

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NorthCoast 99 program focuses on recognizing organizations that excel at the attraction, retention and engagement of top performers. As part of this program, ERC collects research on how these organizations define a top performer and attract, retain, and engage top talent. In recognition that defining a top performer and building a top talent culture can be a challenge for many employers striving to attain this award, this white paper explores the issue of defining a top performer, specifically:

WHY FOCUS ON TOP PERFORMERS?

Every organization needs top quality people to be successful and most organizations would rather hire a top quality employee than an average employee or an employee that isn't going to produce or fit in their organization. Top performers, those that consistently produce above average work and function effectively within the organization and its culture, yield better results than average and bottom performers and there are plenty of studies that confirm this.

WHY DEFINE A TOP PERFORMER?

Organizations define a top performer for many reasons, primarily to support hiring, performance management, compensation, rewards and recognition, training, development, and succession or workforce planning practices. Defining a top performer increases the likelihood that organizations will hire the best quality employees, provides a model for selection and evaluating performance, and helps differentiate those who have the ability to develop into leadership positions – all because organizations have established what they are looking for in talent. By defining a top performer, you can consistently measure the same behaviors that are driving your business's success.

METHODS OF DEFINING A TOP PERFORMER

There are two common methods of defining a top performer: descriptive methods which define specific characteristics and numerical methods which measure top talent by the numbers. Descriptive methods may manifest themselves in competency and behavioral based models and talent profiles, while numerical methods may manifest themselves in top grading, forced-ranking, or segmentation by performance measurements (such as selection of an overall cut score on a performance appraisal).

HOW A TOP PEFFORMER IS DEFINED

There are no universal ways of defining a top performer or attributes that characterize a top performer, but organizations tend to cite several consistent behaviors, competencies, and characteristics of top performers. These include exceeding job requirements, being dependable and reliable, taking initiative, developing themselves and others, displaying creativity and innovation, being team-oriented and collaborative, and more. These consistencies appear to suggest that top performers show consistent characteristics and behaviors across many organizations regardless of size or industry.

CREATING A WORKPLACE CULTURE FOR TOP PERFORMERS

To create a workplace culture for top performers, the focus on top talent needs to be integrated throughout the organization through what you say (philosophies and policies), what you do (programs and initiatives), and what you measure (metrics). These philosophies, policies, programs, and metrics all serve to support a culture that attracts, retains, and engages top performers.