



# 10 Important Questions to Help Identify HIGH POTENTIALS

By Kerry Carney

**A**ccording to a study by the Corporate Executive Board (CEB), as many as 25 percent of high-potential employees plan on leaving their jobs within a year. Many organizations make the mistake of only looking at ability when assessing an employee's potential for managing a job.

When trying to identify a high-potential (or HiPo) employee, performance—or productivity—should not be confused for aptitude. Misidentifying a HiPo can be costly. For example, you have a top-selling sales rep and decide to promote them to a managerial position. It would make sense, right? However, if that sales rep doesn't have the aptitude, aspiration, or overall potential, he or she will fail in the new position. What's worse, the HiPo that you overlooked will feel snubbed and may leave in search of an organization that offers more opportunities for advancement.

The reason high *performers*, as opposed to high *potentials*, fail typically falls within one of these three categories: leadership behaviors, aspiration, or engagement. Aspiration entails whether the candidate really wants the position and is willing to make the sacrifices it requires. Engagement involves the employee's commitment to the company and its mission. When considering an employee's potential for success in a certain job, many organizations neglect to ask, "Does he or she really want to do this?"

Pinpointing the characteristics of a HiPo can be difficult, especially in a young employee. The attributes people develop over time with training, experience, and progress are not always apparent from the beginning. Also, many managers have an outdated estimation of what leadership should be: loud, aggressive, and in-your-face. Employees who exhibit these qualities are favored for advancement before considering the aptitude they will bring to the position.

Organizations should develop leadership competency models based on a predetermined aggregation of traits and behaviors associated with the success of the company and evaluate each employee based on how they measure up to that standard. Employers need to assess their employees with long-term, future goals in mind, not merely to suit the

present, or to fill an open position quickly. Companies also should look to the past to determine what made previous people successful so others may emulate those strengths while also noting the shortcomings they had.

## Here are the 10 questions you should ask when identifying high-potential employees:

1. Does this employee have a proven track record for accomplishing impressive results, not just meeting expectations?
2. Does this person take charge and make things happen or sit back and react to a situation before producing?
3. Are others inspired by the confidence of the candidate's decision making?
4. Can this worker lead through persuasion and influence where he or she serves as an effective sounding board to others who are struggling with complex issues?
5. Do others trust this person to lead projects and teams, even if he or she doesn't have a leadership title?
6. Does he or she have an understanding of how to separate "what" from "how" with an awareness that establishes the goal before deciding on the steps to achieve the end result?
7. Are priorities apparent while keeping a global perspective, or does she or he become mired in the details and tactics?
8. Do obstacles threaten or stop this employee, or do they represent healthy challenges to overcome?
9. What success has this person had with multitasking?
10. How do unexpected changes affect this candidate's performance?

Whether it's repositioning the job of a HiPo or counteracting the effects of a future skills gap, identifying high potentials with these 10 questions will enable you and your organization to prepare better for future needs. **N**

*Contributed by Profiles International. For more information, please contact John Caspole at [jcaspole@AssessmentSpecialists.com](mailto:jcaspole@AssessmentSpecialists.com).*