

As a people advocate, one of your most important tasks is the timely and meaningful distribution of opportunity throughout your team. One reason it's so important is that it's the single most effective way to keep your employees engaged. Many managers think of opportunity strictly in the form of promotions, but when you consider how real-life careers are built, there's actually a much bigger pool of opportunity available for you to distribute.

Forms of Opportunity that Drive Engagement

Face Time

What causes employees to disengage? One of the most frequently cited reasons is that they feel their opinions aren't valued. A great way to increase the value the organization puts on someone's opinion is to include that person in higher level meetings. It not only distributes opportunity in a meaningful way, it gives your employees face time across departments and upwards to management. The organization also benefits by getting the good, bad and ugly of process, performance and execution, direct from the employee.

- **Invite** employees to meetings and tell them you expect them to participate.
- **Get their input** on what meetings they can contribute to and learn from.
- **Coach** them on how to participate productively and present their viewpoints in a compelling way.
- **Identify** other ways they can get exposure with decision-makers and benefit from the opportunity to shine.

Special Projects

At any given time, there could be dozens of "skunkworks" projects going on in your organization. Who on your team might be able to contribute? Use these projects as a way to distribute opportunity and allow people to explore areas they're interested in.

- **Align interest with responsibility:** People are much more engaged and productive when they're doing something they're passionate about.
- **Encourage self-assessment:** Special projects provide a safe environment for people to assess their own strengths and weaknesses.
- **Look for opportunities to break through plateaus:** When employees seem to be stagnating, these kinds of initiatives can help them discover interests and skills they might not otherwise realize they had.

Shadowing

It's very easy for employees in cost centers to become insolated in their routine and forget or misunderstand their internal clients. With shadowing, you can provide a systematic way to give these employees real-time, real-world interaction with their colleagues on the revenue side of the business. It also humanizes colleagues in a way that communication systems like support tickets, email and Slack simply can't. Use shadowing to:

- Establish greater client orientation across departments
- Let employees learn from each other, identify opportunities for process optimization and develop a deeper organizational understanding
- Increase face time

Mentoring

One of the best ways to validate an employee's performance is to ask them to mentor other employees who are interested in what they're doing.

- **Don't over-structure it:** A less formal process will foster more open and honest communication between participants.
- **Empower the mentors:** Let the employee decide how to do it in a way that will work best for them. Maybe the best mentorship between your employees happens after hours. Don't discourage it! You want your top performers evangelizing their performance methods any way they can.

Internal Openings

It's only natural to be nervous about internal transfers. You can't help but think, Who will replace my top performer if they move into this other role? What about the disruption this will cause? But an inwardly mobile workforce keeps top performers from becoming outwardly mobile. In other words, they stick with the company instead of jumping ship for your competitors. And then there's the simple fact that internal hires are far more likely to succeed than external hires.

- **Keep the bigger picture in mind:** Encourage your employees to consider career opportunities that will allow them to grow. When all people managers are systematically reviewing internal openings and advocating for transfers when the opportunity presents itself, the entire organization wins.
- **Build your agility:** If a top performer leaves, it shouldn't throw off your entire game. The reality is, anyone can leave at any time. Be proactive in your planning, allow for flexibility and change, and continually build relationships both inside and outside the organization to keep your bench strong.

Add Your Idea Here

There are as many forms of opportunity within an organization as you are willing to define. Employees don't expect to be promoted every other week, but they do expect to see a path forward. Challenge your employees, and yourself, to identify new ways to maximize the distribution of opportunity on regular basis, and you'll create a more engaged, productive and loyal workforce.