DO YOU SET THE BAR?
How Executives Are Defining HiPo

What is the number one characteristic you look for when identifying high potential (HiPo) talent?

Eighty HR professionals answered this question during breakfast events in San Francisco and New York City hosted by American Management Association (AMA Enterprise) in fall 2016. The events included panel discussions focused on "Navigating a Talent Development Roadmap," during which executives from AMA, BioMarin, Pitney Bowes, Sharp, Simpson Thatcher, and others shared their experiences.

At each event, attendees were asked to write down the characteristic they most often look for in HiPos. These were all posted on a wall so the group could visually compare them. The panelists also participated in the exercise, and they shared with the group the reasoning behind their top choices.

The most common trait listed in both cities was "agility," followed by "curiosity." Thirty-five different traits were posted and only five appeared multiple times, exposing the breadth of priorities among attendees.

Why Agility?

As highlighted throughout the breakfast event discussions, agility is a common trait valued by leaders across geographies. Panelists emphasized the importance of an

employee's ability to adapt to and evolve with the ever-changing, fast-paced world of commerce. However, some expressed that agility is actually a secondary trait displayed in HiPos; to be agile suggests that one must embody certain prerequisite characteristics.

Barbara Zung, Vice President of Global Talent Management at AMA, looks for curiosity, passion, and motivation when identifying HiPos. In her experience, "if someone displays curiosity, half the battle is won. Skill is important, but curiosity is much more vital. The biggest challenge is reigniting that passion, and curiosity is one vessel through which it can be accomplished." Zung suggests that motivation is intrinsic in HiPos and is the bedrock on which agility is formed. She also notes that if agility is your goal, the corporate culture must be one that welcomes thoughtful risk taking. Agility often requires stepping out and trying something new where the risk of failing is higher. The culture must be one that supports the individual after failure and encourages them to get back up and start again. People cannot be punished for taking risks and at the same time be expected to function with agility, she says.

Shveta Miglani, Learning and Development Manager at Palo Alto Networks, suggests that the impetus behind

the development of agility is one's desire to be a life-long learner. "They must have an open mindset and be open to learning," says Miglani. "They should also have a desire to develop others." She suggests that "if a HiPo's desired outcome is to rise through the ranks, the desire for self-promotion should be in equal status with the desire to leave a path of strong leaders behind you. Coaching is a tactical way to help someone foster agility."

Panelist Steve Bartomioli, Vice President of Learning and Development at Pitney Bowes, looks for passion when identifying HiPos. According to Bartomioli, if core competencies are the standard for performance, then passion is what breathes life into the competencies, allowing the individual to rise above the standard to HiPo. "There is a difference between high potential and high performer," says Bartomioli. "High performers are really good at what they do, and we need them to attain business objectives. But passion is what allows someone to go beyond today's definition of high performance, to transition toward what the future really needs, and elevate themselves to high potential."

Agility, Bartomioli says, "is the combination of resilience and self-awareness that leads to insight about what is required in the future. Reflectiveness enables one to evaluate what actually changed and ask: How do I integrate that into who I am and what I need to do in the future?" Self-awareness can be a difficult thing to develop in people, Bartomioli says; it is experiential, a journey of self-discovery. "You must lead the person there as a coach or mentor. You have to anticipate what the person needs to learn and create environments where that learning will occur." He further explains that tenacity should also be a prerequisite characteristic to enforce agility. At times one must demonstrate tenacity to not accept the popular "change du jour," Bartomioli says.

How Can Leaders Better Identify and Equip HiPos?

Bartomioli suggests that leaders identify people early enough in their career to build the right habits. "You really have to have a passion for the frontlines. Senior leadership should maintain contact and be comfortable working with frontline leaders, frontline processes, and management systems, because that is the last thing between you and the client. If you have that passion for the frontline, you will know your clients, you will know your people, and you will know what the right thing is moving forward. This passion allows you to identify HiPos earlier in their careers, eliminating layers of management and process, because you

are actually seeing and experiencing the HiPo yourself," Bartomioli says.

When communicating HiPo standards with the workforce, Zung says, "you have to bake them into your core competencies; otherwise it ends up being just a hobby. If standards are not being measured, if they are not being communicated, if they are not in the fabric of your organization and modeled at the top, then they are just a fad that some hope will go away. Standards should be discussed during the recruitment process and interviewed against, making sure your job descriptions align." It is important to communicate expectations and then establish goal-setting benchmarks throughout the year, she says, so when the time for an annual review takes place, nothing is a surprise.

Bartomioli echoes Zung's thoughts and further suggests that overall there is a need for more clarity and transparency in communicating HiPo expectations. For leaders, Bartomioli notes, "the challenge is not getting bogged down in the day-to-day but really carving out time for developmental discussions—developmental in a more aspirational way. It is not so much about what is in your development plan; these conversations are more about asking who you are and who you want to be."

Miglani adds that senior leadership needs to be equipped with the same language used when communicating standards during onboarding, and must demonstrate these standards on a daily basis to validate their own expectations.

"Transformational leadership, in a very contemporary sense, is really critical for HiPos and agile leaders," Bartomioli concludes. "The rate and pace of change today demands that successful companies transform. Knowing when it is the right time to stop doing things the good ol' way and jump across the chasm in a new direction successfully is something I look for as a differentiator. This is another byproduct of passion. Passion gives you the confidence to propel forward versus being satisfied with inertia."

There is no exact science to identifying HiPos, especially since the lines are often closely blurred with the standards for high performance. However, HR leaders suggest that there are some qualifiers that help bring clarity to these lines. HiPos are typically identified because their actions in the workplace are setting them above the rest. However, these actions are fueled by a foundational appetite for more. HiPos are curious, passionate, motivated and life-long learners. Allow these traits to flourish, and you will unlock their highest potential.

AMA CLO Exchange: Member Spotlight

AMA's Chief Learning Officer (CLO) Exchange is a community of executives responsible for learning and development who convene to discuss topics of mutual interests and share common challenges. A few CLO Exchange members shared their thoughts on talent development and HiPo identification for this article:

Shveta Miglani, Learning and Development Manager | Palo Alto Networks

Miglani leads Leadership Development efforts at Palo Alto Networks. Previously, she was the Head of Corporate Learning and Development at SanDisk. She was responsible for company-wide programs like diversity and Inclusion training, performance management, and global engagement survey as well as leadership development and employee development programs. She also managed global online and eLearning programs that had an outreach to more than 8,000 employees at SanDisk. Her experience includes working with teams like sales, marketing, engineering, IT and legal. She supported executive level development programs and mentoring and coaching efforts. Based on her broad experience with different business units and support teams, she has been part of various leadership panels and has mentored professionals at various stages in their careers. She is a board member of OneProsper, an NGO supporting the training and growth of women farmers in India. She is also the recipient of the Diversity Leadership Award from the California National Diversity Council.

She earned an MS in Instructional Technology and an MA in Organizational Systems and is currently working on a PhD in Organizational Behavior and Leadership Development.

Steve Bartomioli, VP of Learning and Development | Pitney Bowes

Bartomioli is a senior business leader and talent management expert. In his current role, he has responsibility for the development of a global, high-performing learning and development division at Pitney Bowes.

Prior to joining Pitney Bowes, Bartomioli was on the senior leadership team at The Conference Board, Inc., heading member engagement for the association's Human Capital Practice division. He was also a VP and principal consultant for Right Management's Talent Management practice. In those roles, he helped his clients accelerate the development of leaders at all levels within their organizations.

Bartomioli started his career at IBM, where he spent 34 years in global executive roles in sales, consulting, sales operations and business development. He led IBM's global leadership development program for six years. During his tenure in that role, IBM was twice awarded the prestigious "Top Company for Leaders" recognition by Aon Hewitt and *Fortune* magazine, specifically for the development of IBM's global leadership culture and its impact on business results.

Barbara Zung, VP of Global Talent Management | American Management Association

Zung is responsible for AMA's Global Talent Management, i.e., AMA corporate staff members and AMA faculty. Her accomplishments include developing and implementing a best-in-class OD plan that has better positioned AMA's human capital to execute a corporate strategy on a global basis, and creating a continuous learning environment that has enabled employees to maintain best practices while pursuing more innovative next practices. Zung has recently taken on the oversight and strategic direction of new product development and customer experience at AMA.

Prior to joining AMA, Zung worked for six years at Morgan Stanley as VP of Organizational Development for the Client & Technology Services Group. She developed and delivered several programs that proved to be critical to her internal client's success, such as New Hire Boot Camp, Leadership Development & Succession Planning, and Corporate Communication. Previous employers include Pace University, where she was an adjunct professor for several years, and the United Nations.

Zung holds a diploma in International Management from the Europa Wirtschaftsschulen in Vienna, as well as a BS in Professional Computer Studies and an MS in Information Systems from Pace University. Other credentials include the ATD's CPLP, Training Industry's CPTM, SHRM's SHRM-CP, and HRCI's PHR. Zung is also MBTI certified.

Contributing author, Paul Quigley, of Profitable Ideas Exchange, is a facilitator on behalf of American Management Association. In this role, he manages and facilitates the AMA CLO Exchange and AMA's Breakfast Briefing Series: How to Navigate a Talent Development Roadmap.