

## Leadership: Key Question

I was at a seminar in New Delhi a while back, and actually there were a couple of senior generals from the Indian Army who were sitting in the front row. And we were talking about promoting people and what the bases were for selecting one person instead of another. And I'm not sure this is the whole answer or the right answer, but kind of my view of the world is, when you become a senior leader, you're not supposed to be the number one strategist, you're supposed to hire the number one strategist. And the point of the senior leader is the development of people.

For senior generals, it's the development of junior generals and colonels, presumably, and so on, all the way down the line. So, I came up—and I've tidied it up a little bit since—I came up with the primary question that you ask or pursue when you are making a promotion decision to a second-level manager or above. And here's exactly the way it goes. In the last year—maybe we do three years, career, whatever, but let's say a year—in the last year, name the three people whose growth you have most contributed to. Please explain precisely where they were a year ago, where they are today, and where they will be heading in the next 12 months. Please explain your precise development strategy in each of these cases.

Please tell me your biggest development disappointment of the last 12 months. And looking back, could you or would you have done anything differently? Please tell me about your greatest development triumph and your greatest development disaster in the last 10 years. What are the three big things that you've learned about people development in the course of those last 10 years?

And the goal here is to be very precise in asking people about their record and performance as a developer of other people. As I said, I think it works for a senior general talking about junior generals, but it also works for, frankly, it works for a 27-year-old project manager who had a bunch of 23-year-olds working for her over the course of the last nine months. And even as a 27-year-old project manager with 23-year-olds working for her, a significant part of her job is not just to get the project done, but to make sure that each of those people has an exceptional growth experience in the process. As a leader, young, old, the deal is, who have you developed and precisely how have you developed them? That's what you get paid to do. That is your life. That is your legacy.