UNLOCK YOUR TALENT

Five Surefire Ways to Connect Strategy to Talent Development

In today's fast-paced and evolving market, everything seems to be changing in an instant. To keep up, you need more than a catalog of training modules or curated learning paths – you need agile solutions that support your strategy and directly speak to the capabilities your people need today and tomorrow. Based on our 30 years of experience in helping organizations and leaders navigate talent challenges, these five proven actions ensure your talent strategy supports your strategic initiatives and accelerates change.

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1. Strategize first, then focus.

Organizations traditionally focused on broad, perpetual development to build individual competency and capability over time. This long-term approach is important to personal development but it doesn't keep pace with change in the business. Let your strategy determine the core skills your people need most right now, and augment your overall leadership competency model to focus on the top five to eight that drive the strategy. This is the time to discern which skills will have the greatest effect. Once you've isolated those skills, go after them hard in 12- to 18-month cycles with custom content focused on your top priorities.

Key to success: Interview your executive team and high-potential talent to uncover which core competencies will make a major difference in successfully executing your business strategy. This will help you determine your highest priority for the next 12 to 18 months.

2. Get specific.

Think beyond broad competency categories and descriptions. The trouble is that they can mean anything to anyone. To accelerate skill building and support the strategy, identify the most meaningful core behaviors and embed them into daily routines and practices. Getting to specific behaviors also allows you to measure when, where, and how often your people are practicing high performing behaviors so you can adjust and accelerate your approach as needed.

Key to success: After you've identified the top five to eight competencies, explicitly describe specific behaviors for each and be clear about what they look like in action. These behaviors will become the basis of your talent development program.

3. Make it real and authentic.

Now that you have the connection to the strategy and a clear focus, make it real for people! Always begin with the why, what, and how so learners can easily connect the dots between what the business is talking about and how they can help achieve it. Deepen this connection by getting a senior leader to share the information, either in person or a via a short video in a workshop or microlearning. Making the strategy real and authentic increases relevance, allows people to personally connect to it, and makes the learning more memorable and actionable.

Key to success: Create a high-impact program that is actionable, relatable, and speaks directly to your people. Craft stories, visualization, data, and group discussion that reflect the voices of your talent and customers and helps everyone embrace the what, why, and how of your strategy. No more boring learning!
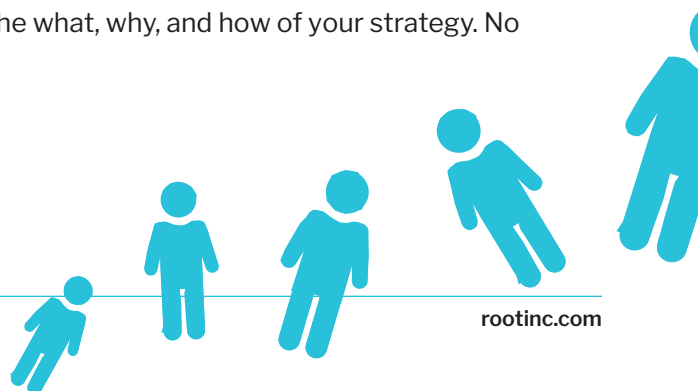
4. Don't neglect the basics.

While it's critical to go after specific skills that help propel your strategy, don't abandon the basics of leading people and leading change. Core leadership skills such as delegating, sharing the big picture, coaching, building relationships, setting expectations, and rewarding and recognizing people are required for project leaders, team leaders, managers, and thought leaders if they're to thrive in their roles. These are the fundamentals from which all strategy-specific skills are built. For example, building team resilience may be critical to realizing your strategy, but it will be a struggle if leaders don't know how to first build trust. This focus is best delivered at key moments in career growth, such as first-time manager programs, high-potential leader programs, and leading change programs that are either independent from or that complement your focus on strategy.

Key to success: Don't let basic development fall to the wayside. Use tried-and-true methods and customize your content to support your talent – from individual contributors to new managers and change leaders – at each career stage (for example, after hiring, with key promotions, and when shifting teams).

5. One size doesn't fit all.

Defining your strategy takes place at the organization-wide level, but change happens at the day-to-day work group level. Your approach to development may differ at the functional level, departmental level, or even the team or individual level depending on the size of your organization and the magnitude of your change. For example, a software company with a strategy to diversify its product offering might need to help the product development team build its innovation skills so it can quickly generate and vet new product ideas. But the strategy might also require developing a stronger voice for the sales team, which tells product development how customers are responding. Collaboration might be a skill that both sales and product development need, and it can be best delivered with cross-functional programs. The key is that one size does not fit all. A clear curriculum and a delivery plan provide the necessary focus to increase speed, relevance, and impact.

Key to success: Take a segmented approach so different levels and functions get exactly what they need to deliver your strategy. Identify the competencies that stretch across your organization and the additional skills that are needed for different levels or business units.

What are you waiting for? It's time to cultivate your people, bridge the gap between your talent development and business strategy, and see real results. Start a conversation with Root's talent experts to accelerate change in your organization and help your talent rock your strategy.

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