

# How to nurture high-potential employees



High-potential employees, or HIPOs, typically stand out among their peers based on superior performance. They often master their roles and responsibilities early in their tenure and look for additional opportunities to excel. Proactive companies try to make the most of their highest-performing talent, and building a HIPO (AKA fast track) program often makes sense.

These provide superstar employees (i.e., those in the top fifth percentile) with greater exposure to different roles, meaningful training assignments, and more progressive career paths through several managerial positions across the organization, both to “challenge the superstar” and to retain those with the highest capabilities. For example, General Electric developed the best-known HIPO program, which typically lasted two years and historically included rotational leadership assignments.

Even smaller companies and nonprofits can customize a program around their highest performers. Follow the three guideposts below to structure and customize a program that meets each individual’s needs.

## Help with résumé building

Top producers and high-potential employees thrive on building their résumés and LinkedIn profiles. As long as they sense that they’re on a fast track—adding value to the company while garnering new skills and accomplishments that they can bullet on a résumé—they will likely remain in place with high levels of job satisfaction and personal engagement. Employee recognition is key to their growth and professional development, so finding ways to publicly acknowledge their accomplishments is a smart strategy.

Remember that from a leadership perspective, you will always get a greater return on investment when building on people’s strengths rather than trying to manage their shortcomings. As you do at the gym, focus on strength

training to build HIPOs' self-awareness and individual potential.

## **Fostering an achievement mentality**

Focus HIPOs on increasing revenue, decreasing expenses, or saving time. You must help them quantify their results in terms of dollars and percentages so they can track their concrete achievements over time.

While this should be a part of all employees' development, it's particularly significant for HIPOs because they desire to demonstrate progress in their careers and toward their own goals. Overachievers thrive on accomplishment. Building out their technical-specialist and management-focused career tracks tends to work exceptionally well with top performers.

## **Paying it forward**

Partner with HIPOs to create personalized individual development plans or IDPs. IDPs focus on short-range, mid-range, and longer-term goals. They tie career aspirations to the organization's broader needs.

They may include new certifications or licenses, greater exposure to senior leadership or other parts of the organization, and one-on-one mentoring and coaching. Ensure that you meet at least quarterly to assess IDP progress—business changes too quickly to only hold such meetings once per year.

Most important, place HIPOs into the role of "paying it forward." Creating the space and expectation that those with the greatest skills can share them with others fosters a sense of selfless leadership that, for many, creates the highest levels of career satisfaction. As the saying goes, you cannot give away anything you don't already have.

Placing HIPOs into positions of influence where they can share their wealth and talents is likely the greatest way to cement loyalty to the organization while building a personal brand that lifts others and builds a stronger sense of teamwork and camaraderie.