



Case Study

Supporting an Inexperienced High Potential Leader

How do you affirm and encourage an inexperienced high potential leader when doubt, overwhelm and self-imposed pressure are reigning supreme?

Success in today's demanding business climate requires strong leadership and management skills at every level. The long term success of an organization also requires the regular infusion of young talent similar to professional sports teams. Business needs and the desire to develop high potential talent can place young talent in challenging roles. The reality of any new role can create doubt, pessimism and a sense of overwhelm in anyone including high potential associates. This is a normal response and one that leaders can help young talent overcome. Doing so results in strong business performance, helps your people grow and develop into loyal and committed leaders and produces a bench strength that will help lead the organization powerfully for years to come.

Early in my management career I hired a college graduate to infuse the operation with new talent. Within a year, Brent was promoted to manager of a highly visible but under-performing unit. The unit's quality and productivity were poor and the risk of significant operating losses was high. In truth, under the previous manager the operation had been a great example of management by the seat of the pants.

One Saturday morning I came in to do some work and while walking around saw Brent sitting at his desk holding his head with his cupped hands. I greeted him and his response was a hardly audible groan. I immediately sensed we needed to talk.

I invited Brent into my office. While there, I asked him several times what was bothering him. All he could get out each time was a groan. It was clear Brent was in a state of overwhelm. Slowly he began to open up. He finally verbalized his concerns. At his very core he felt he was a failure. He felt he should be able to handle the job, but felt incapable. He expressed frustration about his unit continuing to make significant mistakes. Surely, in his mind, he was not right for the job. After all, he was THE manager, and business results were not improving!

I told Brent that I was not surprised by the results so far. I told him I expected them and tried to legitimize his feelings. I said it would take time to implement all the practices needed to improve the unit's performance and shared with him that a house is built brick by brick.

I then took a bold risk. I said what I believe is what he needed to hear so that he could take on a more empowering perspective. With great care, I said "Brent, there is one thing you said that I disagree with ... you are NOT a manager... yet. You are a 'project of a manager'. I don't

expect you to be a full blown experienced manager with all the answers just yet. That is not why you are in this job. You are in this job because you have the potential and character to be a great manager and leader. And, you will be that one day and sooner than you imagine. For now, I need you to learn how to manage your unit the best you can. Learn to be the best manager you can be. In time, your unit will be all you want it to be and more and you will be ready for significantly bigger and more challenging responsibilities!"

This got his attention. It put things back in perspective and helped him take his self-imposed pressure off. He responded with a smile, a sigh of relief and with comments such as "... oh... really... no kidding... wow... this helps... this really helps." We agreed to meet regularly to check in on the unit's progress and discuss how I might be able to assist him over the course of time. A few minutes later, he left the office smiling and with a lighter sense about him. The pressure was off, but not his strong determination to succeed. It was still there and now more powerful than ever.

Eventually, Brent's unit became a top producer. He later assumed responsibility for a number of related functions and established performance standards that may yet to be matched. Following multiple promotions and company changes, Brent recently retired from a large national bank having held the position of Senior Executive, Large Corporate Sales!

You might consider these steps if you are facing a similar situation:

- Remind the leader of your reason for selecting him/her for the role.
- Develop a safe climate to express concerns.
- Show understanding, encouragement and support.
- Help the high potential take on a more empowering perspective.
- Create confidence that success will happen. Build the leader's confidence in his/her abilities to cope with problems and remind them of their accomplishments.
- Make yourself available. Know when and where you need to provide guidance. Offer ideas.
- Provide strong support for reasonable cost effective business and staff proposals.
- Re-enforce learnings and reward all achievements.

Do you have a high potential leader experiencing similar struggles? You can help your young talent overcome doubt, a sense of overwhelm and achieve great personal growth! Doing so will develop leaders that are loyal and committed to you and will produce the bench strength your organization needs to succeed long term.

If you would like a free Executive Management Assessment with me to discuss how I can help you achieve the greatest success possible, please call me or email me and we'll get clear about the best immediate next steps for the success of you and your team.

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