

The Oakridge Voice

Talent Release

The Oakridge Voice has never been afraid to challenge some of the rather glib catchphrases that can so often limit our thinking and expectations of others. “Talent” is one of those words that seem to trip off the lips far too easily and there is sadly no shortage of advice. As an antidote The Oakridge Voice challenges nine key assumptions.

Stop talking about talent as “human capital”

Human beings cannot simply be reduced to such an artificial and debased construct. They do not appear on balance sheets nor profit and loss accounts. Respect their individuality, their capacity to think for themselves and their ability to see beyond light-weight corporate-speak around that internal marketing-catchphrase “people are our greatest asset”.

Stop trying to “drive performance” through talent

If you are needing to drive talent then you still do not have people committed to drive themselves. Understand that intrinsic drivers are far more powerful than external motivators and tap into a deeper well of commitment, ability and aspiration. Talent is not a reluctant or resistant force but a positive stimulus to change and to quality performance. If you are needing to drive it, constantly check up on it, or bribe it that your leadership is ineffective and inefficient.

Stop Managing Talent

The challenge is not to manage but to lead. Talent can manage itself and should be left to do so --- often they are brighter, more contemporary in their approach, more energised than so-called “managers”. The task is to lead people not to manage them. They can manage themselves. And the goal is to make productive the specific strengths and knowledge of each individual. Peter Drucker . Good leadership, rather than micro-management, provides the framework and establishes the culture which excites and releases talent.

Stop measuring short-term targets or tick-box annual KPIs.

They limit aspirations rather than release real potential. After all, you may only get what you set out to measure rather than explore the great unknown and fulfil untold wishes. They may not measure anything of importance. Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted. Albert Einstein

Stop thinking of talent as being a select few or “Top 20/50/100”

Recognise the strength of the talented many --- within every organisation rather than focus merely on the “extraordinary few” who so often tend to be the focus of Organisational Talent Management Programmes. Why focus solely on the 2% - 5% when there is a spirited, capable and committed 80% - 85% who may well make a far greater team-minded contribution?

Release talent and be more hands-off.

In a VUCA world allow talent to be disruptive, to question thinking and old habits, to challenge mind-sets. Become more demanding of talent, not less, and allow its own “relentless momentum”. Be prepared for the unexpected. Learn to let go and to be hands-off. Develop internally the same free-spirit and risk-taking entrepreneurs demonstrate externally.

Free talent from conventional “formal training”

Only a small percentage of learning takes place within workshops or from experts. Create instead a modern learning environment which places more emphasis on cross-functional collaboration, challenging new opportunities followed by reflection on experience, feed-forward rather than feedback, taking risk rather than playing safe. Place more responsibility on individuals to learn rather than creating over-dependency on the Organisation to teach. Set the tone for people to think for themselves, develop their own capabilities aligned to organisational needs, and challenge both their own performance whilst supporting others.

Enjoy rather than dread the challenge of change

Creating the “Great place to work” is all about creating a supportive, optimistic environment. Enjoy it. Change is a challenge, certainly, but a positive one which harnesses our own capacity for development, our own excitement of the new, and our own ability to find new ways forward. Create the mind-shift that sees change as an opportunity and move away from seeing change as exceptional and take an action-packed ride.

Focus on the end result -- performance

Talent, potential, engagement, development, are a means to an end. No more, no less. It is the end result that counts and that end result has to be performance. The burning question may well be, therefore, do you really know what “performance” means for you? Have you boxed yourself in or narrowed your aspirations? Define it, discover it, and then focus on it.

The Oakridge Voice