

Bring out the best in your

From coaching to mentoring to external courses, there are many ways to nurture and challenge your rising stars, reports MARGARET COLES

Colin Mcpherson/Vicki Couchman

Any organisation intent on survival today must master the art of nurturing "talent" — the people, in the words of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), who can "make a difference". But should you run programmes in-house or bring in external professionals? Should you elicit the help of a top business school? The stakes are high: get it wrong and your best and brightest may move on, taking potential future growth and profits with them.

Figures from the CIPD show that 95% of UK organisations rate in-house programmes as the most effective method. Such programmes can include both coaching, which focuses for short periods of time on specific skills and goals — and mentoring, which tends to involve a long-term relationship with an experienced senior colleague.

Standard Chartered Bank, for example, recruits 300 graduates a year from top management and business schools. These recruits join a two-year intensive programme, which provides training in technical knowledge, leadership development, team-building and listening skills. Line managers work with individuals and progress is regularly assessed. "Everyone gets development, but 'high potentials' get more, and move through the company ahead of their peers if they continue to perform well," explains Geraldine Haley, the bank's global head of talent management and leadership development.

"Many organisations focus on helping with weaknesses," she continues. "We prefer to concentrate on strengths. Individual performance objectives are agreed by each employee with their manager, and performance against these objectives formally reviewed twice a year and linked to bonuses."

Among the bank's high-potential middle managers, the focus is on career transition, developing strategic thinking and managing change. At the most senior levels, high achievers enjoy the attentions of in-house coaches, based in London and Singapore. "The aim is to develop their capacity to think about the future, their motivation and their ability to lead and deliver results," says Haley. "The

payback is fabulous. The results are measured through feedback from participants — and the fact that they tend to stay with the company."

Claire McCartney, principal researcher at Roffey Park, an institute focusing on leadership and management skills, recommends giving employees a development plan and encouraging them to take responsibility for their own careers. "Make sure that the learning you provide can be applied to the individual's work role, and that intellectual capital is shared with teams and retained," she advises. "One in three organisations fail to do this."

Bear in mind, too, that emerging talent has a low boredom threshold. "If Generation Y does not get what it wants, it will walk," warns Hugh Evans, director of corporate management programmes at Henley Management College. "If the UK market goes down, they'll go to Asia or travel for a year."

So how do you set goals that will maintain their interest? "Talented people need constant variety and challenge," says Dr Maria Yapp, CEO of Xancam, a business psychology firm. To keep up momentum, some business schools and other course providers have shortened their development programmes from three years to 18 months and typically balance learning modules with challenging assignments and projects. "Some people think made-up projects are okay," says Yapp. "But the most talented people want to do real jobs, with real risks and real benefits, such as increased market share."

"The most talented people have clear strengths," she adds. "They're not interested in developing things they're not good at. Some companies try to round them out, but that's a mistake."

Hot talent expects to be fast-tracked. These days that may mean an international assignment or high-profile project rather than a linear step up the ladder. And even traditionally bureaucratic public service organisations are learning to respond. The National Audit Office, for instance, puts its newly qualified young talent through a two-year programme —



PwC

SHAUN WILLCOCKS, 29, is a senior manager in PricewaterhouseCoopers' (PwC) risk assurance services, based in Manchester. He is two and a half years into the PwC Business Diploma course, run in conjunction with London Business School.

The course combines on-the-job learning with part-time study; participants choose six modules. "The Managing Change module gave me access to managers with varying experiences of what change management means," says Willcocks. "It helped me to understand how successful change depends on managing people and communicating to the wider business."

Willcocks, left, is now working on the Foundation Leadership module. "It makes a distinction between a manager and a leader and helps me to explore the qualities that are needed, such as the right level of gravitas and self-awareness."

Willcocks has support from his career coach, PwC partner Tim Brooke. "He helps me to set my objectives for the course, identifies areas I need to develop and directs me to opportunities in the business where I can do that."

"The course forced me to integrate my new learning. It challenged how I came across, which helped me to be more in control. That enabled me to raise my profile and in January I was made senior manager."

utilising workshops, coaching, networking and mentoring by senior managers — to reach manager level more quickly. "Departments are encouraged to advertise all jobs, and civil servants can apply for any post, including those one or more grades higher than their current position,"

says Helen Dudley, director of leadership and talent management at the Cabinet Office.

There is a danger, however, of over-taxing the best young people. Ali Gill, director of talent management consultancy Getfeedback, warns: "Beware of asking high-flyers to do too

much. They're stimulated by pressure, but as the jobs get bigger they inevitably have to make bigger compromises between work and other interests." Managers have to be sensitive to the fact the even the best people will make mistakes, she says. They must be able to distinguish

Get your talent noticed

- Stop trying to win everything. Win where it is essential and let the other stuff go
- Stop telling the world how smart you are
- Stop undermining others in a bid to make yourself look better
- Stop sucking up to higher management
- Stop acting like someone else
- Stop getting immersed in the detail

- Stop telling and start listening
- Stop expecting your career to fall into your lap — take control
- Stop focusing on the endless tick-list of things to do. Find out what's going to make the biggest difference and focus on that
- Stop hiding behind your desk. Get out there and network. Learn how you can make a difference in some of the big projects that really matter to your organisation

UBS

ORGANISATIONS with a global reach have the need and the opportunity to develop their people's leadership and managerial skills by giving them international experience. Maja Popp, head of learning and development for IT infrastructure at UBS, joined an international mobility programme after completing her degree at Zurich University 11 years ago. Graduate recruits who completed the UBS scheme successfully were

promised international assignments, and as Popp was judged a success, she was sent to America straight after the two-year programme.

As an HR specialist and deemed a high-potential individual, she has an inside track on people development at UBS. During her time at the bank, Popp has had access to both skills-based and managerial training. She has been mentored by two senior UBS people with different

perspectives to hers and is currently based in the New Jersey offices on a "stretch assignment" that has taken her from a position focusing on developing specific products to addressing the needs of clients in different regions.

"The stretch element has to do with demonstrating your ability, but you're being given an opportunity to go beyond your comfort zone. You grow into the position," Popp says.

company's top assets

between the talented person who occasionally "fails" and "someone who simply isn't going to make the grade".

PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC), a professional services firm with more than 146,000 staff in 150 countries, nurtures talent in a variety of ways. "For our very top-potential people we run a two-year programme to develop their leadership skills through mentoring, team-building, seminars, group workshops – and external projects to make them think about leadership in different environments," says Tim Richardson, the company's director of leadership and talent. "At partner and director level [the top two jobs], we offer several development programmes, including one on responsible leadership, where they explore their own understanding of themselves and the wider aspects of leading in a responsible way. They then work on a community project for four weeks."

Coaching – by both in-house staff and external professionals – is offered to people to address specific issues or at critical times in their careers, such as the transition to partner. One hundred senior people at PwC act as mentors, providing support and guidance informally over a lengthy period of time. In addition, PwC has joined forces with the London Business School to offer a diploma (see case study, left).

Among those turning to external professionals to help them nurture talent are the clients of Lane4, a business consultancy. Through Lane4 these clients can employ the services of Lee Fisher, a classical ballet dancer and head of creative learning at Birmingham Royal Ballet, to help their rising stars realise their creative potential. Fisher uses movement to help people overcome inhibitions and to increase their awareness of how others read and interpret the signals they give off. By enacting a story together, people learn "to see the world differently and to realise that they can do things they didn't think they could do", he says.

Whichever talent nurturing methods you choose, how do you judge their effectiveness? PwC evaluates its programmes against several criteria: the successful application of knowledge and skills to the job, the impact on the employee's performance, acceleration of its "talent pipeline" and employee retention. Feedback from participants is assessed after each course, and followed up three months later to evaluate the effect on the employee's work.

Senior partners across the business keep an eye on the "talent pipeline" and report to the business leaders, so that people can be moved on and up as soon as they are ready.



Standard Life

YVONNE GILAN runs workshops to help shy executives deal with corporate stage fright. The former actress employs techniques used in the theatre to help develop confidence and express themselves clearly in public. "Some have

problems with the voice because they're not breathing properly," Gilan, above, says. She invites participants to read stories aloud. "This engages their imagination and brings warmth and expression."

Evelyn Bourke, financial director at

Standard Life UK Financial Services, attended one session. "I'd noticed in meetings that women can end up sounding high-pitched when making a point, which is not very effective. The more I use Gilan's techniques, the more skilled I become."