



# INSPIRE GROWTH

Leadership Insights  
to Develop  
Star Performers

—THE—  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
—GROUP—



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# This Leader Has a Plan for Inspiring Team Growth. Do You?

Do you maximize the talents of your team members? Have you learned to minimize unproductive conflict, and focus the energy and drive of your team? Do you have a comprehensive approach for inspiring star performance?

Mary Terp, Director of Human Resources for the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, has experienced many different “pieces” of professional development. “In the past, some people did Myers-Briggs, and some staff members completed other assessments. It was piecemeal. Individuals would go to a workshop, come back to the office and then put their learning on a shelf.”

A patchwork approach to team development rarely results in the kind of high power collaboration that leads to an increased bottom line.

## **A Complete Solution for Professional Development**

After participating in the Talent@Work® seminar, Mary experienced a more comprehensive approach.

First, Mary learned about herself. What passions drive her? How does she deal with problems and challenges? How does she relate to people, tasks and procedures?

Next Mary explored how other people differ in their passions and approaches. With these insights, she immediately saw how to minimize conflict and improve communication.

Self-awareness. Other-awareness. Those are two key components of emotional intelligence and together they form the cornerstone of all high performing teams: trust.

“As an HR professional, I love the line on your website that explains the value of Talent@Work®: ‘You can put together the most talented group of people you want, but if they’re not trusting and engaging, they won’t be high performing.’”

## The Importance of Hiring for Fit

Seeing how these pieces come together created one “aha” moment for Mary. Learning that communication style, motivators, and emotional intelligence can be used to hire more effectively inspired another.

“So often in recruiting, you focus on hiring the best candidate—the most qualified, the most experienced. What became clear to me is that we also need to make sure we have a great fit with our team. And we have to make sure those highly talented people are collaborating together.”

## 4 Steps for Improving Collaboration

So how exactly do you get people to work better together? Do what the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley is doing:

**Step 1:** To get the entire organization focused on emotional intelligence, Mary invited Shawn Kent Hayashi to conduct a workshop on the topic. “The EQ workshop and the book offered us a structure for getting our staff up to speed on emotional intelligence—what it is and why it matters.”

**Step 2:** “Next we’re rolling out the Talent@Work assessments to all staff this year. In the seminar, I learned how to run our own assessment center, so we’ll be able give and debrief assessments in-house.”

“The assessments will give all of us a common language for working together and will improve everyone’s self-awareness. This will impact how we interact with each other and with the people we serve in the community. We’re looking forward to incorporating awareness into our everyday language and our everyday work.”

**Step 3:** “We’re also going to job benchmark our positions as you taught us to do in the seminar. Job benchmarking will give everyone clarity about who does what in our organization, and it will help everyone understand exactly how to succeed in their role.”

**Step 4:** “Finally, we’re incorporating all these components into our talent management processes including our one-to-one meetings, annual performance planning and review, and development and succession planning. Doing so will keep this methodology alive in our culture and avoid having it collect dust on a

shelf.”

**The United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley is finished with piecemeal professional development. “We’re really excited about having a comprehensive approach to managing in-house talent and becoming a high performing team.”**

“We’re also grateful to The Professional Development Group for generously providing this expertise as an in-kind service. High-performing staff enhances the organization’s ability to provide leadership, convene partnerships and develop the resources and solutions to improve our community. By helping us improve the effectiveness of our team, The Professional Development Group is enabling us to have a greater impact on the community.”

The Professional Development Group LLC is proud to partner with an organization as committed to improving its own people as it is to improving our community.

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# Conversations for Performance Improvement

Do you ever deal with someone who seems stuck? Perhaps stuck in the past way of doing things? Or maybe stuck in a resentful story? Do you know what to do to engage the person to get unstuck and improve his or her performance?

Even high performers can get stuck. They may not be able to problem solve through a difficult situation, or perhaps a personal crisis has affected job performance. Sometimes even corporate decisions to freeze hiring and promotion can stretch people too thin or syphon away motivation for excellence. Whatever the situation, a conversation for improvement can often make the difference in helping people get unstuck. Not only that, but these conversations can also grow trust and respect in the relationship.

Two paths are possible here: Some people know they are off track and bring the issue up. Others are oblivious to the problem. You will want to handle these two situations differently.

If there is already safety and trust in your relationship, the person may approach you to discuss whatever challenge he or she is facing. Resist the temptation to provide answers. Instead, problem solve by asking these questions:

- Looking forward, what could be the best possible outcomes? List a few possibilities
- Where do you want to go from here to move toward the best possibility?
- What do you really want to accomplish?
- What will you need to focus on for this to happen?
- What are the current obstacles you'll need to overcome to move in the right direction?
- What is the first step you will take to begin moving in the right direction?
- Who else could help you with this?

Questions encourage new ideas and open up pathways for new thinking. The

person you are talking with may now be able to envision ways for moving forward. If this does not occur, you can provide specific guidance and insight to actions, behaviors, and next steps that will get things back on track. Using this method of asking questions instead of providing answers allows others to benefit from your management experience while also collaborating in the problem-solving process.

Employees who are oblivious to being off track can be more challenging to redirect. How can you help these people become aware of problems without triggering fear or anger?

First, begin the conversation by indicating your willingness to assist in the problem-solving process: “This is not working, and it’s time to create a new solution. Let’s do it together.”

Second, reconnect to the bigger goals or values that both of you share.

Third, offer specific feedback or guidance to recalibrate actions and behaviors. Directives that give a clear picture of the next steps are useful to people who are stuck. A clear directive is something like, “Keep a time log in 15-minute increments starting immediately following our meeting, and track how you use your time during the next three days.”

Fourth, give difficult feedback by first explaining what the person does well and then pointing out what could be better. “Juan, you have done a wonderful job providing the research and procedures for the team. My intention now is to help you see the next area for your development as a manager. I’ve observed that you sometimes shut down creative brainstorming with judgmental questions and comments. I suspect that you are not aware that this is happening. Are you open to learning more about communicating more effectively with other team members?”

Fifth, if necessary, communicate the serious nature of a situation. Say something like, “This issue is bigger than I suspect you understand. I want you to take this very seriously because if this is not resolved, it could cost you the trust of your team members (or your job).” You do your employees a service by showing them how management sees them, especially when the issue is so serious that it could derail their careers.

World-class leaders are not afraid of conflict because they know how to get individuals back on track. Knowing how to ask the right questions and engaging

in conversations for improvement is vital in developing star performers and high-performing teams. It's also the key to growing your own leadership abilities.

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# Conversations That Inspire Growth

Create a step-by-step plan that shows people how to accomplish more and achieve proven results. There is a fine line between fixing people and inspiring them to grow. Training managers to inspire employees and teams is vital to an organization's success.

Developing star performers requires many meaningful conversations beyond the performance review. A conversation can be powerful and inspiring or flat and dull or somewhere in between. Are the conversations managers are having in your organization currently creating engagement and momentum?

There are 10 conversational strategies blueprinted in "Conversations for Creating Star Performers." One of them is the Conversation for Developing New Skills. Before that conversation takes place, though, it is necessary to have a Conversation for Building Awareness.

This is the point in a conversation that determines if you are crossing a line with someone: If you begin to tell an adult how to develop a skill and he or she is not asking for that know-how, you have skipped over an important awareness-building conversation. People being trained need to acknowledge and understand why it is important for them to develop the skill. They need to ask to learn the skill. How do you get them to ask? Begin with an awareness-building conversation. Managers need to realize that knowing how to create this conversation effectively makes the difference between an eager learner and a resistant, defensive non-participant.

When raising awareness of a skill that needs developing, ask questions such as:

What one skill or ability would you most like to develop? Or what one skill, if you were able to perform at a higher level, would have the greatest positive impact on your career now?

What is important about XYZ ability to you (or your role)?

How would having the ability benefit you?

Who do you know who is particularly good at XYZ ability?

What do they currently do differently than you do?

How do they think about or approach XYZ?

Is there anything you realize they do not do that you are currently doing?

What else do you notice about XYZ?

Want to know how this sounds? Imagine I am managing Isabella, who recently was promoted to lead the Sales department even though she did not ask for the move. She was wildly successful managing the customer service team, and now for the first time in her career she has to start delivering large presentations to customers. You've noticed she seems anxious about this.

After greeting each other, here is how the conversation unfolds:

Shawn: What skill or ability will be most important for you to develop to be successful in your new role?

Isabella: I'll be delivering client presentations, which is something I did not do in my prior role.

Shawn: Who do you know who is particularly good at presenting?

Isabella: Juan is a great presenter. He captures the audience's attention immediately by sharing a story or example that links to the topic.

Shawn: What else does Juan do that causes him to be a presenter you admire?

Isabella: He knows his material so well that he can take questions at any time without being nervous. I guess that is because he has practiced so much. I want to be as good at presenting as he is.

(You've now heard her say she wants to develop this skill; keep the momentum going.)

Shawn: How do you think Juan approaches practicing and preparing for a presentation? What does he think about and practice as part of his preparation?

Isabella: Hmm, I never thought about that. Juan probably thinks about who is going to be in the audience and what they need to know. He always seems to be prepared for any type of question that will be asked, but he has probably thought about what the audience is likely to be questioning. He also has an agenda he has

prepared in advance. He stays with his agenda for the most part, but at the same time he is flexible enough that he can move off of it if the audience changes focus.

Shawn: Yes, I agree. Is there anything you think Juan does not do in preparing for or delivering a presentation?

Isabella: Well, I've never heard Juan use filler words such as um, uh, or OK. He also does not look nervous because he stands up straight and has eye contact with the person or group he is presenting to. That is something I need to work on because I know I say um and OK too much when I am nervous. I realize this is something I need to work on.

(She has the desire to develop this ability for herself now; keep the momentum going.)

Shawn: Sounds like you want to be an outstanding presenter, too. What else do you notice about people who are great presenters?

Isabella: They tell their own stories, not jokes that don't fit with the message or theme of the meeting. They have several stories they can use to connect with the audience, and they rotate from facts and data to stories and examples.

Shawn: Those are great observations, Isabella. You mentioned you want to be as good at presenting as Juan is. I'd be willing to work with you on developing this ability or provide an opportunity for you to attend a training program. (Isabella is nodding with a facial expression that looks like she is excited about the possibility.) Would you be willing to practice doing the things you've described during the next week? Will you put together a sample presentation and deliver it for me next week so we can observe what you are doing well and where you may need to make some adjustments in your delivery? ...

Triggering a feeling of desire for growth before training begins sets the stage for a great learning experience.

Another version sounds like this:

When you think about the people who are doing what you really want to do, what skill have they developed that you have not yet developed? What is the next skill you want to develop within yourself? Can you think of someone who has that ability already mastered? If your role model could learn the process, the step-by-step actions to take to accomplish results, you can do it, too! Did you know you will make more progress by focusing on developing the one skill that is

holding you back more than any other? However, you have to be the one who decides to identify and develop your blind spots and weaknesses. It does not work when someone bullies or uses fear-based incentives to make you develop your weaknesses—that creates only resentment and bitterness. You do not need to be fixed! If you already have developed your strengths and you are now on a plateau feeling stuck, you can decide for yourself to look in the mirror to see what is holding you back from where you want to be now. You can summon up the courage to focus on developing the ability that will create momentum for you next. It is your choice.

Isn't it time to show managers in your organization how to have these conversations? You'll see the payoff in eager learners who are inspired to grow.

### Case Study

Imagine this real-life scenario. A manager, Alex, told me his goal was to lead his employee, Bob, to change his communication style and preference about how he engages with other people even though Bob had never expressed the desire to do this.

I realized Alex was in fix-it mode with Bob. Alex had crossed a line that would cause failure if he continued in this way. Alex had to change his expectations of what was possible in developing Bob as a performer in the role he was in. The fact was that Bob was not a good fit for the work that needed to be done, and no amount of pushing on Alex's part would change this. This is what I said to Alex:

Alex, are you saying you've set a goal to change Bob's core communication style and preferences about how he engages with other people, but Bob himself has not expressed this as a goal? And your motive for doing this is because you want your boss to view you as a strong leader?

Alex replied happily, "Yes! Shawn, you understand completely what I am doing."

I replied with a warm expression indicating no judgment in my tone or body language as I carefully explained the situation. We had to do some unpacking on his position.

There were two layers of influence in Alex's goal that were worth examining. If Bob had not expressed a desire to modify his communication style preferences to be better aligned to the work he is responsible for, asking him to do so when he did not see the connection would cause him significant stress. If Bob decided on

his own that this was his goal, it would still take a great deal of focus and energy for him.

The second issue was that highly effective leadership is not about convincing people to change their natural core style, strengths, and abilities. Leadership is more about identifying the natural talents that are already there and playing to those, developing the potential that is there now, and moving those employees into the roles that need the talents they have. We are viewed as effective leaders when we put the right people into the right roles, so there is a match between what the job naturally rewards as a results of the work that is being done in that role, and what the employee brings to the table.

I sensed that Alex wanted to make a square peg fit into a round hole. He wanted the first chair violinist to put down the violin and instead go play the piano. That would be painful—even more painful than admitting Bob was not the right fit for the role he was in. Why not help that square peg find a role that needs a square peg and then find a round peg for the work that needs to be done here?

As he reflected on what we discussed, Alex evolved his own thinking and posed his new question for our coaching work together: How could he develop people based on who they were and put the right people into the right roles that will bring out their natural talents?

### Developing Skills Takes Time

As a trainer or manager, you are facilitating a development process by asking questions and sharing guidance, experience, and direction at the time they are most helpful. You may be modeling or demonstrating exactly how to do it. Providing opportunities to practice repeatedly leads employees to being at first consciously competent and later unconsciously competent.

Some skills or competencies will be easier for us to develop than others. What was something that was easy for you to learn to do? What was something that was easy for you but harder for someone else? Do you recall something another person learned much more easily than you did? I've observed that those people who have struggled to learn how to do something are often better trainers of that material than the people to whom it came naturally and who did not have to work at learning it. When people struggle to learn a new skill, they focus on each step. They practice over and over until they gain mastery. That practice becomes a gift in that these learners see distinctions in the skill development steps that others

miss. These insights enable them to be better observers and to give clearer feedback to those they are coaching.

As a developer of star performers, create a step-by-step plan that shows people how to accomplish more and achieve proven results. You'll need to create a document that shows off your track record. Do you have a plan to give your employees that provides them certainty and confidence that if they take the steps you've listed, they will produce the desired results? If not, you should begin to do so now. Break it down into actionable chunks that are sequenced from beginning to end in a framework of understandable elements that lead to clear milestones and outcomes. Ideas and action steps are the organizing pieces of your managing content. One of the distinguishing factors of success for world-class managers is the energy, enthusiasm, and optimistic confidence they have because they can share how to accomplish the desired results. Collect uplifting stories about people who have succeeded despite obstacles when developing the abilities you specialize in. Insert words and phrases that will help your employees feel inspired and believe in themselves. Here are a few to get you started:

I have confidence in you because I have observed you doing XYZ and I know if you can do that, you can learn how to do this, too!

If you put your mind to it and stay focused on achieving the desired result, you are going to succeed!

What was something difficult that you learned how to do in the past that now you do consistently well as a star performer? How did you learn how to do it? If you learned that, you can learn this, too!

If you have seen others do it, you can learn to do it, too. It may take you time, but if you are committed enough, you will be able to learn how to do it, too.

To be inspiring and connect the dots showing why having the new ability will be beneficial, you'll likely have to unpack some thinking your trainees currently have and put new beliefs in place. Guiding aspiring star performers to identify a specific skill they want to develop is only part of the process. By being a life-long learner yourself, share your stories about how you learned the skill. This will build rapport and trust with your audience.

The performance review conversation is only one part of being a successful manager and coach. Every day, choose from the menu of conversations that

create star performers as you talk with your team members. Are you ready to be known as the person who is able to engage, grow, and inspire others?

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# Developing Star Performers

Employees who receive frequent criticism without acknowledgment of their strengths and abilities are being mismanaged. It's our responsibility as professional managers to see clearly what others do well.

When you point out to your employees how to use their communication style and abilities to add value to your department, you show that you've taken the time to really get to know them as individuals, well enough to give advice about playing to their strengths and capabilities. With employees that aren't a great fit for their current roles, you can take note of their strengths and guide them towards a role where their talents and strengths would be a better fit.

When you have these conversations with employees-about their strengths, capabilities, their fit into a particular role-you create a positive emotional wake. By pointing out what people are doing well, how they are moving a project forward or how they add value to the team, you are building a positive emotional wake. Conversely, when we criticize or try to fix other people, we are creating a negative emotional wake in that relationship.

If you find you're creating a negative emotional wake, turn it around by instead thanking others for what they bring to the team. You want your employees to hear what you say supporting opportunities for powerful, positive development. That requires you to clearly ask for what you want, with a tone that shows you really understand each employee's strengths, preferred communication style and motivators. Convey the belief that they will be able to perform the task you're asking them to perform. Be known as a leader who inspires star performance.

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WE DEVELOP  
Inspiring Leaders &  
High Performing Teams

## WHO WE ARE

The Professional Development Group guides organizations to develop high performing teams and inspiring leaders. We work with leaders who want to grow their business by bringing out the best in their people, their teams, and themselves. With our clients, we create great places to work by building collaborative teams, developing star performers, and coaching leaders who are committed to growth.

## SHAWN KENT HAYASHI

*Founder & CEO, High Performing Teams Consultant, Executive Coach, Author*

As a global expert in developing collaboration, star performers, and high-performing teams, Shawn facilitates growth in leadership ability, emotional intelligence, and communication skills – the tools needed to create strong relationships, high-performing teams, and effective presentations. She guides leaders to achieve positive, lasting changes in behavior – for themselves, their people, and their teams.

To learn more, [visit our website](#) and connect with us on social:

