How to Get the Most From Your Top-Performing Employees

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Every organization has its stars — the Michael Jordans or Megan Rapinoes, who shine with their leadership and perform at a higher level. The fact that they outperform their peers isn't a bad thing, either: These high achievers raise the bar for their colleagues and motivate them to do better. According to *Harvard Business Review*, studies have found that adding a star performer to a team can boost other team members' effectiveness by 5-15 percent.

More surprising is how much those stars contribute to an organization's overall output. It turns out that a very small proportion of a company is responsible for a large proportion of its results: the top 1 percent accounts for 10 percent of organizational output; the top 5 percent accounts for 25 percent of organizational output; and, the top 20 percent accounts for 80 percent of organizational output.

If this were your soccer team, you'd make sure those top scorers were taken care of — massages, ice baths, downtime — whatever coaches do to keep professional athletes happy. If we take the same approach when it comes to supporting our star employees, perhaps we could also see World Cup-level results.

Since founding my company JotForm, we've grown from just me to over 250 employees. I've learned a lot about building great teams along the way. It's important for all of your employees to be engaged. But it will be worth the extra investment of

time and money to identify your top five percent and make sure they're continually nurtured.

Here, a few strategies for how you can do that within your organization.

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Start by identifying employees with high potential

First things first, you have to figure out which people have the potential to make the most impact. You may wonder: what are the qualities should I look for?

For starters, high-potential employees possess a positive attitude. They don't dwell on negative feedback or occasional bumps in the road. As I've written before, rumination not only affects our mood, it also negatively impacts our problem-solving abilities.

High-potential employees bring to the table a range of skills and experience. Just as important, they also have the drive to pick up new skills, what experts call a "growth mindset." Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck explains:

> *"The growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way – in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience."*

Communication skills are another critical attribute of high-potential employees. According to Forbes, hiring managers and executives rank good communication as one of the most

important skills for employees to have. Contributor Blake Morgan explains: “This is because communication is at the core of every business—even an employee who sits by themselves still likely communicates with people, either on the phone or via email.”

A star employee knows how to effectively convey ideas, reach an understanding with others, and collaborate to solve problems. This not only propels productivity, but it also prevents misunderstandings from brewing below the surface.

Finally, top-ranking employees are highly ambitious. “This deeply motivational category is the accelerator that multiplies the potential influence of ability and social skills on future success, ” *Harvard Business Review* writes. That’s because your ambition or drive determines the extent to which your abilities and attitude are put to use.

Once you identify your top 5 percent, nurture them

1. Challenge them

Challenging employees means giving them room to grow and advance. Once an employee reaches the top of the curve for her position, managers should enable them to advance to the next curve – be it a new job, or added roles or responsibilities. I’ve found that the best employees don’t bristle at being continually challenged. In fact, they embrace it and rise to the occasion.

2. But don’t micromanage them

Nothing destroys engagement like a micromanaging boss. We’ve all experienced one – even if their intentions are good, their constant helicoptering and second-guessing can leave you feeling discouraged and unmotivated. One survey found that among micromanaged employees, 55 percent said it decreased

their productivity and 68 percent said it dampened their morale. Today's world is far too competitive to lose steam in either of those realms.

Instead, give your top employees assignments and let them figure out how to complete them. Have faith in the creativity and capabilities of your team. You hired them — trust that you chose well.

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3. Group high-potential people together

We all know the saying: two heads are better than one. It's true when it comes to sports teams — consider Shaquille O'Neal and the late, great Kobe Bryant, who propelled the Lakers to its first championship in fourteen years and three consecutive NBA titles from 2000-2002.

It's also true when it comes to businesses. With my company JotForm, I've noticed that great people love working with other great people. They feed off each other's energy and inspire each other's creativity. Especially during hack weeks — five-day sprints where our product teams focus on a single problem or challenge — these duos (or groups) become unstoppable forces of productivity and innovation.

Even if you can't group your high-potential employees together on a daily basis, giving them the opportunity to collaborate on projects or hack weeks can supercharge their motivation.

4. Invest in training and courses

Finally, providing high-potential employees with supplementary training can be a great investment for your entire company. The only caveat: choose any such training or courses thoughtfully. Best-selling author Ron Carucci writes:

"If you are going to invest millions of dollars into company

> *training, be confident it is addressing a strategic learning need.”*

For example, if you are launching a product in a new market, training people to get them up to speed with working in that market is a smart investment. On the other hand, signing your employees up for leadership training with no particular end goal might not be your best use of resources.

Hopefully, with these tips, you’ll be able to spot your top five percent and help them grow with your company.

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