

INDISPENSABLE TALENT SHOW TRYOUTS

By Carol Bergeron



Have you ever taken a step back to think about early life experiences that influenced your expedition in leadership development? For me a pivotal event that comes to mind occurred in 5th grade while living in Virginia. My best friend Rhonda and I pitched the idea of hosting a talent show first to our friends, who gave the idea a thumbs up then to our teachers who bought it. We conducted tryouts, organized the order of performances, orchestrated invitations and jointly MCd the event. A good time was had by all. We were entertained by singers, dancers, musicians, magicians, comics (they were really aspiring comics), poetry readers and yes even a baton twirler.

Back then our motive was plain and simple – Rhonda and I thought we had a great idea for having fun and pursued it. We were not thinking about taking initiative & risk, grass roots influence, strengthening our showmanship skills (though that would have been helpful at the time) or creating a forum for kids to display their talents in front of their peers.

Now, reflect on what you've probably been doing for years as a parent. From early childhood at least through high school your kids try out lots of activities ranging from sports to performing arts to hobbies. You essentially orchestrate an exploration process so that your kids have opportunity to explore interests, build confidence and develop talents. Many kids activities later (not to mention the chauffeuring, expense and candy bar sales) your kids emerge as people with talents, no longer hidden, where interest, capabilities and strengths overlap.

And isn't that a fundamental responsibility of leaders? To provide employees "talent show tryouts" to help them figure out where their hidden strengths and talents reside? Then making the most of those strengths by putting them in jobs where they really shine and contribute in valuable ways to the organization? This very effective approach to employee development requires leaders and employees to get comfortable with risk taking, special job assignments, coaching and tolerance for making mistakes and learning and adapting from them.

Flashback: everyone who tried out for our talent show back in 5th grade got a call back and yes they all got in. Hey, we were 5th graders. Rhonda and I didn't have the heart to cut anyone regardless how good or bad the performance. It was their courage to perform in front of peers that mattered.

True, in business there may be extreme situations like turnarounds when a company's survival hangs in the balance and you have to have a proven expert in place to blaze the trail. But more often than not business leaders have plenty of opportunity to work with diamonds in the rough. And it's a great feeling when you make the time to help others be all that they can be.

Routing List

So take 10 minutes today and reflect on these questions. How did you get to where you are today? Did anyone extend you a big break? A great career development opportunity? Did you have trusted mentors along the way? Did you get everything right the first time or did you make mistakes? Did you learn more from the mistakes or successes? When you blew it, did your mentor throw the baby out with the bath water or give you another shot to swim?

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