



THE MANAGER: YOUR DAD AND YOUR COACH

A Head-hunter asked me once in an interview: “Klaus, how many of your ex-colleagues are today covering top management positions?” After the interview was finished I started considering what could have been the background for such a question...

As a Leader or Manager you have – in connection with the development of your staff – almost the same responsibilities as parents have with their children. **The only huge difference is that in business you are not called “Mummy” and “Daddy”** respectively (or at least your staff should avoid those expressions in front of the third parties). I believe that **your associates should rather perceive and see you as a Coach.**

Once you “found” High Potentials for your team, which means

- a. people with a holistic approach,
- b. people who are able to plan and act in a strategic way,
- c. people who have rich social competence and
- d. those, who are really ready to accept change processes,

those associates have to be developed.

But to be honest: is it correct to say “people have to be developed”? Doesn’t this sound egoistic or like an order from a higher level? Shouldn’t this rather be an agreement between at least you as the superior and your associate?

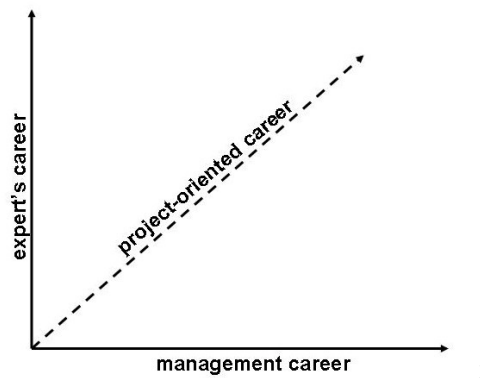
I experienced it several times that in case both the employer and the employee, agreed on the way and direction of the education, the employee stood much longer to this so called “psychological contract” than in cases when the employer just said: “Our HR Department considered you as the proper candidate for the next Management Training” without asking for the employee’s expectations and commitments.

In transition countries like for instance in Serbia you can still realize that especially big companies are wasting a lot of resources for developing people. Why? To satisfy the customers’ demands a huge number of employees have to be trained and educated in a very short period of time, regardless if they want to be developed in such a way or not, like in “mass production”. And together with relatively high fluctuation in – more or less already consolidated – industries like banking business a lot of employees are breaking the “psychological contracts”. Sometimes they leave companies even before they finished their education programs just because another company offered maybe some higher salary or a better position – and without bearing their own long-term career development in mind.

What is left is a high drop out rate – from the employees’ point of view – and wasted time and money – from the employer’s point of view.



The next question – after you and your associate agreed that some kind of education would be necessary – is “in which direction should we go?” **Should our High Potential be educated as a top expert, as a future manager or will he or she have the highest capability in a project-related environment?**



Unfortunately an expert or project-oriented career doesn't sound so fancy especially for young people. Most of them are dreaming about being a CEO in a big company with a huge representative office, a business car including the driver and a lot of power and influence. But various preconditions might be responsible for creating someone's career.

I remember an excellent associate whose only dream was to become a Member of an Executive Board someday, as he told me when we met the first time more than ten years ago. But this guy was – by all means – perfectly qualified as a project manager, because he didn't really prefer ongoing business (besides some other project-related characteristics). But he didn't like this idea at all and although all assessments confirmed my arguments, he wanted us to develop his management career with might and main. Finally he couldn't get the education that he expected in our company, so he left our team.

In his new company he failed several management courses and he also didn't succeed in the final management assessment. But to satisfy his ego he got the position as “Manager of Strategic Development” ... but all chances for a successful career were destroyed.

¹ Source: Trigon Entwicklungsberatung



So, now you found High Potentials for your team, you agreed with them on a certain career development ... and now? I think it's just not enough sending them to some Business Schools, company academies or something similar. There is a second part and this concerns you as a Manager or Leader even more:

In Austria we call it "The Dual Educational System"², which means employees are attending schools or trainings to improve their theoretical background on one hand and once they are back on their workplaces it's their superiors' obligations to lead them to practical success on the other hand: **And that's the way how Managers or Leaders are becoming Coaches.**

But what actually makes a difference between a Coach and someone who is "just" a superior? **I think the major characteristic of a Coach is his/her capability to deal with people**, which means

- to continuously communicate with and listen to his or her staff,
- to share ideas and experiences with them,
- to develop innovations and work out business cases,
- to be available for them and their problems,
- but also to leave them enough freedom and room for developing their own personalities, attitudes and especially management styles. Or as Prof. Philip Stiles from IEDC Bled School of Management said: "Nothing grows in a shadow of a big tree".

Of course, there is no doubt that also the associates, with whom you were dealing for years, are leaving your team. Nothing can prevent such a situation, but sometimes it may happen that your associates already feel prepared for a top management assignment, but your environment does not offer such a position at the moment.

If this is the case, **let your associate go to continue his or her career in another company or business environment. But I would suggest you keeping him or her in your network, because "you usually meet at least twice in your life"...**

Finally I got the answer to the Head-hunter's question: **The more people you successfully developed and the higher the number of (ex)-associates who are today covering top management positions is the more it is an indicator that you as a Manager or as a Leader did an excellent job in regards to people management.**

² It's unfortunately just implemented for trainees, not for developing young managers.