



Diamonds in the Rough Respond to Pressure

“What strategies should I use to position high potential employees for promotion?”

Does this question resonate with you? Leaders with authority to promote need to think how to ready high potential employees for promotion. I often refer to these employees as “diamonds in the rough.” In their natural state rough diamonds become shining gems as a result of the strategic application of pressure.

I often use this analogy when asked about developing high potential employees. Every leader has a responsibility to create safe, respectful environments that encourage individuals to see promotion as part of their career path. Leaders who succeed at this use a combination of training, career planning and strategic application of pressure to prepare employees for promotion.

Application of strategic pressure creates an array of opportunities requiring high potential employees to work outside their comfort zones. These opportunities expose employees to philosophies, skills, and behaviors necessary to be successful at the next level of work. Employees are asked to participate in projects that focus on new and unfamiliar tasks. Employees are given new leadership opportunities. Employees are sent to represent the company at public events typically attended by managers. Employees are challenged to solve problems that yield new opportunity for the business or organization.

In addition to applying strategic pressure in areas known as hard skills, it is equally important to do so with soft skills. Leaders can provide opportunities to participate in new business/ social situations. Expose them to current information on business/social etiquette. Encourage employees to watch the news and to read current industry literature. Engage employees in conversations that challenge thoughts and assumptions about work and the world. Having well rounded social skills is as important as technical skill in terms of readiness for promotion.

People development is often viewed as a low priority task because it is hard work and requires significant commitment of time and energy. Leaders struggle to attend to basic daily tasks, much less finding time to mentor high potential employees. It just seems like one more thing to do. I invite leaders to rethink this point of view.

The most successful leaders treat people development as a priority. They speak with pride about employees who move on and out to new opportunities as a result of being developed. They discuss how they challenged employees to build their confidence, competence, courage, and many different situations. For these leaders, transitioning a “rough diamond” into a “shining” high potential employee adds value to their leadership as well.

Tomorrow when you go to work, look for those “diamonds.” Take time to think about your responsibility to prepare young leaders for promotion. Develop a strategy that includes the strategic application of pressure and tell them of your commitment to their success. They will be so appreciative of your interest and you and your business or organization will benefit from greater productivity and loyalty.

Adapted from The Leadership Journey, published in the Auburn Citizen newspaper