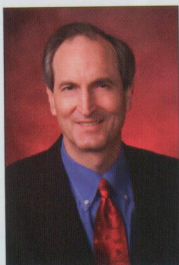


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Forward Thinking

Developing tomorrow's executives requires long-term planning



BY
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If you were the coach of a multi-million dollar professional sports team would you fail to be consciously developing up-and-coming players on your roster? Or lack a clear plan for whom to hire in the next draft? Wouldn't you be planning who will fill positions when your starting players are injured — or move on to another team? Too frequently in the business world many — with *their* multi-million dollar teams — fail to adequately plan for developing successors and most talented rookies.

Warning Signs

One indicator of inadequate planning is whether you have senior managers (especially owner/CEO), age 50 and over, without a formal succession plan. This also holds true for any hard-to-replace leader, even mid-level ones, in strategically important positions. Succession planning needs to be more than an occasional casual conversation. There are four essential components to good succession and talent development planning:

- Formal identification of high-potential talent pool,
- Matching internal candidates to possible succession positions,
- Formal written individual leadership skills development plans, and
- Frequent systematic coaching and/or mentoring.

Good succession and talent development theoretically follows a pyramid model. Ideally, every leader should have at least one or two people below them being formally developed

to advance the pool of talent within the organization. This maximizes available internal candidates for future management positions through a process of continuous coaching and development.

Having a clearly delineated formal leadership development process is paramount. It's the most important organizational indicator of good planning. In this regard, companies serious about planning differentiate themselves from those giving lip service to succession-talent development. Succession planning and leadership development are two sides of the same coin.

For some companies, a leadership development plan consists of encouraging high potential individuals to attend leadership

seminars or write down their goals, which are often vague. And companies that do have succession plans typically invest little time into the process, meeting once-a-quarter in the best case, and once-a-year in the worst case.

than saying "delegate more," indicate to which subordinates, clearly delineating responsibilities and method of follow-up reporting system. Also, assign new on-the-job developmental experiences, responsibilities and projects (e.g. measurable productivity-process improvement targets) designed to "stretch" the candidate. Furthermore, use educational seminars, courses, fraud and higher education to enhance competency in specific areas.


Follow-up coaching and periodic review.

Schedule more frequent coaching sessions, once every 4-6 weeks, where progress in goals is reviewed with feedback, and support and corrective coaching is provided.

Without this kind of attention to more formal succession and development, many

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managers fail to reach the potential they are capable of and are underutilized. Often they become frustrated, disenchanted and leave for jobs elsewhere.

Losing top organizational talent results in unexpected loss of critical bench strength, making a company more vulnerable to stalling or slowing in performance-productivity. The better leaders are equipped to help create higher motivation and enthusiasm within employee culture, the better they'll be able to drive continuous performance improvement. 

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Disciplined Approach

What is needed is a formalized leadership development plan with frequent, systematic follow-up coaching for high potential people. Some key components of such a plan include the following:

In-depth assessment. An individual's strengths and weaknesses should be evaluated using leadership testing, as well as 360-degree open, confidential feedback.

Developmental goal setting. Define behaviorally specific skills. For example, rather