

Problem solver

When developing new talent through graduate recruitment programmes, how can I ensure my other staff don't feel left out?

The academic...



Professor Raymond Madden

ESCP Europe Business School, former head of learning at Lloyds Banking Group and ABN AMRO Bank NV.

Graduates are a key part of many organisations' recruitment strategies. With almost 50% of 18-year-olds now going to university it is not surprising that graduates make up a major part of the entry-level workforce. Companies spend time and effort recruiting potential future leaders from graduates who identify with their culture, corporate values and business principles.

Graduate development can be a significant investment lasting up to two years, involving formalised training, on-the-job development and rotations around the business to provide broad-based experience. With this focus on graduates others can feel left out, so it is important that companies offer a range of learning and development opportunities for staff at all levels. Career development discussions should be a major part of the annual performance reviews undertaken by line managers. Many organisations see staff development as part of a broader talent agenda which feeds into succession planning for more senior roles.

Some organisations have formalised academies to help provide a focus for staff training. Staff are encouraged to go online and choose programmes which help them develop to the next stage of their career. Formal classroom training can be costly and is about ten per cent of the total opportunities available. Organisations prefer to focus their efforts through on-the-job training which is practical and can have an immediate business impact.

Teaching can be a very effective way for senior managers to develop their leadership skills by sharing their experiences. Coaching and mentoring is also an increasingly popular way of engaging colleagues throughout the organisation and may involve senior colleagues being a mentor to more junior staff, like graduates, and coaching peers in different business areas to provide an alternative and neutral sounding-board. Collectively these are great ways to engage different levels of the organisation in personal and professional development.

The HR Director...



Penny Newman

Head of HR, Lewis Silkin, a member of Ius Laboris

With the economic downturn impacting almost every industry, organisations should be re-evaluating their competitive advantage, and renewing their focus on what they do best. It is not sufficient simply to attract individuals with high potential; employees need to be kept engaged, focused, motivated and retained.

At Lewis Silkin, the HR team works closely with managers, teams and individuals to unlock potential, realise strengths and help people achieve their goals.

All fee-earners are assigned a Career Development Partner (CDP), to support them in developing their experience, abilities and career aspirations. The CDP understands the nature and volume of the work and monitors performance to aid continuous improvement.

Career development benchmarks are published for associates, setting out the typical progress we hope that fee-earners will achieve in the years after qualification. Against each broad performance area we give general guidance followed in some cases by department-specific examples of what is expected.

We offer optional bespoke workshops – delivered by senior partners from different business lines – to associates qualified for six years, which cover disciplines such as financial management, business development and marketing, and help associates understand their own leadership style and approach, and enable them to practise the necessary skills in a supported environment.

We hold annual and bi-annual appraisals for all staff, as well as 360 feedback exercises for managers and partners, one-to-one coaching through accredited coaches, and have a structured bonus scheme in place which rewards exceptional performance.

Departmental peer groups come together regularly to solve real work issues in a way that enables them to learn from and with each other, typically in the form of 'Bundle Meetings', Associate Departmental Meetings or knowledge-sharing via departmental information sites on our intranet.

The training consultant...



Karen Osborn

National Account Manager, Thales Training & Consultancy

All employees within an organisation need to be provided with opportunities to progress and develop. However, the reality is that not every employee will be the next CEO or MD. Therefore, potential needs to be sought out in every possible avenue.

It just happens that the graduate talent pool is in the here and now, so that's where a seemingly disproportionate level of attention is focused. However, it would be very short-sighted of managers not to look outside their graduate programme for ongoing talent development.

Ultimately, management must have consistent answers for employees who are querying their right to more to learning and development. Answers need to be fair and objective, as well as assuage any worries or concerns about the individual's potential.

That's easier said than done however; subjectivity is inevitable and every manager will question if an employee's personal goals fit the goals of the organisation, or if they have the ability, engagement and aspiration to progress.

These traits can be evaluated through inter-team tasks and assessment centres. There should always be budget for the non-graduate talent pool and a manager's discussion with his employees should bear this point in mind.

Communication of the organisation's assessment processes is vital in assuring other employees are not left out. Graduates tend to require more induction training in the initial stages of their career, but once they complete their initial recruitment programme, they effectively reach the same level as everyone else and need to become part of the whole pool ready for re-assessment.

Alleviating these fears is not a cut-and-dry operation. The manager who can assess the graduate talent pool while allaying doubts from other employees is not simply the manager who is fully engaged with their staff and their issues. It is the manager who is engaged and successfully communicates genuine assessment solutions.