



Do You Have Hidden Talent?

You might be surprised!

Learn how one woman's career & life was dramatically changed because her company was willing to find and invest in her hidden talent!

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You might be surprised how many people and even leaders are unclear about their best talents. After high school, many go to college, some go to work or vocational training, others go to the military, some become young parents and others may wander directionless. We all make career and life choices. However, the decisions we make early on, and as we go through life, are most often made without objective or accurate data. In turn, lots of the selections made are off the mark or fail to tap into what is best about us.

During your teen years, perhaps someone noticed certain strengths or gifts that you had. A teacher, parent or role model noticed and positively endorsed your achievement. Or, you received an excellent grade or some sort of encouraging reinforcement for an effort well done. We naturally pursue work aligning with our perceived strengths or based on the rewards we enjoy.



On the flip side there are, of course, those whose potential is not pursued at all due to socio-economic or cultural setbacks or constraints. These folks may feel pigeon holed, dead-ended or derailed before they ever had a decent chance to get on a track.

Even with the best early support systems, the personal discovery process often falls short. While there may be great fun along the way (college days), mounting student loans and unfulfilled careers demonstrate the lack of keen self-awareness. By age of 16 to 22, it is rare for students to zero in on their best career and study path. Their information, education and life experiences are just too limited. Many are bombarded with parental and other influences that can further confuse things. *See blog post: College & Major Mistakes.*ⁱ

Next, we have to add the “all important” economic factor. In a capitalist economy where individuals are free to flourish or flounder, we need to earn money to satisfy basic security (living) needs and to pay the bills. So, we have to start somewhere and find the company or organization that will hire us. Diverse and challenging early job experiences can be great for developing work ethic, basic skills, and fundamentals. *(Yes, my first job in high school was at McDonalds – I was good with customers at the front counter but dropped a whole tray of Big Macs when learning to cook and while showing off for a friend...)*

Once we start with serious vocational pursuits, careers are molded along the way based on the company priorities and our performance contributions as evaluated by the perceptions of others. Careers are also shaped by the choices we make along with some level of luck and

timing -- good and bad. In this evolving process whether you prospered, did okay, or struggled; your best talent and gifts and intrinsic motivators may have been overshadowed or missed.

I worked with a leader at an energy company who had spent the first 35 years of his career in a job he hated as a payroll/financial manager. He finally moved into training and organizational development leadership position where he thrived for a few years until he abruptly left via disability with quadruple by-pass surgery. His assessed profile was the exact opposite of an accounting or payroll manager as he was entrepreneur-like, strategic, creative, and not detailed. The years of stressful work had taken its toll. He stayed handcuffed in the payroll job because it paid so well.

Kim (Brinkmeyer) Leveridge, Ph.D. and I conducted an assessment project to find “hidden talent” for an energy company years ago. The company was laying off employees on one side of the business yet had urgent needs for IS analysts and a couple of other key positions. Here’s an excerpt from the article “Out of Oz – Finding Hidden Talent” written a year after the project boot camp training was completed:

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“Perhaps the greatest dilemma facing businesses is the inability to attract, hire, develop, and retain essential IS staff... The bottom line is that the demand explosion in the marketplace has led to a continually growing shortage of IS professionals.

The solution to this dilemma is not over the rainbow and won’t be found by relentless or even lucrative headhunting efforts. Remarkably, when it comes to recruiting IS talent -- there is no place like home.* Many organizations already have the IS staff they need, they just don’t know it. Within businesses today, there is a wealth of unrecognized and undeveloped talent hidden by a wide array of job titles. These future IS professionals are simply undiscovered and untrained. They are often hidden in jobs such as: accounting associates, secretaries, agents, supervisors, customer service representatives, and perhaps even janitorial staff to name a few. They are among and around you.

Amazingly, it is not difficult to identify or to develop this talent. However, it does take commitment, quality tools, and leadership resolve. There are two critical keys to identifying, unleashing and developing hidden talent that must be conducted strictly in this order:

- 1) assessment of existing staff using quality personality and motivational measurement tools that are scientifically validated, EEO/diversity neutral (CDR 3-D Suite of assessments is ideal and there are a handful of others); and,
- 2) provide a re-training, re-tooling or boot camp training so that selected candidates can learn the new job skills. (The camp in this project was a 12 weeks long IS Boot Camp training at the Texas Instruments facility conducted by Stonebridge Technologies)

*Update: In 2016, many companies primarily seek IS talent overseas (India, China) although companies can certainly look within their ranks as well!

This redeploy project was brought on by the reduction of 400 jobs in one operating unit of the company. As a demonstration of the company's commitment to its people, the CEO announced that all employees (14,000) were eligible to apply for the vacancies and that successful candidates would be provided:

- ☒ a career development opportunity, and in most cases, a promotion
- ☒ re-tooling training (boot camp) for eight to twelve weeks funded by the Company
- ☒ full pay while being trained and travel expenses, if applicable
- ☒ an acceptance bonus of \$5,000 once training was successfully completed; and,
- ☒ full relocation benefits at company expense (if necessary).

This was indeed a hefty investment in people and one that demonstrated the firms' commitment to developing talent from within.

A year after the Boot Camp IS training was completed; the instructor was interviewed on request by Technical Training Magazine and reported:

'This is not any easy program by any measure. Participants need to have the ability to learn, understand concepts, and to process and organize information so that they can mentally transform into practical, applied skill set to use when tackling IS projects or problems.

My experience with this energy company's Boot Camp was quite different than other normal groups. The graduate grade range for this broader-in-scope IS position for graduates was a remarkable A+ to A-. (I rated past groups from A+ to C-).

Ironically, there was one exception to this. We had an individual in the class who struggled from the outset. During the first week this individual could not grasp the basic concepts. After some in-depth management discussions on how to resolve this participant's training dilemma (which was beginning to affect the class), we eventually learned that this individual had been added to the class as an executive political favor and had **some how by-passed the assessment screening**. Once the Company understood the predicament created, this employee was placed back in their former position with full pay and the class sped forward to outstanding completion.'

The Stonebridge Technologies instructor communicated that this class was the **best transitional training, or boot camp, class ever**. Another noteworthy comment he offered was that **he found that a number of the assessed participants were at a better skill level and showed more potential and promise than many of the IS college grads he has worked with!**

The Value of Growing Your Own

The need and cost effectiveness for growing your own pool of IS professionals, and other difficult-to-recruit talent, is indisputable. Consider the benefits that this assessment screening process can provide an organization for harvesting new, formerly unidentified talent from within its own doors. This process:

- provides the opportunity to develop staff who are already loyal to your Company, thereby minimizing the potential for turnover;
- promotes and develops those who already know your industry, your business and who have established relationships with your customers;
- provides a mechanism to send a very positive career development message to employees that can eliminate “dead-ending” for many and may prevent the “peter-principal” tract for others;
- is EEO neutral, meaning there is no adverse impact or discriminatory effects of testing as statistically documented within the validity project phase;
- is a great source of data for developing future bench strength (succession planning);
- reduces unnecessary recruiting expenses while directing training and development investments more wisely; and
- can be utilized for virtually **all** positions; unveils highly capable and talented underutilized employees.”

The Value of Finding YOUR Own Hidden (or Best) Talents:

From an individual standpoint, there is nothing more fulfilling than finding your own best career path and ultimately your best job(s). When you are really good at what you do, and love it, you will prosper and have a great sense of fulfillment. You will be able to “whistle while you work” as the saying goes.

We each need to own and manage our personal careers and development and should not expect or allow organizations to be the primary owner or ultimate decision maker.

You do not have to wait for companies to hire an expert to explore your own talent and potential. While that is a great perk if you can get it, many companies’ talent development budgets are being pinched right now. You can hire a coach certified in the appropriate assessment tools to help them identify and unleash their true talent.

Below is feedback from one of the people who went through the IS Boot Camp taught by Stonebridge Technologies in training described from the article excerpt above:

“This was personally the best thing I have ever done. Ever since that day I entered the program my life has changed for the better. Formerly, I was an Administrative Assistant in Salt Lake City and felt stymied in that role. I was relocated to Tulsa for this new opportunity as a Systems Analyst after completing Boot Camp training. From a professional standpoint, it has been really exciting because I am now working on a

large companywide project, developing systems from the ground up. Also, the most impressive part of the redeploy selection process itself was the coaching feedback I received with my assessment results. It is something I recommend to everyone. I feel extremely fortunate that I was part of this initial group.”

Becky Warbarg, Systems Analyst

Going full circle after more than 16 years, today while writing this, I checked Becky’s LinkedIn profile and I was *thrilled* to say the least. Since the many years when Becky’s hidden IS talents were first “discovered” and she was given this boot camp training opportunity and was promoted out of an administrative role, her career has soared within the IS field and leadership ranks. I sent her a message and she responded with:

Your message made my day! It's so wonderful to hear from you!! I have often thought of your organization's part in my career and the life-changing opportunity that was provided for me some time ago now.

It's a thrill to finally connect again (July 2016) and I am so glad you reached out! In fact, I kept the company newsletter about our Boot Camp and every few years I have unpacked it in my belongings and reflected on the experience. Thank goodness that social media enabled us to reconnect...

Often I have mentioned the personality assessment that was conducted by your team and how I was told that I was a "perfect match" for the position. In fact, it makes me giggle a little now when I realize the somewhat stereotypical nature of a software professional's personality. As I reflect, I definitely had/have that side of me. However, during these decades I have also come to realize that I have a bit of gift when it comes to bridging those who are technical with the business people which has served me well in multiple roles in my career.

There aren't enough words to express how touched I am by your support and continued interest. Yes, the value of your work has impacted my life tremendously in such a positive way. When I applied for the program, I was thrilled at the prospect but honestly questioned whether I would be a good match, and then your assessments boosted my confidence so much.

*Thank you. Thank you. THANK YOU! **Becky***

Bottom line, finding your own “hidden talent” may be just what you need to put the skip back in your step and the success and joy back into your career.

ⁱ Parsons, Nancy, CDR Assessment Group, Inc., Blog, <http://cdrassessmentgroup.com/college-major-mistakes/>

ⁱⁱ CDR Assessment Group, Inc., “Out of Oz – Finding Hidden Talent”, Assessment Advisor, 1999, Tulsa, OK.
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