

# TALENT

YOUR PEOPLE ARE YOUR BUSINESS



## ARE YOU A TALENT HOARDER?

on June 30, 2021

**Stockpiling your all-stars isn't smart—it's short-sighted. You should be sharing the wealth instead.**

*By Beverly Kaye, Connie Bentley, and Linda Rogers*

Hoarding is just as human as sharing—really. The words have a common lineage, and both helped our species survive for millennia.

Thousands of years ago, storing food and concealing shelters were essential tactics to keep our early ancestors from starving or being eaten by the local cave hyena. (Yes, cave hyenas did exist, but became extinct 10,000 years ago during the ice age in Europe.) As our species became more cosmopolitan, however, sharing played an increasingly more significant role in survival.

Unfortunately, the disappearance of cave hyenas didn't eliminate hoarding or ensure sharing among future generations. That might explain why so many businesses remain stymied in their internal talent mobility efforts.

Since the practice of talent sharing is in its infancy, there are virtually no experts who can offer data-based advice on how to do it right. So, we won't even try. But as "thinking partners," we can offer our ideas and vision and attempt to stimulate your thinking about this nascent and relatively inert, but vital business imperative.

## Hoarding Versus Sharing

Our experience in helping leaders with this issue has taught us a few things about hoarding and sharing:

### What We've Learned About Hoarding

- Hoarding is a persistent inability or difficulty parting with possessions.
- Hoarding runs in families.
- Environment plays a role in hoarding.
- Approximately 5 percent of the world's population practices hoarding.

### What We've Observed About Talent Hoarding

- Many managers think of employee talent as "possessions" and are reluctant to part with them.
- Managers who see their peers hoarding are likely to do the same.
- Corporate environments often breed talent hoarders.
- Significantly more than 5 percent of managers hoard talent.

Believe it or not, we've also noticed a close relationship between talent hoarding and talent sharing. We think the two are a little like fraternal twins. While they share a common human origin, they demonstrate distinctly different personalities—and hoarding is the evil twin.

Talent hoarding has become one of the most significant barriers to internal talent mobility. Talent hoarders ignore the greater organizational good and maintain an isolated and insulated world that selectively welcomes others, but selfishly keeps the best for itself. And left unchecked, they can even breed their values, goals, and culture.

By contrast, the talent sharer looks like the good twin—but don't be fooled. Talent sharers constitute a rare breed whose good example doesn't eliminate hoarding any more than the words "Be nice" stops bullying. Why? Because:

- **Sharing doesn't come naturally to humans.** With one tantalizing morsel of woolly mammoth remaining, virtually none of our cave-dwelling cousins asked, "OK if I take this?"
- **Sharing requires mental dexterity.** F. Scott Fitzgerald famously wrote, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." For example:
  - Idea #1: "Mom and Dad gave me that truck for my birthday."
  - Idea #2: "My sister is playing with it."
- **Sharing is subjective.** We're all familiar with the dictum, "What's yours is mine. What's mine is mine." It's a belief too many managers put into practice when it comes to sharing talent.

## Knowing Versus Doing

If hoarding and sharing are talent mobility's fraternal twins, knowing and doing are its sibling rivals—and the struggle between the two will cause uproar in any family. If the willingness to share is the most significant enabler of talent mobility, moving from being willing to taking action is the greatest challenge.

The director of IT may be ready in theory to share resources with the rest of the work family, but the fact and act of her best tech magician going to product development for a month may be a bridge too far.

Likewise, an organization's top performer might know the vital role she could play in another department, but if she doesn't feel free to pursue it, she'll most likely stay right where she is—or worse. If her manager's response is, "Oh no, you're too valuable right here," she may start looking outside the company for an environment that will encourage her to share her aspirations and pursue them.

So, how do leaders avoid this? How do they get an entire organization to embrace, foster, and participate in talent sharing? While we don't have absolute answers or tried and true tactics that succeeded in curbing hoarding, we do have a few strategies to share that might stimulate your thinking. We urge you to read them with an open mind and consider which ones might be worth trying.

### Strategy #1: Onboard It

Do with talent sharing what you would do with any critical addition to your organization: onboard it.

- Announce its arrival as part of the culture.
- Welcome it publicly.
- Introduce it to the local stakeholders.
- Set forth the performance expectations related to it.
  - No one owns talent any more than a landlord owns residents.
  - The sandbox belongs to everyone.
  - Leaders must be willing to make their people's talents visible and to offer employees opportunities for career development.
  - Individual employees will be free to explore mobility options and must be willing to take on new responsibilities for "the greater good"—and for their own.

## **Strategy #2: Springboard It**

Provide the support and encouragement that will set talent sharing in motion.

- Demonstrate leadership's commitment to talent mobility—in fact, and act.
- Enlist the help of influential leaders, supervisors, and managers who are capable of changing minds and mindsets.
- Do it yourself. Become a visible practitioner of talent sharing in your organization.
- Deliver the information, tools, and infrastructure that will lend impetus to the effort.
  - Talent management tools.
  - Technology that identifies spare talent capacity.
- Point out opportunities for talent sharing such as:
  - During a temporary increase in demand for specific skills.
  - When there is a need to control, reduce or share labor costs in one area.
  - If a critical player needs or wants to acquire training/skill/experience in an area not addressed by current training programs.
  - If you know, you must implement a cross-functional project or initiative.
  - You recognize that losing key talent presents a threat.
  - You realize that your talent isn't operating at total capacity.

## **Strategy #3: Dashboard It**

Create an infrastructure to track metrics and milestones that indicate individual and organizational progress toward talent mobility.

- Build a "family tree" that charts which work family members have moved from one internal group to another, why, how many left the family for better career opportunities elsewhere, and who stayed and grew in place, etc.
- Document the frequency of shared roles and projects, stretch and temporary assignments, internal gig work, etc.
- Display a leaderboard that publicizes key talent-sharing practitioners—individuals, teams, and departments.

## Strategy #4: Reward It

“Your sister needs it more than you do right now” means little to a 3-year-old, but a manager should be able to grasp the concept—and have an incentive for the behavior.

- Integrate talent mobility into the performance appraisal and compensation systems.
- Create a recognition award for the top 3 leaders who have “made shared workers work.”
- Recognize the small victories. Talent hoarding has been going on for decades, so it will take time to turn it around—but don’t wait to start.

## Turn Common Sense into Common Practice

It’s not hard to understand why IT directors wouldn’t want to send their top talent to product development. Who would? It’s not surprising that top performers don’t publicize their desire to apply their skills elsewhere. Who would? It’s not easy for most people to choose the organization’s greater good over their own. Who would?

We think the answer might be, “Anyone who sees leadership supporting, fostering, practicing, and rewarding talent-sharing across the organization.”

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