



HI-POTENTIAL OR HI-PROFESSIONAL? KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE

By **Michael Gravelle**

Bill Gates once said "Take my 20 best people, and virtually overnight, Microsoft becomes a mediocre company."

Maintaining high-performing talent is a critical organizational competency at all times. Today we start the first in a two part series that addresses the issue of identifying different types of high performers and accommodating their needs.

The first step in this process is differentiating between high-potentials and high-professionals. The retention and development strategies that you use with each will differ.

Sitting in their cubicles, high-potentials and high-professionals may look pretty much the same. They are both top producers, they are technically sound and they are both hard-working and loyal. If you assign them a project you know it will be done right and it will come in on time and on budget - under budget if you are lucky.

The key difference is in the need for challenge and rewards.

While both want more challenge, high-potentials place high value on greater authority, responsibility for others, status and, of course, more money. It is important to high-potentials that they see themselves as moving up the ladder.

High-professionals, on the other hand, will seek more challenge within their area of expertise. Authority and responsibility for others is not a motivational driver as they prefer consensus when making decisions and to them a promotion is not a reward.

But here is the kicker - high-professionals may not realize this until it is too late. A colleague of mine comes to mind. He was a great project manager and happily accepted the offer to run the IT department for his entire company. He soon realized that the extra stress was not worth the extra money, but not being a quitter he kept plugging away for almost two years. Finally he sucked it up, asked for his old job back and is still doing it a decade later. But often things do not end so amicably.

So how can McQuaig help?

Companies need to employ a more objective, systematic approach of identifying high-potentials. Just because a person can produce great results in one job does not guarantee they will do so when they are promoted (don't forget the Peter Principle).

We are more likely to find high-potentials in The Generalist Group of profiles. High Dominance and high Independence usually results in a desire to run the show and to accept the risks and the reward that come with it.

High-Professionals are more likely to be found in The Specialist Group of profiles. While they want more challenge it will likely be within their area of expertise. Because of their low Dominance and high Compliance they are uncomfortable when they have to deal with conflict or make difficult people decisions.

Being aware of this knowledge is critical when determining the reward and development strategies for these high performers.

Sincerely,

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