



SUCCESSION PLANNING

WHAT IS IT AND WHO NEEDS IT?

By Col Harry LeBoeuf, USAF, (ret)



ORGANIZATION **IMPROVEMENT**

In its simplest form, succession planning is the strategy for finding suitable people to replace important executives in an organization when current executives leave or retire. To fulfill this definition, it seems all a company needs to do is wait until a vacancy occurs, and then go out and find a suitable substitute to fill the vacancy. While this rather simplistic definition seems easy to attain, and it seems to fit rather nicely into most company's directives, it often falls short of the totality of what succession planning really entails. The more appropriate name for implementing this tactic is "replacement planning." While this approach might be an acceptable stop-gap measure, and it may work just fine at lower levels of an organization, it really doesn't fill the need for true succession planning.



Perhaps a more complete definition of succession planning might be: a continuous process for identifying, hiring, and developing internal people who possess the potential to fill key business leadership roles within an organization. With this definition you can see several differences. First, it's a continuous process, not just drawing up the succession plan, then placing it on the shelf and never actually fully implementing it – which is what many organizations typically do. Second, this definition speaks to not only identifying, but also developing potential candidates for filling key leadership roles within the organization. Third, the most important difference is the focus on internal people within the organization who could move up the chain and take on greater and greater responsibilities. This isn't to say the organization cannot look outside for potential succession candidates, but every organization should begin by looking from within first, before going after external candidates for those areas needing fresh blood. If you promote, you may have to backfill, but look carefully for options within first. Another and final major difference is identifying and addressing the key business leadership roles within an organization and where gaps occur, rather than just filling any and all vacancies within the organization. Succession planning requires a much larger and more comprehensive process to develop than just replacement planning.

Once the succession plan is drawn up, it should be followed up immediately with what many experts call "succession development." Having a succession plan in and of itself is not enough. Once you have the plan

in place, you have to actually implement or execute it. This is where most companies fall short, because this is the most difficult part of succession planning. Executives must decide who has and who does not have the potential to move up in the company and take on higher and higher levels of responsibilities. This needs to be an honest assessment of each and every member's potential. Sometimes you never know what "diamond in the rough" might already be working within the organization. Once these individuals are identified, then the organization must do whatever needs to be done to properly train, prepare, and mentor those individuals who are selected for advancement. Then, and only then, has the organization lived up to the full aspects of successful succession planning.

Succession planning is not a new concept, or the latest trend, or the current management fad. Many organizations have been struggling with how best to distinguish, cultivate, and keep their most talented employees for decades. Just because it isn't a new problem doesn't mean companies don't need to try to solve it. So if it isn't new, exactly why is it we hear so much about succession planning now? Never before have organizations had to face such a large number of "baby boomers" who are approaching retirement, meaning there is an increase in global demand for a dwindling pool of talented/experienced employees; and if this wasn't enough, at the same time, we have to face a widening talent disparity between those who have "what it takes to lead others" and those who don't.



Now we understand what succession planning is all about and why it's so important, so who needs it? Answer the following questions to see if you or your organization needs succession planning:

- How critical is your job to the organization?
- Are you what your organization calls a key or essential person?
- If you were hit by a bus, would your organization be able to survive without missing a beat?
- Does your position require a scarce or specialized skill for your organization to continue to function?
- Does your position have a critical effect over operations or mission success?
- Are you and your organization ready for the next big economic leap?

By answering these few questions, you will probably notice (and it should be obvious) that you need succession planning. At a minimum you probably need to seriously think about it. Worse yet, if you haven't started thinking about the need before, you need to start thinking about it now and probably discussing it with others in your organization.

There are many politicians and intellectuals, like former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who are very optimistic about the U.S. economic outlook for the future. They believe America is primed for a great leap forward due to a host of transformative technologies they believe will supercharge the American economy. If this positive outlook comes to fruition, will you and your organization have a succession plan in place to

be ready to make the most of this economic upswing? It's never too early to prepare for the future, but it can be too late to take advantage of future potential.

Succession planning is a continuing process where an organization recruits and cultivates employees to be ready to fill the key and essential positions that might come vacant in the near future. Through succession planning, and continuing through succession development, your organization hires the right employees, trains, prepares, and mentors them for advancement or promotion into ever increasing positions of responsibility. Utilizing succession planning ensures your employees are constantly being developed to fill soon-to-be vacated positions. In order to achieve the results your organization wants to achieve, you need to start with the basics, create a strong succession planning process, and then invest in the means and technology to encourage succession development throughout your organization. Once achieved, succession planning will ensure your organization will survive the most turbulent times and be ready for the best of time.

We here at the Ropella Group can assist you with succession planning and help you grow your great company



ABOUT ROPELLA

As the world's leading Executive Search Firm specializing in the chemical, consumer products and technology industries, we understand the challenges you face in trying to find the perfect fit for those highly specialized and complex executive positions.

Ropella excels at finding those select few executive candidates with the right skills, qualifications, background and management style, who fit your compensation parameters and are ready to relocate.

We believe nobody should have to waste time screening resumes of candidates who aren't qualified, don't fit your compensation parameters, aren't serious about the role or aren't ready to relocate. That's why we developed the SMART Search System® to provide our clients with precise and predictable hiring results, giving them a huge competitive advantage.