

every  
woman

# WORKBOOK

Harnessing the talent of  
high-potential employees  
in your team



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# ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

Established in 1999, everywoman advances women in business. Our aim is to ensure women from all over the world fulfil their potential. We produce workbooks on topics that matter to our members and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to kick-start your career, at a time and place that suits you.

It's important to regularly reflect on the way you manage every individual you are responsible for. However, research shows that how you lead your top talent - high-potential individuals, or HIPOS as they are commonly labelled within the HR and people management communities - might hold even greater significance.

Studies show that these individuals - your most capable and motivated talent - make up about 5% of your organisation's workforce. To overlook these individuals as high potentials, or to ignore their specialised needs, presents a real threat to your own success, that of your team and your entire business. After all, these elite individuals are likely to be the most sought-after candidates in the marketplace, and can easily become a flight risk, often leaving to take up employment with a competitor.

The truth is that nurturing these star individuals isn't as straightforward as initiating them into your organisation's designated HIPO programme, if one exists. If that were the case, then all such schemes would see rising stars emerge as polished leaders-in-waiting. Research shows, in fact, that many individuals are wrongly put into the 'high potential' category. Many more drop out before the programme concludes. And while the process can be amended to minimise this, the line manager must also step up and improve how they identify and manage HIPOs in the workplace.

With so many forward-thinking organisations trying to tackle issues such as the gender pay gap and lack of female diversity and inclusion in leadership roles, a management team that can robustly identify and expertly lead the organisation's most valued contributors is critical to strengthening the female talent pipeline. To skilfully nurture this segment of your talent pool is to better attract, advance and retain the very people who are critical to your organisation's success.

Whether or not your organisation has a HIPO programme in place, completing this workbook will allow a better understanding of how you as a line manager can identify a

high potential in your midst. Once you've clarified your employees' credentials, you will learn what steps you should take to be an effective leader of a HIPO, and what you can do to enable your HIPOs to achieve all that they are capable of.

Let us know how you get on - email us at [contact@everywoman.com](mailto:contact@everywoman.com) or  
Tweet us [@everywomanuk](https://twitter.com/everywomanuk).

Good luck!

*Maxine & Karen*

and the everywoman team.

# SECTION I: IDENTIFYING HIGH-POTENTIAL INDIVIDUALS

## What is mentoring?

If a subordinate's performance consistently falls below expectations, they are unlikely to make the grade as high potentials. But, consider someone who is high performing. They're a team superstar, always smashing their goals and outshining their peers. Are they automatically a high-potential employee? Not necessarily.

Studies show that six out of seven high performing individuals are wrongly classified by managers and organisations as high potential. This is often because those nominating elite talent do so based on *current* standards of performance, rather than the potential for *future* performance. Decision makers fail to recognise that while all high potentials are high performers, not all high performers are high potential. When the wrong individuals are welcomed into HIPO programmes (and this happens in 1 in 7 cases), they can end up costing organisations a lot of wasted time, effort and expense. It can also put undue pressure on the individual, causing confidence and performance issues.

20% of high performers have identified a discrepancy between their personal aspirations and what the organisation sees for their future.

High performers aren't necessarily highly engaged. One in four 'young starts' intends to leave their current organisation within 12 months.

The problems with using high performance to assess high potential

33% of high performers admit to not putting all of their available effort into the job.

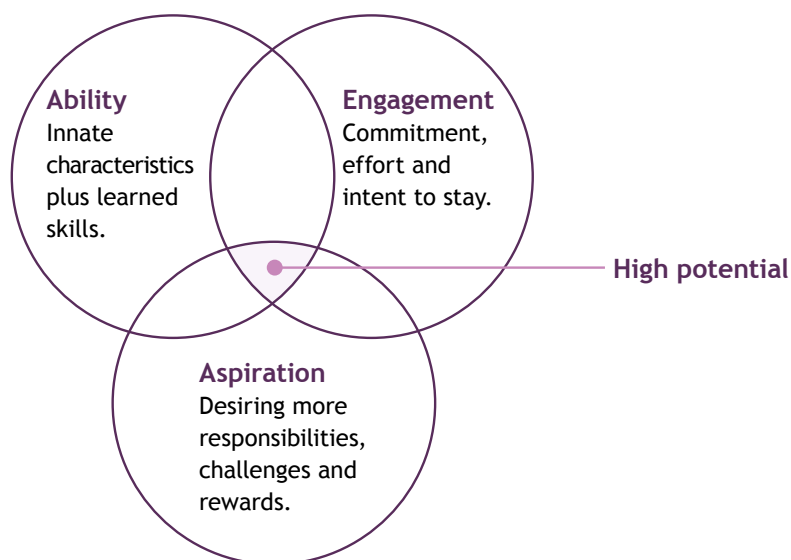
46% of leaders fail to meet their business objectives in a new role.

SOURCE: CORPORATE EXECUTIVE BOARD (2009 AND 2014)

Great performance isn't the only subjective measure by which individuals can be wrongly assigned HIPO status. Many are labelled as high potential due to their lengthy service with an organisation; because they demonstrate a consistent commitment to performing overtime; or because latterly they have stepped up their game (something psychologists call the 'recency effect'). So, if these measures lead to shaky results for HIPO programmes, how can a line manager best identify those employees that are most worthy of investment?

# THE ABILITY, ASPIRATION AND ENGAGEMENT MODEL

This simple model is used by organisations all over the world as a robust methodology for identifying high-potential talent. Whether you work in supermarket customer services, a tech start-up, or the headquarters of a corporate bank, the model can be used to accurately measure the high potential of your teams.



## Exploring ability

When assessing the ability of one of your direct reports, it's important you look not just at ability within the confines of their current role and its key performance indicators, but at leadership credentials and their ability to thrive in more senior and challenging future roles.

### EFFECTIVE MANAGERS AND LEADERS KNOW HOW TO:

DEVELOP	a compelling vision that is based on clear and critical thinking.
ARTICULATE	and communicate goals that motivate others and provide direction.
COMMUNICATE	effectively and support others through change.
GET THINGS DONE	and realise tangible goals and objectives.

SOURCE: ANNA KRAWCEWICZ (CONTACT ONLINE: 2014)

## EXERCISE

Thinking about an individual you would like to assess for high potential, make a note of tangible examples of the following:

### A COMPELLING VISION

What is the evidence that this individual has a clear idea, based on critical thinking, of the future of his or her role, business unit or the entire organisation? What vision/ideas do they have for the department and/or organisation?

### MOTIVATING OTHERS

What is the evidence that this individual is capable of taking others on a transformative journey with them? How do they create loyalty from different stakeholder groups (peers, customers, partners, suppliers, upper management, direct reports)?

### COMMUNICATE AND SUPPORT

What is the evidence that this individual can communicate with clarity and explicitness, and has the ability to help, coach and encourage others?

### GET THINGS DONE

What is the evidence that this individual does what they say they will do, moves things forward and sets and achieves goals? What is the evidence that this individual is customer focused?



**TIP:** Make a mental note of any thoughts you've had about an individual you're assessing. In Section III, we'll look at how biases impact on how individuals are categorised as high potential or otherwise. Awareness of such biases is key to ensuring they do not wrongly impact on decision-making.

Now we've looked at the best tools for assessing ability, we will move onto evaluating aspiration. What does aspiration look like? And how can it help you identify a truly high potential individual?

# EXPLORING ASPIRATION

Evaluating an individual's aspiration - the desire for recognition, advancement and future rewards – isn't as straightforward as scanning the open plan for obvious signs of ambition. It's about noticing behaviours and attitudes, looking closely for potentially subtler signs that someone wants to advance.

In addition, when you bring gender into the mix, it can be even more challenging to uncover aspiration within an individual. Your male reports will be more overt about where they see their career going within the organisation, but where your identified HIPO is female, your approach may need to be slightly different. Many women will cite that they went for a promotion because someone 'tapped them on the shoulder' lending credence to the idea that women may sometimes need encouragement to see the full potential ahead of them in their career.

CEB Global, a board advisory service specialising in identifying top talent for worldwide organisations, analysed 18 motivational factors and found that six core factors are what drive the achievement of an executive position.

## SIX MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS DRIVING ADVANCEMENT TO EXECUTIVE POSITIONS

### 1. ACTIVITY

High potentials prefer fast-paced, multi-tasking work environments.

### 2. IMMERSION

They prefer roles that require a personal commitment above the norm.

### 3. POWER

They want the opportunity to exercise, influence and shape how things are done.

### 4. INTEREST

They look for roles and assignments that provide variety and stimulation.

### 5. FLEXIBILITY

They seek to work in environments that allow more fluid ways of working.

### 6. AUTONOMY

They are attracted to roles that allow autonomy in the execution of responsibilities.

These motivations contribute to aspiration when the employee also exhibits the following two sets of behaviour:

**1. Using initiative and taking responsibility:** They push for results and are willing to invest in their personal development.

**2. Achieving objectives and pursuing self-development:** They're willing to take calculated risks to realise an opportunity and assume positions of responsibility.

*SOURCE: CEB GLOBAL*

Aspiration levels can be difficult to measure without a conversation with your direct report about his or her career plan. In the tip box below, we suggest some questions you can use to structure an open and focused conversation about aspirations with a high-potential candidate.

**TIP**

How far do you hope to rise in the company? How quickly?

How much recognition would be optimal?

How much money?

The responses that an individual gives to these questions should always be balanced against their “softer” objectives involving work-life balance, job stress and geographic mobility.

*SOURCE: HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW (2010)*

## EXERCISE

Think about the different individuals in your team. What specific questions could you ask each one to ascertain their aspiration levels in line with the motivating behaviours outlined above? Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- *What kind of contribution would you ideally make to this business in the next 2-3 years?*
- *If there was one thing you would like to achieve while working at this business, what would it be and why?*
- *What do you see as your biggest asset for the future success of this organisation?*

Now we've evaluated an individual's aspiration levels, we need to identify how engaged they are. When you consider that your high potentials are going to be the most in-demand employees in the marketplace, understanding and managing their levels of engagement is going to be key.

# EXPLORING ENGAGEMENT

Employee engagement has become a buzzword for organisations wanting to increase staff retention, wellbeing and productivity, and for good reason. Research by Gallup suggests that organisations with highly engaged employees have up to 65% lower rates of staff turnover than competitors with poorer staff engagement scores. This means less absenteeism, greater productivity, higher customer satisfaction, and, ultimately, greater profits.

## THE COMPLEXITY OF ENGAGEMENT

High-potential survey participants overwhelmingly agree that they are committed to their organisations (95%).

**BUT**

25% think they'll be working for a different employer in 12 months.

20% see their personal goals as completely different to what the organisation has planned for them.

40% admit they have little confidence in their co-workers.

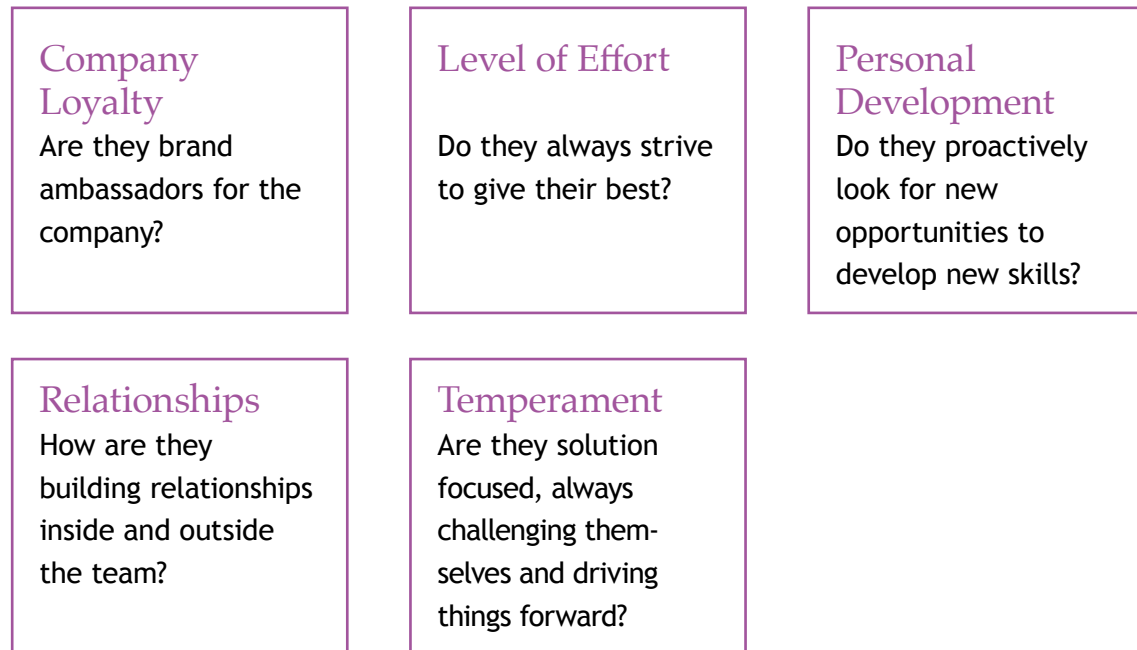
Engagement is complex and, as such, can be difficult to assess. In the HBR animation below, you will see that there are a range of factors that either motivate or demotivate, which may not be immediately obvious in a high-potential individual's performance.

**WATCH:** A Harvard Business Review video animation on the importance of engagement in a high-potential individual - and the traps that managers can fall into when assessing engagement. We'll look at the traps of high potential assessments in more detail in Section IV.

As with aspiration levels, engagement levels are best assessed during a conversation between the line manager and the individual. This could be during a formal performance review, an engagement-focused discussion or even a more informal 1-2-1 catch up. When asking about engagement, the aim is to ascertain how closely the individual feels their desires are aligned with the organisations' plans for them.

The following diagram illustrates five indicators of engagement that you can use to evaluate your high-performance candidate's levels of engagement.

## FIVE KEY INDICATORS OF ENGAGEMENT



## EXERCISE

Think about an individual that you would like to assess for high potential and looking at each indicator below, make a note of a) what evidence you already have about their levels of engagement, and b) what further questions you could ask to find out more. Once you've had your 1-2-1 conversation consider if there are any red flags to consider.

### COMPANY LOYALTY

Are they brand ambassadors for what the company does? What would they say about the company to friends or peers outside of the organisation?

**Red flags:** Someone who is negative about company decisions or their longer-term opportunities within it. Find out what's triggering their perceptions. Do they need more certainty? Do they have low self-belief? Can you get them closer to the changes and shifts that the organisation is making, in order to alter their view?

### LEVEL OF EFFORT

Do they always strive to give their best?

**Red flags:** An individual who always goes above and beyond but who doesn't have a high view of the organisation. This individual martyrs themselves to the organisation, but doesn't think about what it can offer them. Work with them to consider how they can better profile what they currently do and map out what advancement means to them.

PERSONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

Do they proactively look for opportunities to develop new skills and relationships? Do they feel significantly challenged in the workplace?

**Red flags:** An employee who avoids stretch assignments or personal development conversations. Do you need to provide this person with more focus to channel their personal development onto something specific that would get them excited about the organisation again?

RELATIONSHIPS

How do they build relationships within and outside the team to achieve the demands of their role to progress or to contribute more widely across the organisation? What are the pivotal relationships they've built at work?

**Red flag:** Someone who might be a brand ambassador or delivering high on effort but who has a low opinion of colleagues and/or is more focused on their own development than the company goals. Do they need a stretch assignment that involves working with a successful internal team?

TEMPERAMENT

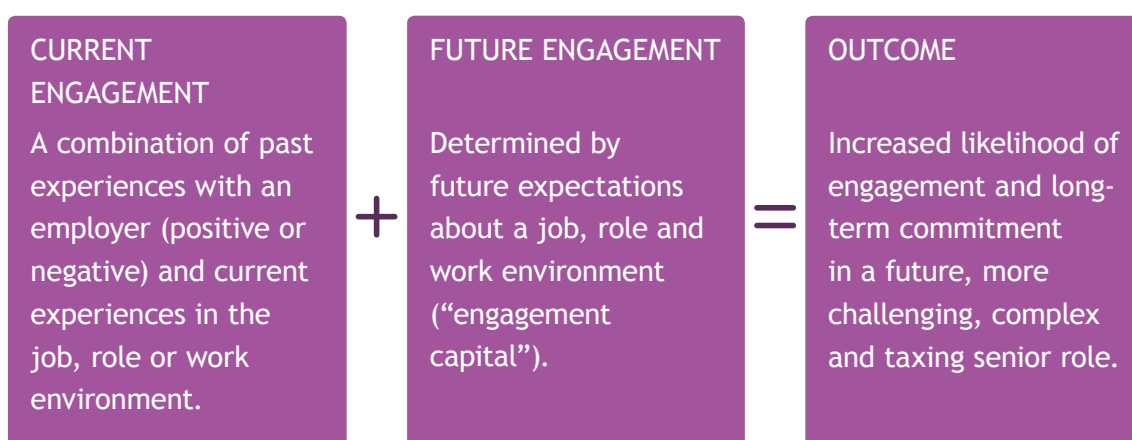
Are they a 'player', who is solution-focused, challenges themselves and others and is always driving things forward?

**Red flag:** A red flag on temperament could come in many guises and the best strategy is always to ask questions to find out more. What are they missing in the workplace? What triggers their specific set of workplace behaviours?



## Current v future engagement

As with ability, we should focus both on current levels of engagement but also on potential for future engagement, when assessing an individual's status as high potential. What is coming up that might increase or decrease their engagement levels? If someone combines high current engagement with high future engagement then there is an increased likelihood of true, long-term commitment in taking on a more challenging and senior role.

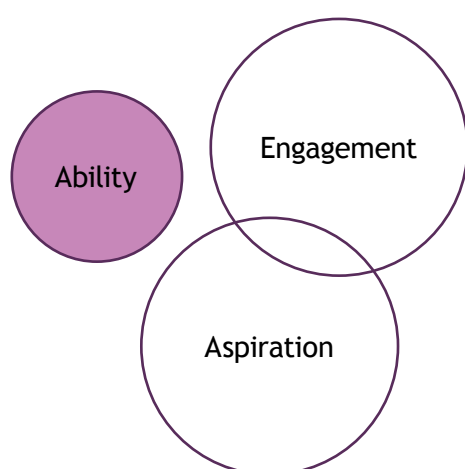


SOURCE: CEB (2014)<sup>8</sup>

## IS TWO OUT OF THREE ENOUGH?

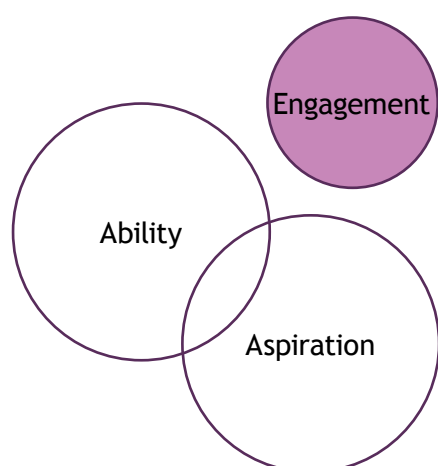
As you've worked through the ability, aspiration and engagement model, you may have found yourself putting some red flags next to individuals you've previously considered as high potential. You could find yourself questioning if identifying two out of three of the qualities is enough to categorise and progress someone as 'high potential'. What happens if someone is missing one component of ability, aspiration or engagement?

### WHEN ABILITY IS LACKING



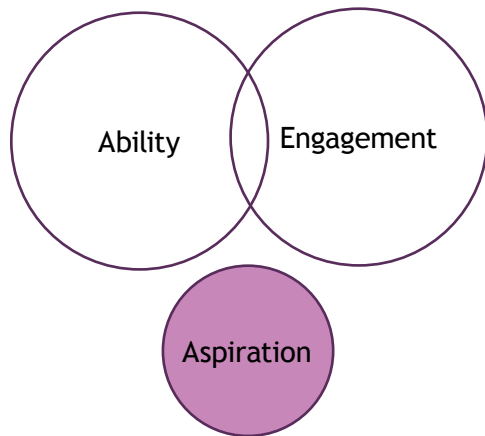
- These so-called 'Engaged Dreamers' account for 10% of high performers who are not high potential.
- They are highly engaged in their roles, and have big future aspirations, but their ability levels (current and future) are average.
- Unless the organisation can develop requisite leadership skills, the probability of success for these employees in a more senior, challenging and responsible role is virtually 0%.

### WHEN ENGAGEMENT IS LACKING



- So-called 'Unengaged Stars' account for 43% of high performers who are not high potential.
- They do not necessarily believe that working for their current organisation is in their best interests and are not fully invested in their work.
- Unless the organisation can engage these individuals, the probability of them being successful in a more senior, challenging and responsible role is just 13%.

## WHEN ASPIRATION IS LACKING



- So-called 'Misaligned Stars' account for 47% of high performers who are not high potential.
- They are highly able and committed, but lack the drive and ambition to turn progress to and succeed at the next level - they simply don't want it enough.
- Their probability of success in a more senior, challenging and responsible role is 44%.

*SOURCE: CEB (2010)<sup>5</sup>*

As the diagrams illustrate, wrongly identifying a high-potential individual can have serious consequences - both for that individual's career and for the organisation. Serious and careful evaluation of each individual is crucial if you want a successful outcome.

### EXERCISE

As you've uncovered the differences between high performance and high potential, what conclusions have you drawn about the individuals you're assessing? Have you changed your mind about anyone? Do any of your high performers fall down on ability, engagement or aspiration?

Do you think the way you're currently assessing high potential is effective?  
Outline any specific steps you will take to identify high potential talent, using  
the model we've explored.

*E.g. "I will schedule regular catch ups with my reports where I can discover more  
about their goals and aspirations."*

# SPOTTING HIGH POTENTIAL – A QUICK CHECKLIST

**Before we look at how you can best manage high-potential talent, spend time reflecting on your own team and organisation.**

Who else can help you identify high potentials? What are the challenges facing your business, now and in the future - and where do your high-potential employees fit in?

The following prompts may be helpful:

1. Did I lose any high potentials last year? Why?
2. Are any of my high potentials obvious flight risks? Why?
3. What people issues do I need to act on immediately to avoid losing top talent?
4. Who within my own personal advisory board can challenge and support my identification of high potentials to ensure my selections are robust?
5. Where do I see the individuals in my team in 12 months, three years and five years?
6. Who is my natural successor and why? What, if anything, are they lacking that they would need to develop before stepping into my shoes?
7. How is my business unit going to change over the next few years and who is prepared to rise to these challenges? What types of skills will they need?

Now you've separated your high potentials from your high performers, what do you need to know about successfully managing them? How are they different from other employees and what practical things can you do to ensure they are successful?

## SECTION II: MANAGING HIGH-POTENTIAL INDIVIDUALS

Once you have successfully identified your high-potential talent, you need a strategy for how best to manage that individual to allow them to flourish. In this section we look at how you can...

1. **Become an ‘enabler’**, providing support and challenge in the right amounts.
2. Ensure that your high-potential individual is acquiring **the critical experiences** needed to move forward.
3. Establish yourself as a sponsor of **high-potential talent**.

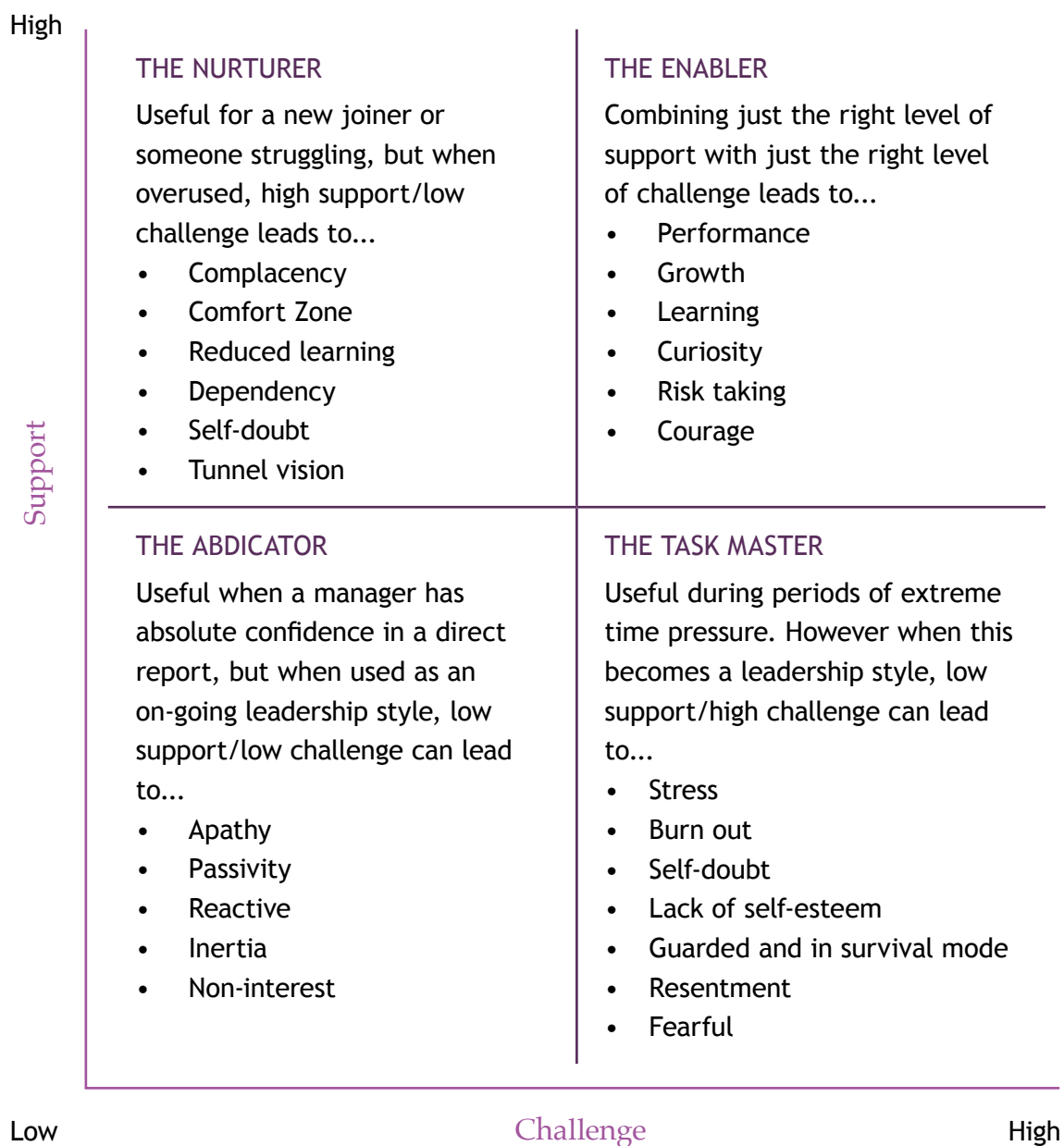
### Becoming an ‘enabler’

People managers rarely fall into one ‘type’ of leader, typically moving between different styles according to the individual or situation. For example, when an individual on your team is struggling with personal issues you might demonstrate nurturing qualities. In times of high pressure and deadlines, you may become more of a task master, steering the team to get things done on time.

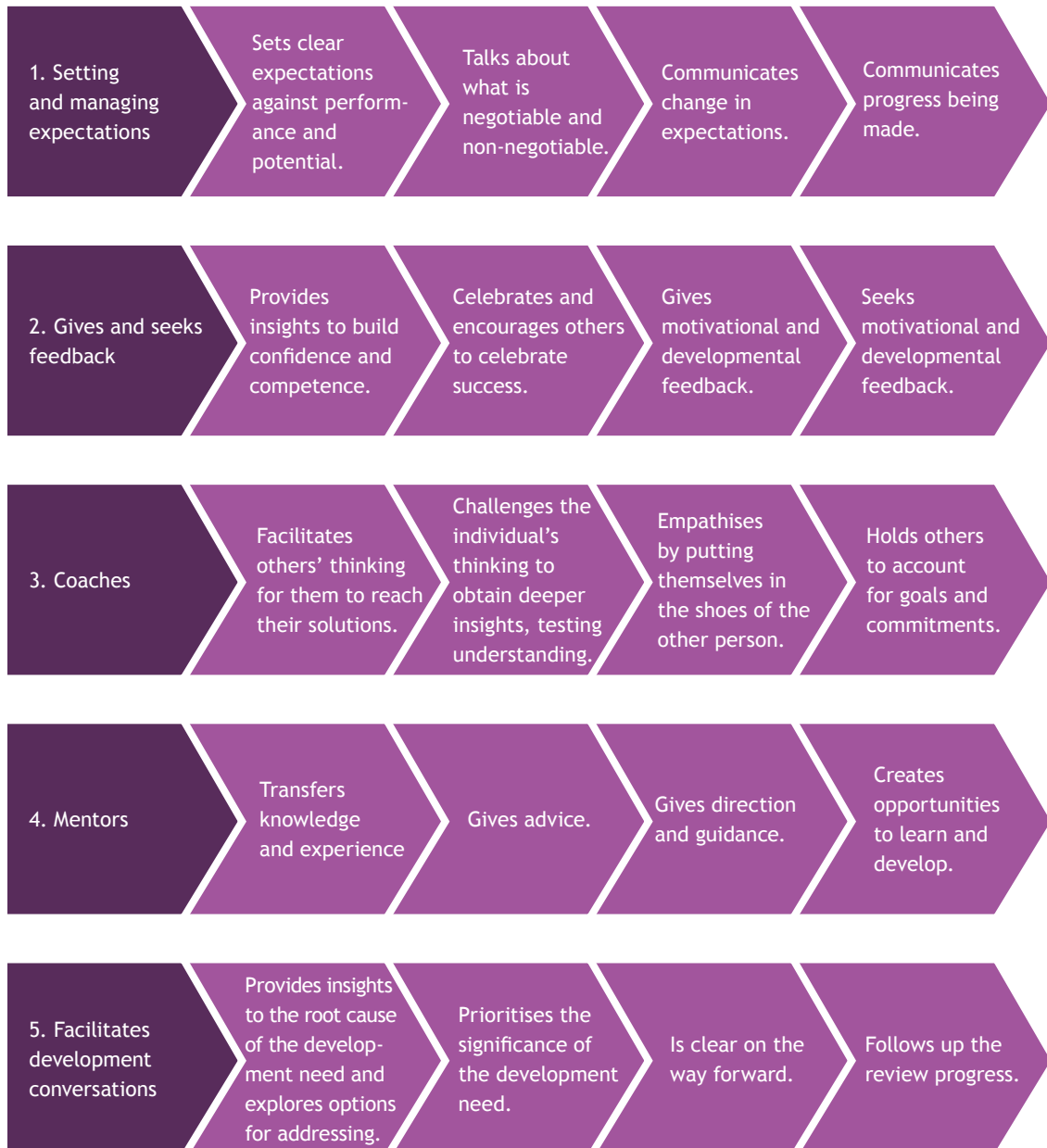
When it comes to getting the best out of your high-potential direct reports, it is important to find the right balance between support (giving them the resources they need in order to progress and excel) and challenge (pushing them out of their comfort zones to stretch in key areas). This idea is represented by The Enabler Model (sometimes called the Support/Challenge Matrix). It was first devised in the 1960s by Nevitt Sanford, a US psychologist looking at how college students best thrived under their teachers.

The table on the right shows four broad styles of leadership and the potential consequences for individuals within the team. As you look over each box, ask yourself what impact such consequences are likely to have on aspiration, ability and engagement? All of your direct reports would likely benefit more from ‘enabling leadership’, but think specifically about those who are most valuable to the future success of the organisation. Review the five behaviours of an Enabling Leader. Which of these do you recognise in yourself, and which could you work on further?

## THE ENABLER MODEL



## FIVE BEHAVIOURS OF AN ENABLING LEADER EXAMPLES IN ACTION





## EXERCISE

1. Which of the four categories of leadership outlined in The Enabler Model do you predominantly reside in? What effect does this leadership style have on the individuals in your team, particularly those who are high potential?

*For example; I tend to make massive demands of my staff, have high standards and expectations and always expose them to stretching activity and responsibility. I make the assumption that they want to be out of their comfort zone, have inner belief in themselves and I forget that they might need support and coaching. This has led to individuals feeling out of their depth, insecure and avoiding asking for help and support.*

2. What, if anything, is currently stopping you from achieving enabler status, e.g. a lack of comfort when giving development feedback? What steps can you take to address this?

*For example: Further reading required around how I can give better feedback. See the information on the everywomanNetwork about models I can use for giving feedback in 1-2-1s with direct reports.*

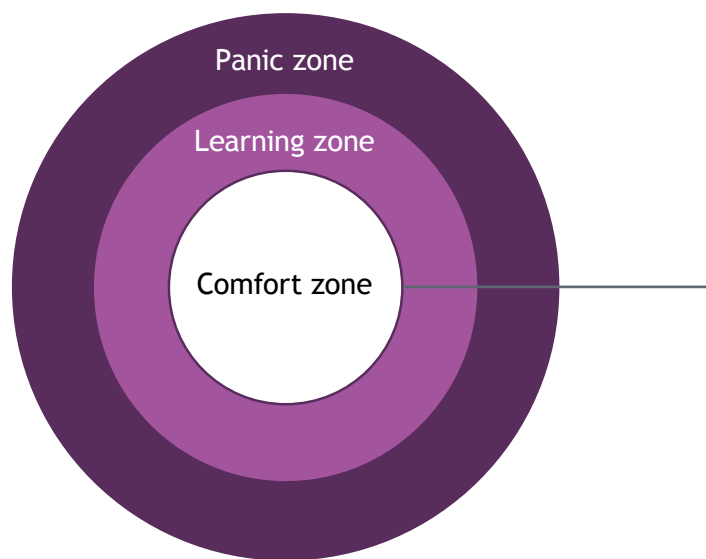
## CRITICAL EXPERIENCES

High-potential individuals should be exposed to as many critical experiences as possible, as a way to reinforce their abilities, aspiration and engagement levels. These opportunities are crucial for the development of high-potential individuals and there are countless examples of the types of experience that are important.

<b>EARLY STRETCH ASSIGNMENT</b> Pushing the comfort zone boundaries early into a new role or career.	<b>WORKING IN DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS</b> Opportunities to learn from different departments and cultures.	<b>PEOPLE MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY</b> Leading others.
<b>INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS &amp; GLOBAL ROLES</b> Experiencing foreign cultures and environments.	<b>JOINING AN EXECUTIVE COMMUNITY</b> Stepping up in the hierarchy and working with senior figures.	<b>CORPORATE 'INTRAPRENEUR'</b> Demonstrating entrepreneurial behaviours while working in a large organisation.
<b>CHANGE AGENT</b> Identifying opportunities for transformation and seeing these through.	<b>'TURN AROUND' PRO</b> Establishing a reputation as someone who can turn failure into success.	<b>OPERATIONAL EXPERIENCES</b> Understanding the mechanics of the wider business.

SOURCE: DR INES WICHERT (2011)

For some high potentials, seizing these kinds of critical experiences will mean stepping out of the comfort zone into a place where they can learn and develop. As a manager to a high potential, you will need to work with the individual to move beyond the confines of their comfort zone. This means ensuring they can move into the 'learning zone' (where development occurs), but not forcing them to make such a leap that they go into the panic zone and consequently retreat back to comfort.



27%

of everywomanNetwork members admit they are in their comfort zone

(member poll: October 2015).

Further reading on the comfort zone

[Enter the learning zone: six steps to job satisfaction and career growth](#)

[Seven reasons you're stuck in your comfort zone](#)

A good leader exercises caution when awarding stretch assignments that offer guaranteed success or rewards. By 'shielding rising stars from early derailment' or by making it impossible for them to fail when they leave the comfort zone, you ultimately fail to develop or test your high potential. Before assigning something new, ensure that the task requires them to gain or develop a skill they are currently lacking.

**“True leadership development takes place under conditions of real stress.”**

How To Keep Your Top Talent, Harvard Business Review

### Procter & Gamble: A Case Study

Managers at Procter & Gamble created a set of complex, high-impact positions that offered steep development and learning opportunities, and then set out to identify high potential candidates to fill them. To be considered for what were termed ‘crucible roles’, candidates needed the right qualifications, stellar leadership skills and a development gap that matched the specific position.

As a result of running this targeted program, P&G measurably increased the percentage of employees qualified for promotion: More than 80% of P&G’s high-potential employees are ready to take on critical leadership roles each year - putting the company at a tremendous talent advantage when the going gets tough.<sup>12</sup>

### EXERCISE

1. What critical experiences can you create for the high-potential talent you’ve identified within your team? Think about the nine different types of critical experiences, and identify four or five that are most relevant to your organisation and the high-performing individual/s you work with. What steps will you take and by when?

*E.g. is there a crisis in one area of a department that could be a turnaround opportunity for a high potential?*

2. Thinking about each of your high-potential employees, where do they currently sit in terms of the comfort zone? What steps can you take to inch them into the learning zone, while taking care to avoid the panic zone?

## BECOMING A SPONSOR

Mentorship is a key component of the Enabler Model. But research shows that as high potentials move up the career ladder sponsorship is also critical to success. In fact, people with sponsors are 23% more likely to achieve senior positions than those without.<sup>13</sup>

### MENTORS...

Are a sounding board, a source of advice, support and guidance as needed, expecting little in return.

Guide mentees through relationship building, helping them to identify useful networks.

Usually share business interests or characteristics with the mentee, i.e. 'someone to look up to'.

Help a mentee prepare for a promotion or stretch opportunity.

### SPONSORS...

Offer guidance alongside critical feedback because they have a vested interest in seeing their protégés succeed.

Connect the protégé to influential figures, requiring a great deal of trust and belief in them in order to advocate for them.

Are not necessarily someone the protégé looks up to or wants to emulate - they are essentially gatekeepers to the next opportunity. Their own role or interest may be of little importance.

Approach a decision maker and vouch for the protégé.

## EXERCISE

1. Explore your sponsor credentials. Against each of the points below, note a) any examples of a time when you have demonstrated these behaviours, and b) how, where and when you will have further opportunities to do so again.

**Offering critical (developmental) feedback to high-potential individuals:**

*e.g. a) I deliver feedback in a timely way through 1-2-1s.*

*e.g. b) Complete the ewNetwork workbook Giving & Receiving Feedback to ensure I'm doing all I can in this area.*

**Connecting high potentials to a wider network:**

*e.g. a) Inviting high potentials to networking events/conferences I'm attending.*

*e.g. b) Asking HiPos to stand in for me at senior meetings when I'm unavailable.*

**Opportunity gatekeepers:**

*e.g. a) Networking widely with other departments to keep abreast of secondment opportunities.*

*e.g. b) Taking more of an active interest in organisational areas outside my own sphere.*

**Vouching for a high-potential:**

*e.g. a) Ensuring that recognition is attributed to specific individuals during departmental meetings.*

*e.g. b) Ensuring skillset of HiPo is widely known by offering their services to leaders most in need of their particular strength for one-off assignments.*

## SECTION III: WHAT CAN GO WRONG: AVOIDING BIASES

As you've discovered methods for identifying and managing high-potential talent, you've already uncovered some of the common mistakes that managers and organisations make along the way.

These include failing to distinguish between high performance and high potential using other arbitrary measures to decide who should be defined as top talent or falling into styles of management that undermine 'enabling leadership'.

Another pitfall for identifying and managing high-potential employees is bias. As you study your team members looking for high-potential criteria, you may be influenced by natural biases that impact your judgment. You are probably already familiar with these eight types of bias; here is an example of how they apply to high-potential talent spotting.

### HALO EFFECT

The tendency to generalise one aspect of an individual's good performance to their overall performance, resulting in weaknesses critical to overall ability being overlooked.

### HORNS EFFECT

The tendency to generalise one aspect of an individual's poor performance to their overall performance, resulting in a high-performance or potential individual being overlooked.

### CENTRAL TENDENCY

The tendency to give 'middle-of-the-road' evaluations so that one can avoid having to justify high or low scores. This can result in both underperformers and high potentials going unchallenged.

### ADJACENCY

The tendency to be swayed by successful/unsuccessful projects, which may not have been influenced by the individual. An individual's development is then likely to fall by the wayside.



### LENIENCY

The tendency to generally view people's performance favourably, which can mean identifying too many high-potential individuals (when in fact they're average or simply high performers).

### SEVERITY

The tendency to generally view people's performance unfavourably, meaning too few individuals are considered for their high potential.

### STEREOTYPING

Allowing personal biases and prejudices arising from stereotyped views of groups of people to distort evaluation of actual performance. This can mean, for example, that someone with a particular geographical or educational background is discounted as high potential.

### REGENCY EFFECT

The tendency to be most influenced by the last observations made and to disregard earlier contrary evidence. This can mean that someone who has only recently stepped up their game can be given undue consideration as a high potential.

### EXERCISE

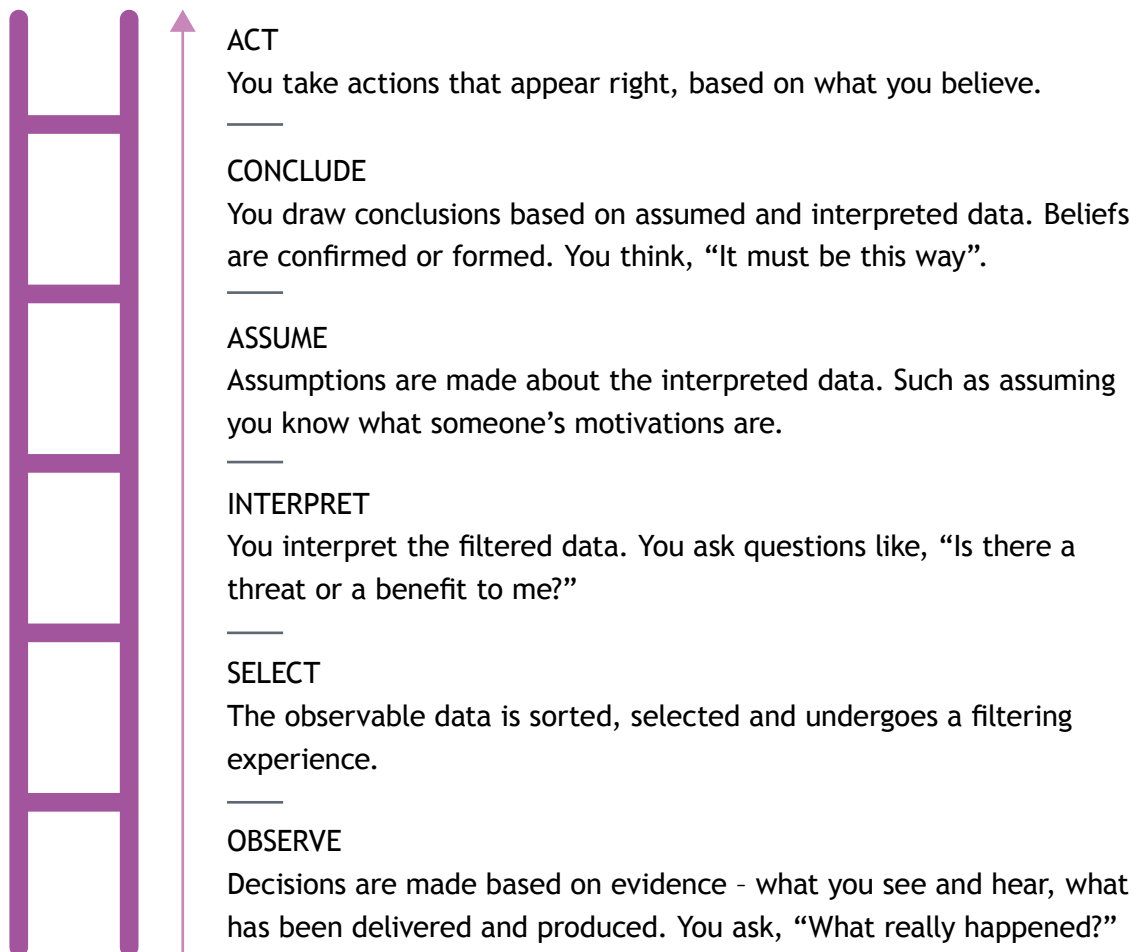
Can you identify other examples of occasions when you have personally demonstrated a bias? What about a situation where you've witnessed a bias in someone else's judgement? What was the outcome?

# THE LADDER OF INFERENCE

If you are in any doubt about whether biases are playing into your decisions about individuals and their high-potential nature, the ladder of inference is a useful reference for working out your thinking process.

How did we get from a fact to a decision? What steps did we take and what thoughts and beliefs came into play when deciding how to act?

The ladder can be used to identify general patterns in our thinking and behaviours, uncover everyday bias or to analyse and unpick a significant workplace event.



Using the ladder of inference:

1. Choose a problem or decision and then identify where on the ladder you currently are. Are you still observing, or have you already decided what to do? Or are you somewhere in between?
2. Assuming you are not still at observation stage, work back down the ladder, challenging your reasoning at each stage. This allows you to trace the facts back to the bottom rung, where you see the bigger picture based on evidence.
3. On each rung examine what you are thinking and why, paying attention to any alternative routes that you dismissed or ignored and the validity of any additional data you're using.
4. Now begin working back up the ladder, challenging your choices, assumptions and decisions, ensuring you aren't demonstrating any of the biases outlined above.

## EXERCISE

Think about a big workplace decision you made recently that involved other individuals. Using each step of the ladder of inference, what can you discern about the merits of your decision? Did any biases come into play? Be as honest as you can, even if it means uncovering flaws in your thinking.

**ACT:** You take actions that appear right, based on what you believe.  
*Consider this: Did your actions reflect your beliefs?*

**CONCLUDE:** You draw conclusions based on assumed and interpreted data. Beliefs are confirmed or formed. You think, “It must be this way”.  
*Consider this: Were you open to other conclusions? Did you have any doubts about your conclusions?*

**ASSUME:** Assumptions are made about the interpreted data. Such as assuming you know what someone’s motivations are.  
*Consider this: Did you ask enough questions?*

**INTERPRET:** You interpret the filtered data. You ask questions like, “Is there a threat or a benefit to me?”

*Consider this: Did you consider all viewpoints or perspectives? Is there an alternative interpretation that you chose to ignore?*

**SELECT:** The observable data is sorted, selected and undergoes a filtering experience.

*Consider this: Did you have enough evidence to begin with? What did you miss or ignore?*

**OBSERVE:** Decisions are made based on evidence - what you see and hear, what has been delivered and produced. You ask, “What really happened?”

*Consider this: Did you ask the tough questions? Was this a situation you were well-informed about?*

## YOUR PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

This workbook will have given you the key principles for the successful identification and management of high-potential individuals. It's now over to you to create a strategy for how you'll use what you've learned.

1. Summarise why it's important to you personally to identify and better manage the high potentials in your team.

2. Have you identified a high potential in the course of completing this workbook? What criteria have you used to measure them? Do they have aspiration, engagement and ability?

3. Highlight three steps you can take to better manage your high potentials in the short-term. What will you do and by when?

4. Highlight three steps you can take to better manage your high potentials in the longer term. What will you do and by when?

5. As you strive to become a dedicated manager of high-potential talent, what particular biases might you personally need to be mindful of?

6. What additional help, support, learning or resources can you draw on in pursuit of correctly identifying and managing high-potential talent?

# EVERYWOMAN EXPERTS

Everywoman creates workbooks on topics that matter to our network members. We draw on member surveys and the latest thinking from the academic and business worlds, as well our own experiences as we navigate our careers. Each workbook offers practical advice, enabling tangible actions in your daily work lives ahead of those important performance reviews.



## Maxine Benson MBE & Karen Gill MBE

Co-founders of everywoman, Karen and Max have spoken to thousands of women about the challenges they face at work. Through their own journey of starting a business, they uncovered a real need for a network where female entrepreneurs and businesswomen could interact and share experiences. The everywomanNetwork, launched in 2013, serves as a truly global tool to enable members the world over to propel their careers through online membership.

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Any topics you'd like to see covered on the **everywomanNetwork**?

We'd love to hear from you: [contact@everywoman.com](mailto:contact@everywoman.com)



## FURTHER READING

### everywomanNetwork resources

*Leading A Powerful Team* (Workbook)

*Navigating Your Organisational Landscape* (Workbook)

*Making The Most Of Your 1-2-1s (for Managers)* (Workbook)

### External resources

*The HR guide to identifying high potentials* (CEB)

*10 reasons your top talent will leave you* (Forbes)

*The Acceleration Trap* (Harvard Business Review)

## ENDNOTES

1. The HR Guide To Identifying High-Potentials (CEB: 2014)
2. See <https://hbr.org/2010/05/how-to-keep-your-top-talent> and <http://www.ucop.edu/human-resources/management-development-program/2014/Donna%20Handout.pdf>
3. <http://contact.bpcc.org.pl/Issue15/views/hr/Shl.aspx>
4. <https://www.cebglobal.com/blogs/the-6-behaviors-that-characterize-hipo-employees/>
5. <https://hbr.org/2010/05/how-to-keep-your-top-talent>
6. <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/163130/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>
7. <http://wango.org/NGONews/February11/CLC.pdf>
8. <http://www.ucop.edu/human-resources/management-development-program/2014/Donna%20Handout.pdf>
9. <http://wango.org/NGONews/February11/CLC.pdf>
10. *Where Have All the Senior Women Gone? 9 Critical Job Assignments for Women Leaders* by Ines Wichert (Palgrave Macmillan: 2011)
11. <https://hbr.org/2010/05/how-to-keep-your-top-talent>
12. <https://hbr.org/2010/05/how-to-keep-your-top-talent>
13. Centre For Talent Innovation

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