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Managing Superstars
The Lowdown on High Performers

Peak Performance[®]
Business Group

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**PEAK PERFORMANCE
BUSINESS GROUP**



MANAGING SUPERSTARS

The Lowdown on High Performers

If you're good enough (or lucky enough) in your hiring and development practices, you will sooner or later have a superstar on staff. They produce more, solve problems and can inspire others.

What makes high performers so important to your business?

Meet or exceed your business objectives.

Have a unit sales goal? They hit it. Have a profitability target? They reach it. Need to have a difficult conversation? They have it. Like having a toll-way fast-pass to success, high performers are the ones enabling such goal attainment.

Often require little assistance or guidance.

With superstars you can set it and forget it. Tell a high performer that you'd like a new lead generation or customer order tracking process and one appears. There's no torrent of inane questions like, "What should it be like?" "What can we do and not do?" "Where should I start?" You merely tell a high performer your strategic direction and wait to see the results.



Act decisively and have terrific business instincts.

Outstanding performers know most difficult business situations don't get better with age. Have a rush order for a key customer because something went wrong the first time? Your high performer knows how to expedite the shipment, ensures quality control is on top of things and follows it through to the end so it gets done right. They don't say, "We'll have to wait for our vice-president to tell us what to do."

Spur others to higher performance.

For many merely being in the presence of a high performer is enough to improve their performance – it's called behavior modeling. People have a tendency to reflect the attitude, skills and techniques of standouts.

Laser-like focus on their objectives.

With the intensity of a Great White shark honing in a seal snack, superstars let nothing get in the way of reaching their objective. They concentrate on what's important.



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DEPARTMENT DIVAS

Before we get too excited about high performers we must understand there are pros and cons to everything (Hey, even Zeppelin used to let Bonham's drum solos drone on a little long). High performers are humans, even they are flawed.

What are their drawbacks?

Sometimes feel their performance gives them special dispensation.

This means the rules only sort of apply to them. Meeting starts at 8:00 they might roll in at 8:15. Start times? Not for me. Really, a status report? You're kidding, right? Did you see my numbers last month?

Can be closed minded to guidance from others.

Occasionally high performers need some feedback. And more than occasionally they have no interest in it. High confidence often coincides with big egos.

Others may find them domineering.

High performers know how multiple factors need to be arranged to achieve success. This causes a heavy handedness some may find off putting.

May have unrealistic expectations of others.

What do you mean you can't come in two hours early, stay two hours late or install an entirely new accounting software package by noon? High performers work

tirelessly towards their goals. When others don't they are dumbfounded and disappointed.

Often push well into burnout.

Achieving objectives equates to high performer mental morphine. Numb to the signs of stress they are often in denial that their behaviors are not sustainable.

When pressed for time they can become belligerent.

Look you either get this point or you don't, I don't have time to explain it.

Can be transactional in their relationships with others.

The old saw about managing tasks and leading people really is spot on. People don't like to be dispatched with all the compassion of a Quick-E-Mart clerk ringing up a gallon of milk.



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WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW TO MANAGE HIGH PERFORMERS EFFECTIVELY?

1 You need to know when to give and take.

Is their office not quite as neat as you'd like? As long as it doesn't look like one of those 'hoarders' you see on Dr. Phil, let it go. Coming late to staff meetings? For me, this is worth a steel cage death match.

Why? Well when you let a standout come 15 minutes late to the staff meeting it communicates to everyone that the rules don't really matter and as manager you're no longer in charge, they are.

Privately (reprimanding publicly creates adversaries) tell them you appreciate their performance and you need them to be a leader. One way to demonstrate leadership is by coming on time to the meetings.

Understanding when to bend and when to take a hard line is one of the most challenging aspects for many managers. The only way to get good at this is to wrestle with these challenging issues. Avoiding situations won't help.

2 Have a 360 degree perspective of their performance.

Some people have all the peripheral vision of a racehorse (none). Avoid this dilemma by evaluating the sphere of performance. You have to ask yourself not only are they achieving their goals, but are customers satisfied? How about co-workers?

Additionally, you have to ask yourself are the objectives being obtained profitably or are they pyrrhic victories. What is the cost to the overall team dynamic?

Guide your high performers to understand that most business objectives are not an ends-justify-the-means situation (for many high performers this is an epiphany). This means as a manager of a standout employee you need to look at performance from all angles, not just gross revenue or capital expenditure reduction, or employee attrition.

3 Recognize their performance in unique ways.

You should avoid the cliché "employee of the month parking space" (unless you're working in San Francisco or New York City, which would make this perk way cool). Instead, try these:

- Specific and public praise.
- Acknowledgment in front of family and friends.
- Give them company tickets to this weekend's big game.
- Enable involvement in plumb assignment.
- Give permission to leave early or come in late one day.



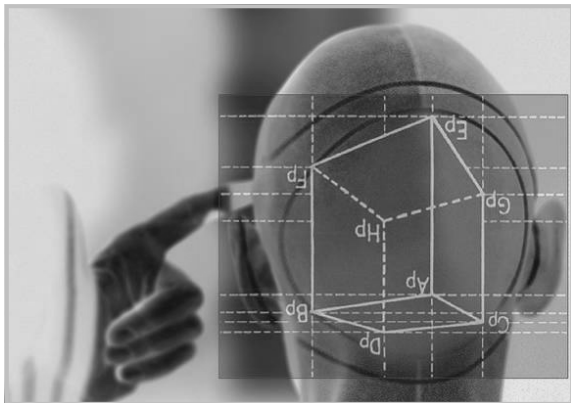
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- Have a senior VP take them to lunch.
- Put your praise in writing.
- Pick up the tab at an expensive restaurant for the employee and a guest.

Often high performers live not so much for the dollars but for the recognition of those that they respect.



4 Encourage their intellectual growth.

Keeping high performers engaged is a key to keeping them interested (they bore easily). So it's important to give your superstars challenging assignments, problem solving responsibilities, and strategic input. Ask them to:

- Figure out how to shorten the monthly process to close the books.

- Build a new retailing strategy for a non-traditional channel.
- Create a new system for handling high customer call volumes during peak periods.
- Measure and improve closing ratios on all sales calls.
- Develop a new marketing piece with helpful tips to increase product usage.
- Form a customer retention strategy.
- Conduct a competitive analysis of your market.

Plus your business reaps the benefits. High performers also understand how this development helps their overall career. Skills developed in the assignments above are portable and can travel with them if they leave the organization (the best will, you don't keep them forever).

5 Give them the role of developing others.

If the previous statement created a collective gasp from managers everywhere – it shouldn't – this suggestion should help ease the pain. Have your high performers take on the mentoring of other high potential people in your organization. This way, if your high performer is only at the company for 3 or 4 years they have helped to greatly improve your bench strength.



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FIRING HIGH FLIERS

Do you ever fire a high performer?

Sure.

If spending time with your high-performing sales rep is like getting a visit from a loan-collecting member of the Sopranos, you may want to rethink things. You may make the sale, finish the project or reduce the expenses today, but where will you be tomorrow?

Not completing important paper work, coming late to meetings, rudeness, and gross insubordination; these are behaviors that over time will be like an infection making the rest of your organization sick.

When the costs outweigh the benefits, pull the trigger.

Why do most managers put up with diva-like behavior from their star performers?

Fear.

Most managers (and companies!) don't have a solid enough process for attracting, retaining and developing talent. So they cling to bad situations because they feel they will never get another district manager, project manager, or customer service director like this one ever again.

You should make sure you're never in that position. The more and higher quality your options, the less willing you are to put up with nonsense. You must develop methods to attract and develop talent.

Do I think high performers earn some latitude? Yep.

Do I think they should get special rewards? Yep.

Do I think it should be allowed to transition into diva-like behavior? No way.

Managed correctly, your high performers will be great additions to your team. They'll produce more, solve problems and develop others – and if you've done your job right they'll be a pleasure to be around. Learning to manage your high performers isn't always easy, but it is always worth it.

Have a high performer story to share with us? Just e-mail Mark Rodgers, President Peak Performance Business Group at:

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An award winning author, top-rated speaker, trainer and consultant Mark has worked with thousands of business people to help them improve their profitability and customer satisfaction. |

Holding a master's degree in adult education, he has also earned the National Speakers Association Certified Speaking Professional designation – There are only 500 people in the world who have passed the rigorous criteria to attain this coveted recognition. He is also a certified member of the Association of Finance and Insurance Professionals.

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