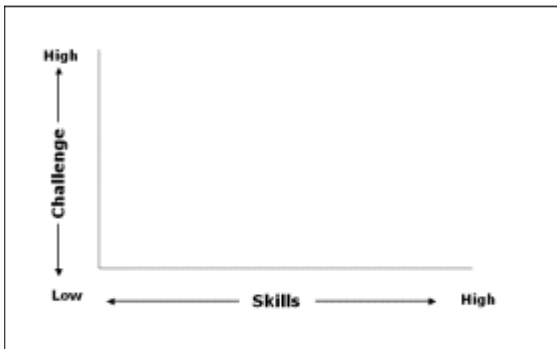


Does Your Employee Development Strategy FLOW?

When you hear the words 'Employee Development' what are the first few words that are brought to mind? For many, the words 'training' and 'skill development' are the first to emerge. We often take a one-stop shop approach to developing our employees, with the majority of our employee development budget spent on classroom training courses. While developing new skills can be an important element to developing our employees, there are really three elements to a person's performance: skills, knowledge and talent.

A skill is defined as knowing how to perform a task and the degree of expertise with which you perform a task. Knowledge is defined as what an employee knows based on experience. Talent, however, is defined as the innate love of a thing. It can't be learned or acquired. When these three elements of a person's performance are in alignment, the employee is able to achieve peak performance.

In his book "Good Business", Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi introduces the concept of FLOW. The concept of FLOW is simple. When developing an employee, you must understand and find a balance between the right amount of skill that someone currently has, and the level of challenge that is being presented to the employee. When skill and challenge are in balance the employee will achieve a state of FLOW, or of being in the moment, completely engaged and motivated to achieve business results.



For example, if an employee has a low skill level in a specific area, let's say project management, and you want to give them a stretch opportunity to grow their project management skill set and so you assign them to lead a very high profile project with a great deal of complexity, and a high level of risk.



Some employees will thrive and rise to the occasion. Other employees, given the same opportunity will be paralyzed and their performance will suffer.

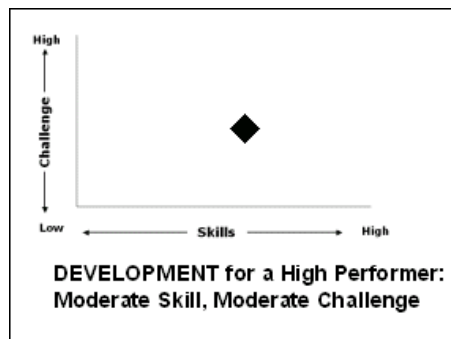
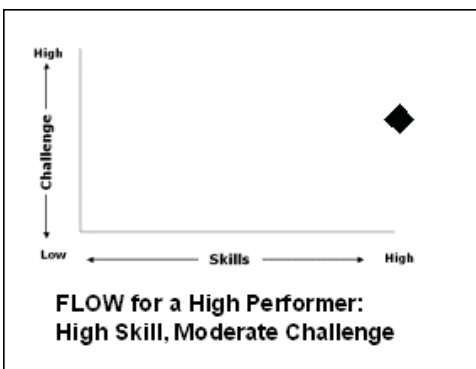
On the other end of the spectrum, someone who is highly skilled might be given an opportunity for on the job learning but the challenge level is too low, and so the employee loses motivation and underperforms.



The balance will be different for each employee. The balance will also be different for the specific skill you are targeting for growth for that employee.

High Performers are those employees that are your subject matter experts. They have deep skill, deep knowledge and an innate talent for the work that they do. They get energy from using their deep skills, and consistently delivery results. They may not thrive when asked to take a high challenge assignment. It puts them at risk to step out of their identity as the one that can deliver consistently and have the answers to an arena in which they may not know the answer. High performers tend to thrive in an environment that has some degree of predictability and structure.

The FLOW for a high performer is often reached when they have moderate challenge and are using their deep skills. When providing opportunities for growth, monitor the level of challenge and make sure it does not grossly exceed the current skill level. Provide opportunities that allow for skills and knowledge to be attained in linear steps, instead of asking them to leap from where they are now to 10 steps ahead.



High Potentials are those employees that may not have a deep skill set, but have initiative, drive and innovation. They have an innate love of learning and continued growth. This will not be your employee that wants to dive deep, to be the subject matter expert. High Potentials get energy from learning and having a variety of tasks to complete. They may not thrive when asked to take an assignment that asks them to use a skill that they have already mastered where challenge is lacking. The High Potential loves to perpetually stretch. They gravitate toward change and will actively seek opportunities for which they do not have the skills to complete the task but have great confidence they will be able to jump in and figure it out as they go. Their identity tends to form around the rush of accomplishing a task and learning as they go.

The FLOW for a High Potentials is often reached when they have high challenge and low to moderate skills. When providing opportunities for growth, monitor the level of skill that the employee has. Be sure to elevate the level of challenge above their current skill level. Within reason. If they have low skill, provide moderate challenge. If they have moderate skill, provide high challenge. Provide opportunities that allow for skills and knowledge to be attained dynamically, through hands on learning.

