Leave a lasting legacy: Be an effective people developer
By Robert N. Llewellyn

One might think people development is an obvious characteristic of all successful companies and their managers. But Lominger Limited Inc.—a leadership development think tank and consultancy—reports that managers and employees ranked "developing direct reports" dead last out of all 67 competencies in its bi-annual study of leadership skills. That's right—managers are viewed and view themselves "worst" at developing their direct reports compared to all other skills in their toolbox.

Fears and hollow excuses are usually what prevents managers from developing their people. You may not be actively developing your reports job because you fear:
1. Losing power. If you develop your people, you may not be the technical expert of your area anymore. (In reality, you agreed to not be the expert any more when you took a leadership position.)
2. Losing your good people. As people develop, they may want to grow further beyond the function of your department. Be aware, however, that if you are seen as a "people hoarder," your career will be severely diminished.
3. Being "leap-frogged." Someone you develop may eventually get a job you want. You may even have to report to one of your previous direct reports. (Let's hope you developed them well.) If you use this excuse, you're revealing a basic insecurity about your own abilities.
4. Creating a rival. Worse than the fear of being leap-frogged may be the fear that a former direct report could become an arch rival in your organization. This excuse is another indication of personal insecurity.

Or you may not be developing other leaders because it takes time or you want to avoid the responsibility. But what else are you doing with your time that is more important? Here are six reasons why you should can the excuses and work on your people-development skills:
1. To improve productivity and effectiveness. While developing a direct report may cause some temporary reduction in productivity, it will pay dividends in your department, team or division in the long run.
2. To maximize long-term potential. Developing direct reports improves the long-run success of your entire company.
3. To keep your sanity. Good people developers usually go home on time. Developing your people not only improves their capacity to perform, but it improves your capacity to delegate.
4. To attract talent. When the word gets out that you are a people developer, the up-and-comers in your company line up to work in your department, team, shop or division.
5. To "plant" good people. When people leave your area, they know your department's function, your methods and your needs, and can help you be successful from their new position.
6. To get promoted. Being a great people developer differentiates you from the pack. People say good things about you. People realize you are a more complete leader, not the usual, one-commodity manager.

No one becomes a great people developer overnight, and there's no one right way to do it. You should cater to your strengths and to your style. Here are some general tips for improvement:

- Be the motivator, not the "mom." Convince your employees that they are responsible for their own development. Each must have a written development plan, including both short- and long-term development goals. Remind employees that capitalism is "creative destruction" and that their jobs may dissolve without notice. Corporate maternalism breeds unhealthy dependence on the company and minimizes self-reliance.
- Incorporate their need to have a personal development plan into your performance-management process.
- Recognize that development is more than going to training. While training courses are an important aspect of development, so are rotations, special tasks, complex projects, reading assignments, informal "brown-bag discussions" and even successful staff meetings.
- Coach with a passion. Most people can remember a coach, teacher or mentor who dared to confront behavior when it was less than optimal. People developers constructively confront—in a private and professional way—when needed.
- Delegate incessantly, and make assignments with development in mind.
- Know your people, particularly their career aspirations.
- When interviewing potential hires for your department, discuss an estimated time for them to move on (assuming this fits their career aspirations), usually by the end of three years. Make moving on a goal, and promise that you will help them find their next position *within* the company when they have developed to your expectations and performed in their current job for a reasonable period of time.
- Creatively reward people who actively develop themselves. Money is not always the right answer. Know your people and reward them with a motivating intangible.

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