. On that basis – keep the managers you want, and not the ones who can't manage. Do this lawfully, and do this ethically – but do it nonetheless.

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If you would like to talk to us about management development or coaching, please do call or email, we'd love to talk to you.  
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