

# The Success Factor

Tags: *#high-potential*

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## Dialogue

Title: How to Lead and Retain High Performers

Substantial difference in productivity levels between high performers and typical employees. What do we know about what the data and research show about this?

Those who supervise high performers need to know how to corral and engage with these unique employees. What works for everyone else will not work for them.

Malcolm Knowles: widely regarded as the founding voice of adult learning principles. Adult is maturity vs. age -- and high performers often fall in category of maturity. Knowles had six assumptions that he developed to guide the understanding how adults learn and grow:

One of them: intrinsic motivation -- more potent than external motivations governed by others, such as promotions, diplomas, and awards.

What's the implication for leaders want to lead and retain high performers?

Starting points, not endpoints.

### Offer opportunities for exposure

- Visibility to senior leadership
- Stretch assignments
- More decision-making

### Provide autonomy

High achievers can make connections that others do not yet see or appreciate. They crave finding the unknown and going down a path that others have not. For high achievers, the chase is as exciting as the win, which is likely why they fear not trying more than they fear failing.

### Create advancement pathways

High achievers prefer rapid promotion opportunities and will balk at doing the same types of tasks for years on end.

Client example?

## Offer further training

Often the developmental programs offered through human resources are not appropriate for what they need and are too generic to be of interest to them.

Provide funding.

Also, expect that they know what the opportunities are.

Point --> manager engagement, esp. external

## Developing a team

High achievers know others like them. Developing a team of high achievers requires putting together a blend of senior, junior, and mid-career top performers so that they can learn from and support each other.

I think many leaders have had the experience of having a person on their team vs. a team of high performers. What's a shift here?

## Quotes

*Highlight [page 63]:* Every organization should be tripping over themselves to recruit these high achievers, and doing whatever is necessary to retain them. Research has shown that high achievers can quickly take on a leadership role and develop a high-performance mindset within an organization (Mackay, 2015; Huselid, 1995). High-achieving employees, those who routinely blow benchmarks out of the water, can be the most productive colleagues yet challenging to retain. While a higher salary might be their stated reason for departure, for high achievers, the lack of mentorship and murky path to leadership is a major reason they walk out the door.

*Highlight [page 64]:* Most organizations do not have formal programs to recognize and develop high achievers as a pipeline of future leaders. So what is the result? The high achievers get frustrated by the lack of advancement and innovation and leave the organization. The company is then left with average or, even worse, below-average employees. Ultimately, there is a real business case for actively working toward retaining high achievers.

*Highlight [page 64]:* Malcolm Knowles, one of the founding fathers of adult learning, coined the term andragogy and considered it the “art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1968). Knowles had six assumptions that he developed to guide the understanding of adult learning. They have become the cornerstone of this field and need to be understood to build more high achievers: 1 As a person matures, they advance from a dependent personality to a self-directed human being. They like to choose how they will learn, such as in a formal classroom or webinars. The adult learning environment needs to be a place where a culture of respect, support, and acceptance is fostered. There needs to be a level of psychological safety to leverage the maximum learning potential (Edmondson, 2019). 2 An adult compiles a growing stockpile of experiences, which serve as a rich source for learning. Every experience is an excuse to learn. That is why high achievers view feedback as an opportunity for enhancement, not a critique (Gotian, 2020c). They understand any insight can make them better, faster, stronger, more efficient, or innovative. The readiness of an adult to learn is firmly related to their social role. If your role does not provide any opportunity or expectation for growth or innovation, why try harder? If, however, you are always expected to be curious and original, you are more likely to seek opportunities to learn. 4 As people age and mature, their perspective shifts from the future application of knowledge to its immediate use. As a result, an adult is more attuned to a problem-centered approach than a subject-centered focus on learning. They want to know how their knowledge will be helpful to them and their work or life. 5 Intrinsic motivation, which is focused on the person and their internal desire to learn, is more potent than external motivations governed by other people and can be seen when it is driven by recognition such as promotions, diplomas, and awards (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2000). 6 Adults need to know why they are learning something. They do not want to memorize random facts that are not anchored in anything useful.

*Highlight [page 66]:* Research by Daniel Pink demonstrates that for high achievers, extrinsic values such as bonuses or salary increases do not improve productivity at nearly the same rate as intrinsic motivators such as adding value to an organization (Pink, 2009). High achievers want to see examples of creative innovation, curiosity, and passion for raising the bar. They want to know that the organization is investing in their professional development and their path forward within the company. There are several things an institution can do to develop its high achievers.

*Highlight [page 67]:* Those who supervise high performers need to know how to corral and engage with these unique employees. What works for everyone else will not work for them. Research has shown that irrespective of industry, job function, or status, the common denominator that high achievers seek in a boss is a caring nature, a good communicator, authenticity, results-oriented, and a strong inclination to help and develop others (Mackay, 2015; Sutton, 2010).

*Highlight [page 68]:* Let the high achievers show their leaders and others what they are capable of accomplishing by provide them with ongoing stretch assignments and projects where they have greater exposure and visibility to senior leaders and other

teams. For example, allow them to head up a task force, lead a cross-functional team, conduct an analysis, or develop a proposed solution for a pervasive challenge. Give them a lead role in presenting these ideas to the executive leadership team. If you want to prevent your top performers from relocating, allow them to lead global teams (Willyerd, 2014). High achievers want to know that their work adds value. They thrive off of feeling like they are respected and have a seat at the decision-making table. Offer them domains of ownership where they feel empowered to think like CEOs. For decisions that impact high performers but lie outside of their responsibilities, provide ample context and transparency while treating them like decision-making partners, not simply employees who will execute orders from the leadership.

*Highlight [page 68]:* High performers live for the challenge of solving a problem (Tobak, 2015). To do this effectively, they need the right conditions where they can quench their craving for autonomy and avoid being micromanaged. They need the freedom to be creative in their thoughts and processes while having the authority to complement their responsibilities. If this does not match, high achievers start to look for other opportunities that are better aligned with their needs.

*Highlight [page 69]:* High achievers prefer rapid promotion opportunities and will balk at doing the same types of tasks for years on end (Kanter, 1977). They do not wish to sit in the same chair doing the same type of work just because the person in the role senior to them is stuck in their career. The high achievers recognize that the faster they get promoted, the better opportunity they will have to work on challenging assignments, which they crave. Promotions and fasttrack career opportunities would be expected and increase the likelihood of retention of the high achievers.

*Highlight [page 69]:* Despite all of their accolades and advanced degrees, high achievers are always on the hunt. They look for opportunities to enhance and broaden their knowledge. Often the developmental programs offered through human resources are not appropriate for what they need and are too generic to be of interest to them. Consider offering them opportunities to further their training, learn new skills, and broaden their career pathway. These courses can be in person or online and might be provided outside of your institution. Provide flexible working conditions so that they can go to class or work on assignments as needed (Trank et al, 2002). High performers are engaged when they learn new skills and immediately recognize their application in their daily work. The learning will lead them to get more excited about projects. Do not worry about them working less because they are not in

*Highlight [page 70]:* 46 HIGH ACHIEVERS AND SUCCESS the office; high performers will work until the job gets done, likely long after you went to sleep.

*Highlight [page 70]:* High performers tend to direct their learning through formal and self-directed learning options and are looking for an organization that will actively support that growth (Willyerd, 2014). Consider offering a professional development budget for high performers. Letting the employee have control over which course to take or conference to attend is essential. A culture of psychological safety and

encouragement is critical to ensure that they take advantage of this opportunity and don't feel it is a benefit that is offered but should not be used (Edmondson, 2019). Now you recognize what makes adult learners tick and how they process information. Because it varies for each person, offering options is empowering for adults. Alternatives are especially needed for high achievers who do not like to be bound by rules often made for the majority, which is inherently the middle of the group: those who are average. This does not work for high achievers who routinely work along the liminal edge.

*Highlight [page 74]:* High achievers are 400 percent more productive than the average employee. Every organization must work to hire, lead and retain these top performers. 2 3 4 High achievers want to know that they and their work are valued. They are seeking organizations where they can learn, grow, and be inspired and innovative. There are numerous ways to develop high achievers, including giving them stretch assignments, offering them professional development inside and outside the organization, extending opportunities for exposure, and providing mentoring opportunities. High achievers know others like them. Developing a team of high achievers requires putting together a blend of senior, junior, and mid-career top performers so that they can learn from and support each other.

*Highlight [page 95]:* Identifying and pursuing your intrinsic motivation will help you become a high achiever. Its pursuit will nourish and sustain you as you face challenges, and they will surely come. 1 Use the tools provided in this book to help you identify your intrinsic motivation. This may change as you face transitions in life, so feel free to go back and repeat the process when you need to get back to your "why." 2 Often, your love and passion for a project will far surpass your initial goal. It gives you purpose. Work to pinpoint what gives you purpose. 3 Sample several things before you decide on the area where you will focus. See where you are able to maintain a flow state and where you get distracted. 4 Utilize the strategies offered in this chapter to help your intrinsic motivation stick.

## References