

# Stay close to your top talent

## Break up human bottlenecks with a personal touch

Organizations spend large sums designing and deploying talent management and development processes. They plot their aspiring leaders into matrices, grids and other templates. These are very helpful but they're not enough.

**T**he CEO needs to connect personally with the best talent. This is the only way to really know what is happening with them, to gauge how much value they deliver to



**STEPHAN LIOZU, PH.D.**

Founder, Value Inruption Advisors

Assistant professor of management and strategy, Chatham University in Pittsburgh

Stephan specializes in disruptive approaches in innovation, pricing and value management.

sliozu@gmail.com  
www.stephanliozi.com

the business and to find out if they are living the dream.

Because the dream can quickly turn into a nightmare, thanks to the "human talent bottlenecks" and people "de-motivators" you find in most organizations. These are middle managers and other leaders who have serious leadership gaps and can significantly affect energy and passion levels.

Their behaviors range from taking credit for the work of your best talent and manipulating the results of these A players, to filtering the communication lines between the CEO and the talented staff and blocking advancements.

As a CEO, I worked with some of these people and had to craft plans to go around and deal with them. Here are some steps I took:

- 1. Connect directly with A players and make sure everyone knows the exchanges are candid and transparent.** I had a list of the top 30 to 50 critical employees and promising leaders. My goal was to meet with them every four to six weeks, formally or informally, to gauge their job satisfaction. By forging personal relationships, I was able to break through the games and filters put in place by some middle managers.
- 2. Ask your problematic leaders and other human bottlenecks to take 360-degree surveys.** This is the best

way to surface issues of leadership, micromanagement, manipulation and other dysfunctional behaviors.

**3. Hold talent management review in groups** so feedback and perceptions come from multiple sources. This will isolate the unsupported and irrational views of some of the worst offenders.

**4. Make sure you tell these leaders that you know what is going on and that it needs to change.** They'll deny this, but with support from specific feedback and 360-degree survey input, you can change the game. I recommend you put these less-than-mindful leaders in performance improvement plans.

**5. Invite your best talents to participate in strategic projects and special task forces.** See them in action to determine their impact to the organization. Results do not lie.

I trusted the assessment of my direct reports, as a CEO, but I wanted to make my own assessments to ensure there were no gaps in talent evaluation.

Once I identified deviant behaviors from some leaders, I took action. A bad leader impacts your organization in many ways. Don't allow them to demotivate and negatively influence your best talent. Stay close to these "bad apples" and take quick action.

The race for talent in the U.S. is heating up. With unemployment down and the economy making a comeback, CEOs should stay close to their talent to retain and inspire them. ●