



SECTION4

FOR COMPANIES

Your top talent isn't who you think it is

HOW TO COACH, RESOURCE, AND SET FREE THE NEW STAR PLAYER

In every company, a handful of star players drive the business forward. Whether you employ five people or 500 people, they make an outsized impact on everything – from your growth trajectory to the way you work as a team.



Your biggest priority as a manager or L&D leader is making sure your star players stick around.

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Why the new star player looks different now

Five years ago, we had a methodology for identifying top performers: look for the people who come to the meeting with a good-looking PowerPoint deck and speak persuasively about their strategy.

And by applying that limited lens, we missed a lot of people who could have transformed the business, product, or project – the real star players.

THE OLD TOP PERFORMER

- Fancy pedigree or job history
- Looks like a future executive
- Speaks persuasively in meetings
- Puts together a mean deck
- Uses the right jargon
- Understands internal power dynamics
- Seen as driving “big company moments”



Post-pandemic, we have new tools for identifying star players. Leaders can observe conversations in real time via tools like Slack and Teams, which gives us new insight into how people think.



THE NEW STAR PLAYER

- Understands the whole business
- Bases decisions in data
- Consistently has great ideas
- Gets stuff done
- Good spoken and written communicator
- Influential across departments

The immense impact of star players

Star players aren't just strong performers. They're the standouts who help define your company's trajectory.



FOR THEIR TEAM, THE STAR PLAYER:

Creates energy and urgency around the projects that matter

Holds everyone to a high standard for performance

Injects exciting ideas and innovative approaches into daily work

Moves the team forward by getting their hands dirty every day



FOR THE BUSINESS, THE STAR PLAYER:

Makes up your future leadership bench and allows you to succession plan with confidence

Drives the company vision forward

Serves as a cultural lynchpin and models your operating principles to the whole team

Helps attract and retain other star players



BY THE NUMBERS:

On a team of 10, 2 to 3 should be star players

What skills does the new star player have?

1

They live and breathe the health of the business

A common weakness in junior employees is an inability to contextualize their work. They may be a superstar in one area, but they can't connect their output to your objectives. The star player can:

- ★ Understand the health of your business
- ★ Tie business health to the priority activities for your team **right now**
- ★ Articulate how an idea ladders up to key objectives (or not)

2

They base decisions in data

The new star player can take a mound of data or information and quickly synthesize it down to the most important insights to drive decision-making. They can:

- ★ Quickly identify which data they need to solve a problem
- ★ Put data in context to reveal trends and patterns
- ★ Pull out key headlines for decision-making

3

They communicate clearly in-person and online

With a star player, you never think, "What are they talking about?!" Their communication style is direct and easily understood – and they can do it just as easily over Slack as they can in a meeting. They can:

- ★ Communicate their ideas fluently and concisely in person
- ★ Write succinctly in documents and Slack/Teams
- ★ Create clear, incisive decks and memos that get others to a decision



What you hear about them:

"Allison pushes others to measure their progress against our OKRs, not just shrug their shoulders and assume it's working."

"When I ask Dave to tell me how our ads are performing, he doesn't dump data in my lap. He pulls out the three trends we need to pay attention to."

"I love that Yussre herds cats on Slack and helps people get to a decision. You can really waste a lot of time going back and forth without someone like that."

4

They wield influence across departments

You can spot a star player because they're making an impact outside their swim lane (even if they ruffle feathers occasionally). You might hear from another department head, "I love working with Stephanie" – when you had no idea they collaborated. They can:

- ★ Quickly pull together the right cross-functional team
- ★ Influence other departments into taking action
- ★ Manage effectively up, across, and down

5

They get a lot of stuff done

In the past, we'd often promote great orators without realizing they couldn't really do anything. You'll notice the star player because they are **constantly** giving you output. They can:

- ★ Get from ideation to execution quickly with a high degree of fidelity
- ★ Intuitively sense which things are worth their time and which aren't
- ★ Actually do the work – not just hand it off to others

6

They're always innovating

A lot of good performers are happy to do the job they're hired to do and not much more. And that's fine – you need some reliable "doers" on your team. But star players are different. They:

- ★ Regularly pitch both small optimizations and "big swings" to make things better
- ★ Insist on progress against important metrics, whatever it takes
- ★ Push other teammates to do excellent – not "good-enough" – work



What you hear about them:

"Damien seems to have an 'in' with everyone at this company. He convinced Product to spend their time on a project that I never thought they'd buy into."

"Can we clone Gemma?! She is insanely productive and seems to anticipate my requests before I even make them!"

"I looove Kai's appetite for innovation – he's got so many ideas that I never would have thought of before we hired him."



Want to unlock the potential of your star players?
Get in touch with us at teams@section4.com.

Your personal star player rubric

SKILL	RATING (0-5)	NOTES ON OPTIMIZATION OR IMPROVEMENT
Business health comprehension		
Understands the health of your business		
Prioritizes work in the context of the business		
Articulates how an idea ladders up to OKRs		
Business health score (0-15)		
Data-driven decision making		
Quickly identify data needed to solve a problem		
Put data in context to reveal trends and patterns		
Pull out key headlines for decision-making		
Data-driven insights score (0-15)		
Communication		
Communicate their ideas fluently in-person		
Communicate effectively in documents and Slack		
Create clear decks/memos that drive decisions		
Communication score (0-15)		

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SKILL	RATING (0-5)	NOTES ON OPTIMIZATION OR IMPROVEMENT
Influence		
Quickly pull together the right cross-functional team		
Influence other departments into taking action		
Manage effectively up, across, and down		
Influence score (0-15)		
Getting stuff done		
Get from ideation to execution quickly with a high degree of fidelity		
Intuitively sense which things are worth their time		
Actually do the work – don't just hand it to others		
Getting stuff done score (0-15)		
Innovation		
Regularly pitch optimizations and big swings		
Insist on progress against OKRs		
Push teammates to do excellent work		
Innovation score (0-15)		
Total Score (0-90) Note: Star players usually score between 70 and 90		



How to manage the new star player

Once you identify a star player on your team, your next job is to give them resources and set them free to make an impact.

1 Tell them they're a star player

Feedback is critical to engagement: 84% of engaged employees say they got meaningful feedback in the last week, compared to 22% of unengaged employees.

2 Tell them what makes them so important

Identify the top three "star player" traits on this list and tell them, so they know how to grow and take advantage of their superpowers.

3 Tell them where they need to grow

This doesn't need to be framed as negative feedback. Tell them that you see them as a future leader, but first they need to work on a few core skills – with your help.

4 Ask them what motivates them

The old question, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" is out of date. Instead, dig deep to find out what your star player wants right now. It could be more money or a promotion, or it could be the freedom to be creative or a more cross-functional role.

5 Give them more responsibility

"More responsibility" doesn't necessarily mean "promote them and give them someone to manage." Lots of star players aren't great managers. Instead, listen to what they want and give them a project that will elevate their influence and impact.

How to manage the new star player

A TEMPLATE FOR TALKING TO YOUR STAR PLAYER

Leader Jenny, I wanted to tell you that you're a huge asset and I see you as a future leader of this company.

The reason you're so important is that you can connect our activities to high-level business objectives and recommend both small optimizations and "big swings" to achieve them.

My biggest priority for you this year is to work on your communication and presentation skills, since that will help you sell your ideas.

I'd also like to talk about what you want out of your career right now.

Jenny I'm really motivated by the possibility of running a big initiative for the company. I have some ideas for big swings to drive growth.

Leader I think that's a great idea. I'll come back soon with next steps.



How to build your star player base as an L&D leader

L&D and People leaders need to build a base of star players for the sake of succession planning. Here's our checklist for how to do it:

1

Determine the ideal number of players on each team

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Around 20% of your employees should be star players.

On a team of 10, that's two people. On a team of 70, it's 14.

.....

2

Note which teams are lacking star players.

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Maybe Product has plenty but Marketing doesn't have any – make a note of that and **plan to transfer, hire, or develop to fill those gaps.**

.....

3

Keep an eye on “borderline” stars

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You'll have a group of people we call “borderline stars” – they're not quite there, but they have strong potential.

These are the people you want to develop with upskilling.

.....

4

Identify groups of star players and bring them together

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Once you have a solid list of star players, bring them together to do leadership training. **Building those connections early will create a strong leadership bench for the future.**

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The courses every star player needs to succeed

The skills that star players need to work on will vary. Here's the curriculum we recommend for every future leader, with special call-outs depending on where they need to grow.

LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS



The Business Strategy Sprint Master the secrets of the trillion-dollar business

NYU Stern Professor Scott Galloway teaches your star players to put strategies from Apple, Amazon, Facebook, and Google into practice at your company.



The Storytelling Sprint Talk so the world listens

Bestselling author Will Storr helps your star players sell ideas to customers, internal teams, and stakeholders using proven storytelling frameworks.



The Complete Manager Sprint Be a coach. Not a boss

Bestselling author Michael Bungay Stanier teaches your star players to build trusting, resilient relationships, set worthy goals, and coach for success.



The Productivity & Performance Sprint Stop wasting time. Start making progress.

UC Berkeley Haas lecturers Dr. Sahar Yousef and Lucas Miller enhance your star players' productivity, no matter how much they have on their plate.



COURSES FOR COMMUNICATION AND INFLUENCE

Numbers and Narratives
with **Aswath Damodaran**

Driving Human Behavior
with **Will Storr**

Building Thriving Workplaces
with **Adam Grant**

Tough Questions About
Workplace Diversity
with **Mita Mallick**



COURSES FOR BIG PICTURE UNDERSTANDING

Business Drivers for Growth
with **Eric Kim**

Product Strategy
with **Gibson Biddle**

Increasing Customer Lifetime Value
with **Neil Hoyme**

Creating a Winning Recipe for
Recurring Revenue
with **Eduardo Luz**



COURSES FOR DATA FLUENCY

The Data & Analytics Sprint
with **Tom Davenport**

Measuring the Right Metrics
with **Dan McCarthy**

Business Drivers for Growth
with **Eric Kim**

How to Value a Small,
Private Company
with **Sabrina Howell**



COURSES FOR INNOVATION

The Platform Strategy Sprint
created by **Mohan Sawhney**

Web3: Hype vs. Reality
with **Scott Galloway and Ian Rogers**

NFTs for Business
with **Sabrina Howell**

Design Thinking
with **Christina Goldschmidt**



Get in touch with Section4 for Companies

We can help you build your future leadership bench starting today.
Start unlocking your star players' potential with one conversation.

→ teams@section4.com