

LEADERSHIP Excellence

Warren Bennis



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**Leading an
Enterprise**

**Corporations
Are People**

**Are You a
High-Performer?
Do You Meet the Criteria?**

Howard M. Guttman
Leadership Consultant and Coach



"LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE IS AN EXCEPTIONAL WAY TO LEARN AND THEN APPLY THE BEST AND LATEST IDEAS IN THE FIELD OF LEADERSHIP."

—WARREN BENNIS, AUTHOR AND
USC PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT

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High Performers

Clear the obstacles to success.



by Sara Canaday

EVEN IN THE BEST OF times, CEOs need all of their people doing their best work. But the current economic fits and starts make consistently high performance even more critical. To succeed, leaders must quickly identify their *leadership thoroughbreds*—those who show real promise for becoming top performers—and invest resources to ensure that the organization can harness their maximum value. Those tasks are vital: *if the high potentials succeed, the organization succeeds.*

I've helped many leading companies apply this strategy and reap the measurable benefits. Clearly, it makes good business sense to give the best people every tool possible so they can run at full speed. *Here are a few general suggestions to help your organization incorporate this approach:*

- Institute/endorse a *High Potential Rotation Program* for managers who need and want exposure to P&L, global business, marketing or other key areas
- Dedicate time/resources to ensure these professionals get the training they need in technical and functional areas, as well as the realm of leadership and collaboration skills
- Put your future leaders in charge of company-wide projects to expand their scope of experience and test their agility in facing challenges on issues beyond their usual expertise
- Ensure that *high potentials* have time to consider, suggest or promote new strategies and innovative solutions
- Cast a wider net when choosing company ambassadors or speakers to give up-and-comers a chance to hone and showcase their presentation skills
- Monitor their performance in the spotlight to detect *leadership readiness*

But what if all (or most) of these things have been done, and some high-potential team members still fall short of your *anticipated performance goals*? What if you've created a clear path for them to move up, but their progress seems *hopelessly stalled*? One common hurdle is the inability of *high potentials* to switch from being *Doers* to *Drivers*.

Doers build a successful career on

getting things done, tackling the details, keeping all of the balls in the air. Unfortunately, a new set of *unwritten rules* comes into play when they try to make the transition into upper-management. The competition is no longer based on the quantity of their accomplishments; instead, they are judged on their ability to *involve, lead and inspire* other people.

The *Doers* become frustrated when their formula for success no longer works, and their leaders share that frustration. Unless the *Doers* can shift to become *Drivers*—adding value by genuinely *leading* rather than just *managing*—they won't progress. The new scorecard is all about delegating and strategizing, innovating and motivating. Even some of the most talented people can fail to recognize that the game has changed. If your *high potentials* aren't operating at top speed despite your best efforts, this could be why.

Once I consulted with a talented woman named Leslie who struggled with this issue. She couldn't see why she was passed over for promotions and not perceived as *executive material*. She arrived at our first meeting with a large folder containing many documents to substantiate her track record. As she described her achievements, page by page, I could tell that her career roadblock wasn't caused by a missing page in her file. The problem was her inability to make that critical shift in her leadership skills. Leslie was clearly stuck in the role of *Doer*, despite the fact that she was brimming with potential to be a successful *Driver*.

If your organization is facing these same challenges as you strive to push your high potentials to the next level, there are some practical strategies to help you increase the *Driver-to-Doer* ratio. Consider these ideas to remove the hidden obstacles to success, accelerating the performance of your future leaders as well as your company.

- *Strategically pair your promising middle managers with successful executive leaders* who can demonstrate the skill of *driving* rather than *doing*, help-

ing them to understand the changing expectations involved with senior-level management. Encourage them to observe how the *Driver-mentors* spend their time during the day. Do they immerse themselves in to-do lists or push themselves to look at the big picture? How do they interact with other people at all levels? What kind of word choices, tone and body language do they employ? How do they influence and inspire teams to reach their goals?

- *Provide coaching in image management and emotional intelligence* to help nurture their *executive presence*. Credibility is often based on a *visual resume*. Those who enhance their image and demeanor to more closely match the company's best and brightest executives gain credibility and increase their capacity to lead and influence others.

- *Guide your targeted managers to become stronger thought leaders in key areas.*

Thought leaders develop an area of expertise valuable to the company, and apply their knowledge in ways that result in a unique understanding or a distinct opinion about that topic. They can spot trends and see implications more clearly. Identify unique areas of expertise

within your high-potential group, and nurture those through professional development and specific business opportunities.

- *Deliberately change the assignments* you give to rising candidates so they can stretch in new areas.
- *Let your high potentials know the value they bring* to the organization to generate loyalty. Be clear that you are investing in them to take on more responsibility and ultimately become the *face* of your brand as a top leader.

Doers respond quite well to guidance in this new direction, quickly growing in confidence and developing a more robust leadership persona with real traction. The previously stalled high potentials often regain their strong momentum once they understand the new rules. And organizations that invest in this learning process discover that helping their high potentials cross over the bridge from *Doer* to *Driver* generates positive benefits and a formidable competitive advantage. LE

Sara Canaday is a leadership expert, career strategist, corporate speaker and author of *You—According to Them: Uncovering the Blind Spots that Impact your Reputation and your Career*. Email Sara@SaraCanaday.com, www.SaraCanaday.com.

ACTION: Clear away obstacles to Hi-Po success.

