

FAST COMPANY

4 signs your company views you as a high-potential employee

Research finds that high-performing employees exert 21% more effort than their non-HIPO peer.

By Gwen Moran
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In the world of talent management, high-performing employees, or HIPOs, are the holy grail. Smart, agile, and talented, Gartner research finds that HIPOs, who are smart, agile, and talented, exert 21% more effort than their non-HIPO peers and have a 75% chance of succeeding at roles that are critical to business performance and the future leadership pipeline.

But how do you know if your organization thinks of you as a HIPO?

It can be tricky, says Marc Effron, president of Talent Strategy Group, a talent management consulting group, and author of *8 Steps to High Performance*. Just 40% of companies communicate to HIPOs that they're identified as such, according to his firm's research. "The challenge is not only do the HIPOs not know that they're HIPOs, but a lot of people who may think they're HIPOs . . . are never told that they're not HIPOs," he says.

If your company isn't forthcoming with what they think about your performance or potential, here are four indicators that you're in the HIPO category:

ASSIGNMENT QUALITY AND VARIETY

Take a look at your assignments. Are you busy? Are you getting more challenging projects? Are more people asking to collaborate with you? These are good signs that you're seen as a top performer, says Keri Ohlrich, CEO of HR consulting company Abbracci Group. Companies "do not put people who aren't doing well, or they don't respect in highly visible projects," she says. But quality matters. If you're just getting more busy work or you're moved to a role that is isolating and doesn't offer you opportunities to grow, that's a bad sign, she adds.

It's not unusual for HIPOs to be moved around often, Ohlrich says. If you're viewed as a "fixer" who can tackle and solve problems, your company may add you to teams that are struggling in an effort to overcome those challenges. This movement may feel haphazard and even frustrating—just when things are going more smoothly, you're moved to another thorny situation. "That's a sign that your company thinks really highly of you," she says.

INSIGHT AND ACCESS

Another good sign is that people seek your insight and listen to what you have to say, says Randall S. Peterson, academic director of the London Business School's Leadership Institute. You may find that people who are higher up in the organization than you are seek your opinion or input and care about what you think, he adds. This may lead to somewhat of a "self-fulfilling prophecy" when it comes to performance.

“Senior people have opinions about other certain people, they will leak it a little bit in the way they talked about people around the place. And that encourages other people to collaborate with you,” Peterson says. The combination of access to leadership and new invitations to collaborate can lead to new growth opportunities, he adds.

TRAINING AND INVESTMENT

While it seems like being singled out for additional training could be a sign that your company sees potential, you need to look beneath the surface to determine if it is, Peterson says. Training may simply be a matter of compliance. Or, it may also be an indication that your company sees the need for remediation in certain areas. Look closely at the content of the training for which you’re selected. If the people are more senior than you, or you’re chosen for a coveted development program, those are indications that your company is viewing you as a HIPO, he says.

Companies will often make other investments in a talented employee’s growth, Effron says. If you are given a coach, matched with a mentor, or selected for some other specialized program, those are all good signs, he says.

FEEDBACK

Like training, suddenly getting more feedback isn’t necessarily an indicator that you’re a HIPO—it could mean that your boss thinks you need correction. Constructive feedback by someone senior, especially if they’re giving you specific clues about what you need to work on, is generally a good thing, Randall says.

If the feedback is too nice, that might be a sign that the giver isn’t truly interested in your development and doesn’t want to deal with conflict. If the feedback is overly negative, it could be a sign that the individual doesn’t see the potential for you to get better or just wants to drive you out of the organization.

Companies that are serious about retaining their HIPOs typically devote a combination of opportunities, resources, and support toward their development. By looking closely at both your company’s actions and their content, you may gain valuable clues about exactly how your employer views your potential.

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