

How to Treat High Potential Employees

High potential employees, as the name suggests, are workers who have the potential to become great. Many companies turn to these employees when they're looking for future leaders and managers. After all, it's much easier and less costly to...

Method 1 of 3:

Showing Your Appreciation

1. **Let your employees know if they're high potential.** Many companies make the mistake of not telling their high potentials that they are high potentials. This can lead to feelings of frustration and lack of recognition, which will make your employees more likely to look for work elsewhere. Instead of keeping them in the dark, tell them what they mean to you and the company.^[2]
 1. For example, you might have a private meeting with them to let them know you consider them high potential or fast-track material.^[3]
 2. You could say something like, 'Angela, I want you to know that we consider you one of our most promising employees. In fact, we're hoping you might be interested in transitioning to a more managerial role at some point in the future.'
 3. Studies show that most high potential employees are aware of their status, even if their employers don't tell them. However, open recognition leads to higher job satisfaction and productivity.
2. **Tell them how much you appreciate them.** If your employee is making a real, positive difference for your organization, let them know that you recognize their efforts.^[4] This could mean anything from sending them a note to treating them to lunch as a thank you for their latest work.
 1. Public recognition is a great motivator for high potential employees, and it's also a good way to show other employees which behaviors you value most.^[6] Send a company-wide email congratulating your employee for a job well done, or recognize them on your social media accounts.
 2. You could post something on the company website like, 'Thanks to Hildebrand for going above and beyond this month! We're so happy to have you on our team.'

Did you know? Researchers have found that companies that recognize employee milestones and offer Years of Service awards are more likely to retain their best employees.^[5] Reward your high potential employees for their loyalty to encourage them to stick around longer!

3. **Ask them what they want and need from their job.** High potential employees will be more likely to stick around if they feel like you care about their needs and will listen to what they have to say. Give them frequent opportunities to express any concerns they have, and work with them to figure out ways to improve their job satisfaction.^[7]
 1. For example, you might have a one-on-one meeting or send out a survey asking your employees for feedback.
 2. You could ask things like, 'Do you feel valued at your job?' or 'On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your work-life balance?'

3. This shouldn't be an empty gesture—make sure to follow through on meeting your employees' needs. For instance, if they say that they need more flexibility in their schedule, you might offer to let them work from home on some days.
4. **Create opportunities for visibility with company leaders.** High potential employees do best if they know that top ranking members of your organization are aware of them and care about how they are doing. Encourage company leaders to spend time with your high potentials one-on-one and talk to them about their work experience.^[8]
 1. For example, you might arrange a meeting between your CEO and one of your top high potential employees. Let your CEO know what kinds of contributions your employee has been making and explain why you believe they have strong leadership potential.
 2. If you are a CEO or someone in upper management, check in with high potential employees on-site and see how they are doing. Ask them how you can help them and if they're satisfied with the kinds of development opportunities they're getting.
 3. Company leaders can also be great mentors or coaches for high potential employees.
5. **Work with your high potentials to shape their career track.** As your high potentials advance in the company, don't just assume you know what's best for them. Talk to them about where they see their careers going and what they're most interested in doing rather than simply deciding their path for them.^[9]
 1. For example, you might say, 'We have an opportunity for you to lead our sales team at the regional office in California. Are you interested?' If they say no or that they can't move right now, work with them to find other opportunities that are a better fit.
6. **Offer frequent pay raises and bonuses.** While good pay is just one of the many incentives that helps keep high potential employees around, it's an important one. Offer your key employees a competitive salary and benefits, and be generous with raises—even if they're not necessarily due for one according to your company's typical schedule.^[10]
 1. If you get wind that one of your high potential employees has gotten an offer from another company, be prepared to give them a more generous counter-offer.
 2. While good pay is a great incentive, don't rely on financial rewards alone. Your employees will feel most valued if you combine pay with other types of incentives, such as employee recognition programs, scheduling flexibility, perks like vacation days and equipment upgrades, and thoughtful non-monetary gifts.^[11]

Method 2 of 3:

Developing High Potentials

1. **Offer management training courses.** There's a good chance your high potential employees are already doing great things, but it's important to keep challenging them and helping them build their skills. If you're hoping that your high potentials will take key leadership roles in the company someday, offer special training opportunities, such as classes, workshops, and seminars.^[12]
 1. For example, you might offer to pay for your high potential employees to take special certification courses or join a professional organization that can help them develop their leadership skills.
2. **Pair your employees with compatible mentors.** One-on-one mentorship and coaching is a vital part of employee development. Not only is it a great way for your high potential employees to learn new skills, but it also helps them feel recognized and appreciated on a personal level. Make an effort to match your employees with mentors in leadership positions who can help them learn new skills, understand company politics, and find opportunities for learning and advancement.^[13]
 1. If your company doesn't already have a mentorship program, look into starting one. Developing a program with a defined structure and goals can make it easier to pair your employees with mentors

who can meet their needs.^[14]

2. For example, you might have potential mentors and mentees complete surveys about what they hope to get from the mentoring experience and what they have to offer, then make matches based on the results.
3. **Provide opportunities for on-the-job training.** Practical, hands-on experience is one of the best ways to keep high potential employees engaged and help them learn new skills. Give your high potential employees assignments that are designed to challenge them and teach them new things.^[15]
 1. For example, you might offer your high potentials developmental job assignments, which are temporary assignments specifically designed to build skills that your employees don't use during their normal work.^[16]
 2. For instance, if your employee normally works in back end development, you might have them temporarily work on content marketing or some other position where they develop materials for the public.
4. **Assign your high potentials tasks with real responsibility.** Your high potential employees will feel more challenged and appreciated if you give them substantive work that can really make a difference for the organization. Don't just tell them what to do—give them the opportunity to take charge of something.^[17]
 1. For example, you might ask them to co-direct a project with you, or put them in charge of supervising a small team of employees.
 2. Don't be afraid to let them make mistakes. It's part of the learning process!
5. **Focus on development opportunities that will hone the right skills.** If you're hoping that your high potentials will eventually take on leadership positions in your company, work on teaching them skills that will help with that. Keep on top of changes in your industry and try to get a sense of what will help your employees stay competitive going forward.^[18]
 1. For example, in today's constantly evolving workforce, leaders who are aware of what other organizations are doing have an edge. Give your high potential employees opportunities to work with partner companies and organizations so they can bring outside perspectives to your organization.^[19]

Method 3 of 3:

Identifying High Potential Employees Effectively

1. **Assess whether your employees have the ability to learn new skills.** In order to have high potential, an employee needs to be quick and flexible. Watch your employees carefully to get a sense of whether they're good at picking up new skills and adapting to new situations—not just at doing the things they already know how to do.^[20]
 1. The most adaptable employees are not only bright, but also creative and imaginative. Look for workers who are good at thinking outside the box and coming up with creative solutions to problems.

Tip: Companies like the Anderson Leadership Group have developed tools specifically for assessing employee potential and readiness for leadership positions. Consider using tools like these to figure out which of your employees are high potential.^[21]
2. **Look for employees who get along well with others.** Don't ignore your employees' personalities when deciding if they're high potential. No matter how bright, adaptable, and creative they are, an employee who has anger issues or can't get along with their coworkers is likely to create problems in a leadership

position.^[22] Look for employees who have strong social skills, such as:^[23]

1. The ability to cooperate with others
 2. Good conflict management skills
 3. The ability to network and form new connections
 4. Dealing calmly and constructively with difficult or high-pressure situations
3. **Check for high levels of drive and motivation.** High potential employees are self-motivating, driven, and determined to succeed and grow. Look for employees who are eager to work hard, take on extra responsibilities, and keep learning new things.^[24]
1. The most driven employees are often willing to make sacrifices and endure a certain amount of inconvenience in order to keep gaining the skills and experience they need in order to succeed.
 2. For example, a high potential employee might be willing to pick up and move to a completely unfamiliar part of the world if they felt that it would benefit them and the company.
4. **Keep an eye out for employees who are interested in making a difference.** One of the best indicators of employee potential is that they show a genuine interest in having a positive impact—on the company, their coworkers, and their community. Look for signs that your employees are invested in making your organization better and not just advancing their own self interests.^[25]
1. For example, they might eagerly share their ideas for improving the workplace or actively participate in company events and initiatives—even those that aren't directly connected to their job responsibilities.
5. **Watch for an interest in growth and development.** High potential employees are always seeking to better themselves, and recognize that the potential for growth and learning is limitless. Watch out for employees who are never satisfied with the skills and experience they have, and keep looking for opportunities to learn and try new things.^[26]
1. For example, they might volunteer for new types of assignments or seek educational opportunities without any input or encouragement from management.

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