

To develop your teams into high performers, first accept your responsibility for your people's individual growth and on-the-job learning. Next, experiment with the following action points from the superboss handbook of highly personal, innovative, and committed leadership to enable better talent development on a daily basis!



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How to develop talent like a superboss

Based on *Superbosses: How Exceptional Leaders Master the Flow of Talent*, by Sydney Finkelstein (Portfolio, February 2016).

1 / THROW OUT YOUR TRADITIONAL HIRING CHECKLIST

It's not easy to find talent that will go the extra mile with you, which is why superbosses are willing to search high and low for such individuals.

- **Reject preconceived ideas about what talent should look like:** Creative, versatile people often follow unconventional career paths, which is why superbosses throw out traditional hiring checklists ("right schools," "right experience," etc.). "Take chances on people who lack industry experience or even college degrees," Finkelstein writes, explaining that this will widen your talent pool, with the added benefit of diversifying your workforce.
- **Hire based on how candidates think:** Without a traditional HR checklist, what becomes the basis for hiring decisions? For superbosses, the answer is unorthodox interview techniques, like asking unexpected questions or, in the case of real estate mogul, Bill Sanders, taking candidates on intensive mountain hikes to gain insight into how they think. Look for signs of intelligence, creativity, and flexibility, or "a kind of brilliance that can be applied to many sorts of problems."
- **Start slow:** The superboss approach to hiring "may

feel risky and dangerous," warns Finkelstein, which is why he suggests starting small. "You don't need to throw everything you've learned about HR out the window. Take small steps and allow the superboss mentality to seep into your existing hiring process."

2 / VALUE THE CAPABILITIES OF YOUR TEAM MEMBERS

"Most managers aren't actually comfortable with the very best," reports Finkelstein. "They don't feel at ease directing employees who understand the task at hand and what it requires better than they do." Don't let insecurity get in the way of your ability to recognize and develop the capabilities of your team members!

- **Build up your sense of self:** Focus on building your confidence, so you won't feel unthreatened by intelligent, creative, forceful personalities. Try to enjoy when those working for you provide with opportunities "to improve your understanding, do better, or come up with better solutions." The following perspective may help you to combat feelings of insecurity as a leader of rising stars: "When superbosses see their employees shine, they feel it reflects positively on them as leaders."
- **Be more tolerant of difficult personalities:** Take the ...

... same tolerant attitude with your team members as you likely take with your bosses and clients. In part, such tolerance is rooted in respect for your employees' capabilities – and their importance to the company. As Finkelstein explains, “because (superbosses) expect most people who work for them to become stars, they will often tolerate personal problems, eccentricities, and big egos.”

3 / TAKE AN EXPANSIVE VIEW OF WHAT PEOPLE CAN ACCOMPLISH

- **Learn to delegate:** “If you have trouble entrusting your team members with important new responsibilities,” Finkelstein writes, “ask yourself: why not? You hired them!”
- **Remove arbitrary limits on potential:** Don't decide whether or not people are ready for more responsibility based on age or background.
- **Create opportunities to fit developmental needs:** Treat your employees like you would treat customers, tailoring the organization to fit them and their needs rather than the other way around.
- **Hold people accountable for their performance:** “Bosses tend to let performance slide for extended periods, ‘getting tough’ only when serious problems arise,” Finkelstein notes. “Superbosses, by contrast, are performance mavens. They eat, breathe, and sleep high performance. There's never a time when they're not driving hard.”
- **Create a sense of possibility:** To help your people accomplish more – and avoid burnout in the face of your high expectations – try to build up their confidence. “People will work their hardest to become bigger, better, tougher, more resourceful, and more creative when they first see themselves as these things,” explains Finkelstein.

4 / PROVIDE AUTONOMY BUT STAY CLOSE

Superbosses have a “puzzling way of giving up control over their employees' work, and at the same time asserting it more uncompromisingly than anyone.”

And their ability to navigate this paradox is the key to how they consistently foster creativity and innovation.

- **Work closely with your employees:** Get your hands dirty by working alongside employees. Staying in the trenches gives you a clear vision into what is happening and provides opportunities to model the desired behaviors and step in as needed. As Finkelstein notes, “You can't develop a personal approach to training staff if you aren't there in person (or, if necessary, via communications technology), day in and day out.” Simply being there makes it possible to build close relationships with your team members and keep the lines of communication open. Visit employees regularly and ask questions designed to ensure they have what they need to be successful.

- **But respect their autonomy:** Don't breathe down people's necks. If you fail to trust people to do their own work in their own way, you will stifle their creativity.
- **Encourage people to disregard hierarchy:** A relatively flat organization makes it easier for you to build close relationships with your team members.

5 / 5CRAFT AND COMMUNICATE AN ENERGIZING VISION

Inspire and align your team members around priorities and objectives by alerting them to the underlying purpose(s) of what you are doing together.

- **Define your energizing vision:** Ask yourself: why does your organization exist? Why does your team exist? Once you have your answers, craft them into succinct messages for your teams.
- **Be authentic:** “Don't just evoke possibilities for your people because you think it might result in an extra market-share or an extra percentage increase in revenue.” Do it because you really feel passionate about your people and your mission. As Finkelstein warns, “Most people are smart enough to recognize a fake when they meet one.” ■