

## Top Five Obstacles & Remedies to *High Potential Development*

The following is a list of the top five obstacles we have encountered in our client organizations attempting to develop and sustain *high potential development* programs. A general description of the obstacle is followed by common remedies. We would love to know if our readers have encountered similar or different challenges as well as the ways in which you have attempted to overcome them.

### 1. Making Development Programs Too Complex

**Obstacle:** Many organizations, with all the right intentions, end up overcomplicating their high potential development programs. The common culprits of this barrier are the felt need to perfect programs before roll out, to add unnecessary “bells and whistles,” and to measure up to other seemingly successful and prominent companies in one’s industry or geographic area. The result we typically see is that organizations overwhelm and eventually burn out their leaders when attempting to implement and sustain these programs.

**Remedy:** Keep it simple. Use the research that is available, talk to other organizations, and learn about which elements of a high potential program are most essential to success. Ask which particular identification strategies, plan development tactics, training programs, and real-work projects actually generated a positive return on investment. For additional insights on this remedy we recommend that you review the book, *One Page Talent Management, Eliminating Complexity, Adding Value* by Marc Efron and Miram Ort.

### 2. Fear of Differentiating High Potentials

**Obstacle:** Many organizations have a fear of singling out high potentials within their organization and developing an “insider’s club” that will be the envy of other employees. The assumption is that such feelings of jealousy will cause contempt and ultimately lead to non-identified, highly talented and valued employees leaving the organization for greener pastures where they will not feel ignored or under-valued.

**Remedy:** If your high potential program is envied by employees who are not identified at one point in time, this can in fact drive inspired high performing employees (particularly those who are also truly high potentials) to learn how they can be identified in the next round of selection. You can help matters (and lessen feelings of contempt) by communicating the link between your organization’s strategy and high potential development, the sound rationale for differentiating resources, and the definitions your company uses for high performance and potential. Feelings of neglect can also be reduced by enhancing developmental opportunities available to all employees.

### 3. Failure to Engage Senior Leadership

**Obstacle:** All too often we encounter organizations where the Human Resources department is viewed as the owner and sole driver of high potential development. While HR professionals should be intimately involved in design and implementation of programs, high potentials are the greatest assets of any organization and should be treated as such by all members of the senior leadership team. Failure to invest in identified high potentials by sharing access to their people, their time, resources, and growth

opportunities within their function can stall even the most well designed and funded high potential programs.

Remedy: Support from senior leadership for the development of high potentials must extend beyond budget approvals and warm and fuzzy speeches. Executives must be willing to get involved in identifying and offering developmentally-stretching work assignments, providing timely feedback and mentoring, and removing of organizational barriers for their high potential employees. Using precious time within executive meetings to discuss and review people, progress, and collaborative efforts to develop high potentials is key to a successful program.

#### **4. Failure to Engage High Potentials and Supporters of High Potentials**

Obstacle: This is a catch-all obstacle that can take several forms. Developing programs that are not well explained to high potentials or that come across as the “flavor of the month” initiatives is a sure way to lose engagement. Failure to follow through on well laid plans or to hold people accountable (both high potentials and leaders who are expected to implement programs) are also common killers of initial efforts. Essential when the enemy of “not enough time” rears its ugly head, high potential programs will always slip to a lower priority when engagement levels drop.

Remedy: High levels of engagement in high potential programs must begin and continue with clear, consistent communication. You cannot over-communicate when it comes to providing high potentials and their leaders with reminders of the ultimate purposes, competitive advantages, and outright necessity of investing in development. Program leaders and other sponsors must routinely solicit feedback, listen attentively, and be willing to change elements of the program that are not working or could be optimized. Also, careful consideration of how to reward and incentivize high potentials and their leaders should be included within early program design discussions.

#### **5. Failure to Integrate High Potential Development with Real Work**

Obstacle: Due to the realistic barriers of not having unlimited budgets, time, and resources available to develop high potentials, organizations can become overwhelmed with the daunting tasks of building and sustaining a successful program. Investing huge sums of money in outsourced solutions, while costly, is frequently seen as an easier, more robust solution to developing in-house development programs.

Remedy: This is perhaps not only one of the most common and frequently overlooked obstacles, but it is also one that is relatively easy to fix. What many companies overlook is that they already have some of the best developmental experiences to offer their high potentials. Strategic planning, organizational development initiatives, and cross-functional team leadership assignments aimed at real-world challenges and opportunities facing your organization are free training and development courses. Such experiences, when well-coordinated and when coaching is added to crystalize learning, will equip high potentials with the most valuable knowledge, skills, and abilities they will need now and in the future.

We would encourage you to contact us either for the purpose of sharing additional remedies/best practices or to learn more about how Humber, Mundie & McClary can assist you in addressing the needs of your organization’s High Potential Development Program.