

Volume 34**The Question**

"I am hearing from my people that they want to know their future with the company. How do I handle this?"

A Perspective

There are several barriers that get in the way of having this conversation with your people:

1. It took enough effort to do evaluations; career plans and development plans are seen as extra work.
2. Individuals wait for their leader to do it for them.
3. It's hard, not fun, so leaders make excuses for months or years about not doing them.
4. Leaders fear that a career plan equates to a promise of a future role or employment.

(NOTE: In general, I consider "development plans" and "career plans" to be essentially the same thing, with one difference: development plans focus on one to 12 months while career plans focus on one to five years. To simplify this discussion, let's use the term "development plan" to refer to plans that span from one month to five years of personal development.)

In Daniel H. Pink's book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, he outlines the three core motivators for people: autonomy, mastery and purpose. I have spent two decades focused on my own professional development and working with individuals and leaders on theirs. When I reflect on that experience in conjunction with Pink's three motivators, a clear, three-tiered ROI from having a written development plan emerges:

1. It provides a clear target to work toward for the next 12 months and will fuel accomplishment of key business goals.
2. It creates clear ownership for the individual and will become a key part of retaining your best people.
3. It will quickly define your A, B and C players (see my trUTips on [A](#), [B](#) and [C](#) players), allowing a more strategic, objective view of who are the top performers and who are not.

Your Action Plan

Remember what a development plan *is not*:

1. a promise of a role in the future
2. a bunch of expensive training classes
3. another thing you have to manage as a leader

Remember what a development plan *is*:

1. a path for the individual to pursue mastery and purpose
2. a key method for focusing the development of your people on your key business goals and desired outcomes
3. a defined plan that can be presented to key people in a position to help the individual pursue goals that matter to them (i.e., retention and team development)

Step 1: Establish a rhythm — at least monthly — of (a) reviewing the individual's past performance, (b) setting their goals for the next 30 to 90 days and (c) clarifying their current role and responsibilities. Include opportunities for the individual to give you feedback on what support they need and how you are making their job harder as a leader.

Step 2: Start following up on all performance conversations with one to three development goals for the individual. These goals should be three- to nine-month commitments by the individual, and must be well-defined and meaningful goals.

[\(See my SMART-Er worksheet for assistance with SMART goals.\)](#)



Strategic People Reminders for the Busy Executive

Step 3: Consider an outside support resource that is 100% focused on helping support these conversations. Generally, your human resources team is *not* that resource.

Step 4: If you're frustrated by a lack of follow-through by an individual *and* you feel like you're doing everything as a leader to support their success, consider replacing that person. My advice would be that if the individual in question is in a role where all you need is a solid B player and they have a positive attitude, then let them know you are okay with an average performance in their role and focus your development efforts on other people. This might sound harsh. Remember, though, that great development is about *honest conversations* that lead to thoughtful actions *and* improved performance. Actions have to be owned by the individual. By not following through, they are saying that improved performance is not important to them, but solid is. If that's okay, then that should be the honest conversation.

Do you need help building your capacity to have these conversations? Are you not convinced of the ROI? Do you see your leadership team struggle to have these conversations? Contact me. Scott@thetrugroup.com

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