

What Fuels the Talent Development of Star Performers? By Molly O'Neill

The standard compensation package creates a good foundation for talent development. Things like salary, benefits, and recognition are all the basic annual requirements for good performance. But what if star performance is what you're after? How do you set the stage for that level of success?

Star performers move beyond the ordinary expectations of the job, into the realm of excellence, distinguished by outstanding accomplishment and value to the organization. They're the ones, at any level of the organization, who make a difference, who contribute the qualities of leadership – who know that who they are is every bit as important as what they do. They bring authenticity, creativity and resourcefulness to whatever they do and they deliver results that every organization wants and needs.



How do we move people toward star performance? What are the competencies that star performers share? Research has shown that emotional intelligence is one of the key factors that star performers have in common. Daniel Goleman, in *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, identifies three areas of personal competence and two areas of social competence that separate star performers from the rest of the pack:

“PERSONAL COMPETENCE – how we manage ourselves

Self Awareness (*Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions*)

Emotional Awareness: Recognizing one's emotions and their effects.

Accurate self-assessment: Knowing one's strengths and limits

Self-confidence: A strong sense of one's self-worth and capabilities.

Self-Regulation (*Managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources*)

Self-Control: Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check.

Trustworthiness: Maintaining standards of honesty and integrity.

Conscientiousness: Taking responsibility for personal performance.

Adaptability: Flexibility in handling change.

Innovation: Being comfortable with novel ideas, approaches, and new information.

Motivation (*Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals*)

Achievement drive: Striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence.

Commitment: Aligning with the goals of the group or organization.

Initiative: Readiness to act on opportunities.

Optimism: Persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks.

SOCIAL COMPETENCE – how we handle relationships.

Empathy (*Awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns*)

Understanding others: Sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns.

Developing others: Sensing others' development needs and bolstering their abilities.

Service orientation: Anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers' needs

Leveraging diversity: Cultivating opportunities through different kinds of people.

Political awareness: Reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships.

Social Skills (*Adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others*)

Influence: Wielding effective tactics for persuasion.

Communication: Listening openly and sending convincing messages.

Conflict management: Negotiating and resolving disagreements.

Leadership: Inspiring and guiding individuals and groups

Change catalyst: Initiating or managing change.

Building bonds: Nurturing instrumental relationships.

Collaboration and cooperation: Working with others toward shared goals.

Team capabilities: Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals.”

But these are all intangibles! How can these qualities be developed and tracked? The good news is that they can definitely be encouraged and learned. An assessment or a series of assessments may be a good starting point as awareness generally precedes change. In the same way, some training may also be a good investment. But what is it that really drives implementation and improvement in key areas of human performance? Research shows individual and team coaching to be the highest return on investment when it comes to developing star performers. In a study done by MetrixGlobal, LLC (a professional services firm specializing in performance measurement solutions that increase

bottom-line business results), to determine the business benefits and return on investment for an executive coaching program, they reported that “coaching produced a 529% return on investment and significant intangible benefits to the business. Including the financial benefits from employee retention boosted the overall ROI to 788%.”

Coaching is the Key

What is it about coaching that makes it work? In the coaching process, star performers engage with their potential. They own their ability to grow and have the support and safety to make the changes that will propel them into a bigger game. They begin to see opportunity in places and situations that might otherwise seem routine or even mundane. They chart new territory for themselves and begin to experience the results of implementing their development plan and growing the “intangible” aspects of performance. Natural enthusiasm and motivation arise, above and beyond that connected to the paycheck and benefits.

When people shift focus from task mastery to “being” mastery, another dimension of human resource becomes available to the organization. As the “information” age shifts to the “conceptual” age as defined by Daniel Pink in *A Whole New Mind*, the more intangible side of human development is becoming increasingly critical to success. Pink points to six essential aptitudes that characterize today’s star performers:

Design (*function is no longer enough – design is now a key component to success*)

Story (*the ability to convince and communicate through story rather than argument*)

Symphony (*the ability to see the big picture not only in terms of analysis, but also to integrate and synthesize to create something greater than the sum of all the parts*)

Empathy (*in addition to logic, emotional intelligence is required*)

Play (*the seriousness of life needs to be balanced with play*)

Meaning (*in this age of abundance, meaning is a critical factor in personal and job satisfaction*)

These right-brain attributes unleash the creativity, inventiveness and purpose that are so needed for people and organizations to flourish and thrive in the 21st century.

In summary, what fuels talent development? A process over time that offers: opportunity; assessment; inquiry, expanded awareness; acknowledgment of strengths and talents; letting go of status-quo beliefs and assumptions; defining knowledge/skill/being gaps; self-development plans that are relevant, impactful, and supported; accountability; safety to experiment, practice and develop mastery; willingness to grow and learn; ways to embrace new mindsets, perspectives and possibilities; courage to face the challenges; meaningful

connection to purpose and values; joyful celebration of wins, application of learning to different situations; thoughtful intentionality; commitment; mindful choice; insight; action... The package might be called coaching, but the results are star performers who fuel success in organizations across the globe!

About Molly O'Neill



Molly O'Neill, BA, is an Adler Certified Professional Coach and an ICF Associate Certified Coach, committed to positively impacting the goals, well-being and prosperity of her coaching clients and client organizations.

As an individual and team coach, Molly specializes in developing increased capacity in critical leadership qualities. She works with an inside-out leadership model, encouraging clients to envision, implement and sustain the changes needed to attain their desired results. She motivates her clients to be open to possibilities, maximize unique strengths and become fully accountable for manifesting their vision and goals.