



District
Management
Group

10 MISTAKES TO AVOID

Developing High-Potential Leaders

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Keep these ten lessons in mind to effectively build a strong pipeline of high-potential leaders.



10 Mistakes to Avoid

Developing High-Potential Leaders

Building a strong pipeline of high-potential leaders—those special teachers, staff, and administrators who perform at a high level and display the potential to grow and take on responsibility—is essential to district success. To do this effectively, districts must adopt strategies for identifying and developing these individuals and must systematize a cohesive approach. Keep these lessons in mind:

Don't forget to emphasize talent management.

Many districts' human resources (HR) functions focus on compensation, performance reviews, benefits, and similar compliance-related domains. Robust talent management goes further by strategically managing recruiting, staffing, and developing talented people to advance district goals.

Don't rely on external hiring.

External hires may have the skills and experience to fill openings immediately, but they are less likely to succeed in leadership positions than internal promotions. Cultivating internal high-performers allows districts to target development to meet district needs as well as to support strong and stable leadership.

Don't underestimate the impact your top people and leaders have on results.

A district's top performers are responsible for an outsized share of results. To maximize results for the district, it is worth identifying high-potential teachers and leaders early on and creating a separate track to allow them to develop their skills.

Don't confuse past or current performance with future potential.

Many amazing staff are exactly right for their current position, but that does not mean they necessarily have the potential to become one of your district's future leaders. Look at factors beyond current performance in order to ensure you are developing the right people to lead the district forward.

Don't forget what potential looks like.

Assessing future potential means looking for those top performers who have the *ability* to think and learn new skills, the *aspiration* to take on new responsibilities and become leaders, and the *engagement* to work well with and inspire others throughout the district.

Don't forget to tell them.

Telling high-potential individuals that they have what it takes to become leaders and that they will receive targeted development increases their motivation and decreases the chances they will leave the district. Research shows that it is better not to let this go unsaid.

Don't leave talent development to formal PD programs.

Over-relying on formal training makes it hard to target specific development needs. Instead of counting on mandatory, undifferentiated PD sessions, systematically provide opportunities for on-the-job learning experiences, coaching, and learning from others.

Don't forget to leverage the power of on-the-job learning.

Accelerate the development curve for high-potential leaders and help them gain the experience they need by enlarging and enriching their jobs with new projects and responsibilities that require them to learn additional skills, or by rotating them through different positions when appropriate.

Don't forget the power of coaching.

Performance coaching has proven to be a strong tool for improving the learning of critical lessons, with 90% retention even weeks later. And yet, coaching is underutilized as a form of professional development by the majority of districts.

Don't forget to measure your results.

Don't forget to track and analyze promotion, retention, and turnover rates and levels of engagement. Districts that define the correct metrics and establish systems to measure them are better able to make adjustments and ensure continued alignment with district priorities.