

Performance
Workplace Development



How to positively progress your team

Why internal promotions can fail...



It's all about understanding a person's value

An introduction...

In 2015, Gallup estimated that organisations select the wrong candidate a staggering 82% of the time ¹. Failed promotions lead to loss of revenue, loss of talent, loss of confidence in your organisation and low staff morale.

In its report, **Succession Matters: Effective Succession Planning**, the Korn Ferry Institute found that only around 1/3 of employees surveyed were satisfied with the outcomes of their organisations' succession plans ². The Institute highlights the need for individuals to be ready to move into more senior roles by having a cohesive and thorough succession plan. So, how can you plan for success rather than failure? What strategies can you implement to help your employees to progress in their careers while also benefiting the company as a whole?

¹ Rigoni, Brandon and Nelson, Bailey. Leadership Mistake: Promoting Based on Tenure. Business Journal December 21, 2015.

² The Korn Ferry Institute: Succession Matters: Effective Succession Planning, 2015.

Provide a sufficient incentive

Mark Price – until recently the UK’s Minister of State for Trade and Investment – writes in his book, **Fairness for All**, about the primary goal of his former employer, the John Lewis Partnership:

In his written constitution, [John Spedan Lewis] outlined that the first principle and supreme purpose of the John Lewis Partnership was the happiness of the employees, or Partners. He saw the commercial advantages of this approach long before others did: more engaged employees give better service, as a result of which customers will be more satisfied and therefore more loyal, which in turn leads to sustained profitability. After more than thirty years working in the Partnership, I came to see the wisdom of his extraordinary foresight for a modern world challenged by capitalism’s extremes.³

“Consistently losing your star performers to the competition?”

Are incentives offered by your company making it an attractive workplace to employees, or are you consistently losing your star performers to the competition? Competitive salary rates are important, but employee recognition, flexible hours, the possibility of working from home and employee-assistance programmes all play a part in making workers feel valued. This culture is best if embedded from the top, with individual line managers encouraged (and given latitude) to apply the less costly incentives, where appropriate.

It’s not unusual for a promotion to bring considerable additional challenges with associated longer hours – especially at first as a promotee adapts to the challenges of the new role. Does the promotion come with the expected associated benefits, such as a salary rise? If pay rises are held back until the annual review, it can create a sense of resentment, that someone is ‘working for free’.

³ Price, Mark. Fairness For All. David Fickling Books Ltd, 2017.

Best person for the job

Sometimes a job role can be filled out of desperation or because of an insistence on internal promotion. Should you promote someone because they have 'earned it'? Loyalty and diligence are fantastic qualities, but although someone may be a long-serving, reliable employee, it doesn't automatically mean that they are promotion material. Internal promotion can be a great incentive for employees, but be realistic. Do your employees have the skills in the necessary field to succeed? If an employee's numeracy is poor, putting them in charge of a finance team may not be a smart move, even though their people management skills may be second to none. You are setting them up to fail.

One company with a history of hiring close associates and promoting from within is Blackberry. Once the leaders in smart phone technology, Blackberry was rapidly outstripped in innovation and development by their equally fruitily named rivals, Apple, a corporation whose co-founder, Steve Jobs, was always on the lookout for new talent.

*A reliable employee isn't
automatically promotion material*

Named after the Canadian professor that posited it (Laurence Johnston Peter), the Peter Principle proposes that employees will be promoted within an organisation until they reach a level that is too challenging for them; thus, every employee will be promoted to his or her level of incompetence, and stay there. Over time, this means that every position within a company could be filled by someone who is unable to competently fulfil their job role.

Skill set

Just because someone is good at their current job doesn't mean they will be great at a different one. This isn't a bad thing - people have different strengths.

As unarguably one of the greatest players in English football history, Sir Bobby Charlton (CBE) has 49 international goals, a World Cup, FA Cup and countless other honours to his name, including a staggering 249 goals for Manchester United, a record that remained unbroken for 44 years. His record as a manager, however, is less illustrious. Having played briefly for the side towards the end of his career, Charlton agreed to take over as manager of Preston North End in 1973. His first season at the club ended in relegation.

In 1975, he left Preston to continue his playing career at Waterford United in Ireland, but returned to management in 1983 with Wigan, but once again retired from the position after nine games, having won only two. There are countless other examples of sports stars that have failed to make a successful transition from player to manager. Why? Because the skill set needed is completely different. You may have a fantastic administration assistant, but can they inspire and guide someone else to be great at the job? This is a completely different skill set.

*Is your candidate
suited to management?*

Most more senior positions will require some degree of people management and leadership. Qualities that are essential for aspiring leaders include good communication skills, approachability, adaptability, discernment and the ability to inspire others. Does your promotion candidate have the necessary characteristics for management?

If an employee does not understand their own strengths and weaknesses, or those of their team, it is vital that they discover these quickly. Tools such as Insights Discovery can help here. Insights Discovery uses a four-colour model, comprised of Cool Blue, Fiery Red, Earth Green and Sunshine Yellow energies, to describe people's strengths, styles and team contributions.

<http://performancewd.co.uk/profiling>

Temperament/emotional intelligence

A favourite example when citing a leader with a poor temperament is Gordon Ramsey yelling and swearing at failing chefs on his TV show, **Hell's Kitchen**. While it may make for entertaining viewing, it is unlikely that Ramsey has built a successful food empire by subjecting all of his employees to the kind of vitriol that chefs experience in the Kitchen.

While it is sometimes acknowledged that temperament is as important to leadership as competence, qualities such as patience, empathy and accountability can be overlooked when promotion are considered. Worse still, within a business environment, such virtues can be considered as weaknesses of character rather than vital traits for leadership.

Equally, emotional intelligence (EQ) is not often as highly prized as intelligence quotient (IQ), but a manager's level of EQ (or lack thereof) can contribute significantly to a whether a team is effective, motivated and confident.

Are you promoting employees with the right temperament and level of EQ to be leaders and managers?

Are they:

- Fair and impartial
- Accountable
- Keen to encourage and slow to blame
- Quick to thank others
- Confident in their ability and role
- Invested in their team
- Flexible
- Consistent

Recently recognised as one of history's prime examples of poor leadership, General Custer was a reckless commander with little regard for the lives of his men (or anyone else, for that matter...). In 1876, he led a cavalry unit of almost 300 men into battle at Little Big Horn against a Native American army, despite being outnumbered more than 10 to 1. While he was admired in the US for many decades as a fearless and optimistic leader, the inevitable slaughter of the entire unit (including Custer) is testament to his inflexibility and indifference towards his troops. These deficiencies led to his defeat.

Accountability rather than blame

While accountability is important, a culture of blame makes people hesitant to admit mistakes and encourages them to cover them up rather than fix them. A newly promoted employee making mistakes while learning a role may be discouraged from taking any kind of responsibility or initiative for fear of reprisal. This could result in a manager who won't take risks or think creatively and is reluctant to take on any new tasks. Equally, if they model the blame culture that they have experienced, they will quickly alienate their team, reducing productivity and motivation.

In his speech to the Global Patient Safety Summit in 2016, Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt said that the NHS needed to move from a blame culture to a learning culture to avoid repeating past mistakes⁴. He cited the case of a junior doctor attending a 16-year-old boy receiving palliative chemotherapy. The doctor administered both syringes passed to him by a colleague into the boy's spine. It was only after performing the procedure that the doctor realised that one of the drugs, vincristine, should have been administered intravenously and was, in fact, fatal when given intrathecally (spinally). The boy died as a result a week later.

“A culture of blame makes people hesitant to admit mistakes”

Instead of looking at how the error occurred and how it could be avoided next time, the doctor was convicted of manslaughter and both he and a colleague received custodial sentences. Little was done to modify procedures to ensure that the mistake never happened again. In fact, while the case was being tried, an identical error was made in another NHS hospital and another patient died because, as Mr. Hunt said, the NHS was “more interested in blaming than learning.”

⁴Hunt, Jeremy. From a blame culture to a learning culture: Health Secretary addresses the Global Patient Safety Summit on improving safety standards in healthcare. Department of Health March 10, 2016.

Training and support to enable employees to transition from one role to another

Many firms have a thorough induction process and training scheme for new starters, but often when an employee is promoted within an organisation, it is assumed that they know the company and job role, therefore training and support is not as necessary as it would be for a new hire.

As well as having the necessary skills to take on a new position, if an employee is stepping into a whole new role, with the added responsibilities and assignments that entails, training and time to learn are just as vital as they are for new hires. Are you providing regular and appropriate training to help employees transition from one role to another? Equally, are your employees able and keen to learn?

*In a new role,
training is as important...*

Research carried out by Mind found that 42% of UK workforce staff surveyed had considered resigning due to workplace stress ⁵. Equally, in his book, **Strengthening the Retention of Child Protection Workers**, Kenneth Burns cited the number one reason for social workers leaving their jobs as feeling unsupported by their employer ⁶.

Are you providing your employees with the resources they need to manage and support their teams and carry out their own role effectively? In addition to providing training, this could include considerations such as sufficient budgets, office resources, allocated time to conduct staff reviews and the opportunity for feedback and consultation with a designated line manager.

⁵ <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/>

⁶ Burns, Kenneth. *Strengthening the Retention of Child Protection Workers*. CT Salzwasser-Verlag GmbH & Company, 2013.

A thorough understanding of their new role

When an employee takes on a new role, it is important that expectations are clearly communicated and goals set in order to help both them and you to measure success and correct any deficit areas. A lack of understanding of the role could result in low production, a loss of customers, and unhappy and underconfident employees. If expectations aren't aligned, it inevitably leads to conflict. Do your employees have a thorough understanding of their individual roles or the roles they are stepping into?

“A lack of understanding could result in low production”

Promotions can be doomed to fail from the outset if an employee feels they are constantly torn between the job they left behind and the one they have just taken on. This could be because a lack of confidence in their ability to fulfil their new responsibilities, leading them to fall back on what they know best, or because they feel they are leaving old tasks in incapable (or no) hands. Is the person you are promoting able to leave their old job behind? Is there someone adequately trained to step into their shoes and have you given your promotion candidate sufficient time to properly hand over their previous job role?

Effectively delegate

Many employees promoted into a managerial role will have to consider delegation for the first time. They may not know how to effectively delegate or who within their team may be most suited to taking on each task. The pressure to look good in a new role may drive an employee to strive for perfection, doing every task themselves or micro-managing every task delegated to another. This is a waste of management time. This could be because of a blame culture or insufficient training or preparation for the new role and the responsibilities it will bring. While the desire to be 'indispensable' may be strong, if a team cannot function with the manager on holiday or off sick, the manager is failing the team.

Equally, as we've mentioned before, no-one can be good at everything. The multi-billionaire, Richard Branson, puts his success partly down to delegation⁷. "From a young age, I learned to focus on the things I was good at and delegate to others what I was not good at. That's how Virgin is run. Fantastic people throughout the Virgin Group run our businesses, allowing me to think creatively and strategically."

Micro-managing your team leaders can be as damaging to production as them micro-managing their own teams. It is important to allow a degree of autonomy. Do your employees have permission to make decisions independently?

⁷ Branson, Richard. Like a Virgin: Secrets They Won't Teach you at Business School. 2012.

A desire to progress and develop

Research by LinkedIn is that professionals want to feel challenged⁸. But what if a promotion is in name only, with no challenge to which they can rise? Perhaps the promotee's line manager is a micro-manager and fails to give their staff the opportunity to take on challenges.

“Sometimes it’s hard to tell if you’d like a job or not until you’re doing it”

A good place to start may be whether an employee really wants a promotion. They may really enjoy their current role. They may not want to step into leadership or management, or take on different responsibilities. The role you have in mind may not be on the same trajectory as the candidate wants their career to be on. They may not want to commit to working more hours.

Sometimes it's hard to tell whether you'd like a job or not until you're doing it, even if you've seen someone else working in the role. But by the time you realise it might not be for you, it's too late to change your mind. How about offering a junior member of staff a chance to shadow a more senior employee if they are keen to be promoted or you are considering them for a promotion? This would give both you and them a chance to evaluate how they would handle the role and whether they are ready for promotion.

How about a trial period?

If you think someone may be suited to a role and they are eager to advance, you could offer them a job on a trial basis. Be open and honest. Express that this is to give both you and them the opportunity to see how they would develop.

⁸ Interview with Jon Addison, Head of Talent Solutions LinkedIn UK, from hrgrapevine.com

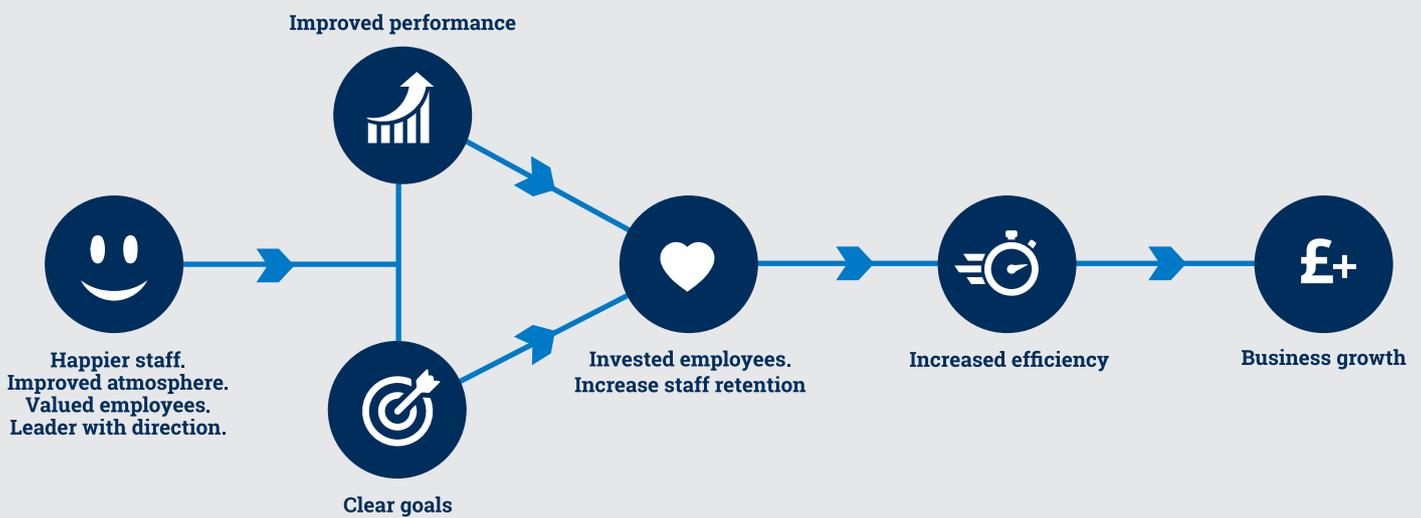


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On our journey together – whether short or long-term – we aim to communicate openly as we work with you to develop your team and see them deliver performance growth.

Ian Crossley – Director



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