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Talent Management

Talent management is the steady, everyday work of helping the right people do good work, grow in their roles, and stay long enough to matter. It is not a single program, a software package, or a yearly event. It is how a workplace finds people, welcomes them, teaches them, gives them fair feedback, helps them plan what comes next, and treats them with respect when they leave. When talent management is done well, workers know what is expected, managers know how their people are doing, and leaders can see where help is needed before a small problem becomes a crisis.

This set helps anyone who leads people, hopes to lead people, or works alongside a team and wants to understand how good workplaces actually run. That includes a shift lead with three people to schedule, a small business owner hiring a first employee, a nonprofit coordinator working with volunteers, and a new supervisor who was promoted for doing good work and now has to learn a different skill: helping other people do good work. You do not need a human resources title to use these lessons. If people count on you, and you count on people, this is your work too.

Why does it matter? Because people leave workplaces for reasons that could often have been fixed. They leave when the job was not what they were told it would be. They leave when nobody taught them the work and then blamed them for doing it wrong. They leave when feedback only arrives when something has gone badly wrong, when good work is never noticed, and when there is no honest path to learn more or earn more. Replacing a person costs time, money, and trust, and the team that stays behind carries the extra load. Talent management cannot fix every reason a person leaves — pay, schedules, health, and family life all matter, and this set is honest about those limits — but it can fix the parts that are about clarity, fairness, teaching, and respect. Those parts are larger than most workplaces realize.

A final honest note before the lessons begin. Talent management is not about controlling people or squeezing more out of them. It is not about ranking people against each other for sport, keeping secret files, or making promises about promotions and raises that you cannot keep. This set teaches general practices only. It does not replace employment law, a collective agreement, or qualified human resources or legal guidance for your situation. What it does offer is a calm system you can actually run: clear roles, careful hiring, real onboarding, steady feedback, and thoughtful planning for what comes next.

What You Will Learn

- How to describe a role clearly before you hire, so the job a person starts is the job they were told about.
- How to interview and choose fairly, using the same core questions and real work samples instead of gut feeling alone.
- How to onboard a new person in the first days and weeks so they learn the work, the people, and the safety rules in the right order.

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- How to give feedback that is specific, timely, and kind, and how to receive feedback without shutting down.
- How to hold a fair performance conversation that looks at results, effort, support, and obstacles — not just a number.
- How to spot growth potential honestly and build simple development plans a person can actually follow.
- How to plan for coverage and succession, so one absence does not stop the whole workplace.
- How to handle exits, transfers, and hard conversations with dignity and accurate records.

Lesson 1 — Start With the Role: Clear Jobs Before You Hire

Every talent problem gets easier or harder depending on one early choice: whether the role itself is clear. A role is the bundle of work one person is responsible for — the tasks they own, the results they are expected to produce, the people they work with, and the limits of their authority. When a role is fuzzy, hiring is fuzzy. The interview wanders. The new person guesses. The manager judges them against expectations that were never said out loud. Months later everyone is frustrated, and each person believes the other is at fault. Most of the time, nobody is lying. The role was simply never written down in plain words.

Start by writing what the work actually is today, not what it was three years ago and not what you wish it were. Watch the work for a week if you can. List the tasks that truly take time: the reports, the customers, the cleaning, the driving, the calls, the checks that keep people safe. Then sort that list into three piles. The first pile is the heart of the job — the work that must happen every shift or every week, done to a standard you can describe. The second pile is important support work that happens less often. The third pile is work that has crept in over time and may not belong in this role at all. That third pile is gold. Removing it on paper, before you hire, prevents you from hiring one person to do one and a half jobs and then calling them slow.

Next, describe what good looks like. Vague words like "excellent communication" help no one. Plain descriptions do: "answers the phone within three rings, takes a complete message, and passes urgent messages to the lead the same hour," or "closes the register with less than a five-dollar difference and writes down any problem the same night." A new person cannot aim at a target they cannot see. A manager cannot give fair feedback about a standard that was never described. Take the time to write three to five results that matter most, in words a new hire could read on their first day and understand.

Also write down what the role is not. This protects everyone. If the role does not include driving, say so. If it does not include lifting beyond a certain weight, working alone at night, or handling cash, say so. If the schedule includes weekends, early starts, or seasonal rushes, say so early and plainly. People can make good choices about a hard job when the hardness is honest. What breaks trust is discovering the hard parts after starting. Honesty at this stage is not just kind — it is practical, because a person who leaves in week two costs far more than a candidate who politely declines in week zero.

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Finally, decide what a person truly needs on day one versus what you can teach. Many workplaces list every skill they can think of, then wonder why no good candidate applies. Separate the list into two columns. Column one: must have now — a required licence where the law requires one, the ability to work the stated schedule, the basic safety knowledge the work demands. Column two: can learn here — your software, your forms, your product names, your way of greeting customers. Be strict with yourself about column one. Every item you move honestly to column two widens your pool to include capable people who simply have not worked in your exact setting before — career changers, parents returning to work, and young workers with strong habits and no record yet.

The Steps

1. Watch or review the real work for several days and list every task the role actually includes, with roughly how long each takes.
2. Sort the tasks into core work, support work, and work that should be removed, moved to another role, or stopped.
3. Write three to five key results for the role in plain, observable words — what done well looks like, with numbers or standards where they honestly apply.
4. Write a short "this role does not include" list covering duties, hours, lifting, driving, cash, or lone working that are outside the role.
5. Split requirements into "must have now" and "can learn here," and challenge every "must have" — if you can teach it in the first month, move it.
6. Add the real schedule, pay range where you are able to share it, and the physical setting of the work, in honest words.
7. Have one person who does or has done the job read the description and ask: is anything missing, wrong, or dressed up? Fix what they find before you post or share the role.

A Worked Example

Priya manages a small bakery with a counter, a kitchen, and a busy Saturday market stall. Her counter assistant quits, and her first instinct is to repost the old job description from three years ago. Instead she spends one week noting what the counter role really does now. The list surprises her. Online orders have doubled, so packing web orders is now an hour a day, not ten minutes. The card machine and a new allergen labelling rule have added careful checks that did not exist before. And the role has quietly absorbed restocking the drinks fridge, which belongs to the kitchen porter. Priya rewrites the description: core work is serving customers, packing online orders accurately, and following the allergen steps every time; the fridge moves back to the porter role. She writes good performance plainly — "every online order checked twice against the ticket before sealing" — and states clearly that Saturdays are required and the shift starts at 6:30 in the morning. Two strong candidates apply. One declines honestly after reading the early start, which Priya counts as a success, not a loss. The person she hires, Tomas, later tells her the description matched his first month almost exactly. He stays. The hour Priya spent watching the real work saved her a second hiring round.

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Common Mistakes

- **Copying an old description without checking the work.** Jobs drift. A description from years ago hires for a workplace that no longer exists.
- **Listing every skill as essential.** An inflated list filters out capable people you could have taught, and it often hides the two or three things that truly matter.
- **Hiding the hard parts.** Undisclosed weekend work, heavy lifting, or difficult customers do not disappear — they reappear as resignations.
- **Using vague praise words instead of observable standards.** "Self-starter" and "team player" cannot be taught, checked, or fairly judged. Describe the behaviour instead.

Lesson 2 — Hire Fairly: Interviews, Work Samples, and Honest Offers

Hiring is a prediction. You are trying to judge, from limited time together, whether a person can do the work, learn what they do not yet know, and work safely and respectfully with your team. No method predicts perfectly, and this lesson will not pretend otherwise. But some methods predict far better than others, and the fairest methods and the most accurate methods turn out to be largely the same ones: ask every candidate the same core questions, ask about real past behaviour, let candidates show the work itself where you can, and decide using notes taken at the time rather than impressions remembered later.

Begin before anyone walks in. Turn your role description from Lesson 1 into a short scorecard: the key results, the must-have requirements, and the behaviours that matter, each with space for notes and a simple rating. Decide your core questions in advance and ask them of every candidate. This is not cold or robotic. It is what fairness looks like in practice, because the friendly candidate who chats easily should not get an easier ride than the nervous candidate who answers slowly. You can still follow up on interesting answers. The core stays the same so that, afterwards, you are comparing answers to the same questions instead of comparing your moods on different days.

Ask questions that reach real experience. "Tell me about a time you had to learn a new system quickly. What did you do first?" beats "Are you a fast learner?" because the first question asks for evidence and the second asks for a compliment to oneself. Ask about a mistake and what changed afterwards. Ask about a difficult customer, patient, student, or coworker and how they handled it. Then listen more than you talk. A common failure is the interviewer describing the workplace for forty minutes and hiring the person who listened politely. You learn little that way, and the candidate learns a sales pitch instead of the truth — which sets up the early resignation you were trying to avoid.

Where the work allows it, add a work sample: a short, real slice of the job, done under fair conditions. A care worker talks through how they would respond to a scenario. A driver completes a route-planning exercise. An administrator formats a messy document or drafts a reply to a sample message. Keep samples short, relevant, and the same for every candidate, and be thoughtful about unpaid time — a brief exercise is fair; a full day of free labour is not. If

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candidates need adjustments to show their best — a larger-print document, extra processing time, a quiet room — provide them. Adjustments do not lower the standard. They remove noise that has nothing to do with the job.

Close the process with the same care. Decide from the scorecards and notes, not from who reminded you of yourself. Check references with specific questions about the work, not general character compliments, and complete any checks your field requires before the person starts. Then make an honest offer: the real pay, the real schedule, the real start date, and what the first weeks will look like. Put the essentials in writing. A candidate who accepts a clear offer starts with trust. A candidate who discovers the truth later starts with a grievance, and they are usually right to have one.

The Steps

1. Build a one-page scorecard from the role description: key results, must-haves, key behaviours, space for notes and ratings.
2. Write five to seven core questions in advance — mostly "tell me about a time when" questions — and ask them of every candidate.
3. Add one short, relevant work sample or scenario exercise, the same for all candidates, with any needed adjustments offered.
4. During the interview, talk less than the candidate. Take notes on what they actually said, not your conclusions about them.
5. Score each candidate against the scorecard straight after their interview, before you meet the next person.
6. Compare scorecards, check references with work-specific questions, and complete required background or eligibility checks before a start date is agreed.
7. Make the offer with real pay, schedule, duties, and start date, and confirm the essentials in writing the same day.

A Worked Example

Marcus supervises a community transport service and needs a dispatcher. In past hiring he relied on conversation, and his last two hires — both charming talkers — struggled with the detail the job demands. This time he builds a scorecard: accuracy under pressure, calm communication, and basic map and schedule reading. Every candidate gets the same five questions, including "Tell me about a time you spotted an error before it caused a problem." Every candidate also does a twenty-minute exercise: given a sample driver list and three booking changes, update the run sheet and flag any clash. One candidate, Angela, is quiet in conversation and scores only fairly on the questions. Her exercise, though, is excellent — she catches a double-booked vehicle that two other candidates missed, and she writes a clear note for the driver. Marcus hires Angela, and his notes remind him why when, a month later, she is already the person other dispatchers ask to check their sheets. The work sample saw what conversation alone had missed, in Marcus as much as in the candidates.

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Common Mistakes

- **Asking each candidate different questions.** You cannot compare answers you never asked for, and uneven questions quietly favour whoever got the easy ones.
- **Hiring the person most like you.** Similarity feels like fit. It is not evidence about the work, and over time it narrows a team's strengths and ideas.
- **Talking through the whole interview.** Every minute you spend selling the job is a minute you are not learning about the candidate — and the candidate is not learning the truth.
- **Skipping written confirmation of the offer.** Memory edits terms kindly in both directions. Writing protects the candidate, the manager, and the relationship.

Lesson 3 — Onboard Well: The First Days Decide More Than You Think

Onboarding is everything that happens between a person accepting a job and that person doing the job confidently and safely on their own. It is more than paperwork and more than a tour. A new person's first weeks teach them three things at once: how the work is really done here, whether people here keep their word, and whether it is safe to ask questions. Those lessons stick. A workplace that shrugs at onboarding — "just shadow Kevin, you'll pick it up" — is teaching, too. It is teaching that the new person is on their own, that standards are whatever the nearest person happens to do, and that questions are an interruption. The rehire that follows a month later is the tuition for that lesson.

Plan onboarding backwards from competence. Ask: what must this person be able to do alone, safely, by the end of week one, week two, and the first month? Then arrange teaching in that order — safety and essentials first, refinements later. A new kitchen worker needs handwashing, allergen steps, and knife safety before they need the specials board. A new office worker needs to sign in, find the shared files, and know who to call when stuck before they need the quarterly report. Write the plan down as a simple checklist with names beside each item: who teaches this, who checks it, and when. A checklist feels humble. It is also the difference between training that happened and training everyone assumed happened.

Assign a buddy as well as a manager. The manager owns the plan, the standards, and the formal check-ins. The buddy — a capable, patient coworker — answers the hundred small questions a new person will not bring to a boss: where things live, how breaks really work, which printer jams and how to clear it. Choose buddies for patience and accuracy, not just availability, and thank them for the work, because it is work. A good buddy shortens the lonely, guessing phase of a new job more than any handbook.

Schedule short, real check-ins: end of day one, end of week one, then weekly through the first month. Keep them human and specific. What did you learn? What surprised you? What is still confusing? Is anything different from what you were told when you were hired? That last question is an early-warning system — ask it while a misunderstanding is still small enough to fix with an apology and a correction. Also watch the workload honestly. New people often get either nothing meaningful to do, which breeds doubt, or the full load plus training, which breeds

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errors and exhaustion. Aim for real work in growing amounts, with the safety-critical steps checked until the person has earned trust through repetition — and then say so, so they know where they stand.

Finish onboarding formally. At the end of the first month, or your workplace's trial or probationary checkpoint where one applies, sit down with the checklist and review it together. Name what is solid, name what still needs practice, and agree the next goals. If serious problems have appeared — repeated unsafe acts, unreliability, conduct that harms others — do not let the formal meeting be the first time the person hears about them. Onboarding includes early, honest correction, delivered privately and specifically, with a chance to improve and support to do so. Surprises at a review are a management failure, not a management tool.

The Steps

1. Write a first-month checklist ordered by safety and importance: what the person must do alone by week one, week two, and month's end, with who teaches and who checks each item.
2. Prepare before day one: workspace, tools, logins requested, schedule confirmed, and the buddy and manager ready to greet the person by name.
3. Day one covers welcome, paperwork, safety essentials, the tour, and how to get help — not the entire job. End the day by asking what is still unclear.
4. Pair real work with teaching in growing amounts; check safety-critical steps every time until competence is shown repeatedly.
5. Hold short check-ins at day one, week one, and weekly for the first month. Ask what surprised them and whether anything differs from what they were told at hiring.
6. Correct problems early, privately, and specifically, with support and a clear chance to improve — never save them up for a formal review.
7. Close the month with a joint review of the checklist: confirm what is solid, agree what needs practice, and set the next goals in writing.

A Worked Example

Denise runs a small home-care agency. A new carer, Fatima, starts on Monday. Before she arrives, Denise has the checklist ready: shadow visits with two named experienced carers, medication-prompt rules taught and quizzed before any solo visit, the lone-working phone procedure practised on day two, and documentation training using sample notes. Fatima's buddy is Grace, a carer known for patience, who shows her the small things — where clients keep their notes, how the office likes visit changes reported. At the week-one check-in, Fatima says one thing differs from hiring: she was told visits were mostly in one neighbourhood, but two of hers are across town, stretching her bus route. Denise does not get defensive. She apologizes for the unclear description, reworks the run so the far visits sit together on one day, and notes the fix for the next job description she writes. At the month-end review, Fatima is signed off on everything except one documentation skill, with a practice plan for it. She later tells Denise that the apology in week one was why she stayed: "Every job has problems. Yours was

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the first place that fixed one when I mentioned it."

Common Mistakes

- **Confusing paperwork with onboarding.** Signed forms prove a person was present. They do not prove the person can do the work safely.
- **Dumping everything on day one.** A flooded new hire retains little and feels foolish for it. Sequence matters more than volume.
- **No named buddy or teacher.** "Ask anyone" usually means the new person asks no one, guesses, and builds habits you must later untrain.
- **Saving problems for the formal review.** Early, kind correction is a gift. A surprise verdict at month's end is an ambush, and people remember ambushes.

Lesson 4 — Feedback and Performance: Steady, Specific, and Fair

Feedback is information about work, given so the work and the worker can improve. Performance management is the wider rhythm around it: setting clear goals, noticing progress, correcting problems, and reviewing the whole picture at intervals. Workplaces tend to fail at this in two opposite ways. Some give almost no feedback, so people work in a fog until a yearly review or a sudden dismissal reveals judgments that were formed months earlier. Others give feedback only as criticism, so the manager's approach becomes a signal of trouble and good work passes in silence. Both patterns teach people to hide mistakes — and hidden mistakes are how small problems grow teeth.

Make feedback frequent, small, and specific. Specific means it points at the work, not the person's character. "The report went out with last month's figures in the second table, and the client spotted it" is feedback a person can act on. "You need to be more careful" is a label they can only worry about. Timely means close to the event, while both of you still remember it — the same day for small things, within the week for larger ones. And balanced does not mean sandwiching every correction between compliments, a formula adults see through instantly. It means your feedback over time reflects reality: you genuinely notice and name good work when it happens, so your corrections are trusted as fair rather than heard as dislike. People can tell the difference between a manager who sees them whole and one who only sees errors.

Structure harder conversations so they stay fair. Describe what you observed, with dates and examples. Explain the impact — on customers, safety, coworkers, or cost. Then listen properly, because you may not have the whole story: a broken tool, a missing delivery, an instruction from someone else, a personal crisis handled with more grace than you knew. Agree what will change, what support you will provide, and when you will look again together. Write that agreement down in plain words and share the note. This is not bureaucracy. It is memory, fairness, and proof that the person was told clearly and given a real chance — which matters ethically, and matters practically if the problem continues and firmer steps become necessary.

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Formal reviews, where your workplace holds them, should contain no surprises if the steady feedback has happened. Use them to look at the whole picture: results against the goals you actually set, the quality of the work, how the person works with others, what obstacles sat outside their control, and what they want to learn next. Be honest about the difference between a person who is struggling in the role despite support, a person in the wrong role, and a person whose role itself is broken — overloaded, under-resourced, or badly designed. Managers who blame individuals for system problems lose good people and keep the problem. Also calibrate with other managers where you can: if one team's "excellent" is another team's "average," ratings become a lottery based on who your boss is, and people know it.

Finally, learn to receive feedback as well as give it. Your team sees your blind spots daily. Ask specific questions — "What is one thing I do that makes your job harder?" — then listen without defending, thank the person, and act visibly on what you can. A manager who punishes feedback, even with a sigh and a cold shoulder, will stop receiving it, and will then manage a workplace they can no longer see clearly. Asking, hearing, and visibly changing something is also the single best lesson you can give your team in how feedback is supposed to work.

The Steps

1. Give small feedback close to the event: name the specific work, what was strong or what went wrong, and its impact.
2. Praise precisely and in proportion — name the exact good work so the person can repeat it, not just "great job."
3. For a problem, prepare examples with dates, meet privately, describe the observation and impact, then listen fully before agreeing next steps.
4. Agree actions, support from you, and a review date. Write it down in plain words and share the note with the person.
5. Follow up on the review date. Acknowledge real improvement plainly; if there is no improvement, say so and agree the next, firmer step.
6. At formal reviews, judge against the goals actually set, account for obstacles outside the person's control, and record development wishes.
7. Ask your own team for feedback on your management, act on something visibly, and report back what you changed.

A Worked Example

Jordan leads a warehouse team. One picker, Sam, is fast and friendly, but his error rate has climbed — wrong items in roughly one order in twenty. Jordan's first instinct is a warning. Instead he prepares: he pulls two weeks of error records, notices the errors cluster on night shifts and on one product line with new, similar packaging, and then meets Sam privately. He shows the pattern and asks what Sam sees. Sam admits he has been skipping the second scan check when the queue is long, but also points out the lookalike packaging and that the night shift lost its checker to a vacancy. Both things are true. They agree: Sam restores the second scan without exception, Jordan restores a checker on nights by rotating the role and raises the

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packaging problem with the supplier, and they review the numbers in three weeks. Sam's errors fall below his old rate, and the packaging complaint — backed by Jordan's records — gets the supplier to change the labels. Jordan later reflects that a warning would have fixed half the problem while teaching Sam to hide the other half.

Common Mistakes

- **Judging character instead of work.** "Careless," "lazy," and "bad attitude" cannot be improved because they describe nothing a person can change on Tuesday.
- **Saving feedback for the annual review.** A year of silence followed by a verdict is not management. It is storage.
- **Skipping the listening step.** Managers who never hear about broken tools, unclear instructions, or impossible loads keep "fixing" people for system faults.
- **Writing nothing down.** Without dated notes, later conversations rest on memory, and memory under conflict is the least reliable witness in the room.

Lesson 5 — Growth, Coverage, and Leaving Well

Talent management does not end once a person can do today's job. People need a future to work toward, teams need cover when someone is away, and every workplace eventually faces departures. This final lesson covers those three longer views: development, succession and coverage, and exits handled well.

Development means helping a person build skill and readiness over time. Start from honest conversation, not assumption. Some people want promotion. Some want mastery of the craft they already love. Some want stability while life outside work is demanding, and that is a legitimate answer, not a lack of ambition. Ask what the person wants to learn, what work energizes them, and what they would like to be able to do in a year that they cannot do now. Then build a simple plan with mostly real-work learning: a project to stretch them, a skill to practise with a coach, a course only where a course is truly the right tool. Most growth happens by doing harder real work with support, not by sitting in training rooms. Keep the plan to a page, review it at your regular check-ins, and be honest about timelines. Development is not a promise of a specific promotion on a specific date — never make that promise unless you truly control it — but it must be more than a kind conversation that changes nothing. If a plan produces no new work, no new skill, and no new opportunity within a few months, it was decoration.

Coverage and succession planning sound grand, but at their heart they are simple questions. For each critical task in your workplace: who else can do this if the usual person is ill, on leave, or gone? Where is the knowledge written down? Who is learning it next? Build a small coverage map — critical tasks down one side, the main person and a backup across the top — and treat every task with only one name beside it as a risk to fix gradually through cross-training. For key roles, succession means identifying who could step in temporarily and who might grow into the role over time, and giving those people honest development toward it. Keep this planning factual and kind. It is not a secret ranking of favourites, and a person learning a backup skill is not being groomed to replace anyone — they are making the whole team safer, including themselves

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when their own leave comes.

Exits deserve the same care as arrivals. People leave for promotions, moves, family reasons, retirement, and sometimes because the fit was wrong. How a workplace handles leaving teaches everyone who stays what their own leaving will look like, and they draw conclusions about whether loyalty here is honoured. Run the practical steps cleanly: confirm the last day, arrange the handover of tasks, knowledge, keys, and records, complete final pay and paperwork accurately and on time, and follow your workplace's rules for references honestly. Where you can, hold a respectful exit conversation: what worked, what did not, what would you tell your replacement? Listen without arguing. Some of the most useful truths a workplace ever hears arrive in that room, because the speaker no longer needs anything from you. When an exit is involuntary — a dismissal or a redundancy — the care matters even more: decisions made fairly, on evidence, with required process followed, explained plainly and privately, and carried out with as much dignity as the situation allows. This set cannot teach you your local legal process for those decisions, and you should always take qualified advice there. It can insist on the human standard underneath any process: no surprises built on silence, no humiliation, no gossip afterwards.

Close the loop. Every exit, gap, and coverage scare is information for Lesson 1: the role description, the hiring, the onboarding. Talent management is a circle, not a line — the workplaces that get good at it are simply the ones that keep walking the circle and writing down what they learn.

The Steps

1. Hold a development conversation with each person at least yearly: what they want to learn, what work energizes them, and what they want to be able to do in a year.
2. Write a one-page development plan per person built mainly on real work — a stretch task, a coached skill, a course only where it truly fits — and review it at regular check-ins.
3. Build a coverage map of critical tasks, naming a main person and a backup for each. Flag every single-name task as a risk.
4. Cross-train gradually to close coverage gaps, and keep key knowledge written down where the team can find it.
5. When someone leaves, run a clean checklist: last day confirmed, handover arranged, final pay and paperwork accurate, equipment and access handled per your rules.
6. Hold a respectful exit conversation where appropriate; listen more than you defend, and record useful themes without names where sensitivity requires it.
7. Feed what you learn from exits and gaps back into your role descriptions and onboarding plans.

A Worked Example

Aisha manages a small advice centre with six staff. Her longest-serving adviser, Robert, announces his retirement in four months. Because Aisha keeps a coverage map, she already knows Robert is the only person who handles benefit-appeal paperwork — a single-name risk

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she had flagged but not yet fixed. The four months become a planned handover instead of a panic. Robert and a colleague, Beth, work appeals together, with Robert explaining his reasoning aloud while Beth takes cases under his review. Aisha records his key contacts, deadlines calendar, and document templates in the shared folder, tested by Beth actually using them. Robert's development story matters too: two years earlier, his plan had named mentoring as the work that energized him most, so leading this handover feels to him like an honour, not an erasure. At his leaving conversation he tells Aisha the centre's intake form confuses clients about one question — a fix she makes the next week. On his last day the appeals work continues without a missed deadline, and the team's card for Robert includes a line from Beth: "You taught me the hardest work here. It stays."

Common Mistakes

- **Assuming everyone wants promotion.** Forcing a growth path on someone who wants mastery or stability wastes their trust and your resources.
- **Making development promises you do not control.** A promised promotion that never comes does more damage than an honest "not yet, and here is why."
- **Ignoring single-person risks until the person is gone.** Knowledge that lives only in one head leaves with that head. Map it while there is still time to share it.
- **Treating leavers as traitors or ghosts.** Cold exits teach the remaining team that their own loyalty will be discarded the same way. People plan accordingly.

Try It

Set aside ninety minutes this week and work the circle once, on paper, for your own team — or, if you do not yet lead a team, for a workplace you know well, using invented names. First, pick one role and rewrite its description using Lesson 1: real tasks, three to five observable results, the "does not include" list, and the two requirement columns. Second, draft the five core interview questions and one short work sample you would use for that role. Third, sketch its first-month onboarding checklist with a named teacher for each item. Fourth, write one piece of feedback — one praise and one correction — in the specific, observable language of Lesson 4, based on work you have genuinely seen. Fifth, draw the coverage map for your team's five most critical tasks and circle every single-name risk. Finish by choosing the single smallest item on any of these pages and putting it in your calendar with a date. Talent management is not the binder. It is the dated, finished item, repeated calmly until the system runs on habit instead of hope.

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