

"We need the best people today and tomorrow in order to achieve top performance over the long term"

Michaela Bürger, Vice President Executive Development at CD E, is responsible for the "Top Talent" module at People Excellence.

Ms. Bürger, what exactly are Top Talents? The child prodigies of Siemens?

Well, that depends on how you define child prodigy! (laughs) No - we aren't looking only for the up and coming Mozarts or Einsteins of the world. And we really don't have to go that far anyway, because every individual has very special talents - whether musical, technical, business or in sports. The decisive question is: How do you find out which talents and abilities people have and in which areas? Often far more potential rests in people than one suspects. Our job is to recognize this talent, to develop and utilize it, and to create an environment that enables such talent to be tapped, encouraged and advanced.



"We have to recognize, develop and utilize talent"

How do you identify a Top Talent

Naturally, we have clear criteria in our performance and evaluation rating process. Specifically, Top Talents are defined as top performers who have the potential to climb two position levels within five years. They must already have a record of outstanding results and exhibit great performance in their particular areas of competence. That's why Siemens says Top Talents can't be university graduates who have just started out their careers with us. On the contrary: It is also important that Top Talents have the proven ability to lead and drive a team, even against opposition. Our managers, above all, have the job of identifying these talents. They must have the right "feel" for this. They must recognize what abilities an employee has and how they can strengthen those abilities.

Does this mean that all managers should develop a sense for finding top talents?



"An excellent manager has a feeling for people in general"

I am absolutely convinced that managers should have a feeling for people in general. That's what makes a manager excellent, I think. It's all about seeing individuals in their entirety, and identifying their professional and personal strengths as well as their areas of improvement. Do they have a passion for their work? Do they have untapped talents they aren't aware of themselves? What potential do the employees have? Managers must trust their employees, and have the courage to give them new tasks and not simply let them go on doing what they have always done, and generally done well. At the same time, employees must have the courage and flexibility to try out something new. Our focus is on developing our employees - in order to put them in a position where they can tap the maximum of their potential for themselves and for Siemens.



So we can turn this around and say that good employees also look for excellent managers who develop them?

Absolutely. On the basis of my personal experience I can only confirm that, before I decide on a new job, I always look closely at its specific professional challenges and at the character of my potential manager. What kind of person is he or she? Does he or she encourage and develop talent? Does he or she have an open and honest way with people? If managers support and develop their employees, they will attract good people and support them along the way. The very basis of a high-performance culture is built on trust, mutual appreciation and the fun one can have in delivering excellent performance.

Then developing Top Talent isn't an end in itself?

Definitely not. We need the best people in order to achieve top performance over the long term. That's why we aim to identify our Top Talents as early as possible so we can most appropriately develop them. And in this process, quality always takes priority over quantity. While you can never have too many people in the Top Talent pool - they must be the right people.

Ms. Bürger, you often work with Top Talents yourself. What do you find most impressive about these people?

For one thing, the fact that they fight for their ideas. They have a very strong inner mission and believe in what they are doing. And this can apply to all possible areas, personally or professionally. They stick to their ideas even when they might end up standing alone - which doesn't happen very often! Such people also have the outstanding ability to get strong teams fired up about their work and back them in their efforts. Top Talents are able to win over employees and colleagues and also be acknowledged in their leadership role. Additionally, Top Talents are able to think outside the box, without any borders. For them, change is something positive. They want change and they drive it. At the same time, they are not only enthusiastic about top performances in their own area of competence, but also want to create value for the entire company. We have such people, and we need even more.

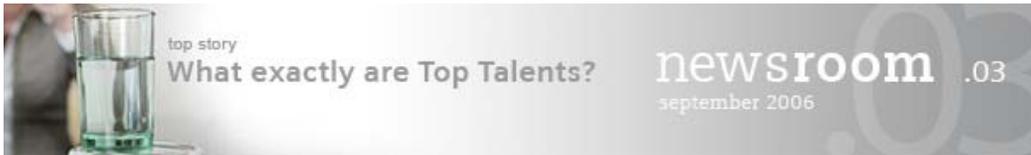


"We can't afford not to use our people's valuable potential"

Why have we just now rediscovered the idea of Top Talent for Siemens?

We really haven't rediscovered it. Siemens has been focusing for many years on personnel development. The fact that we are leaders in this field is frequently confirmed by our competitors, who like to use us as a benchmark. Now, we want to concentrate even more on the early identification and development of talent. We all know that the markets and competition are changing at an increasingly faster pace. To keep ahead in this kind of environment, we need the best people. We simply can't afford not to use our people's valuable potential to create value for our business.





How about a rather unorthodox question: What happens if someone is identified as a Top Talent and it later turns out that he or she really isn't one?

Well, the world certainly won't come to an end! No, seriously: Even then, one would have a very good employee. This is another situation where our rule of fairness comes into play: If the manager and employee talk openly and honestly about why it may be advisable to take the employee out of the talent pool, then they are actually doing each other a favor. Employees and managers have often discovered that energy is tied up in such a constellation, rather than set free: tied up through stress, through insecurity, through dissatisfaction. But why not ask the question the other way around? What happens if one discovers and develops a talent that perhaps hadn't been suspected at first? Then we've proven that our company provides an environment that gives its people the opportunity to develop their full potential. Then we've succeeded in putting the right people in leadership positions - top managers who help make sure our businesses are world-class, and employees who contribute their individual strengths to the sustainable success of our company.

