

# Earning Acclaim for 'STEALTH' DEVELOPMENT

**Weaving career development into work flow makes for an organic and powerful tool for talent managers. But becoming too stealthy risks the effort going unnoticed.**

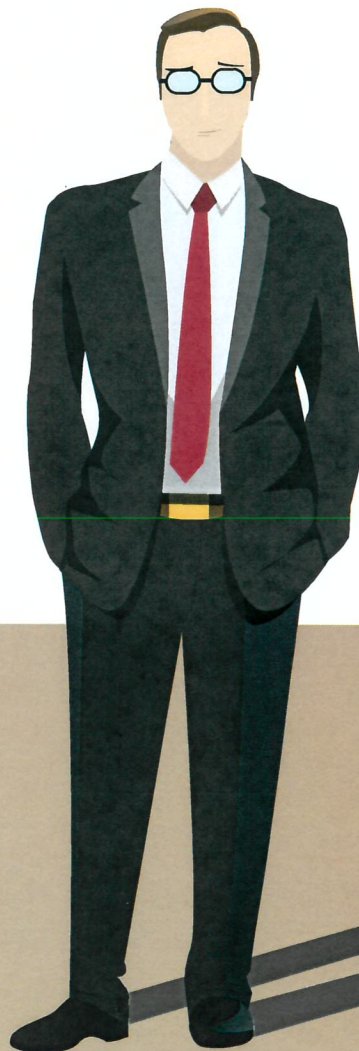
ESSAY BY BEVERLY KAYE AND JULIE WINKLE GIULIONI

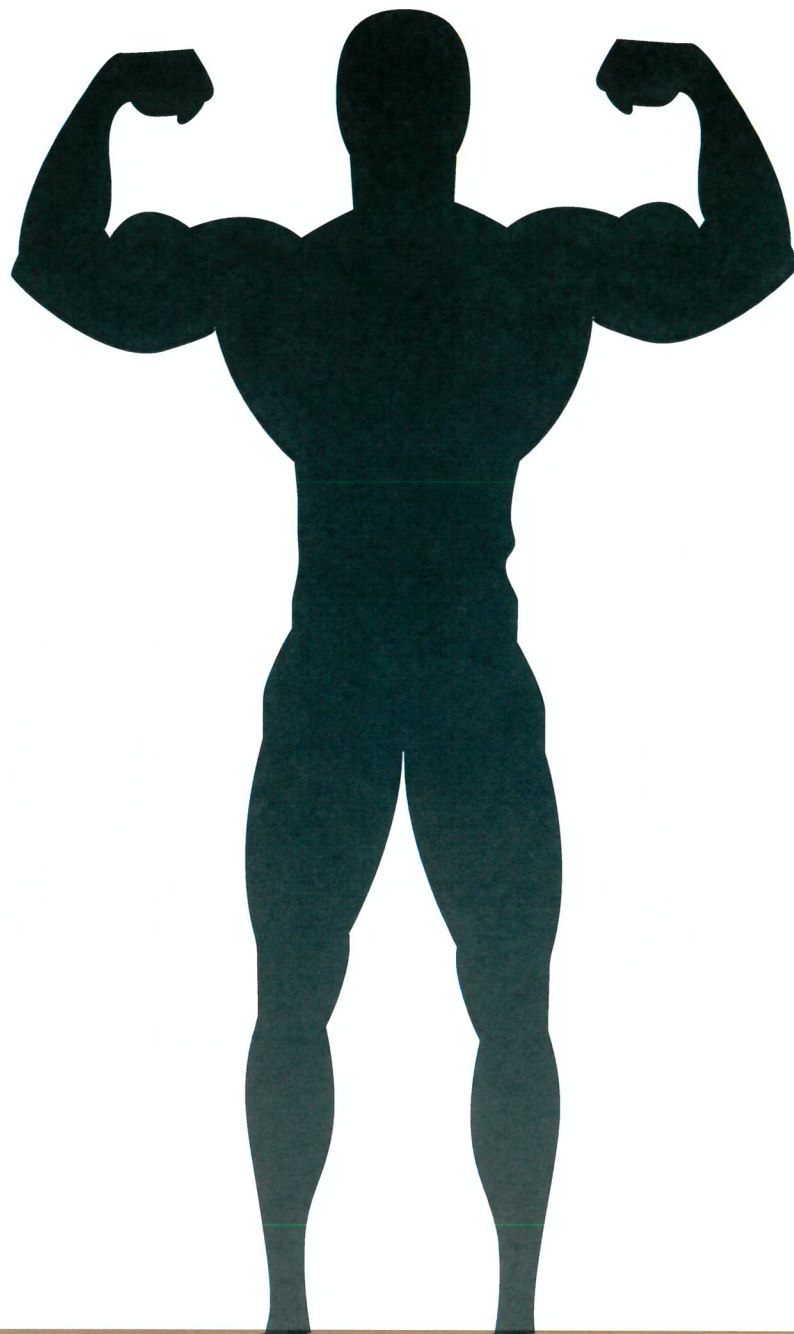
Annual performance reviews are getting a lot of bad press — and for good reason. The Wall Street Journal and other business news outlets regularly spotlight the shortcomings of this time-honored system of appraising employees once a year through a face-to-face meeting, with unproductive and arbitrary ratings dominating the process.

Meanwhile, many high-profile companies like Adobe Systems Inc. and Microsoft Corp. have finally decided the system is useless and infertile. Others have followed. What these companies have adopted is a system of more iterative and frequent conversations about performance, achievement and results.

What took so long? The performance review's second cousin — the career development conversation — has been the subject of a similar focus over the past several years. Countless organizations have come to understand that career development cannot be treated as another initiative or annual program. Many have been working for some time to abandon the formal yearly process or supplement it with more regular, embedded development.

Many managers are becoming more adept at weaving career development into the work flow, making it more casual, conversational and part of the day-to-day cadence. What's more, these companies are realizing a powerful result in the process: authentic and sustainable career development.





#### **ON THE WEB**

Simple conversations can unearth targeted development options that may not come to light through observation alone.

**[talentmgt.com/  
DialogueForDevelopment](http://talentmgt.com/DialogueForDevelopment)**



But some organizations may be reaching an inflection point. Those that have mastered this new approach are beginning to wonder if their efforts to extend career development beyond the clear confines of the annual individual development plan meeting have taken it too far. They're asking themselves if their "nanocoaching efforts," spontaneous on-the-spot interactions and embedded development have become too seamless.

They worry that these stealth approaches may not translate. Employees may not notice the significant investment that's being made in career development. They may not recognize that career development is even happening.

The good news is organizations increasingly are getting the message about what employees want and need as well as how to move the needle relative to development and employee engagement. Many human resources departments are leading the charge and taking meaningful steps to move career development to something that's organic, fluid and woven right into the work flow.

Meanwhile, managers are learning to help others grow through an ongoing dialogue that deepens rapport and understanding while uncovering creative ways to use employees' talents. Formal systems and form-driven processes are giving way to less structured, more personalized ad-hoc approaches. Career development is being transformed in ways that support the employee, manager, other stakeholders and the organization as a whole.

The bad news is busy employees may not recognize what's happening because, in their minds, these good leadership behaviors and actions don't fly under the banner of career development. This comfortable, casual, conversational system may feel so natural and normal that employees are not connecting the dots back to career development.

Moreover, organizations and managers committed to doing career development right may not get credit for it because "right" happens quietly, regularly, iteratively and without the fanfare of programs and initiatives.

## Reader Reaction

Is there a downside to organizations stealthily providing learning?



**@AmyFranko**

Career development shouldn't be stealth. It's a top reason why ppl are engaged and your best talent stays.



**@yourworkplace**

Employees should notice it though! Seeing you career develop is motivating and something to be proud of.



**@TriciaDupilka**

If it's a shared leadership responsibility and part of your culture, it will be noticed.



**@TonyHerc**

It's strategy that matters. If there is vision toward innovation & development of people as part of your strategy it's seamless.

What do you think? Join the discussion at [tinyurl.com/stealthydevelopment](http://tinyurl.com/stealthydevelopment) or follow us on Twitter [@TalentMgtMag](https://twitter.com/TalentMgtMag).

The truth is you don't likely have this problem—at least not yet. The vast majority of organizations and managers haven't become so adept at embedding career development that their ongoing interactions would be characterized as "stealth."

There are some organizations struggling with this, and there are steps they can take to ensure that the efforts of their leaders, managers and supervisors resonate as career development with the employees they are so committed to developing.

## Informal to Invisible

A large East Coast-based financial institution made an organizationwide effort to address career development over a two-year period (Editor's Note: The authors declined to identify the organization). The forms,

systems and administrative artifacts of career development were de-emphasized. The focus was on putting the "human" back into their human resources processes.

Managers went through extensive training to conduct meaningful career conversations that focused on employees' skills, interests, preferences and goals. They learned how to engage others in dialogue around the big picture, evolving business landscape, industry changes and the needs of the organization.

They became skilled at helping employees put their talents and strengths to work in new ways that challenged the individual and supported the organization. Although the organization didn't have a lot of promotions or lateral moves to offer, job enrichment and expansion exploded, and employees were pleased.

When the next employee opinion survey came, there were high hopes that career development would finally find its way to the top quartile. When the results were published, leadership could not believe that not one single career-development-related item had improved; one had even dropped further.

They tried to understand how they could have so completely missed the mark, despite the many focus groups and interviews with employees conducted.

The source of the problem eventually revealed itself: Employees simply didn't make the connection that the conversations, opportunities and development they were receiving—and genuinely appreciating—were career development. Career development had become so embedded and seemingly effortless, that it was invisible. It was stealth.

As a talent manager, if you're considering a less formal, more pervasive and conversational approach to career development but are concerned that your efforts will go unnoticed, no worries. There are several non-gratuitous, organic and value-adding strategies that leaders can implement to ensure that employees recognize the undercurrent of development within the organization



and appreciate it as part of your culture and commitment to them.

## Flag It

Just because it's part of a daily cadence rather than an annual process doesn't mean the conversations about career development can't be overt. Use language to your advantage.

Start by getting to know what each person's career goals are. Refer to them frequently, explicitly using the term "career goals": "How do you see that project supporting your career goal of ...?"

Don't hesitate to label discussions you're having as "development conversations": "Do you have a minute for a quick career development conversation? I got some great client feedback that demonstrate show you're doing against your goals."

Use the word "development" liberally, re-

framing progress and learning in these terms: "How do you think that workshop helped you develop and move toward your career goals of ...?"

## Focus It

An individual's career goals can be a powerful anchor point in a variety of different contexts. When launching projects, delegating tasks or assigning work, focus on the connection to the employee's career goals.

When people struggle with challenges, stumble or fail, it's the ideal time to frame the need to learn and cast lessons forward in terms of development.

When wrapping up projects or initiatives, a simple question — such as "How will what you've learned support your career development?" — can consciously shift focus and raise awareness around your com-

mitment to the individual's growth.

## Foster It

In today's fast-paced business environment, it's easy for busy employees to put their heads down, do what's before them, and miss the connection between their actions and development.

Carve out time routinely to check in with employees, creating the time and space to consider how their work, new skills and insights are furthering their career objectives.

Recognize and celebrate concrete progress toward career goals and milestones, as well as efforts that may not yet have yielded results.

Make sure the employees understand that formal training programs aren't the exclusive domains of development. On-the-job expe-

**STEALTH** continued on page 48

# A Management Education For Those Who Expect More

American Public University knows the value of strong management and leadership skills. Learn talent development and other management strategies for organizational success in a competitive business world. APU offers 190+ career-relevant online degree and certificate programs including:

- Human Resource Management
- Retail Management
- Transportation & Logistics Management

Partner with a nationally recognized leader in online education and strengthen your workforce investment.

Get started today at [StudyatAPU.com/talent](http://StudyatAPU.com/talent)



We want you to make an informed decision about the university that's right for you. For more about our graduation rates, the median debt of students who completed each program, and other important information, visit [www.apu.edu/disclosure](http://www.apu.edu/disclosure).





## STEALTH continued from page 27

riences, activities, job shadowing, coaching, networking and volunteer opportunities are all part of a well-rounded development plan. Ask, “What kinds of stretch assignments would you like to explore in support of your career objectives?”

### Flaunt It

Just because career development is no longer rolled out on the annual organizational red carpet, doesn’t mean it shouldn’t get a little fanfare. The more casual nature of ongoing, embedded development demands that leaders really highlight the value and success of everyone’s efforts.

Include the word “development” on every agenda and facilitate a conversation about how each team member is growing, learning and developing. Then loop back to individuals to connect these insights to their career goals.

Then, celebrate. When someone acquires new competencies, changes roles, gets a promotion internally or even takes a position externally, it’s an opportunity to shine the light on career development.

Pat the organization on the back. Leverage the old sales technique of letting the customer know what you did for them: “We’re delighted to have been able to give you an opportunity to further your career by ...”

Use newsletters, message boards and social media to publicize how people are learning, growing and succeeding, linking it all to career development.

More and more organizations are seeing the wisdom of taking career development off the annual calendar and transforming it into an everyday leadership responsibility. But successfully doing so requires that employees don’t overlook the commitment, support and effort invested on their behalf.

When it comes to this more organic and ongoing approach to development, integrated doesn’t have to mean invisible. Ad hoc doesn’t have to be interpreted as absent. Embedded doesn’t have to feel imperceptible.

If leaders consciously and verbally bring greater attention to their commitment and actions, making development a little less stealthy may be the secret to making it a lot more satisfying to employees and successful for organizations. **tm**

**Beverly Kaye** is founder of Career Systems International, which specializes in engagement, retention and development. **Julie Winkle Giulioni** is co-founder and principal of DesignArounds, a consulting and instructional design firm. Both are authors of “Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go: Career Conversations Employees Want.” To comment, email [editor@talentmgt.com](mailto:editor@talentmgt.com).

## CATALYSTS continued from page 31

“Baseline data about the players we have in the system today helps us target the players we need,” he said. “We collect a rich set of data about each player we’re scouting, and we use aggregate data to analyze player talent trends, including the effectiveness of particular sources of talent within the geography so we can focus our efforts in a smart way.”

The technology and social business practices exist today for organizations to manage the people in a similar data-driven fashion.

The types of cycle-bound and process-based measurements that defined the online reporting of first-generation talent management solutions will be complemented and then increasingly supplanted by a richer, data-driven perspective on the workforce.

This includes talent management data analysis that goes far beyond traditional measurements, like “number of applicants” or “number of people who were rated a ‘3’ in the annual performance appraisal process,” Levitt said.

Digital talent managers will use data to understand what success and risk are today, and to reveal trends that will help the business grow and thrive in the future.

### The Enterprise Digital Leadership Opportunity

Social collaboration and digital talent management are coming to the workplace, and businesses that do not embrace this change face competitive challenges from those that do.

Talent leaders should consider the effect this evolution will have on their careers, including understanding the demand for this type of data about people within the business and promoting the kinds of information and data that HR can offer.

The digital evolution of the workplace needs leaders. Talent leaders who connect people in nonhierarchical networks, create boundary-free information-sharing and learning, reach and engage people through social channels, and provide insightful people analytics will make their businesses more competitive.

This evolution represents the most significant leadership opportunity for HR in decades and an unprecedented career opportunity for the new digital talent managers. **tm**

**Jim Bowley** is a vice president at workforce management technology provider PeopleFluent. To comment, email [editor@talentmgt.com](mailto:editor@talentmgt.com).