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Topgrading

How Leading Companies Win by Hiring, Coaching, and Keeping the Best People

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

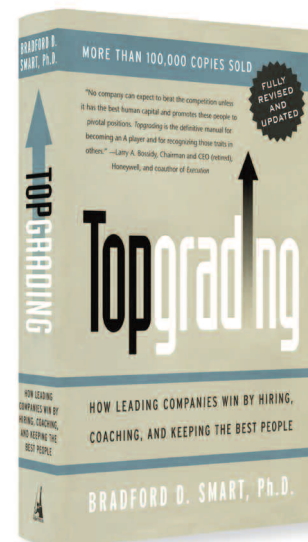
Great companies are made by A-Players. The secret is to hire, promote and retain only these individuals, but this is easier said than done. Research shows that typically only one-fourth of those hired or promoted turn out to be A-Players. The other three-fourths (the B- and C-Players) become mis-hires and mispromotions. And with the cost of a staffing mistake estimated at 15 times base salary, the financial drain on the average company is huge.

Compare that with the 90 percent and higher success rate enjoyed by companies that use management psychologist and consultant Bradford D. Smart's topgrading practices for hiring, training and promoting. Case studies of topgraded companies — including General Electric, Hillenbrand and the American Heart Association — prove that it's possible to vastly improve how people are hired and promoted at companies large or small. By rewarding A-Players, improving B-Players and weeding out C-Players, topgraded companies are much more successful.

Topgrading can enable your company to gain a sizeable advantage over your competition.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How leading companies have embraced topgrading.
- A practical approach to the Topgrading Interview, the proven best practice for assessing talent.
- How to turn some B-Players and C-Players into A-Players.
- Successful techniques for developing and coaching A-Players.
- How to gain a strong advantage over your competition.
- What management competencies to look for when hiring a potential A-Player.



by Bradford D. Smart, Ph.D.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: TOPGRADING

by Bradford D. Smart, Ph.D

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Topgrading: Every Manager's First Priority

How dramatically can topgrading improve talent? The average company today hires only 25 percent A-Players, promotes only 25 percent A-Players and has 25 to 40 percent A-Players in management. Topgraded companies hire 90 percent A-Players, promote 90 percent A-Players and eventually have 90 percent A-Players in management.

What Is Topgrading?

Topgrading is filling every position in the organization with an A-Player, at the appropriate compensation level. Topgrading involves replacing underperformers until the entire team of 10 consists of 10 A-Players, or at least those who clearly exhibit A-potential. When you are topgrading, you are not accepting a mixture of A-, B- and C-Players. You are proactively doing whatever it takes to pack your team with *all* A-Players. Topgraders are not cheap. Circumstances might justify paying above the *entire* accepted salary range. The topgrader is more rigorous than the “upgrader,” more thorough in assessment and more likely to get what he or she pays for.

Proactively seeking out and employing the most talented people can have a major effect on the creation of other competitive advantages. High performers contribute more, innovate more, work smarter, earn more trust, display more resourcefulness, take more initiative, develop better business strategies, articulate their vision more passionately, implement change more effectively, deliver higher-quality work, demonstrate greater teamwork and find ways to get the job done in less time with less cost. It's no coincidence that A-Player managers attract and retain A-Players, who want to be part of organizations that succeed.

Who Is Topgrading?

McKinsey & Co., a premier global consultancy, is known for its commitment to seeking out and employing the best people available at every level. Intel, Dell, Goldman Sachs and 3M attract and retain A-Players and quickly redeploy C-Players. Lincoln Financial, Hillenbrand Industries, General Electric, MarineMax, Hayes Lemmerz, the American Heart Association and UBS increase their percentage of A-Players yearly and redeploy not just C-Players but B-Players too.

What Is an A-Player?

An A-Player is someone who qualifies among the top 10 percent of those available for a position. An A-Player is the best of class. Most fine companies use these definitions:

- **A-Player:** top 10 percent of talent available
- **B-Player:** next 25 percent
- **C-Player:** below the top 35 percent.

The Topgrading Calculator

The Topgrading Calculator helps to overcome talent self-delusion. If you are a perfect topgrader, you don't need a Topgrading Calculator to estimate the number of replacements necessary to achieve 100 percent A-Players. If your success rate is 100 percent, you need only hire one person (who will be an A) as a replacement. If your likely success rate is 25 percent, you need to hire four people to get an A — three mis-hires and your good hire. Topgrading promises to improve your success rate from 25 to 90 percent. In the meantime, to learn how many people you will have to hire to finally have 90 percent A-Players:



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Topgrading Calculator

Total Number of Replacements to Achieve 90 Percent A-Players

Number of Underperformers to Be Replaced	25%	50%	75%	100%
10	31	17	11	10
20	67	35	24	20
40	141	72	48	40
100	357	179	120	100

1. Estimate your current number of A-Players, including those with A-potential.
2. Estimate your hiring success rate (your percentage of A-Players and A-potentials after hiring and promoting people).
3. Use the Topgrading Calculator (see above). It will show the total number of people you must hire or promote in order to end up with *at least* 90 percent A-Players, after replacing all those who turn out not to be A-Players. For example, if you wish to replace 10 underperformers, you hire or promote 10 using topgrading, and end up with nine or more A-Players on your team. ●

The Financial and Career Costs of Not Topgrading

Integrating topgrading into your interview process minimizes the firings and measurable costs of mis-hires, making your course of action relatively quick, seamless and inexpensive.

Topgrading case studies for years have shown how to achieve a 90 percent success rate in hiring. The CEOs of the following organizations estimated the percentage of upper management hires who turned out to be A-Players as follows: Lincoln Financial, 90 percent; Hayes Lemmerz, 94 percent; ghSMART, 92 percent; MarineMax, 94 percent; and the American Heart Association, 95 percent.

Prior to topgrading, most of these organizations experienced a hiring success rate of about 35 percent; Topgrading Interviews took them to 90 percent and higher. Their typical topgrading discipline is for a group of managers to scrutinize each hire one year after the person was hired. B-Players without A potential are deemed mis-hired.

In some companies that evaluation of the hiree is so

tough that if the hiree turns out to be a B or C without A potential, the bonuses of the hiring manager and HR professionals are reduced. So there is great confidence that those deemed A-Players truly are.

The Cost of Mistakes

It doesn't make any difference if a person is "hired" from outside or inside the company. Mispromoting internally is about as costly as mis-hiring an external candidate.

At the worker level there are plenty of published statistics on turnover and even a few studies of the costs associated with mis-hires. A computer search of more than 200 studies and articles produced a hodgepodge of single-company results, with costs of mis-hiring factory workers to be \$1,500 in one company and salespeople \$6,000 in another. Government studies have placed the costs of mis-hiring programmers at two to three times their annual compensation. At the managerial and professional levels, the data are even more sparse.

The single biggest *estimated* cost of mis-hiring is the wasted or missed business opportunity. In recent years there have been many multimillion-dollar fiascos that clearly could have been avoided had an A-Player been hired instead of a B/C-Player.

One of the most insidious elements of wasted or missed business opportunity goes to the heart of topgrading. B/C-Players hire B/C-Players and drive away A-Players.

CEO mis-hires are the most serious. The media, if not behavioral scientists, cite at least some of the costs. Have you read enough about Ken Lay and Dennis Kozlowski? Their companies suffered because of their failures as CEOs. Michael Ovitz was hired and fired by his buddy Michael Eisner at Disney, and Ovitz walked away with \$140 million in severance (challenged in later lawsuits). Not only are the stockholders hurt, but all business suffers a black eye when executives reap great financial rewards despite destroying companies and jobs.

The Career Setbacks

There is no clearer truth to a topgrading professional than this: The most powerful lever for career success in management is topgrading.

Its corollary is: There is no more certain career derailer in management than failing to topgrade.

More than 6,000 senior managers have answered exhaustive topgrading questions about every job they held, an average of 10 jobs. Successful careers all have a common pattern: Creating more talented teams accounts for better results, earning managers more promotions.

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Sometimes the managers admitted they were lucky — they inherited an A-Team because a boss assigned them the “best and brightest,” or they went to work for a topgrading company that taught them how to do it. Most were motivated and resourceful, figuring out how to develop or replace non-A-Players.

The vast majority of managers interviewed in a recent study experienced a stutter step — a failure to topgrade and a resulting failure to perform — that led to career stagnation for a while or, in some cases, getting fired. The most successful leaders figure out the importance of topgrading, do it, get better results and earn promotions. ●

Hiring and Promoting Talent: The Topgrading Platinum Standard

The main responsibility for hiring good people rests on your — the manager’s or CEO’s — shoulders.

The CEO’s job is to achieve results by getting the strategy, talent and organizational culture right. Topgrading must be thought of as a function permeating the entire company, supported by HR but driven by the CEO. When delegated to HR, topgrading fails, even when HR is a fully topgraded function.

HR cannot drive topgrading, because it lacks the line authority and political clout and because many HR systems (compensation, performance management, hiring, succession planning) require CEO intervention to maintain the A-Player standard.

Anyone can topgrade — *any* department manager can topgrade a department; *any* division manager can topgrade a division. But from a corporate topgrading perspective, the CEO cannot assume that A-Player subordinates are doing it. That’s why Jeffrey Immelt (CEO) and Bill Conaty (HR) literally spend months in the famous Session C talent meetings at GE.

The same principle holds for you if you are a function head or operating division head. As a division president you can topgrade, but it is foolish to assume that all your A-Player plant managers will topgrade (even though they would not be considered A-Players without being topgraders). In your talent meetings as well as daily discussions, you must be sure that no one is gaming the system or eroding your A-Player standard for political reasons.

Topgrading Assessments

In topgrading companies it is typical for everyone in management to be topgrading-assessed, to create an overall talent picture of A’s, A-potentials and non-A’s.

Managers are developed and become A’s or are redeployed, and eventually there are 90 percent A-Players. Companies relying on a current performance review and a three-year-old topgrading assessment fail to achieve 90 percent success in promotions. To achieve a 90 percent success in promotions, you must supplement performance appraisals with a fresh, current topgrading-based assessment. ●

Redeploying Chronic B- and C-Players: A Moral Approach

If topgrading means packing teams, even the entire company, with A-Players, then it usually involves removing chronic B- and C-Players. *Chronic* means they don’t even try to become A-Players or else they have embraced their Individual Development Plan, or IDP, (a performance plan to maximize strengths and minimize weak points) but simply aren’t improving sufficiently to qualify as A-Players in a reasonable amount of time.

Some B/C-Players can be redeployed internally into jobs where they can be A-Players. If this isn’t feasible, they are redeployed externally. They’re let go or “changed out,” though typically with an appropriate severance and outplacement counseling. Having worked on their IDPs, they also have good insights into themselves and a clear understanding of what sort of job would enable them to be happy and ... A-Players!

Unfortunately, topgrading requires some firing or asking people to resign. It’s painful, but it’s not immoral if companies:

- Use the best selection techniques, which lead to hiring 90 percent A-Players.
 - Use the best assessment techniques, which identify as many people with A potential as possible.
 - Use the best coaching techniques, which give A-potentials the best chance of becoming A-Players.
 - Look for other internal jobs where the person would be an A-Player.
 - Fire people only if they fail to achieve agreed-upon standards for performance. ●
-

Topgrading Case Study: Lincoln Financial

In 1998 Jon Boscia was named chairman and CEO of Lincoln Financial, and he continued to execute the new business strategy, transforming Lincoln from a traditional life insurance company to a diversified financial services

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powerhouse. Topgrading was key to the success.

Today Lincoln, with \$5.3 billion in revenues and \$131 billion in assets, is a different company, one of the nation's leading providers of wealth accumulation and protection, financial planning and investment advisory services for the fast-growing segments of affluent and retirement markets.

Topgrading required dramatic changes in management, not because the company had weak talent, but because some of the managers in the traditional insurance company lacked necessary competencies to drive the strategy.

Boscia said, "About half of the top 100 managers were A-Players in the old Lincoln and became A's in the new Lincoln, but others simply did not have the necessary skills for the new strategy."

Simple Topgrading Model

To qualify as a company that topgrades, the A-Player standard has to be embraced, but that alone is insufficient. The A-Player standard is not achieved without superb methods to assess and deploy internal talent and assess candidates for selection.

The simplest model for topgrading includes these five essential components:

1. Topgrade from the top down.
2. Assess internal talent using Topgrading Interviews, a process that involves an indepth review of an individual's education and work history, his or her core competencies, as well as a thorough background check (*see page 6 for more information*).
3. Coach people using Topgrading-based Individual Development Plans.
4. Hire and promote people using Topgrading Interviews.
5. Redeploy (fire, demote, transfer) people who fail to achieve the A-Player standard. ●

Obstacles to Topgrading and How A-Players Overcome Them

Ratcheting up an organization's talent involves many obstacles. Here are the top 10 major obstacles to topgrading and the best practices to overcome them:

1. **"I can't get my B/C-Players to hire A-Players."** Topgrade from the top down, or require your A-Players to make the topgrading judgments for their B/C's.
2. **"We think we're hiring A-Players, but they turn out to be B/C-Players in disguise."** Perform more accurate assessments using the Topgrading Interview.

3. **"Our human resources people are overworked and understaffed, so we don't exactly have a pipeline of A-Players going through the office."**

Constantly recruit your "virtual bench," your network of A-Players in your Rolodex, who are ever available to join you. And require all your managers to constantly build their virtual bench.

4. **"Search firms just don't produce enough A-Player candidates."** Manage the search process, including search firms, much more thoroughly.

5. **"I want to raise the performance bar, but almost every talented person I bring in from the outside is rejected by the current organization culture and ends up quitting."** Provide new A-Players protection from undermining by existing personnel.

6. **"We can't afford to hire A-Players."** A-Players are available at *all* compensation levels.

7. **"I do not want to fire loyal B/C-Players."** Redeploy chronic B/C-Players because painful as it is to fire someone, failing to do so is almost always more painful — to the company, your career and the underperformer.

8. **"Our problems will soon clear up because we engaged a management consulting firm and their report looks great, so topgrading isn't necessary."** Topgrade first. Organizations that topgrade are able to drive improvements in strategy, productivity, innovation, quality, customer service and speed to market.

9. **"We could never attract A-Players because of our location, industry, current financial problems and so on."** Pay more in compensation to attract the level of talent necessary to beat the competition.

10. **"My subordinates tend to give 'thumbs-down' on A-Players."** Don't let them have a vote. Make the hiring decision yourself. ●

Coaching 101: The Topgrading-Based Model

Coaching is a one-to-one dialogue in which a coach helps a person understand his or her strengths and weak points and build commitment to improve performance. Coaching helps unlock someone's potential. This involves:

- **Counseling** — to help someone improve self-awareness and change points of view.
- **Mentoring** — sharing sage advice to help someone become more savvy in matters of organizational culture, networking and career planning.
- **Teaching** — instructing someone in order to improve expertise.

- **Confronting** — addressing non-performance to help someone either achieve performance goals or accept the necessity of redeployment.

Ordinary solid human qualities blended with topgrading best practices frequently result in leaders being rated “very high” on coaching scales. This becomes clear during assimilation coaching, a disciplined process to help your new hire adjust and to begin a comprehensive developmental process.

Assimilation Coaching

First-time topgrading interviewers have fun in assimilation coaching, a high-powered, positive coaching session. You feel empowered, so it is relatively easy to empower your new hire. There are fewer problems to fix with A-Players than with C-Players, so there is little inclination to push, cajole or demand certain changes.

With an initial coaching meeting a success, you become positively reinforced to polish your skills, to extend coaching to other subordinates. Hiring an A-Player using topgrading interviewing and thorough reference checking automatically endows you with super-coach characteristics.

A topgrading-based coaching meeting, whether for assimilation or another purpose, is not always warm and fuzzy. Even A-Players have weak points — plenty of them. Coaching need not be acrimonious, but to be effective, it must be hard-hitting.

The nicest thing you can do for high-potential managers is tell the truth and hold them accountable for growth. That means saying, “Improve, and only then will you get promoted.” People change the most when they sense pain in not changing and benefits in changing, and fully embrace developmental activities to achieve their goals.

Whether coaching a new hire, addressing a newly observed problem, or facilitating change in any performance-management or career-development system, the steps are the same: awareness, rational acceptance, emotional commitment, individual development plan, reinforcement, monitoring progress and conclusion. Implied in all seven steps is who’s in charge — not the coach, but the person receiving the coaching. ●

Coaching to Fix Weaknesses

Having conducted a Topgrading Interview gives you instant coaching advantages. Having hired an A-Player, you automatically are 20 percent better as a coach.

The four essential steps in coaching a new hire to succeed are:

50 Management Competencies

A-Players need not be excellent in all competencies, but they must meet the minimum standard for a particular job on all of them. The following are 50 management competencies:

- **Intellectual Competencies:** Intelligence, analysis skills, judgment/decision making, conceptual ability, creativity, strategic skills, pragmatism, risk taking, leading edge, education, experience, track record.

- **Personal Competencies:** Integrity, resourcefulness, organization/planning, excellence, independence, stress management, self-awareness, adaptability.

- **Interpersonal Competencies:** First impression, likability, listening, customer focus, team player, assertiveness, oral communication, written communication, political savvy, negotiation, persuasion.

- **Management Competencies:** Selecting A-Players, coaching, goal setting, empowerment, accountability, redeploying B/C-Players, team building, diversity, running meetings.

- **Additional Leadership Competencies:** Vision, change leadership, inspiring “followership,” conflict management.

- **Motivational Competencies:** Energy, passion, ambition, compatibility of needs, balance in life, tenacity.

1. **Hire an A-Player with** a tandem Topgrading Interview, reference checks with all bosses in past 10 years, a co-worker competency interview (one hour each), and conclusions stated in a Candidate Assessment Scorecard (CAS), a simple form used to assess the candidate on all competencies.

2. **Conduct oral interviews or e-mail 360 survey** two to four weeks after hire, with the purpose of measuring first impressions.

3. **Have a coaching interview** two to six weeks after hire; state conclusions, strengths, weak points; and create an Individual Development Plan together.

4. **Hold a mid-year career review** in which you discuss follow-up e-mail 360 survey results and include feedback to you.

This rather typical assimilation-coaching session should progress through the seven psychological stages of change: awareness, rational acceptance, emotional commitment, program for development, reinforcement, monitoring progress and conclusion.

Constructive Criticism

The business world is too fast-paced and too demanding for quiet, gentle little hints, except with a rare subordinate requiring your most flexible and sensitive care. This world requires hard-hitting constructive criticism.

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You want the straight scoop if your boss is dissatisfied. You want to be treated with respect, and you respond best when you are presented positively with an opportunity to improve. Your subordinates want and deserve the same thing. ●

The Topgrading Interview Guide

The Topgrading Interview Guide provides you with the most accurate and valid insights when assessing internal talent and candidates for selection or promotion. Companies can achieve a record of 90 percent A-Players hired when a tandem interview (two interviewers) is conducted and the interviewers have been trained in Topgrading Interview techniques.

The Topgrading Interview Guide features comprehensive questions that cover college, work history, self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, leadership/management, topgrading and competencies. It produces more valid results than so-called targeted, or competency-based, interviews that ignore dozens of important competencies as well as the chronology, the crucial patterns of how the interviewee developed throughout his or her career.

Interview Questions to Facilitate Topgrading

During the interview process, it's important to ask thorough questions about the interviewee's education and prior work history. Beginning with college, incorporate some of the following questions into your Topgrading Interview:

- What people or events during college might have had an influence on your career?
 - What were the high points during your college years? (Look for leadership, resourcefulness and particularly what competencies the interviewee exhibits *now* while discussing those years.)
 - What were your career thoughts toward the end of college?
- Following the questions about education, move into a discussion about the interviewee's work history. Based on his or her resume, you will already have an overview, but the following questions will allow you to delve deeper:
- What were *your* expectations for the job? What did you find when you arrived to the position? What major challenges did you face?
 - What results were achieved in terms of successes and accomplishments? How were they achieved?
 - As a manager, what sort of talent did you inherit? What changes did you make, how did you make them,

and how many A-, B- and C-Players did you end up with?

It is also necessary to have the interviewee give a self-appraisal. This involves listing all of his or her strengths and assets, as well as any shortcomings and areas for improvement. After obtaining the list, go back through and have the interviewee elaborate upon each point. Finally, ask the interviewee to go over his or her competencies with you. These include intellectual, personal, interpersonal, management, leadership and motivational competencies. A general question such as "Please describe _____ and what specific examples can you cite?" should be asked. This information will allow you to assess a number of the interviewee's competencies.

Interpreting All the Data

Here are some of the most important principles for valid interpretation of data:

- 1. Observe patterns.** Patterns in many statements give multiple vantage points from which to find out what makes a person tick and what the person's strengths and weak points are.
- 2. Assume that strengths can become shortcomings.** Under pressure, we all tend to overuse our strengths, and they can become shortcomings. During interviews, entertain this hypothesis frequently.
- 3. Assume recent past behavior is the best predictor of near-future behavior.** As you review an individual's chronological history, weigh the most recent behaviors most heavily.
- 4. Spot red flags and look for explanations.** Red flags are warning signals to the interviewer that something has gone wrong. Use follow-up questions to get additional information.
- 5. Weigh negatives more heavily than positives.** Good-fit factors do not ensure success, but poor-fit factors can ensure failure.
- 6. Watch out for strong feelings and beliefs.** Naturally, strong beliefs can be an asset for any candidate. It's when the beliefs are accompanied by rigidity, intolerance and extreme emotionality that you begin to wonder if there might be accompanying shortcomings. ●

Avoiding Legal Problems

Topgrading can embrace the spirit and letter of employment law or it can be abused. An effort to remove chronic B- and C-Players can incur big risks if

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care is not taken to avoid a charge of discrimination — age discrimination, for example.

Developing future A-Players can trigger litigation if disabled people protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act are overlooked. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission will be knocking on your door if your infusion of new A-Players systematically excludes minorities. Employees and managers have discovered not only their civil rights, but also their contract and tort rights. Unless your company protects itself, it could face serious employment-related claims, including claims of wrongful discharge, breach of contract, discrimination, negligent hiring or harassment.

Topgrading will help you meet legal requirements during the hiring process. The leading-edge practices in recruitment and selection — job analyses, behaviorally anchored competencies, structured interviews, note taking and so forth — must be coupled with working hand in hand with your partner in HR and your legal counsel to avoid legal problems. State laws vary and your company might be vulnerable. So check with your attorney before acting or failing to act.

Safe Hiring and Firing Practices

Despite the complexities of employment law, the answer is to focus on the fundamentals: (1) perform thorough job analysis; (2) write job descriptions with behavioral competencies; (3) use nondiscriminatory language in employment applications, topgrading forms and guides, job advertisements and interviews; (4) use legally sound job offer letters; (5) avoid negligent hiring and retention claims; (6) use safe managing and firing practices; and (7) follow guidelines on how to topgrade outside the United States. ●

Topgrading in the Future

It's hard to imagine an organization that cannot benefit from topgrading. From hot dog stands to the United Nations, A-Players get results, C-Players don't. What organization cannot benefit from a 90 percent success in hiring versus 25 percent?

Consider just a few future venues for topgrading:

1. Community Service. Community-service organizations can attract more money in the future by topgrading them and advertising, "We have a team of A-Players who will spend your donations for maximum results."

2. Government. Why not screen political candidates for financial support by submitting them to Topgrading Interviews?

3. Finance. Half of all mergers and acquisitions fail, and the biggest reason is inadequate talent. The most successful venture capitalists are very rigorous in assessing management in organizations in which they invest; they qualify as topgraders. Topgrading offers the world of finance accurate insight into people.

4. Governance. To hire a CEO, boards have historically trusted the search firm's interviews and report, with directors performing perfunctory interviews. With directors taking more (deserved) heat and incurring more legal risk, it would seem prudent to select a CEO by topgrading.

5. Legally Mandated Topgrading. With race norming and quotas illegal, yet the pressure for affirmative action continuing, valid approaches for hiring truly talented protected groups is the solution.

6. Education. Are 90 percent of teachers in your school system A-Players? European high schools surpass U.S. schools on standardized tests, yet our per-pupil cost is sky-high (six times what French students are allocated, for example).

7. Career Planning. Topgraded companies rarely promote people over their heads or leave a super-talent languishing and underutilized. Educational institutions could assess students' career talents much better if they would incorporate a Topgrading Interview.

8. Future Research on Topgrading. Talent as an issue, or opportunity, is as old as the human race. Many companies could contribute to the body of scientific literature, and hundreds of master's theses and Ph.D. dissertation could refine and connect individual corporate studies.

In the meantime, you can conduct your own research on talent maximization every day. Topgrading is not easy. There are lessons to be learned, by you and me, about what topgrading approaches work best. Your personal "case study" is an art form, a work in progress. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Topgrading*, you'll also like:

- 1. *Good to Great* by Jim Collins.** The author takes on the question of whether a good company can become a great company.
- 2. *The Smart Interviewer* by Bradford D. Smart, Ph.D.** Smart has successfully interviewed more than 4,000 candidates for selection or promotion, trained more than 3,000 hiring managers in how to interview and counseled thousands on how to manage their careers.
- 3. *The Leadership Pipeline* by Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter and James Noel.** Written by three management gurus, this book shows companies how to prepare future leaders as well as keep the "pipeline" flowing.