

SmartBlog on Leadership

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[Trademarks of a great boss: Provide growth opportunities](#)

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on April 21st, 2014

Of course you're already a good boss, or you wouldn't be reading this article. You may even be a great boss. But how do you stay at the top of your game? You do it by modeling great boss behavior on a daily basis.

Of course, you don't get up every morning, look at that face in the mirror, and proclaim, "I'm going to be a great boss today." Instead, you spend a little time on introspection and make some key personal decisions. Once you have created the internal foundation, you will more naturally do what a great boss does and you'll be able to grow your people by showing them the way. Begin by asking yourself these three questions:

- Where are you going?
- Who's going with you?
- How are you going to get there?

But wait — how will you find time for this? It's so easy to get stuck in the day-to-day rut. You have deadlines to meet, tasks to accomplish and numbers to make. That scenario doesn't necessarily encourage needed introspection. However, to grow yourself and your employees, you need to step back long enough to see the big picture. If you feel stuck or overwhelmed by this, get some help — hire a coach, join a mastermind group, or find an accountability partner. Just take the first step, and the future will begin to reveal itself.

1. Where are you going? Before you can grow your employees, you have to know where you yourself are going. Clearly define your path. What is the next step in your own career progression? Have a well-defined understanding of your company and where it's going in the long term. Identify the company's goals and then evaluate your own goals to make sure you are in alignment.

What to do now: Set aside an hour this week, either behind closed doors or away from the office, and make a list of your personal and career goals.

2. Who's going with you? Look behind you. Look around you. When you move up the ladder, who will fill the spot you vacate? Don't limit your thinking to the boxes on your organization chart. Look throughout the company for standouts. Consider people who have volunteered to take on new projects or responsibilities. Think about who steps up to the plate when somebody else doesn't come through.

When you've developed a talent roster, sit down with each individual. Explain your personal business goals, the company's goals, and how it all fits together. You don't need to conduct a strategy retreat, but at least give your people the high points. They need to see themselves in the picture a year or five years from now. This will help them decide how to spend their time, and then you can work together to create a growth strategy that will serve both of you.

It's a lot easier to grow a team and a company when everyone is paddling in the same direction.

What to do now: Spend the next week keeping your eyes open and make a list of high-potential employees you'd like to talk to. Then set up a schedule for meeting with each individual.

3. How are you going to get there? Although skill-specific training is often needed to move people into new responsibilities, we're talking about people development here, which is a much broader and more philosophical concept. The best way to develop your people is to let them take the lead. As you talk about the company's long-range goals, ask each individual, "Where do you see yourself? What job would you like to have? Why? What do we need to do to prepare you for that job?"

Be creative with your development plan. If someone tells you she wants your job, see it as an opportunity, not a threat. Let her come up with a new client presentation or a change in sales strategy and try it out. Create job-exchange programs, so that someone in sales can work in accounting or human resources temporarily. They may not change careers, but experiencing the company from a different perspective will make it easier for them to interact with other departments as they move ahead. Use job shadowing or temporary internships to let your people interact with and learn from C-level managers. Use mentors and coaches, both inside and outside the company, so that your people get input from multiple sources.

What to do now: Choose one high-potential employee from your list and work with him or her on their personal career goals and development plan. Use that as a template for working with others on your list.

Finally, when you have your people development plan in place, set milestones so you can work with each individual to evaluate their progress. You may need to make midcourse corrections from time to time, but your people will be motivated to exceed your expectations when they know you're committed to their success.

***Joel Garfinkle** is recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the U.S. He has 17 years of firsthand experience working closely with thousands of executives, senior managers, directors and employees. He is the author of 300 articles on leadership and seven books, including "**Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level.**" More than 10,000 people subscribe to his Fulfillment@Work newsletter. **Sign up and you'll receive the free e-book** "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"*