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Tip Top Talent: Topgrade Your People for Post-Pandemic Success

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As company leaders, our task is to manage the efficient restart of our companies. Regardless of the industry sector or how positively or negatively positioned a company has been through the COVID-19 crisis, we face a new business normal to varying degrees. As leaders, we want our companies to come back bigger, stronger, and better. Whether as an employee of a company who has remained busy, furloughed, or laid off, we also want our companies to come back stronger than ever. We want our roles to provide us as much satisfaction and career growth as possible.

The critical ingredient to company and career success in this new business era will be the people we are surrounded with as we embark on this journey. All organizations are only as strong as their people. And vice versa, professionals' careers are only as rewarding as their company and fellow employees. Around the world, we have been afforded a painful yet unique opportunity to positively improve the talent of professionals driving our company and our careers forward.

The concept and process of Topgrading talent was first developed by Brad Smart as an interviewing philosophy to seek out the highest quality workforce by ensuring that talent acquisition and development only focuses on the most talented and well-rounded performers. There are many strategic reasons to do so, which run the gambit of launching new products, services, and industry initiatives or the turnaround restructuring of a distressed business.

Two realities naturally occur in creating the need for topgrading talent. The first is that hiring even under the best practices is an imperfect science. Statistically, up to half of all employment decisions result in a mishire. The wrong person in the wrong job. The second is that as companies and professionals grow, expand, and develop, what was once a perfect fit no longer is. This is commonly referred to as the Peter Principle. Either the employee is not capable of the professional growth equal to the company growth, or the company is no longer capable of adequately investing in an employee's professional growth.

While this historically challenging time may appear an odd opportunity to address topgrading company talent and one's career growth, it is a perfect time to do so. All organizations, no matter how they have been affected, are looking intently at their business to understand how to improve what they do.

Whether it is to preserve cash flow or to bring a service or product to market that the world needs to cope with the crisis or new business normal, there is no better time to thoroughly review your teams for A, B, and C players than right now. Can the A player continue their strong contributions in their current role, or are they strong enough to take on more responsibility or lead a different strategic focus? What do we need to invest in our B players to grow

them into A players? Are they in the right seat on the bus, or is it further professional development that they need? For C players, it does not necessarily mean we do not bring them back if laid off or terminate them but first look at that seat on the bus they occupy. Does this C player bring better value to another role? Or do we need to make the painful decision to part ways with that employee?

To guide companies and professionals in making these decisions, emphasizing culture fit is the key first decision point. Do the company and employee mutually fit the vision, mission, and values of the company and is that professional a positive influence on those around them.

This could mean parting ways with a professional who technically is an A player but is a negative influence on those around them, which in the long run is a detriment to achieving company goals.

When rehiring those laid off or hiring new employees as we come out of the crisis, utilize specific behavioral-based assessments to identify their fit to your culture. Now is an ideal time to shed professionals with damaging, negative attitudes and poor behaviors, no matter their skill level. Talented professionals are looking at their career growth options more than ever since the Great Recession, and there you will find those who will better fit and improve your culture.

Technical talent will be the second focus. Often when conducting internal talent assessments, this can lead to the realignment of roles for B and C professionals should they closely embody a positive culture fit with some level of proven talent. When interviewing or rehiring, we must identify the core technical skills an employee must-have for a specific role and which technical skills can be taught. There is no perfect candidate or employee, just as there is no perfect company or job. It is a mutual journey of company and professional working together to grow and learn with one another daily. This goal drives home the importance of being astute when hiring or promoting professionals relative to their cognitive ability to learn skills vs. what is mandatory to be successful in a role from the first day.

The recruiting industry has for years called this the Purple Squirrel Syndrome. There are no purple squirrels, as there are no perfect candidates. The companies who build high performing teams understand this balance between what technical skill is necessary to have a mastery of when beginning a role and what skills can be taught.

Companies and professionals are encouraged to begin this topgrading assessment if they have not already done so. This process does not mean we do not care as a company or as an employee. Far from it. It means we care deeply for the ultimate success of our company or career. Recognizing the need to topgrade talent or careers is the ultimate spirit of collaboration, strategic thought, and positive intention to face down this crisis and become a stronger company or professional as we restart businesses everywhere.