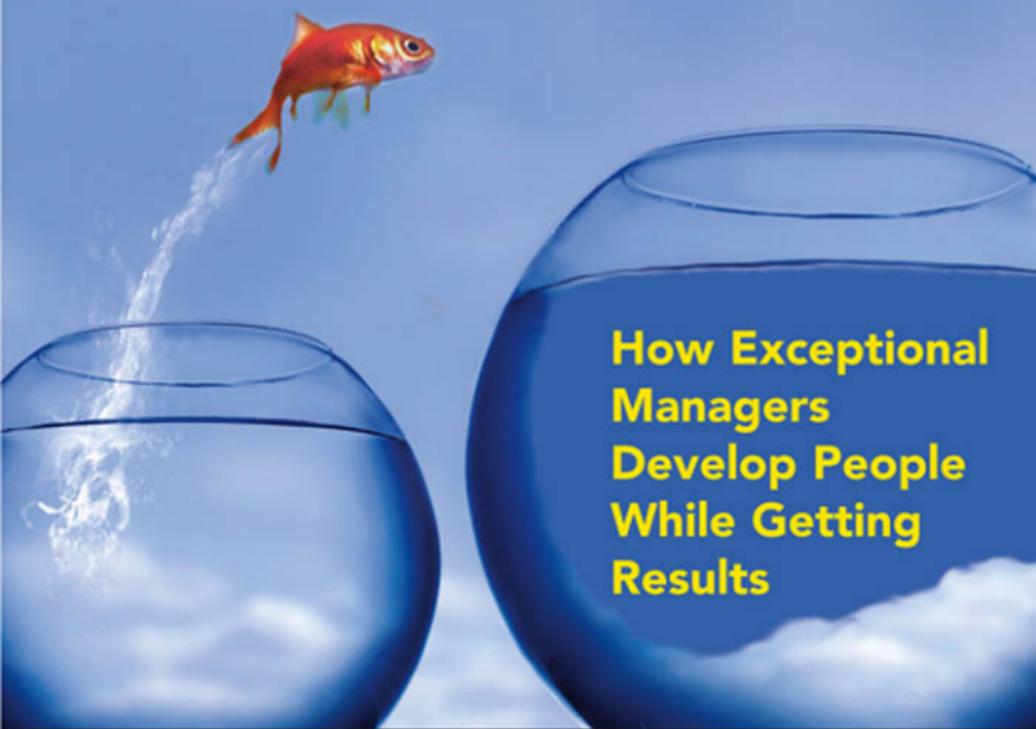


Five Proven Practices to Use Every Day

Make Talent Your Business



**How Exceptional
Managers
Develop People
While Getting
Results**

**Wendy Axelrod &
Jeannie Coyle**

FOREWORD BY DAVE ULRICH

An Excerpt From

***Make Talent Your Business:
How Exceptional Managers Develop People While Getting Results***

by Wendy Axelrod and Jeannie Coyle
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Make Talent Your Business

*How Exceptional Managers Develop
People While Getting Results*

Wendy Axelrod & Jeannie Coyle



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Contents

Foreword *by Dave Ulrich* ix

**Introduction: Helping Good People
Get Better Every Day** 1

- A Manager Who Grows People Like Crazy 2
- Identifying and Closing the Talent Development Gap 5
- The Five Practices for Making Talent Your Business 12

**Chapter 1: Make Every Day a
Development Day** 17

- How to Make Every Day a Development Day 18
- Tuck Development into Work 20
- Create the Right Stretch 25
- Seize Developmental Moments 29
- Leverage Team Learning 34

**Chapter 2: Tap the Psychological Side
of Development** 43

- How to Tap the Psychological Side of Development 45
- Start with Yourself 46
- Cultivate Relationships Built on Trust 50
- Help Employees “See” Themselves During Key Interactions 53
- Connect the Dots Between Emotions and Learning 61

Chapter 3: Connect People with Development Partners 67

- How to Connect People with Development Partners 68
- Green-Light and Motivate People to Partner Up for Development 69
- Give People an Accurate Compass to Find the Right
Development Partners 71
- Teach People How to Get the Most Learning
from Development Partners 76
- Invest in a Network of Future Development Partners 83

Chapter 4: Teach Skills to Navigate Organization Politics 91

- How to Teach Skills to Navigate Organization Politics 93
- Clarify and Adjust Assumptions About Organization
Politics 95
- Help Map the Bumpy Political Terrain 98
- Coach Employees to Build a Portfolio of Politically Smart
Approaches 102
- Prepare for and Sometimes Rehearse the Handling of
Complex Situations 111

Chapter 5: Shape Your Environment to Drive Development 119

- How to Shape Your Environment to Drive Development 121
- Create Development Abundance 122
- Shine a Light on Learning—Yours and Theirs 130
- Manage the Interface with the Broader Organization 132

Chapter 6: Put Exceptional Development Practices into Action 147

- How to Put Exceptional Development Practices into Action 148
- Take Your EDM Practices to the Next Level 150
- Integrate the Five EDM Practices for Optimal Benefit 157
- Savor the Rewards 166

Acknowledgments 175

Notes 177

Index 181

About the Research 189

About the Authors 195

Foreword

Dave Ulrich

DURING A RECENT INTERVIEW, an executive with a large investment firm asked me if the principles regarding talent and people my firm advocated would cause his people to work harder for the same money, so that he could buy a bigger yacht. I was stupefied and not sure how to respond. I realized that leadership Neanderthals continue to exist who worship the escapades of Gordon Gekko, the hero of the *Wall Street* movies.

Fortunately, fewer and fewer leaders practice traditional command-and-control, greed-is-good, self-interest-rules leadership. More leaders recognize the importance of communicating and coaching, generosity over greed, and service to others more than self-interest. These enlightened leaders understand that business is about people, inside the company and as investors and customers outside the company. Simply stated, when people are at the heart of business, business operates better.

But while pledging that “people are our most important asset” is easy to say, it is not always easy to do. Wendy Axelrod and Jeannie Coyle insightfully, wisely, and clearly close the knowing-versus-doing gap. They are uniquely qualified to help modern

Dave Ulrich is a business professor at the University of Michigan, a partner in the RBL Consulting Group, winner of the Nobels Colloquia Prize for Leadership on Business and Economic Thinking, and the best-selling author of two dozen books on business leadership.

leaders become exceptional development managers (EDMs) who create exceptional developing employees (EDEs). They have combined decades of personal experience in identifying and developing leaders, they are informed consumers of theory and research, and they have thoughtfully interviewed EDMs and EDEs to find out how to “make talent your business.” I have known them for many years and knew of their passion for developing people while getting results. What I learned by reading their book was how clearly and cleverly they can turn complex ideas into doable actions. Their book shares stories of real managers who have learned how to develop people and then translates these cases into practical principles.

The result of their experience and work are five practices that will help any manager turn the rhetoric of talent management into the reality of competent and committed people.

As I savored their insights, I was reminded of a set of Russian matryoshka (nesting) dolls, in which the doll hidden inside each larger doll shows increasing detail and craftsmanship. The five practices Wendy and Jeannie propose are only the outer image of the further refinements they offer for helping leaders better develop and manage their people. As a result, their book became increasingly richer and more fulfilling the more I delved into each chapter. Leaders who understand the principles and access the practices the authors offer will recognize the pathway to becoming an EDM.

Managers who make every day a development day will discover that development is not a sidebar to work but work itself. Our research has revealed that top companies for leadership had managers who spent about 25 to 30 percent of their time on developing future leaders. Sometimes when we present this finding, leaders gawk and wonder how that is possible with the

press of business. Wendy and Jeannie offer very concrete examples of how leaders develop others every day and every way.

When managers tap into the psychological side of development, not only do they look in the personal mirror that reflects their own behavior, but they also try to understand why employees do what they do. We have found in our research that when employees have a *why* to work, the *what* and the *how* of work are much easier to accomplish.

Leading others is a team sport as evidenced in the principle of connecting people with development partners. Partners may be friends, colleagues, or social media associates. These partners offer support and build peer pressure to help people develop.

Organizations don't think; people do—and when people think and act, there are inevitably political and relationship overtones. Managers who develop people master the practice and teach skills to navigate the political terrain. As managers help others recognize and engage in the positive aspects of political discourse, they help people learn to make things happen.

Finally, managers who develop people shape their environment to drive development. We have found in our work that when leaders are meaning makers, employees are not only competent and committed but also fully contributing with their heart and soul. Creating an organization where this sense of purpose is abundantly instilled in all employees becomes a primary leadership agenda.

As each of these five practices is assessed and accessed, leaders can become development managers. What is particularly impactful is how these five practices overlap and build on each other. The truly exceptional leaders of the future will not only understand but put these practices into action.

Of course, like the tradition-bound leader who interviewed me and was more concerned about self-interest than service to others, not all leaders will be able to lead the employees of the future. But with help from outstanding books like this one, leaders who want to lead exceptional employees will be more able to do so. And leaders who rely on historically autocratic approaches to leadership will find themselves increasingly isolated from both people who care and from business results that matter.

Thanks, Wendy and Jeannie, for this marvelous treatise and guide on becoming exceptional development managers.

Introduction

Helping Good People Get Better Every Day

WOULDN'T IT BE HEAVENLY if the people you manage were developing new skills while they delivered results every day? They would be more productive, happier, *and* less likely to leave. You'd get a kick out of seeing their personal and professional growth and building the "human assets" of not only your department but also your company.

Pipedream or possibility within reach? Our research demonstrates that there are exceptional managers who make this dream a reality every single day. They are masters at making talent their business—a business they get down to every day while achieving good and often great results. You, too, can grow talent while you grow results by learning and applying the five powerful practices these exceptional managers use. Through extensive research into their development tactics, we have distilled their success into actionable, practical advice you can adopt starting now—even though you're already feeling busy and overwhelmed. In this book, we share stories of managers just like you who have made the switch and seen their people, their results, and their own careers soar.

A manager we'll call Lori certainly made it happen in her team. Let's start with her story.

A Manager Who Grows People Like Crazy

“Developing talented people is an imperative for me,” says Lori. “If I don’t, good people leave. It’s my job to make their work a bit ‘edgy’ for them. That way, they are always learning.” She assembles and manages teams of people assigned to high-impact projects. She could simply hire fully experienced people, leave them to it, and then step in to help if they hit a roadblock, but that’s not how Lori manages.

Instead, Lori deliberately staffs the teams to create huge opportunities for development—development that supports the job at hand as well as skill development that deepens and broadens her employees’ abilities. Like a master chef, she likes to go beyond predictable meat and potatoes. She mixes things up by bringing together all kinds of people with varying tastes and talents and deftly combines them into a “gourmet” type of team. An expert in unusual combinations, she layers newbies with tenured folks. In her teams, you are likely to find people who possess great client interface skills mixed with those who are technically competent but not so good with clients, and so forth. As people implement the project work, they can turn to each other for support to address their skill gaps.

Lori takes risks with people by giving them both the latitude and the explicit *requirement* to learn. Somehow, she’s figured out how to put together these unconventional “entrees” without risking project results. An appreciative member of her staff describes her secret sauce as “intertwining performance and development . . . with performance taking priority.”

When we asked the people Lori manages how they feel about being pushed out of their comfort zone to learn more, we heard time and time again answers like, “She pushed me.” We learned

that Lori is very skilled at getting to know each person and developing trust and rapport. Once Lori had a solid understanding of each of her employees, she was in a good place to know just how far to push them. They then trust that she won't let them get in a career-limiting accident. Because of the high trust, they also open their minds and hearts to the direct and sometimes tough feedback Lori gives them to support their growth. One person applauds Lori's unusual, honest, and candid approach as "nonhierarchical" (not like the boss talking down to me) and more conversational. With this approach, her delivery of hard-hitting feedback works. Instead of engaging in "hit and run" feedback, Lori initiates an ongoing discussion in which she shares her experiences and provides the context for action.

Lori is also very clever at setting up "development partners" for her fast-learning staff. It's not that she doesn't teach her staff herself—she does. But she also sees the value in helping each of her employees configure a network of people who can teach them expansive and deeper skills beyond what they need to know to perform today's tasks. One of her staff said, "She encouraged me to network and build developmental relationships and opened my eyes to the importance of exposure to other people as a key to my development. It was a way to stretch my thinking and skills."

Lori creatively infuses the environment with learning—not just classroom training programs but simple things and abiding attention. Her brown-bag learning lunches, spirited brainstorming sessions, and learning circles remind us of college study groups. They feature important learning in bite-size pieces close to the action. All these approaches together have a way of naturally sending a signal about the importance of development. While many managers pay lip service to it being OK

to learn from failure, Lori truly does create a work environment in which people will take some risks to try new things. When people fail, she promptly provides empathy and feedback and then quickly turns the discussion to lessons learned.

By now you're probably thinking Lori is working overtime to do all this. We assure you that she is neither burning the midnight oil nor feeling overworked. Lori is actually working less because her staff's growing capability means they get better results faster than simply focusing on near-term performance. And she's doing less cleanup of mistakes made by her people. Less time, less frustration, more productivity—sounding pretty good, isn't it?

It gets better. Although Lori says she uses this approach because she would lose people if she didn't, she also says she reaps many more benefits than low staff turnover. She's also told us she's growing her *own* skills. She shared that she takes great joy and pride in what she is doing, so much so that what she brings home to share with her husband are almost all stories about growing people—not just stories about growing results. We also happen to know that she's a downright talent magnet. Her reputation draws good people to her, and she therefore gets to pick from the best. We suspect senior management notices her great people development and business results, and we predict she'll be promoted because of them. Her “graduates” tell us that they're applying what they learned from Lori as they manage others, a great example of “paying it forward” to magnify the people development effect.

Embedded in Lori's management style are the five powerful practices that we discovered when we did our research on exceptional managers who are great at developing people. These are managers who, like Lori, reach well beyond getting perfor-

mance from people to also developing their deeper and broader skills every day. We're talking about skills that allow employees to extend and add to their reach—such as influencing people to accept changes, taking the lead in projects, identifying breakthroughs to products and processes. After sharing just a bit about our research, we'll call out the five practices that form the core of this book.

Identifying and Closing the Talent Development Gap

We are both passionate about talent development, and a central theme of our careers has been advancing development from many avenues. Jeannie has been a senior vice-president of human resources at American Express, building the company's first extensive talent development system. Wendy directed a *Fortune* 50 company's corporate university and talent management function. She also started up a highly successful mentoring program for professionals in the greater Philadelphia area. We have similar consulting and coaching practices and share a deep and abiding passion about the overriding significance of the manager in developing the potential of people. Together, we have over fifty years of experience in organizational development, talent management, leadership development, succession planning, and executive coaching in over one hundred organizations, from start-ups to *Fortune* 100s, in a wide variety of industries, including financial services, pharma, health care, high tech, manufacturing, telecom, and education. We're proud of the fact that we spent decades of our careers in organizations, learning about them from the inside, before going out to start our practices. We've taught literally thousands of managers to coach and develop people, both in workshops and as part of our executive coaching practices.

In the course of our varied careers, we have seen and read much that has made us determined to help identify and close the gap between the promise of developing people's potential and the stark reality that the promise is not fulfilled. For example, a few years ago, a highly reputable firm specializing in leadership development reported on the most and least used of the 67 behaviors (not 5, not 50, and not 100, but exactly 67) proven to make up good leadership. At the time, the company already had an enormous database that included over 10,000 rated leaders in 160 top companies. Out of the 67 behaviors tracked, "developing others" consistently came out near the bottom in terms of leadership behaviors actually used on the job.¹ Keep in mind that the sample included many leaders from companies that produced good results. You would expect that these subjects were likely to be managers with some training and the expectation that they develop their people.

So how could this be? Companies say they want managers to develop people. They tell their stakeholders so most convincingly and laud "developing people" as a top priority in their annual reports. They invest millions in leadership coaching and training. They use 360-degree feedback instruments galore. They renovate performance management processes, including development planning approaches, again and again. If we are to believe the data—and we do because it reflects much of our experience in organizations—in spite of all this corporate effort, managers are spending a very limited amount of their time developing staff. And there are doubts in some companies that even the time they spend is yielding good results. Managers float in a veritable sea of talent management tools and processes, but like the ancient mariner, many managers feel there is "Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink."² To managers focus-

ing on near-term results, these invented-elsewhere tools seem like a distraction rather than a lifeline.

We dug into the many credible studies that show that sufficient progress has not been made in finding effective ways to develop talent. For example, a 2008 Human Capital Institute study sponsored by Hewitt Associates revealed that while most organizations hold their executives and managers accountable for achieving business results, few hold managers (7 percent) or executives (10 percent) accountable for *developing* direct reports. Worse, only 5 percent of organizations say their managers consistently demonstrate the ability to develop their employees. The study concluded that these organizations were underinvesting in creating manager development capabilities.³ McKinsey's ten-year follow-up to the "War for Talent" study echoes this same theme. It indicates that the talent shortage remains acute and has gotten worse.⁴ McKinsey notes that the heavy investments made to date in talent management processes have proved to be "insufficient, superficial and wasteful."

Cynics in the field have said, "Managers will never develop people well enough. Just give up. Talent development is HR's job to do." We disagree. While we may be accused of being eternal optimists, we refuse to be grumpy pessimists. We believe there is hope, and it's in plain sight. The hope is you and thousands of other managers with unique day-to-day access and personal—and therefore intrinsically powerful—points of leverage. You are right in the heart of the most powerful environment for staff development. And we think you have a good sense of just how much you have to offer.

We were bolstered in this belief by working with some managers we met at a large insurance company. They longed to develop people but felt their desire exceeded their reach. In

many ways, they expressed this desire to do more than simply helping employees do their “day jobs” well. Although many of these managers were accomplished people developers, they had a sense of being restricted by the pressure to “make the numbers.” These managers told us they felt disconnected from the company’s talent management processes and explained that they lacked the corporate support to significantly develop their people. With these frustrated but hopeful managers, we shared the old proverb, “Doubt is the beginning, not the end, of wisdom.”

So if your intuition tells you that as a manager you have more to offer in meeting the need for developing talent, we agree. If your gut also tells you that you don’t have all the answers for how to be great at developing people, know you are not alone. There are managers in all kinds of organizations with all the right intentions but few of the right skills or tangible support mechanisms to develop staff fully. Clearly, desire *and* doubt abound.

We knew there was a better answer for talent development, and we couldn’t find it in the research. So we embarked on our own research to find the answer. We wanted to see when and *how* managers like you can make a big impact on developing talent. Our aim was—and is—to give motivated but perhaps doubtful managers the tools to develop the insights, skills, and a personal practice set to develop their people. Imprinted on our brains are the words of our colleague, Cal Wick, who has made learning the cornerstone of his career: “Learning cannot survive in a bell jar. It needs the support and immediacy of everyday application or it quickly suffocates.”⁵ We were determined to help you take learning out of the bell jar and bring it to life every day.

“About the Research,” at the back of this book, provides details about our research methodology and results. We conducted in-depth interviews with more than seventy-five people in well-

known companies such as Adidas, Booz Allen Hamilton, Corning, GE Interlogix, Genentech, GlaxoSmithKline, IBM, Intel, JPMorgan Chase, Kaiser Permanente, Kraft, L'Oréal, Marriott, Merck, Microsoft, Siemens, Wells Fargo, Wyeth, and Xerox, as well as smaller firms (twenty-eight companies in total). We spoke with both “exceptional development managers” (EDMs), whom we prequalified as people who truly develop the capacity of their employees beyond day-to-day performance needs, and “exceptional developing employees” (EDEs) who search out and seize growth opportunities. These EDMs and EDEs gave us countless hours of their time and a window into the story behind the story often told about how managers develop their people.

What we found from our research was eye-opening. We were able to distill a combination of insightful yet very practical approaches that have an incredible impact on developing people. The EDMs operate in a zone above and beyond the foundational management skills of delegating work, holding people accountable, and providing performance coaching and feedback. They do more than turn in expected business results and close skill gaps to get near-term results. They help people develop expanded and new skills for the future by generating *broad* and *deep* development—the very thing that most people hunger for and the EDEs we talked to demand.

The key finding is that EDMs embrace both development and results simultaneously, every day, in a way that makes the work itself powerfully developmental. In addition, we discovered four other practices that most or all EDMs use *in combination*. By melding the five practices, they make developing people notably more engaging, more time efficient, and more cost-effective. That's why they can do it without burning out their spirits, their energy, or their budgets.

They find that there are triple, even quadruple benefits to applying this unique combination of developmental practices. First and foremost, they grow the skills and value of individuals *while also* achieving superior business results. They take employees out of the territory of good day-to-day performance and help put them into a more mindful, customer-focused, organizationally sensitive zone and more able to manage complex work situations. In other words, they go beyond basic, near-term performance coaching to more expansive development coaching. In so doing, they recognize that they are investing the company's future talent—or, as the CEO or CFO might say, appreciating the company's human assets. EDMs also reap *personal* benefits, as they are also investing in themselves. They report greater job satisfaction because they escape the crossfire of daily pressures, and they have good reason to believe they are enhancing their reputations as valuable managers.

Do these managers conduct a daily cost-benefit analysis of developing staff? No; they feel no such need to calculate or communicate the specific value of what they're doing. While these managers are *our* heroes, they in no way consider themselves heroic. They are just doing their jobs as they see them. The difference is that for them, their job is making the numbers *and* developing people for the future. They find great satisfaction in what they do. Not one used the fancy word "steward" to describe himself or herself, but that is indeed what EDMs are: stewards of talent, managers who help good people get better every day.

This book brings their practices to life for you so that you can apply them in your organization. There's one chapter for each of the five practices embraced by the EDMs we studied. While much of what they do can take time to learn, most man-

agers can implement these practices without complete support from the organization. Each chapter gives you real-life examples gathered in our research or experience within companies, good ideas to get you started, a tiny bit of development theory, and a just-in-time refresher course on some specific skills you'll need to put the concepts into action.

Chapter 6 encourages you to put your own EDM practices into action. We show you how to amplify your progress in learning these approaches, combine and sequence the individual practices, and anticipate the many rewards that accrue to you, your staff, and the organization. EDMs we spoke to didn't say they were into developing others for their own personal gain. Yet the truth is that you will increase your job satisfaction, reputation, and prospects by applying these practices for the benefit of others and your company. The conclusion of Chapter 6, focusing on the myriad of personal benefits you'll gain by becoming an EDM, is uplifting. Above all, you'll experience the gift of joy and pride that stems from making a real difference in people's lives and creating a legacy.

That difference can be as significant as opening a new frontier of possibility for your employees. This book's cover is a symbol of this transition. Imagine the smaller fish bowl as "today's work reality." When a manager provides basic performance coaching for an employee, it's like the fish, swimming more effectively in the smaller bowl. A good thing to do, no doubt. But by engaging in the five practices described in this book, an exceptional development manager makes expanded space available through stretch experiences *and* provides the foundation of support to encourage the person to make the initial, often scary jump to the bigger space. Once in the "bigger bowl," an employee has the opportunity to develop greater skills—and have a better time. The manager's developmental

work simultaneously takes on a whole new dimension beyond performance coaching. It becomes a new blend of management work that is deliberate, resourceful, and continuous. Life in the bigger bowl is simply better for both employees and their managers. Once comfortable there, a still bigger bowl will call to them both. And so deep, continuous development becomes the new norm.

Your investment in the deep development of your people every day is a gift that opens door after door for them and for you. Your employees will experience the gift of opportunity and support to grow substantially at work. Your company will benefit from the gift of good employees who get better every day and who are motivated to stay and keep contributing themselves. In giving these gifts, you will have made talent your business and built a personal legacy.

This book provides you with the road map for making that transition. It's designed to show you how to act like the exceptional managers we studied. Developing talent in this way doesn't take extra budget for training or fancy processes or extra add-ons outside of work. It simply takes the creativity and diligence to use work as the main source of learning. EDMs learned what to do from experience. You get a head start by learning from them. The experience is there for the taking.

The Five Practices for Making Talent Your Business

Here are the five practices we discovered through our research with exceptional development managers and exceptional developing employees. The first one, "Make every day a development day," and the second one, "Tap the psychological side of development," are foundational. The others build on that base. Each of the practices can be used in the crevices of day-to-day work.

Using all five together works like a dream. For little investments of time, these managers reaped huge benefits in the growth of their people. We believe you can do the same.

1. Make Every Day a Development Day

EDMs demonstrate a way to go well beyond near-term performance to drive substantial development of people in order to ensure the organization's future growth. These managers use the work itself as the starting place to develop people. They add to and reshape work, stretching the space for people to grow skills *while* they are achieving expected "business" results. The EDMs are there every day as active participants and positive forces to support development on the job.

This practice is about adjusting your mind-set to focus on results and development simultaneously using "stretchy" work that develops people. It's a "two for one" approach that can be integrated into your day-to-day management. You'll find that this practice actually takes just a little time in the short term yet yields great performance and timesaving dividends over the long term as people become more skilled and more independent.

2. Tap the Psychological Side of Development

EDMs know that the effort they devote to developing people cannot be summarized into a step 1, step 2, step 3 approach, like you see in the directions for an IKEA furniture kit. Instead, the deep development employees seek involves learning complex skills like in-the-moment judgment, customer interface, and collaborative decision making. It turns out making an impact at that level necessitates development that's not just logical but also psychological.

Tapping into the psychological side of development involves creating a trusting relationship that makes it safe for your

employees to open up to you, hear and act on your feedback, step out of their comfort zone, take risks, and become aware of their internal drivers. With all this new learning, employees find themselves much better equipped to handle their interactions. Getting to know them on a deeper level also helps you know just how far you can stretch them without going too far.

3. Connect People with Development Partners

You don't have to do all the development yourself. In fact, you shouldn't do it all. Take a page from EDMs who find ways to link with a number of other people as development partners for their employees. Spending the small amount of time it takes to connect people with others who have specific skills or experiences puts you in the enviable spot of sharing the development load. You open the door to expertise that goes beyond your own limitations while also increasing your staff's ability to find and work with other learning resources.

You start the process by helping your employees adjust any negative assumptions about reaching out to others. You then set the expectation and teach them how to make the most of these partner relationships. Importantly, you don't let go of the wheel once the match is made. Instead, you stay in touch to leverage lessons learned, look for gaps, and help fine-tune how people apply what they have learned.

4. Teach Skills to Navigate Organization Politics

Functional and technical skills can get your people only so far. To succeed, they also need to know how to navigate the politics of your organization and work appropriately to influence others. This isn't about cheating or manipulating the system. Rather, it

is about being realistic and strategic regarding how decisions are made and having influence to make sure their ideas get heard.

EDMs help people map the political terrain, put together a plan of approach, and then learn and practice the skills to thrive in the terrain. This practice yields handsome benefits. Your people's efforts will be more efficient and effective. They end up producing results that really stick with those on the receiving end. Teaching these skills also reduces the time you spend cleaning up after political missteps.

5. Shape Your Environment to Drive Development

EDMs weave development into the very texture of their organizations, big or small. To do so, they add development abundance to their environment. They develop talent across the board—not just among a few high potentials—and circulate work challenges among team members to keep everyone on the learning edge.

Within their department, they make development an everyday expectation and hold people *and* themselves accountable for following through on development. They set the standard that learning is not an option but a requirement.

EDMs manage the interface between their world and the rest of the organization. They divert distractions from day-to-day development and ingeniously adapt talent development tools provided by the organization to their own needs. The result? An oasis of daily development that becomes not only a magnet for talent but also a prototype for the whole organization.

this material has been excerpted from

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by Wendy Axelrod and Jeannie Coyle
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