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The Dilemma Of The Extreme High Potential

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The world seems to be going to extremes – business is no different. For years company leaders kept a close eye on the younger talent in their organization identified as “high potential.” This moniker is usually reserved for a small group of management talent which is viewed as having significant future potential.

Occasionally there is an up-and-comer who shows such great promise that they could be classified as an extreme high potential. These are few and far between and often reach very senior level positions while still in their 30s. These extreme high potentials often have similar characteristics: top tier education (both undergraduate and graduate), extreme quickness at processing information, high interpersonal skills and a natural ability to assess business situations. Some examples:

- A CEO of a multi-billion dollar publicly-traded company – 34 years old
- A Chief Customer Officer of a \$10 billion consumer business - 33 years old
- A Chief Human Resources Officer of a \$25 billion publicly traded company – 37 years old

The Dilemma of the Extreme High Potential

The extreme high potential can handle new challenges and roles almost as fast as you can promote them, but at times their promotions should be slowed. This addresses the fact that some things must be learned over time. For example, extreme high potentials can rise so quickly that they don't live with the consequences of their decisions. The other area we see that takes times to learn is executive maturity. This is a nebulous characteristic, but one which is easily identified by peers and subordinates. Lastly, humility is something which can be in short supply with an extreme high potential. Slowing promotions coupled with good coaching can keep this type of executive's ego in check.

We all want to have high potentials in our organizations, but extreme high potentials are their own special breed. Handled correctly they can make large, positive contributions to the business.