

Memo to the CEO: 5 Myths that are Killing Your Talent Development

By
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Talent development is a perennial issue for CEOs, but this year, it's more prominent than ever.

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers' 2013 Global CEO Survey, the shortage of key skills ranks second (behind higher taxes) among the threats to growth in 2013. Additionally, in the Conference Board's CEO Challenge 2013, human capital — how best to develop, engage, manage, and retain talent — leads the list of the year's top 10 global challenges. Moreover, CEOs' top strategy for addressing human capital is growing talent internally.

Executives also say that only 5% of their employees have the combination of skills and capabilities required to deliver desired results in 2013, according to a recent study by global corporate research firm CEB.

Too bad, then, that talent development, a roughly \$300 billion market worldwide, is on life support. Why? Because most companies (including yours, probably) design their development programs around a number of mortally misguided myths.

Consider these five:

1. Development is for top talent.

Talent development hardly stops with a company's high potentials. And when it does, the company undermines its own potential and growth.

Smart development is approached with an abundance mentality, a go-big-or-go-home attitude of inclusivity rather than exclusivity. It recognizes that everyone, not just the so-called A-players, can grow and develop and, more importantly, that the success of the business depends on it. Companies that go beyond "hi-po" programs, to give all their people a shot, put managers in the lead and produce more and better results.

2. Performance and development don't mix.

Performance and development are powerfully synergistic. Too many companies, however, treat them separately or, more often, tag development on to performance management, almost as an afterthought. Yet, time and again, managers tell us that the performance management process, with its myriad formalities, has become cumbersome and, worse, counterproductive.

The solution? Have managers tuck development into real work intrinsically tied to the productivity and performance of

the business. This means equipping managers to seize everyday learning opportunities while getting things done.

3. Development belongs to HR, not managers.

With all their tools and training, it's tempting to outsource development to HR; in fact, today most companies do. That's not to say, though, it works, particularly now when many workforces are heading for a performance cliff.

For decades, research has proved that all but the most rote skills are learned on the job. Similarly, 70-20-10, a widely recognized learning model, lays out how true learning occurs: 70% occurs from on-the-job experiences, 20% from others, and 10% from formal courses.

Having managers drive development daily is a winning proposition. HR can match formal programs with everyday development expectations, and in so doing, maximize the intensity and impact of the training.

4. Development requires major investments in training.

Companies spend billions in training programs and technology, yet by all accounts the ROI is unclear. To be sure, smart training delivered through suitable channels is a potent part of the development mix. Nevertheless, no training can embed development in the DNA of an organization like managers can.

Given managers' day-to-day contact with their employees, only they have the ability to consistently connect development to the priorities of the business. At the same time, they can play to people's strengths, promote creative risk-taking, and provide new challenges—things training programs can support but not set in motion or sustain.

5. New knowledge is the same as learning.

Now more than ever, learning isn't real until you actually do something with the knowledge. You've got to apply it to work linked to business goals. Development, as a result, is most meaningful when it occurs every day, on the job, with managers skillfully in the lead. In this way, the work itself becomes an invaluable development tool. None of the learning is squandered (as it is in training off the job) and, better yet, the development directly supports the business.

So, here's our challenge to you: Debunk these myths at your company and demand that your talent development get real — with managers in the lead.

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