

# Are You Talent Obsessed?

Unlocking the secrets to a  
workplace team of raving  
high-performers

by Beth Armknecht Miller

Founder of Executive Velocity



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*Leaders who are “talent obsessed” understand that without an engaged and talented workforce, the execution of their strategic plan is just a hope and a dream.*



*To Your Leadership Success*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beth".

Beth Armknecht Miller



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# Introduction

## Are You Talent Obsessed?



# Are You Talent Obsessed?



## What does it mean to be a talent obsessed leader?

It means that while you realize that spreadsheets, projections and the bottom line are all important indicators of organizational success, you also recognize that at the core of your company, the thing that drives sustainable success and long-term growth is your talent. And, that no organization can grow or develop without the right people in place.

An architectural masterpiece is nothing without its foundation, and a successful company is nothing without its people. Talent obsessed leaders are those that focus on the foundation first, and everything else second.

This eBook is designed to help business leaders learn how to make the most of their talent by managing and developing them. If you want to know more about what it means to orient your leadership style around a commitment to finding and cultivating high-performers, this eBook has the lessons, insights, and tools you need to become talent obsessed.

# Reader's Guide

## How to Use This eBook to Build Your Talent Obsession





forward, someone else will take them two steps back.

The bottom-line is: by focusing on and entrusting in top-performing talent it will allow you to let the small things go and free up your time to tackle the big picture. Only then, will your organization have the capacity to move into the future and achieve long-term sustainability.

Good leaders become great when they tap into their talent obsession and create a team of high-performers. While reading this book, ask yourself these questions:



- What would it be like to have talented people lining up to work for you?
- Are all your employees working to their full potential?
- Who do you need to be developing so you can focus on more strategic initiatives and how can you develop them efficiently and effectively?
- What projects are not advancing as quickly as they should?
- What would it be like for you as a leader to be able to confidently delegate some of your current tasks and responsibilities?
- What projects would you move up on your priority list that, if you had additional time, could change the course of your organization or your career for the positive?

This book was written for the business leader who struggles to inspire employees to think bigger, innovate more and drive their organization forward. When business leaders embrace their role and focus on their people, great things can happen. This book is your first step on the road to developing and managing the talent around you so you can see your organization excel far into the future.

The Proof

Why Does it  
Matter?



# Why Does it Matter?



## Reasons to be a Talent Obsessed Leader:

1. Strong talent means strong growth.
2. Keeping talent saves money.
3. Employees who are engaged, perform.

**A strong leader is** one who keeps an unwavering eye on talent. But a savvy leader is one who makes decisions based on evidence. Numerous studies focused on talent management provide evidence that focusing on talent can inject a positive boost into your bottom line – and enhance your chances of building a business that will be successful far into the future.

Here are the top three reasons you should be a talent obsessed leader:

## 1 STRONG TALENT MEANS STRONG GROWTH

It's impossible to grow your business without growing your people at the same time.

The Build Network is an organization devoted to helping mid-scale companies grow. In December of 2013 they did a study of business leaders where they posed the following question: What might derail your company's growth or even threaten its survival? Eighty-one percent of those who responded cited "Sudden loss of a key employee" as a concern. The best leaders know: you're only as good as your staff.

Unfortunately there's often a disconnect between what companies say, and what they do. According to the same study, eighty-two percent of leaders recognize





that promoting financial success, employee diversity and transparency help a company grow. Yet only half make those policies “a vital part of their business.” Don’t fall into this trap! Invest your time where it counts: in your talent.

## 2 KEEPING TALENT SAVES MONEY

Every business leader knows the cost of retaining a customer is significantly less than the investment required to acquire a new one. The same story applies to staff.

American Home Shield, based in Memphis, is the major appliance warranty arm of ServiceMaster. It boasts about 1,500 employees. According to a former manager of Human Resources, it wasn’t that long ago that a key department was experiencing an annual turnover rate of eighty-nine percent. The company estimated that the cost of training replacements for so many staffers was over \$250,000 a year. But AHS took action, researched retention management strategies, and in the course of a year, cut turnover to thirty-five percent.

There’s no question the costs associated with employee turnover are severe: According to the SHRM Foundation, the direct replacement costs can reach as high as fifty to sixty percent of an employee’s annual salary, with total costs of replacing and retraining for a position ranging from ninety percent to two hundred percent of annual salary. In addition to cost, losing employees can also hurt your business’ performance and make it increasingly difficult to manage.

## 3 EMPLOYEES WHO ARE ENGAGED PERFORM

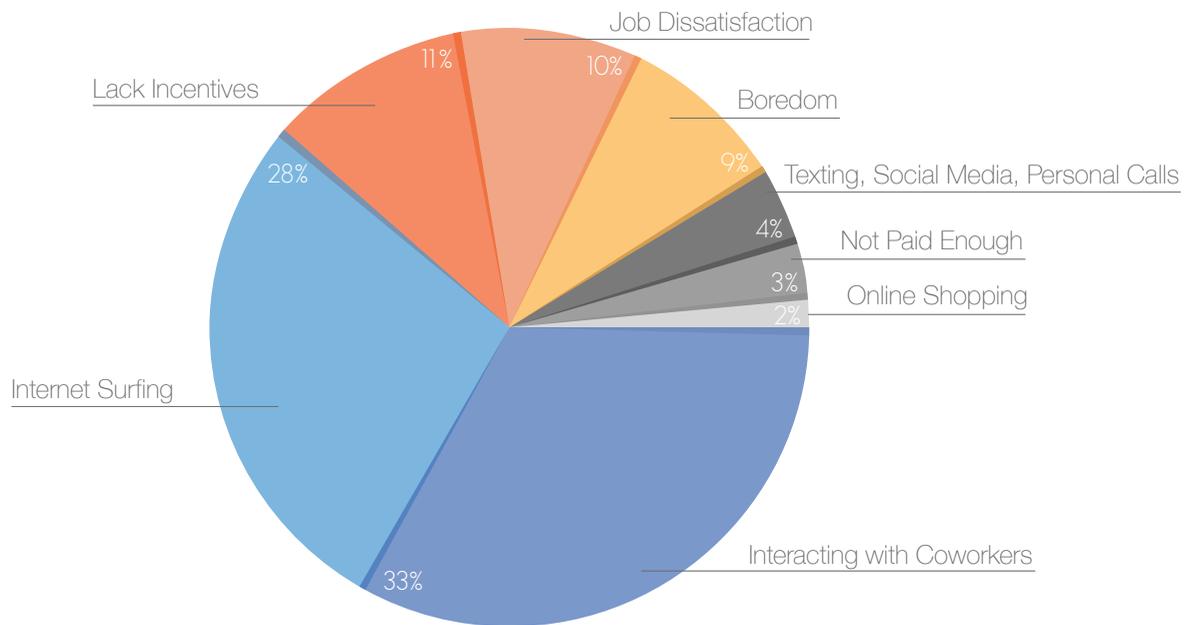
Creating a culture where talent is appreciated, and challenged, is the key to fostering a work environment where employees are engaged and motivated to grow.

“  
*In addition to cost, losing employees can also hurt your business’ performance.*”

### DID YOU KNOW

Replacement costs can reach as high as **50-60%** of an employee’s annual salary.

Your employees are at their best—and their most beneficial to the organization—when they come to work fresh, engaged and eager to contribute. But it’s all too easy to let your employees slide into complacency. According to a survey done by salary.com, these are the reasons people waste time at work:



Only two of these are related to money, all of the rest are related to good talent management, which means as a leader, it’s within your power to keep your employees engaged.

The numbers don’t lie. If you look at the companies who continue to grow, year after year, there’s always a common denominator: devotion to talent.

# Chapter 1

# Talent Obsession: The Key to Great Leadership



# Talent Obsession:

## The Key to Great Leadership



**The realization that motivated** employees drive business success is what separates good leaders and their companies from great ones. But when it comes to implementation of this understanding, it's easier said than done. It's one thing to want great talent, but what does it mean to truly devote yourself to finding and retaining top-level talent? The first step is to get your employees engaged.

### 1 WHY START WITH ENGAGEMENT?

Quantum Workforce's 2013 Employment Engagement Trends Report found that those organizations with increased retention had significantly higher levels of engagement, over 8% higher. In addition, companies with higher employee engagement reported higher profit levels. Engaged employees want to be present, and want to work hard - and it's from that foundation that other progress will flow. Simply put, engaged employees are more productive employees. They're also more profitable, more customer-oriented, more safety conscious and more loyal to the organization. To really succeed, this commitment can't be mere lip service either - it has to be a fundamental piece of how you do business.





## Case Study

# The Domino Effect: How One Talent Obsessed Leader's Decision Benefited the Organization as a Whole





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Three layers between the **customer and management** were eliminated and replaced by a single contact.



or director of environmental services. Exceptional production staff were promoted into this new role to take advantage of their first-hand experience with service provision. Using the same metrics that were focused on by the senior management team, these new leaders fostered growth, higher customer satisfaction and increased profitability within the organization. Three layers between the customer and management were eliminated and replaced by a single contact, the Team Leader.

## RESULTS

Through the introduction of the Team Leader role the company enhanced their reputation in their industry, improved their bottom-line and established a culture focused on talent development, which resulted in:

- 1 Support of the staffing change by management, leading to the introduction of continuous training and positive reinforcement techniques to ensure the success of the program.
- 2 New weekly “stand up” meetings on the production floor to ensure all team leads remained in the loop regarding their accounts.
- 3 The ability to offer superior customer service. When a new Team Leader saw a customer struggling to reach heavy items on the top of the cart, the cart was immediately reorganized to better suit their specific needs.

They filled holes in their **customer service** they didn't realize existed.

By focusing on talent and empowering staff to take on greater responsibility and decision-making, they filled holes in their customer service they didn't realize existed. Invest in your talent, and suddenly you won't be the only one who takes your organization's success to heart.

Tool

# Talent Obsessed Quiz for Leaders





**6** Are the meetings regularly scheduled or on an as needed basis?

**7** How much time are you spending with your high performers vs those that are low performers with bad attitudes?

## EFFECTIVENESS

**1** Do you practice looking for coachable moments and then act upon them? What is the most recent example and what were the results?

**2** How effective are you as a coach? And what results can you point to that supports this belief?

**3** How are you measured in the area of employee development? What metrics are used?

**4** Who are you currently challenged with coaching and developing? What are your next steps?

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

**1** How much time do you spend on developing yourself as a leader? And, what are your preferred methods of development?

**2** Who could step in and take on your role should you suddenly not be able to perform your responsibilities?



**3** How do you gain feedback on your performance?

**4** What is the one behavior, that if changed, would have a significant impact on your leadership success?

## RAPID RECALL

### Talent Obsessed Leaders Focus On:

1. Time Investment
2. Effectiveness
3. Personal Development



## Chapter 2

# Rhythms of Talent Management Obsession









## Chapter 3

# 5 Steps to Become a Talent Obsessed Leader



# 5 Steps to Become a Talent Obsessed Leader



**Ever wonder where to look for** examples of talent-obsessed companies? Chances are, you've probably already heard of a few: GE, IBM and Proctor and Gamble are all among the industry giants who know their people inside out and do everything they can to set each and every employee up for success. Part of what's elevated these companies to the top of their industry is an understanding that people build the organization.

Many leaders see imitating companies like GE as on par with challenging the Beatles for number of chart-topping hits. But becoming talent obsessed isn't only for industry giants! It's one of the more achievable ways to put you and your company, whatever its size, on the path to success. Being talent obsessed requires the discipline in thought and action to foster a culture where your people are your priority, but by following these steps your business will be well on your way to increased employee retention and engagement.

“  
*Being talent obsessed requires the discipline in **thought** and **action** to foster a culture where your people are your priority.*”

**1 ACT OBSESSED**  
‘Fake it ‘til you make it’, is a saying for a reason. As a leader, the development of your employees should be priority number one, and if you make the effort to act obsessed about talent, those actions will become habit. So set time for your employees and work daily coachable moments into you schedule. Talk to

your employees. Get to the core of what motivates them. If you see them struggling, address it. The first step in helping others to improve their performance is to identify the actions and behaviors that may lead an employee off track or are potential roadblocks to future success. Remind yourself that developing others is a marathon, not a sprint.

step **2 TAKE TIME TO MENTOR**

Make yourself available to your staff and make sure they know that they can come to you by establishing an open door policy. And don't let yourself spend all your time with your low-performers - all too often, they're energy vampires for leaders, so don't fall victim to this trap! Those who are struggling need guidance, but helping your high-achievers strive for more will pay dividends.

step **3 PUT TALENT DEVELOPMENT ON THE AGENDA**

Meetings are an unfortunate fact of corporate life, but most managers burn up costly employee hours discussing what happened in the previous week or what they hope to achieve during the upcoming one. What these meetings don't address is the specific learning that is occurring, in that particular moment. As part of your weekly meetings, ask each employee to spend three minutes talking about a recent success and what they learned from it. Don't spend more time reliving mistakes than you do on learning from successes.

step **4 PROVIDE CONSTANT FEEDBACK**

Don't wait for formal reviews to give your employees feedback on their performance. Look for opportunities to provide informal, verbal feedback or to sit down for a casual chat. Keep employees focused on what they're working towards and how they can help the company achieve its goals. This goes for leaders, too. Always ask for feedback from your employees - you also have room for improvement! What could you be doing to better your communication skills? How can you coach and motivate your employees more effectively?



step **5 PLAN AROUND TALENT**

In the same way that you plan your budget and your marketing strategy, incorporate talent management into your quarterly forecast and long-term plans. Any review of your business plan must go hand-in-hand with a workforce review - including a strategic assessment of company values, team performance and future succession plans.

For the talent obsessed leader, talent is never an after-thought. Incorporate it into everything you do and get used to thinking about talent development as an essential part of your organizations success. Leaders are only as good as the people they lead.

## RAPID RECALL

### 5 Steps to Increase Employee Retention and Engagement

1. Act obsessed
2. Take time to mentor
3. Put talent development on the agenda
4. Provide constant feedback
5. Plan around talent



## Chapter 4

# Independent Assessments: Why Every Business Needs an Outside Perspective



# Independent Assessment: Why Every

# Business Needs an Outside Perspective



**There are significant benefits to** bringing in someone to conduct a third party assessment. But if you're going to bring someone in, it needs to be done right. Saj-Nicole Joni, Ph.D., explores how to build the most powerful advisory team possible at each stage of your career in her book, *The Third Opinion*. If you need help figuring out how to assemble the right group of experts that will provide the kind of guidance, input, trust, and feedback you need, her book has a plethora of tips, supported by compelling, real-life examples. So what should you consider when conducting a third party assessment?

## **MAKE SURE YOUR ASSESSOR IS THE RIGHT FIT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION**

If a third party assessment is meant to be a snapshot of your company, it's one that will be colored and shaded by the people who take it. So make sure you've got a group of people with the optimum mix of skills. Some should be your employees, who have a front row seat to your management skills. Some will be your peers, who bring their knowledge of the industry. Still others will be your managers who have their own ideas about where you should be heading. Be clear with everyone that they're to provide the best constructive criticism they can - and that doing so will help put your company on the path to success.



What should you **consider** when conducting a third party assessment?

## LET ALL EMPLOYEES CONTRIBUTE

Any assessment requires a firm commitment from management at all levels of the organization. But to be truly effective, it also needs feedback from employees and frontline staff – the people actually responsible for delivering products and services. The process should be confidential, in order to get the most honest opinions possible about how senior leadership is doing. The results should provide a clear analysis of your company’s mission and values and how well they align with the organizations short and long-term objectives.



## MAKE SURE IMPORTANT ASPECTS ARE COVERED, INCLUDING:

- The processes in place that allow company leaders to strengthen talent management.
- The actions (not just rhetoric!) that demonstrate leaders see employees as their number one asset.
- The mission and values of the company and how they relate to a talent-driven culture.
- The talent strategy and how it connects with your overall business strategy.

No good leader is an island. Be open to feedback - in fact, openly invite it - and you’ll get some of the most useful advice possible to move your organization forward into the future.

“

*No good leader is an island. Be open to **feedback**.*

## Chapter 5

# How Your Organization Can **Benefit** from an Independant **Party** **Assessment**



# How your Organization Can Benefit from an Independent Party Assessment



**No one becomes a successful leader** by toiling away in isolation. A big part of the process is continually evaluating what you're doing well by soliciting the opinions of colleagues and competitors about where and what you can improve. One of the best decisions a leader can make is bringing someone in with no direct stake in the organizations success – providing an honest assessment of the current state of the business.

## UNBIASED POINT OF VIEW

After all, it's hard to be totally objective about your own issues and colleagues and peers are likely to shy away from being too honest. Ideally, an assessor should possess the knowledge of your industry required to put your leadership strategy into context, minus the personal attachment to your organization that would skew his or her judgment.

## BENEFIT FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF A LARGER ORGANIZATION

If you're a smaller organization, you often won't have the structure or the personnel to conduct an in-depth review of your own organization. You don't have the resources on hand to drive the process or a person with the time or capabilities to devote

### Benefits of a Third Party Assessment:

1. Unbiased point of view..
2. Benefit from the experience of a larger organization.
3. An objective perspective on leadership.



## Chapter 6

# How to Get Started Building Your Talent Obsession



Tool

# Talent Obsessed Checklist





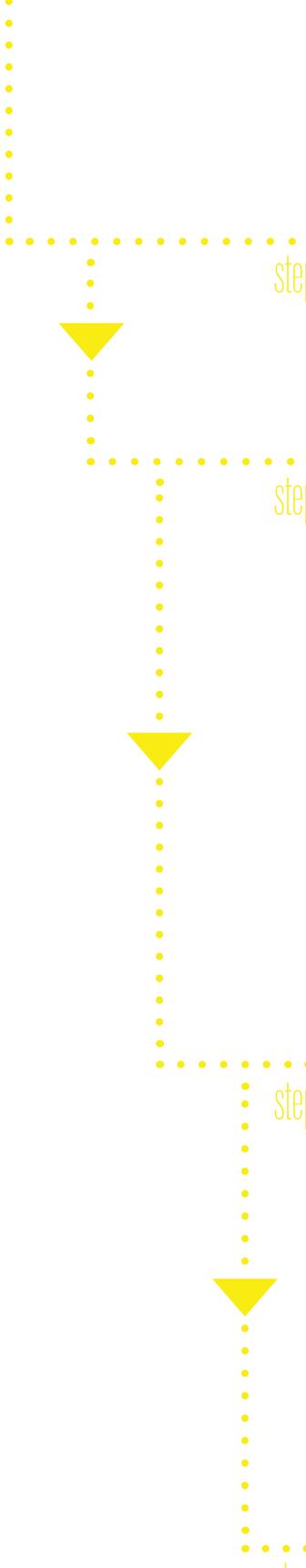


# Action Learning

## Get Started with These 5 Steps







**2 TELL YOUR EMPLOYEES WHAT YOU WANT**  
When a tree falls in the forest with no one around to hear it, it goes unheard, just as a set of workplace values won't sink.

**3 PROVIDE MENTORS**  
Talented people want to understand the company they work for and their place in it. Mentors have a dual role: they help guide new recruits or emerging talent, provide advice about how to succeed, and conduct informal, but crucial, job training that will enhance interactions with less experienced employees.

Mentors also model the advantages of staying with the organization long term, and the benefits that can come with taking the time to engage with the company and mature into new roles.

**4 DESIGN WORK IN TEAMS**  
No man is an island, and that's especially true of employees who want more from their work life than a solitary existence in a cubicle. Team environments force employees to share ideas and learn from each other. But it also can get people from different parts of the organization working towards a common goal, creating a sense of fellowship in the workplace that will lead to better collaboration – and happier employees.

**5 MAKE IT WORTH THEIR WHILE**  
It's common these days for people to switch careers multiple times in their lifetime. So make sure your top talent knows you'd like them to stay put and that their personal development is an organizational priority. Tie financial incentives to tenure and create unique reward and recognition systems that differentiate you from your competitors.



When you are obsessing over talent, you surround yourself with the people who have the passion, ambition, and attitude to take your company to the next level. Becoming talent obsessed won't happen overnight, but with these 5 simple steps you can be on your way in no time.

## RAPID RECALL

### 5 Action Steps to Become Talent Obsessed:

1. Hire the Right People
2. Tell Your Employees What You Want
3. Provide Mentors
4. Design Work in Teams
5. Make it Worth Their While



# What People Are Saying About **Are You Talent Obsessed?** .....

Such an inspiring and thoughtful book. **Beth** provides very practical and knowledgeable advice. Personally, I believe most organizations are just getting “bodies in a seat on the bus” as opposed to being scrutinizing about what talent is allowed to join their team. A must read for anyone in HR, OD, or Talent Management.

**Kevin A. Sheridan**

Leading Expert on Employee Engagement and Virtual Management,  
New York Times Best-selling Author

**Are You Talent Obsessed** is not only an excellent treatise on the importance of talent management in nurturing competitive advantage, but a wake-up call to senior management on the critical need to prioritize their focus on the management of the human capital in their organization. There are many business tactics, well managed, that are sufficient for maintaining reasonable financial returns and long-term viability, but sustaining exceptional talent is a necessary condition for any organization to deliver long-term wealth creation for its stakeholders. This book presents a concise business case supporting this proposition as well as some best practices for managers – in the critical areas of “employee engagement,” reward systems, “design of work,” teaming, and mentoring - that are universally applicable, foundational, and easily implemented.

**Michael S. Salvador, Ph.D.**

Director, Executive Education Programs  
Michael J. Coles College of Business - Kennesaw State University

**Beth Armknecht Miller's** new book is an outstanding contribution to the ongoing talent debate. She addresses the difficult questions around talent and offers a clear road map for the reader to pursue in building an organization where finding and developing the best people reigns supreme. Too many organizations today are hiring based on generic job descriptions. This book offers a clear and better alternative for making sure you have the right team in place to be competitive now and in the future. Well done!

**Randy Hain**

Founder and president of Serviam Access, well known for consulting with companies and business professionals on targeted business relationship coaching. Award-winning author of four books, including LANDED! Proven Job Search Strategies for Today's Professional

In **Are You Talent Obsessed?** **Beth Armknecht Miller** goes beyond the hype of employee engagement to discuss practical mechanisms for making it happen. She provides a structured schedule (In the military we would call it a battle rhythm) for developing talent that I found very helpful.

It includes: Daily teachable moments, weekly team learning, monthly one-on-one mentoring sessions, quarterly forecast and plan I think the focus on the scheduling actions is correct.

This is where good intentions either become realized (or not). Ms. Miller correctly identifies that unless leaders are putting in the time to develop their talent, it will just be one more thing on the “to do” list. Recommended for people who work with people.

**L. David Marquet**

New York Times Best-selling Author