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## Talent Traps

A huge amount of energy and effort are going into the identification and development of “talent.” Does all this effort produce real value for a company, or is it merely the latest fashion in organizational “interventions”? If you are involved in a talent assessment of any kind, here are a few of the most common pitfalls to avoid.

### 1. The Halo Effect

Once someone has been identified as “talent,” a big investment in development usually follows. This could be coaching, special training, or special assignments designed to give further visibility.

The person then “owns” the development, but the organization that has made the investment doesn’t “own” the individual. For the individual, the designation and development investment make good resume material. That makes him or her even more valuable outside the company. This is particularly likely to happen when there is no real understanding of the individual’s own interests and plans, as in most succession processes.

### 2. Expectations and New Needs

Sometimes a person is slotted for a position but new business requirements intervene. This may happen when a company needs to introduce a new product for which new knowledge and experience are necessary. That means that although Frank may have been being groomed for the position, it may be necessary to hire from the outside. Frank is going to be pretty disappointed and feel set up.

### 3. “Real” Talent Identification

Most talent identification processes are highly dependent upon a person’s direct manager. If your manager doesn’t see you as talent, you aren’t likely to be picked. But managers tend to be myopic. If a person isn’t good at sales but has a talent for marketing, that marketing talent is unlikely to be recognized by a sales manager. It’s more likely that sales colleagues will recognize the marketing talent and ask their colleague for marketing ideas, than that the direct manager will.

### 4. Self Assessment and Talent

People rarely value what they are best at because it is easy for them. They are more likely to value what is hard for them. So, individuals don’t always know what their talents are. Or, particularly if they are at a high level in the organization, they may have an inflated idea of their talent, particularly management talent, because no one has told them otherwise.

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So, how do you avoid these talent traps? Here are some quick ideas: First, make sure that anyone who gets special development treatment gives back to the company or the workgroup what they have learned. For example, ask them to run a training event for others in their department to share their new knowledge and skills.

Second, make sure you build into your talent or succession programs the possibility of hiring from the outside. Integrate new talent into your organization by credentialing them carefully

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## Ask Us...

### “A bird in the hand...”

*Question:* I received one job offer, but it’s not the one I want! A second company is promising to hire me—they say I’m perfect, exactly what they are looking for, but they can’t make an offer yet even though they said I’d have the offer by now. I’ve already asked the first company to extend my decision time once, and I don’t want to ask them again. They need to have a decision from me by the end of the day today. The second company told me to refuse the first offer and wait for *their* offer. What should I do?

*Answer:* First of all, you need to do what is best for you in this situation. Don’t let yourself be pressured into a risky situation. If you really need a job, take the first one and don’t wait around for the second company to follow through and make you an offer. A real job offer is better than a real *promise* to make a job offer.

On the other hand, if you have a job that you can keep for a while and can afford to take the risk, turn down the first offer and wait for the second. (I wish our readers better luck than our poor questioner, though. That promised second offer never actually materialized.) ■

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## Success Stories

*Names and some facts about these clients have been changed to maintain confidentiality.*

### "I'm just lucky!"

Just as many people do, Warren started his career in customer service. "I did it well, so my boss just assumed that if I could do it, I could teach others to do it. So, I put something together and tried to figure out what worked, first coaching people individually and then in groups. I knew I was much better teaching it than doing it."

Warren's boss supported him in this new direction by sending him to conferences and workshops. "I discovered there's a whole career path in this! It was so exciting to me, I went on to get my master's in training and development. So, that's how I found the career I love. A combination of luck and a boss who supported my new direction."

### Mary Faces a Decision

Mary, a senior investments professional, was a quiet person, unlike many of her peers. Judging by investment results, she was a star performer. Judging by personal style, she was overlooked by management. This was frustrating to her. She tried to act with the bravado she thought was called for, but she just couldn't fake it.

When a peer with a poorer record but the "right" personal style was identified by management for the special development opportunity, Mary knew she had to act. Should she go to Human Resources and complain? Should she go to her manager? Should she just leave and move to a place that cared about results?

What should Mary do? Email us your suggestions at [pclaman@career-strategies.com](mailto:pclaman@career-strategies.com). In our next newsletter, we'll let you know what your suggestions were and what Mary actually did. ■

## Talent Traps Cont'd

*continued from the front...*

during the integration process and asking them to share any special knowledge and to mentor internal talent.

Third, be sure your assessment processes include client and peer contributions, filtered to be nonpolitical. A valued outsider who knows the organization and its needs can make a big difference by identifying untapped talent or talent in the wrong job or just people who aren't good at promoting themselves but have a lot to contribute. ■

## We Recommend...

### *Coming this month...*

A new book by Monica C. Higgins: *Career Imprints: Creating Leaders Across An Industry*, Jossey Bass, Warren Bennis Series

### *Coming this summer...*

An updated version of Human Resources White Paper for those of you who are using it in courses or classes. It will include the impact of outsourcing on HR.

### *Coming this fall...*

A superb workbook by Lewis C. Paine III detailing what a new manager has to do in the first thirty days on the job in order to be successful.

### **Ask...**

*How to Get What You Want and Need at Work*

The book by Priscilla H. Claman

Available directly from Career Strategies at 617.227.5517  
and also from Amazon.com. Copies are \$14.95 each.

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