



# Moving High Potentials into Star Performers



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**TTI - The Assessment Company**



# Introduction

*One measure of an organization’s health is the state of its talent pipeline. Whether preparing for executive succession, filling open management positions as the need arises, or staffing new roles created by restructuring or growth, how ready is your company to fill key positions with star performers? The answer may fall somewhere between how many superior performers you have now and how many high potentials you are currently cultivating.*

*Forward thinking leaders don’t rely just on hiring superior performers or poaching established talent from competitors. They are mining their talent pool now, to deepen the engagement of existing stars while causing a whole new group of superior performers to emerge from the ranks.*

*These market leaders are getting a profit boost by making use of talent management systems. There is a wealth of expertise available to help employers better deploy talent, and data shows that strategic talent management pays off handsomely. Results from Ernst & Young’s Global Talent Management Survey show that companies that integrate and align business strategies with talent management deliver higher shareholder value. Those with the best alignment “had significantly higher financial performance [a 20% higher annual return on equity (ROE) over a five-year period] than those that did not.”<sup>1</sup> Going forward, successful competition in the marketplace is increasingly correlated to a company’s ability to attract, retain and develop talent.*

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# Bench Strength Starts with a Benchmark

The foundation of a strong talent pool is properly benchmarked jobs, since accurately measuring performance in a specific job is only possible after a standard for performance has been established. Ideally every position in a business is benchmarked, assuring that uniform, unbiased criteria define the accountabilities, skills, attitudes, motivators, behavioral style and experience that each job calls for.

It's best to let the job speak for itself, rather than having one or two people write a job description that will unavoidably reflect their own idiosyncrasies. An effective benchmarking process<sup>2</sup> will call for assembling a team of subject matter experts to collaborate on voicing the job. The expert team should include the top three performers currently occupying the position, top performers who have occupied the position within the last six months, the position supervisor, the manager, and one or two people in roles that interact with the job being benchmarked. The team should not include every person occupying the position, since that would lower the bar, resulting in hiring for and accepting diminished performance expectations.

The benchmarking process is a logical opportunity for re-aligning each position with the most up-to-date strategic business initiatives. The team will clarify why the job

exists and how it fits into the company's strategy going forward. As they define, weigh and prioritize key accountabilities, a clear picture emerges. The behaviors, values, personal skills and task preferences required for success in the position can now be used to screen a suitable candidate. A bonus is that the benchmarking process may also close past accountability gaps between positions that gave rise to recurring deficiencies in communication or productivity.

Planning for upcoming leadership needs starts with identifying priority management and executive positions for benchmarking. These would be the ones generally considered most at risk for vacancies and those with a known likelihood of someone leaving, followed by future positions planned to anticipate growth. It's important to assess the existing team against the benchmarks produced so that any gaps in the current team can be accounted for when planning for new positions, training, or succession.

The benchmark produced will provide unbiased marching orders for HR's hiring efforts, making it an invaluable tool for [Selecting Superior Performers Safely Under The Law](#).<sup>3</sup> Once jobs have been benchmarked, the critical competencies and attributes required for each job are used as guidelines both for hiring and for training high potentials to excel.







# Hire for Higher Performance

With jobs benchmarked, the next step is assessing staff to get the most detailed picture of each individual’s profile. Beyond intelligence and experience, individuals bring a unique combination of attitudes, behaviors, and skills to the job. Each of these factors has a direct impact on performance, determining whether the employee is average or exceptional in that particular role.

While a person’s behavioral profile is crucial for determining that they are an appropriate fit for the job, it’s a mistake to rely on behavioral match only. Just as hiring candidates with prior relevant experience is not enough to guarantee top performance, assessments that only describe workplace behaviors are not inclusive enough to most accurately predict potential performance.

According to Mindy Bortness, President/CEO of Communication Works, Inc, “Hiring managers commonly hire for behavior only. This can be intentional or unintentional. And it often results in turnover because the candidate wasn’t truly aligned with the position. You have to look from the outside in and from the inside out. From the outside in you see the person’s experience, and maybe you like them (behaviors). From the inside out, you have the TriMetrix®4 results (talents, motivators and behaviors). Smart people developed TriMetrix. Use the system because the system works. Believe your diagnostics, act on them, develop your people and you will experience terrific results and happy employees.” See Case Study 1 for Bortness’ creative use of motivational indicators to deploy and retain talented managers.

A comprehensive assessment process includes an analysis of the underlying attitudes and world view that motivate a person to action. When a job addresses the vital motivations equated to a meaningful life, job satisfaction and the potential for superior performance goes up. Before they can become stars, employees with high potential must be deployed in positions that align to their deeply held intrinsic motivations. The result is invigorated job satisfaction that leads to better retention, and with development, better performance.

The assessment must also include an analysis of the person’s competence in 23 universally recognized job skills. Proficiency with these skills, seen in Table 1, is what determines a person’s ability to work effectively with others, to manage themselves and to align with evolving company strategies so that key outcomes are achieved.

**TABLE 1**  
**Personal Skills**

- Accountability For Others
- Conceptual Thinking
- Conflict Management
- Continuous Learning
- Customer Focus
- Decision Making
- Developing Others
- Diplomacy & Tact
- Empathetic Outlook
- Flexibility
- Goal Achievement
- Influencing Others
- Interpersonal Skills
- Leading Others
- Objective Listening
- Personal Accountability
- Planning & Organization
- Problem Solving
- Resiliency
- Results Orientation
- Self-Management
- Self-Starting
- Teamwork



## Case Study 1 National Retailer

**Mindy Bortness, President/CEO of Communications Works, Inc. was hired by the new division of a successful national retailer to assist filling management teams for the division's new chain of stores.** Their goal was to set the new chain apart from the parent company by establishing a company culture that expressed their distinct consumer market appeal.

- TTI benchmarks were created for Assistant Manager, General Manager and District Manager positions.
- TTI TriMetrix Reports were used to assess candidates for Assistant Manager and General Manager positions, as well as managers already hired.
- Development programs were put in place using TTI University Online's Rx development options, making it possible for managers to address their own unique growth needs.

The client had already hired both a General Manager and an Assistant Manager before benchmarks were created. Assessments revealed that the GM was strongly motivated by the desire to give back to society and help others. Her job description was adjusted accordingly, to include the responsibility for creating store events that would generate revenue while contributing to the surrounding community and enhancing employee job experience.

The Assistant Manager completed an assessment which indicated his strong motivation to achieve aesthetic harmony. His job description was adjusted to include responsibility for new store launches, particularly aesthetic aspects such as signage and product placement.

Potential hires were assessed, with GMs compared to the GM benchmark, while Assistant Managers were compared to both benchmarks. The results indicated that some candidates could be fast-tracked, because their profile more closely matched that of a GM. In fact, some AMs were promoted to General Manager within two months.

The result after 10 months has been zero turnover in a market where turnover rates are currently at 30% and historically at 50%. Hiring right-fit employees and adjusting jobs to fit their strengths have supported retention to give the chain a strong start. As a result, Bortness has been tasked with staffing 30+ new stores in 2010.



# Identifying Potential Stars

A high potential is an employee who fits the benchmark for the position and measures above the mean on at least 18 of the 23 universally recognized personal skills. For example, strong personal initiative can be an indicator of a high potential candidate. As Stephen Blakesley, author of *“The Target—The Secret to Superior Performance”* points out, “Mediocre performers show up on time and meet deadlines without having to be prodded. Star performers go well beyond that, to work in the white spaces of their job description. If they recognize a problem, even if no one else knows about it, they attempt to solve it. They volunteer to help others when they see they have the knowledge that’s needed.” This ability to be self starting is one of many qualities revealed in an assessment that measures the application of personal skills on the job.

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Cultivating high potentials who are already within the ranks to become superior performers means they will be ready to step up as positions open. Promoting internal candidates who have been specifically developed to the needs of the next-step position also offers an opportunity for the business to ramp candidates up to full productivity more quickly upon entering the new position. Time to effectiveness in the new role is abbreviated for the employee who is already acclimated to the company culture and goals, in addition to saving the time and resources that would have been spent on a candidate search.





## Case Study 2 Engineering Firm

**Stephen Blakesley, Managing Partner of GMS Talent, LP, was hired by an engineering firm struggling with low productivity. Despite a corporate philosophy of only hiring the best, they still weren't as productive as some of their industry peers.** The initial evaluation confirmed that in fact, 77% of them were mediocre performers, 6% were low performers, and only 17% were star performers.

- Blakesley started by assessing employees and managers with a comprehensive tool that included an essential piece—measurement of EQ (emotional quotient.)<sup>5</sup>
- He created a tailored coaching manual using each engineer's TriMetrix<sup>®</sup> assessment report to create a unique development plan. This identified their specific strengths and managers used it to coach them on how to leverage their strengths in that particular work environment.
- Managers followed a regimented routine for the coaching session, meeting with each employee for one hour a month to focus on the 23 skills, EQ awareness, and work strategies. Development plans included teaching employees to understand how their emotions impact those around them at work.

The result was that when employees were assessed after one year of training, 20% had moved from mediocre to superior performance status. Billable hours were up 30%, while profit after tax increased by a staggering 25%. Blakesley reports, "Even those who started out as skeptics ended up as raving fans."





# Not the Same Old Training Day

Anyone who's ever wasted a day sitting through a completely unnecessary training, especially one they could easily have taught from the front of the room, will concede that great employee development is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Time and money are wasted when training isn't personalized to each individual's verified needs, causing some individuals to tune out or become frustrated.



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In the past, development often meant delays in delivery because of timing issues. Employees who genuinely needed immediate training for job effectiveness might be forced to wait months until the other seats could be filled. Getting all the right people in the room at the same time could be easily thwarted by travel, sick leave, vacations, etc., and in the meantime, performance stalls.

Sophisticated talent management systems offer development options that address the distinct needs of each individual, many of which can be accessed immediately. An internet delivery system combined with component-style trainings offers 24/7 access so high potentials can move forward faster. With their own unique set of strengths and weaknesses identified, employees use the system at will.

Rather than being a course or class, each individual training component in TTI University Online's Rx<sup>6</sup> development program is a stand alone information system that will identify more detail about a particular skill, with tips and suggestions about how to incorporate skill development into daily work life. They are designed to result in a consistent understanding of personal skills throughout the company and to help employees value having them in their working repertoires.

Managers refer employees to these components but don't have to memorize the definitions. Otherwise, development would become a tremendous burden on managers. They can choose between prescribing a training path or simply monitoring one that the employee self-manages. Either way, both the employee and manager can focus development efforts on assuring that the high potential employee is boosting performance in the current position while building the strengths necessary to perform well in the next one.





## Case Study 3 Food Manufacturer

**After three consecutive years of poor performance, the client hired Brent Patmos, Principal and Chief Thought Leader of Perpetual Development, Inc. In 2008 alone, losses totaled \$2M, and the company's lender had given them 18 months to reverse the trend.**

- The turnaround process began with a comprehensive assessment process that correlated to benchmarked jobs. Brent is adamant in saying, "There is no 'wiggle room' for hiring bias. For example, don't hire a candidate just because you like them. A benchmarked position is a must because it's the foundation for superior performance. If the candidate doesn't align with the benchmark, it's a no-go."
- Two new sales people were hired, and the VP of sales was replaced. The Perpetual Development group made sure that the entire sales team was a good match to the skills, behaviors and motivators that the sales benchmarks called for. Results from TTI assessments showed that the revised team fit the profile required for star performance potential in the job.
- Development plans were customized for each employee, using TTI University's online Development Rx's as a tool for each person to address the skill gaps that

their assessment identified. Using these resources expanded employees' understanding of their own capacity beyond their current performance.

- In some work groups, TTI Professional Development Series weekly seminars were used to establish a common language of performance that established consistency. For other teams, Perpetual Development delivered Dynamic Communication and Your Attitude is Showing single event seminars to quick-charge skills for an immediate return, such as when new employees need quick access to team communication.

Brent acknowledges that moving high potentials to star performance is a process that requires reaching every dimension of an individual's capacity. The first priority is assuring that there is alignment between the candidate and the company culture, because the individual must have the ability to develop relationships within the company that make it possible for them to utilize available resources in their entirety. They must also be willing to put in the required effort.

By the time the client reached their lender's deadline, Perpetual Development had guided the company through a process that resulted in a \$2.2M turnaround, posting a profit of \$200K for 2009. Going forward, the Perpetual Development team ensures that on-boarding of new hires automatically has a development focus.



# Summary

*As businesses around the globe see improvement in the marketplace, we're finding out what the new business-as-usual is. For many it has been shaped by lessons learned in an economy that requires making every dollar and every person count. More than anything, the new normal is defined by how effectively businesses deploy available resources, especially staff.*

*Fortunately, available resources include metrics that offer deep insights into every aspect of business that we care to examine, including people and performance. It's possible to know more, sooner, than ever before. If 'knowledge is power', which information can power increases to the bottom line?*

*Workforce analytics are demonstrating that the successful alignment of a company's talent with its business strategies fuels growth. Those that foster a continuous learning culture find that developing talent pays big dividends. Market leaders gain a competitive edge when they hire, retain and develop today's high potential employees into the superior performers they will need tomorrow.*





# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>“Sophisticated Talent Management Programs Drive Business Results”, Ernst & Young, May 24, 2010 [www.ey.com/US/en/Newsroom/News-releases/Sophisticated-talent-management-programs-drive-business-results](http://www.ey.com/US/en/Newsroom/News-releases/Sophisticated-talent-management-programs-drive-business-results)

<sup>2</sup>Target Training International, Ltd. and Performance Benchmarking, Inc., [www.ttidisc.com/products.php?product=jb](http://www.ttidisc.com/products.php?product=jb)

<sup>3</sup>“Selecting Superior Performers Safely Under the Law”, Research Report by Bill Bonnsetter, Target Training International, Ltd., October 2009 [www.ttidisc.com/people-energizing-people/2009/10/the-answer-is-eliminating-bias](http://www.ttidisc.com/people-energizing-people/2009/10/the-answer-is-eliminating-bias)

<sup>4</sup>TriMetrix® is a combination assessment report that measures world view, behaviors, motivations, values, and skills. By producing a ‘Gap Report’ between the individual and the job benchmark, it identifies both strengths and areas for improvement that can lead to enhanced performance.

<sup>5</sup>“TTI Emotional Quotient™ Leveraging Emotional Awareness for Effectiveness in the Workplace”, [www.ttied.com/images/4/40/Flyer\\_TTIEQ.pdf](http://www.ttied.com/images/4/40/Flyer_TTIEQ.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>TTI University Rx Online provides simple online delivery of independent learning opportunities at the employee’s convenience. For more information, contact a TTI Solutions Specialist at 800-869-6908



# About TTI

TTI Performance Systems, Ltd. is the worldwide leader in personal and professional assessment tools. With years of research and validation, TTI assessments are time-tested and proven to provide timely solutions for today's business challenges. Through a network of over 7000 Value Added Associates, TTI tools are utilized in over 50 countries and 26 languages to help businesses and organizations effectively manage their most valuable asset—people.

From recruitment to retention, TTI Performance Systems is a constant resource for new ideas and business applications. As a leader in the marketplace, we ensure the status of TTI assessments in the future by carefully managing our intellectual property and protecting the research and advancements TTI has made in the field. With several patents, copyrights and trademarks, TTI products are guaranteed to stand the test of time. Our staff is an expert resource in the assessment industry and continues to stay abreast of industry changes to enhance and expand the product line to provide unique solutions for the challenges businesses face everyday.