



## Bursting the Bubble of Corporate Talent

Are we still promoting “talent” – or just handing power to the best-dressed opportunists in the room?

What I keep hearing in boardrooms, team sessions, and leadership coaching raises the same question:

Have we lost sight of who actually builds organisations?

Corporate decline does not start with dramatic exits.

It starts when we confuse visibility with value. Style with substance.

It starts when clowns, not builders, get labelled as “high potential.”

This article calls it out.

It introduces the real drivers of performance – the HPPs: Hardworking, Persistent People.

And it offers a way to stop mistaking polish for potential.

Call it culture protection.

Call it performance hygiene.

I call it: Bursting the Bubble of Corporate Talent.



## What do we really mean by 'talent'?

Working with organisations and their top management teams, I regularly hear people referred to as “talent.” Young talent. Mid-level talent. Emerging talent.

But what does that actually mean?

That they went to the right school? That they fit the corporate image? That they sit at the right tables – or show up to the right events – dressed in the right designer gear, saying the right things to the right people?

## Who actually builds the organisation?

If we dig one layer deeper: who are the true high performers? Who is actually building the organisation, not just navigating it?

These are not necessarily the ones being labelled as talent. In fact, I often see a different group being overlooked: the ones who are transformational, not just transactional. The ones who have followers – not because they are loud or polished – but because they are competent, kind, resourceful and clear. These are the people who go the extra mile, then go a few more. The ones who carry teams and clients through difficult days and deliver results when nobody is watching.

Let us call them what they are: HPPs – Hardworking, Persistent People.

## When self-promotion gets mistaken for performance

In contrast, many organisations confuse self-promotion with talent. And the cost of that confusion is high. Too often, what gets rewarded is performance over substance – brand over backbone.

These are not the builders. They are the clowns. The opportunists. The thieves, perhaps. The ones who look sharp and speak well but glamorously corrode the culture.

## These are the people who:

- ☐ Climb by stepping on others – and call it ambition
- ☐ Tailor the “truth” to suit whoever is listening
- ☐ Optimise every move for optics, not impact
- ☐ Would work for your fiercest competitor tomorrow – if the perks were better

Built for show – wobbly on the circuit. They shine in calm conditions – and disappear when it gets difficult.



## **What actually works – help HPPs build leadership essentials**

I have the privilege of working closely with both senior leaders and rising contributors. What I consistently see is this: when you shift focus from surface-level “talent” to identifying and investing in HPPs, the returns are extraordinary.

With the right training and coaching, people transform fast. The core ingredients:

- ☐ Problem-solving using structured thinking
  - ☐ The art of questioning, feedback, and situational leadership
  - ☐ Self-awareness and the ability to manage energy, not just time
  - ☐ Professional presence to become visible in a noisy environment
- ➡ You can find many of these tools and programmes here: [W-focus Learning Platform](#)

## **When polish masks toxicity**

Quiet contributors become visible leaders. Followers become role models. The underestimated become indispensable.

I also work with organisations when the opposite happens – when so-called “talent” turns toxic. When the polished surface hides something parasitic. Individuals who manipulate the system, disappear when it matters, and treat the mission as optional.

It is not always loud. Sometimes it is elegant, articulate, well-dressed – and quietly corrosive.

## **So what to do: Hold up a mirror – or open the door**

In these cases, the best thing you can do is hold up a mirror – through honest coaching and crystal-clear, fearless management. And if that does not work, you hold open the door. Because if you do neither, the problem becomes yours.

## **What truly matters: find and foster HPPs and boost their growth**

Your real competitive edge is not found in brand, polish, or pedigree. It lies with those who stay – and build.

The Hardworking. The Persistent. The ones who put the mission before their image.

Let us stop calling everyone “talent” and start calling out what truly matters.



### Take the next step

Want to find out how you can accelerate your own journey from contributor to advanced manager – and ultimately to builder?

Take the Leadership Learning Survey to get started.

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#corporateidentity #hpp #wfocus #coaching #emergingleaders #careertruths  
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