

Keeping a Top Performer

Top performers can be hard to come by. And when you have one, you know only too well that they are an incredibly valuable asset in your organisation.

Here are some simple tips that will help you retain these valuable assets.

Grow or Go!

Top performer wants to see their world getting bigger, with more things to challenge them every day. If they don't see this, they will eventually leave.

The most likely reason you employed them in the first place was they felt stifled or limited in their previous position.

They probably saw your organisation as an opportunity to expand their horizons, so they jumped aboard.

You need to be acutely aware, however, that the *same thing applies today*. If they feel they are not growing sufficiently with you, they will look around again for more challenge.

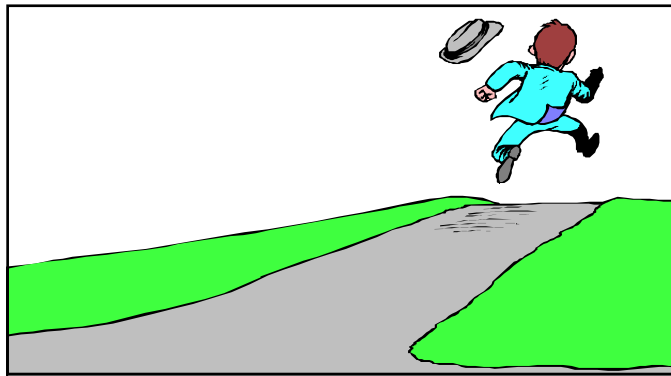
The best strategy is to keep the game interesting for them. If they feel their capabilities are always being challenged, if they feel they are being stretched to the limit. They will stay with you.

Different types of growth

“Growth”, to some top performers, can only mean rapid promotion to the highest levels within the organisation structure. But this is rare. There are actually two categories or situations here:

- Promotion to higher levels.
- Expansion with the job.

Some top performers are definitely in the first category. If they cannot see themselves getting to the top of your organisation within a reasonable time, they will simply consider your job as a stepping stone along the way. Sooner or later they will leave you for bigger things.



This can be a tough one, particularly if there truly is nowhere else for them to go in your structure. Sometimes, however, you can satisfy their need to grow by expanding their role, but other times, the best you can do is be thankful for the time they were with you.

Of course, this assumes that the person really is a top performer, and not simply someone with delusions of grandeur. It's easy to tell the difference, by the way. Do they get results?!

Thankfully, most top performers fall into the second category. They really don't have aspirations of becoming the Managing Director next week. But they do seek the challenge of expansion within their own sphere. And there are some things you can do to ensure that these top performers remain with you.

Expanding their role

When you have someone who is producing results and is obviously very effective, you need to look at how you can give them more responsibility.

This can come in many forms, for example:-

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1. Give them support.

If they are already getting great results in what they currently do, you will get more productivity out of them by giving them support. In Sales, for instance, an inexpensive support person can make a huge difference.

It also expands the role of the top performer and keeps them growing.

2. Get strategic planning ideas.

A person who is really doing well in their job can be relied upon to have a good grasp of their area. They know what is going on in **real world terms**.

It is therefore very valuable to get their input when you are looking at the strategic direction of your operation. Senior managers rarely have time to get involved at **all** levels. They can therefore lose touch, jeopardising the veracity of long term decisions. Seeking input **from effective employees** can overcome this, whilst also validating those employees (the top performers) and giving them the sense of expanded responsibility they need.

3. Move them to a new area.

If it is appropriate to move them into a brand new area, this too can be a way to keep them “growing”.



Part of the game here is to get them to ensure their old area does not collapse when they leave

it. It's all part of the challenge. (See earlier article on “Orienting a New Employee”)

Be careful to take account of the top performer's specific skills and abilities. If the new area is **too different**, and they are not equipped to handle it, they may well fail. Just because a javelin thrower wins gold does not automatically mean they would do well on the cycle track or over the pole vault!

This is most clearly recognisable in the move from non-people management to people management.

The Sales Representative who is promoted to Sales Manager (“because they did so well at selling”) can sometimes fail because they don't have the people management skills. A better solution is sometimes to give them a bigger territory or tougher clients.

4. Involve them in staff training

When an employee has become so good at their job that they just keep on producing top class results, month after month, they really do have something to offer other staff — both new and old.

Getting such people involved in training is not only a good way to transfer some of their skills to others, it is also a great way to acknowledge the top performer. It also usually helps to satisfy their need to expand their sphere of responsibility.

The New Challenge

When an effective employee gets so good at their job that it is **easy** for them and the results come pouring in, watch out!

If you have someone who has taken such good control of their job that:-

- It all flows through without a hitch...
- They achieve their targets time after time, with little or no effort...

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- They are so much in control that nothing ever goes wrong...

...it's time to give them a new challenge. If you don't, they will start looking around for that next mountain to climb. And if you don't have one for them, they may look elsewhere.

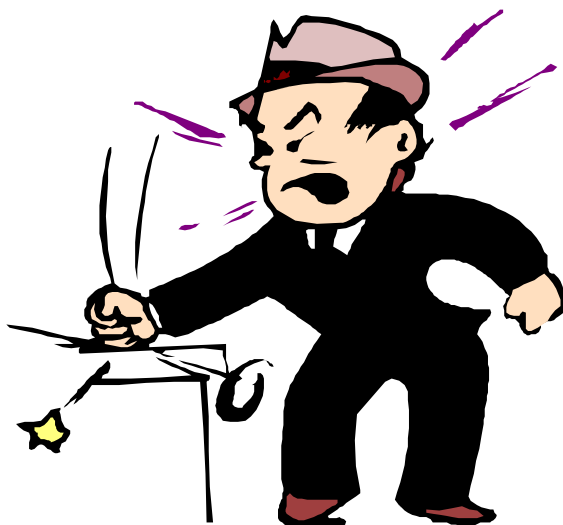
Ask them what they need to build their area up. This puts that next mountain in **your** back yard!

Beware of Sparks

One of the characteristics of a top performer is that, because they are so results-oriented, anything which gets in their way will earn their wrath. This can sometimes cause "sparks".

You really know it when a top performer is being stopped from performing. And if such situations are not handled, this is another reason why they will eventually leave you.

You have to do some careful differentiation here, however. When you have a conflict or problem which is causing those sparks, look at the people involved, and measure **their** value by the results **they** achieve.



Placement of a Top Performer

If you are about to hire a top performer, or if you are about to move one in your organisation, look carefully at the manager of that area. If that manager is not *also* a top performer, you may not get the most out of the placement.

It could be said that the opposite of a top performer is a person who holds their position purely because of their "status". They have the right degree, or they have "seniority", but that's all they have. If there are no effective results coming from their area, the "status" doesn't matter.

Putting a top performer into such a person's operation will stifle the new person and you will eventually lose them.

Conclusion

Top performers are hard enough to find. It is worth that extra effort to ensure that you retain them for as long as possible.

- **Expand their role.**
- **Keep them challenged**
- **Place them correctly.**

And if you need any help in finding top performers, give us a call. We're experts at it, and we don't pull any punches!