ARE YOU READY TO LEAD TALENT?
No matter what industry your company is a part of and what products and services you contribute, there’s a place where competition is still hard. It’s all about people. There’s a rapidly increasing digitization and automation that’s changing the way we work, but being a leader and running a company is still a people game and it’s not going away any time soon.

You’re curious to find the potential that’s around you as a leader every day, but that maybe hasn’t yet been released. You’re willing to look yourself in the mirror and be brutally honest in relation to the areas where you already do it well and the areas where you’ll need to make changes if something else is going to happen. There are no shortcuts or easy solutions for getting the best out of others. Therefore, you should be passionate about it and you shouldn’t be able to resist taking on the task.

This article is for you who is ambitious with your management and ambitious on behalf of your company and employees.
The task of seeing potential in others is quite simple. You have to be able to see something that doesn’t exist yet and see the potential in your people that they themselves may not see. Easy, right? Potential is defined by not yet being present. There may be small signs that something interesting is on its way, but it is not yet fully realized. You have to imagine what your people will be able to do if the right circumstances are in place. In order to succeed, you need to try and be aware of what the small changes in tasks and projects do to your people, how your thinking and behavior affects their thinking and behavior, how the bridge between what your company needs and what your people are competent in and motivated for looks like.

It also means that the traditional business logic on linear planning and execution does not hold when you have to find and realize potential in people. You can’t plan how to unfold potential. You can’t plan what happens when you give an employee a new task that is at the limits of what they can do today. You can’t plan how people respond to new challenges.

In short, you can’t plan the potential, you have to work your way forward. If you reach this realization and accept it, then you’ve made it a long way.
As mentioned, potential is not a linear size. However, there are a number of indicators that can help when you have to spot it. Look for:

• **Abilities** How are the employees’ professional and personal abilities in relation to creating the value you want as a company?

• **Engagement** What is the employee’s commitment like to what the company is engaged in? Where are the valuable transitions between the company’s objectives and the employee’s objectives of being in the company?

• **Aspiration** Is the employee hungry for more? Does the employee have the ambition to make a greater difference for him/herself, his/her colleagues, and your customers as well as for the company?

• **Learning** How (and how fast) does the employee acquire new knowledge and start using it in a valuable way?

• **Cooperation** How does the employee solve problems and create results with others, and how does the employee build and develop relationships with others?

• **Curiosity** To what extent does the employee investigate with regard to new knowledge and situations that give the opportunity for learning and increased value?

• **Feedback** To what extent does the employee seek feedback that not only confirms his or her existing level but also the feedback showing the next level?

Use the above as a filter when you’re considering potential and as themes you need to think about in developing employees’ potential. Make sure that the tasks and projects the employee is involved in contain opportunities to train these topics as part of solving the task. In this way, you solve company problems and develop potential simultaneously.
When you work with seeing and developing the potential of others, there’s one word that makes all the difference. It is the word ‘yet’. If you get used to using ‘yet’ when you look at your employees, you insist that they have potential.

- She doesn’t succeed in communicating her messages clearly – yet.
- He doesn’t understand customers’ concerns – yet.
- She doesn’t deliver high enough quality – yet.
- He hasn’t shown the level I expect – yet.

If you remove ‘yet’ from the above sentences, there’s a risk that your image of the employee is too fixed and it will be harder for you to see the way forward. However, if you use “yet” consistently, you give yourself (and the employee) the opportunity for something new to happen. That the employee will actually be able to master what is asked for but hasn’t reached – yet.
Take a picture of all your employees and put them on the table. Look carefully at them and answer the following questions:

• What exactly is it that gets the individual employee to open door in the morning? Why did they choose to be in your company and with you as a leader?

• What’s the individual employee’s individual objectives of being in your company? What is it that he/she finds interesting about being with exactly you?

• What are the specific strengths that every single employee possesses that are strategically significant for the company?

• What pitfalls does the employee have in the way of achieving full potential?

• What are the main motivational factors that the employee primarily has? What causes the employee to become highly committed?

• When is each employee absolutely at their best? What does their top performance and top motivation look like and what factors should be present for this to happen?

You will most likely find that you have a couple of gaps with regard to some of the employees. Perhaps you have an overall picture of them but probably not a completely in-depth one, which means you have a problem. This problem has both a business and a human side. Your business problem is that you don’t achieve the goals that you actually could achieve, because performance in a company is closely linked to the people in the company and what they choose to bring to work. The human problem is that you only understand a fraction of what actually makes your people think it’s worth doing their best. The consequences of this include:

1. That you can create more links between the business critical tasks and your employees’ talents and commitment.

2. That the dialogues you have with your employees need to be adjusted to focus even more on their objectives, freedom and skills.

3. That your focus must be sharpened in relation to the underlying reasons that your employees do as they do (or don’t). You need to get closer to them.

One of the prerequisites for this to be able to happen is trust. Do the employees trust you and that you actually want the best for them? Building this trust can be done, for example, by having a strong connection between what you say and what you actually do afterwards. That you’re able to create relationships with your employees that go beyond the daily tasks and KPIs and that the employees find that you focus on things that are not just about what you want to achieve but also based on where they actually are.
DO THE EMPLOYEES TRUST YOU AND THAT YOU ACTUALLY WANT THE BEST FOR THEM?
The way you think about the development of people and business is a part of the foundation for how well you’ll succeed as a leader. Our actions as leaders don’t occur out of the blue. There is, among other things, a way of thinking and some beliefs that shape what we do in the face of everyday life in the company.

One way to get closer to this is to consider the following:

- Do you believe that all people, under the right circumstances, can become highly committed and motivated?
- Do you believe that your role as leader is significant in that the employees are highly committed and can do their best?

If you answer yes to these questions, you’re ready for the consequences of your answers. They are the following:

- If everyone, under the right circumstances, can become highly committed and motivated in their work, but not everyone is with you, then there’s something you’re missing today. Look at the employees’ freedom in solving tasks, the objective of the task and the connection with the employee’s own objectives for being with you as well as the employee’s ability to feel competent and get feedback on being competent.
- If you think that leadership and your role as a leader are essential in employees both doing well and doing it well, you cannot delegate this to others. You cannot leave your employees’ talent to HR or external people. It’s your job to see it and develop it in everyday work – and of course, use relevant people around you as inspiration and support, but it’s you sitting in the driver’s seat together with the employee.

Most leaders have plenty of opinions about what good leadership is and what they believe in. Take it a step further and turn your opinions into actions so that there’s a direct link between what you believe (and know) works and what you actually do Monday to Friday at work. You’ll not only stand out, but you’ll also create some different results.
What do your employees look like when they come in the morning and when they go back in the evening? Are they engaged and motivated when they come or is it something that just has to be gotten over with?

Do they have drive and desire in their eyes at the end of the day because the day was meaningful and engaging, or do they go out of the door in a worse state than when they came? What is the company’s and your impression of the employees between the entrance and the end of a regular working day?

The question is whether you primarily consume or build talent?

We all spend a great deal of our time at work, which should mean that something needs to be done. If we don’t have really big moments once in a while, then it’s close to being game over. Your role as leader must therefore also be to help your employees achieve the high points of their careers that they otherwise wouldn’t have had if you weren’t their leader. High points where they contribute to creating something valuable that makes a difference, experiences that make them smarter and committed, moments where they doubt their ability but actually experience having more potential than they themselves believe.

That’s excellent leadership and it’s the unique opportunity you have as a leader. You can make significant footprints in people’s careers that really go beyond what they thought was possible in the beginning. The question is whether it’s interesting for you?
To develop other people’s talent, you have to bring your own into play – so what is your talent as a leader? What is it that you find easier than others, that you’re often really successful with and are strongly engaged by? It is some of that that you need to find in the development of other people’s talent. In developing employees’ talent, there is a critical thing that you have to do: As a leader, you want your employees to take the initiative, to suggest new and creative solutions to difficult challenges as well as to be committed and perhaps even passionate about their work. What kind of leader doesn’t want that?

The difficulty in bringing this out is, among other things, that you can’t demand it as a leader. You can’t demand that your employees take the initiative, are creative and committed. You can certainly try, but of course you’ll quickly find out that no one responds particularly well to these demands. So, when you can’t demand these important things, what do you do? One suggestion is that you ask yourself how to make yourself deserving that your employees bring the best they have to work.

In addition, you can benefit from using the following good habits in the development of other’s talent:

- Build bridges between the tasks you have and the development needs your people have. Watch out for “just” solving the everyday tasks. It’s not enough if you also want the best. Therefore, carefully consider why you give certain tasks to people and what potential development the individual employee can achieve through the specific task. Think of any business challenge as a potential opportunity for developing someone’s talent.

- Put your employees in touch with good people from your network. Be generous with the people you know that can inspire, challenge and support the employees in their development and contribution to the company. You don’t have to do it all by yourself. Use the good people you know.

- Draw out learning and knowledge from the tasks and situations the employees go through. There’s something to learn in everything, so help employees see these lessons and use them in the future. Supplement with specific feedback that’s both based on what employees are really successful with as well as what they can do even more of.

- Help to create links between what your company and customers need and what employees are really good at and highly motivated by, even if it means that an employee has to move to a different team than yours. Think of talented people as the whole company’s and not just your department’s.
As a leader, if you really want to get the best out of people and work with some of the best, you’ll have to accept a little resistance and that you’ll spend time on other things than you normally do.

Talented people are (and must be) impatient, focused on making a real difference, highly driven by goals and meaning, will ask more questions and push for you to move forward (faster).

Use it as a quality and as an opportunity to get things done that otherwise wouldn’t be possible without these people on the team. Give them a bigger mandate than you’re immediately comfortable with and be prepared to be surprised at what will happen, because talented people break the boundaries of what we initially thought was possible.