

## Take the groan out of IDPs.

By Beverly Kaye and Beverly Crowell

The idea of holding *Individual Development Plan* (IDP) discussions between managers and direct reports isn't new. These discussions were once held as part of the performance management process, or separated out. Often these conversations weren't taken seriously unless they were used to surface high-potential talent or weed out unsatisfactory workers.

The process was frequently ignored by most workers—the *massive middle*. In fact, **many managers and employees groan and grumble about the IDP process.** *Is it that time of the year again?* IDPs can seem like a huge waste of time.

Yet organizations that address the development of *all* employees gain a competitive advantage. Companies need their people to be more fully engaged, to bring their discretionary efforts to the job, and to support their leadership. By recommitting to the IDP process, all can benefit. It can boost performance of employees and prevent them from leaving. If you're not nurturing and developing your talent, and keeping them longer, you're losing vital knowledge and personnel, and that affects the bottom line.



**Three strategic focus areas can provide an engagement edge with the massive middle:** career self-management for employees, complementary career coaching for managers, and a wider and deeper mentoring methodology push. Managers must be skilled to feel comfortable in the dialogue and that employees are skilled enough to take responsibility for their own satisfaction. When this dialogue is mandated, accountability will be shared.

### Stakeholders' Commitment

IDP implementation requires a stronger commitment from all stakeholders. The organization must devise the systems that support the discussion and the accountability practice; the manager must be prepared to be the *support*; and the employee has to be proactive and jump in as the *spark*.

Typically few stakeholders receive the training and support necessary to make best use of the tools they have. As a result, unnecessary mistakes are made, and development discussions are often passed to HR. Manager involvement is critical to challenge employees, build relationships, align individual needs with organizational needs, and put employees on projects where they can best utilize their talents and skills. The development dialogue requires ongoing conversations between the manager and employee. Instead of waiting to have these conversations once a year when developing IDPs, managers

can unleash the energy of their employees in a series of structured, powerful conversations during the year. For instance, with new hires you might open dialogue around six areas critical to new beginnings: relationships, passion, challenge, focus, balance, and intention. If you don't do this, you may find that six months later, those new hires might be gone, and *backfilling* only crowds recruiters' agendas and impedes other staffing demands.

When there is genuine support, when managers are held accountable for engagement efforts, and when employees buy in, great improvements in staffing are possible.

At the same time, employees must get *real* about their development goals. Organizations talk often about getting **SMART** by creating goals that are *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic* and *Time-bound*. All well and good, but if development goals aren't **REAL SMART**, then the *spark* may be missing.

### Ensure that all development goals are **REAL**:

**Relevant:** Will the results be aligned with where you want to go and where your organization is headed? How do you know?

**Enticing:** Does it really look good to you? Do you want it enough to make it happen? Do you smile when you think about achieving it? Why?

**Achievable:** Does it look like you can complete the actions that are required within a defined period of time? Is it a bit of a stretch but still within your means? What would your first step look like?

**Leverageable:** Does it serve multiple purposes? Are there ways to apply your hard work to other goals that you may have?

### Turn IDPs into Ongoing Conversations

Today, employees are asking, "Can I see my future in your future?" They are not only asking the question as part of the IDP process, but sometimes every day. And while IDPs are important, development conversations cannot only be left to what some may feel are regularly scheduled but distasteful annual events. Instead, all stakeholders need to hone the habit of more frequent, ongoing conversations. Even when the annual conversation is done well, once a year is not frequent enough. Without help and encouragement, employees and managers alike put the plans away until next year's inspection.

So help them both hone a *development habit*. Ensure that career development is top of mind not just at IDP time, but all year round. Talk about it, help both sides find ways to weave development into the day-to-day fabric of the organization. Evaluate managers based upon the development of employees; back up their commitment to development with learning and training opportunities to build capacity; and put career development on every meeting agenda.

Development is not a solo performance. Organizations that embrace development, not just once a year, will see to it that managers are skilled to feel comfortable in the conversation and that employees are skilled to take responsibility for their own career. **LE**



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