

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

By Lee Perrett, Vice President | Coker Group

The long-term success of an organization likely will depend on the people it chooses and develops as its future leaders. However, because career development and succession planning are seldom executed flawlessly, if at all, many organizations find themselves without a pipeline of qualified, talented, and capable people to move into key roles when vacancies arise. This shortage is an age-old issue organizations face, and there are no easy or inexpensive remedies. However, there are solutions available and methods to avert the leadership deficit.

The executive leadership team should begin by identifying, agreeing upon, and articulating the organization's mission-critical roles, and, more importantly, defining the required competencies and skills for those positions. They need to determine if the people in those roles have potential successors identified who can fill these positions if a need arises. If possible successors are not currently recognized, individuals should be selected for development and grooming for these roles.

Combining the succession planning and leadership development functions has the potential to create a process for managing talent base across the organization. Getting the right people, with the right skills and competencies, in the right roles will profoundly affect the organization's success. If done properly, this process will build a pipeline of talented employees prepared to move into key roles when vacancies occur.

There are a variety of approaches to accomplish this task that differ based on the size of the organization, the complexities of the major roles, and the number of incumbents in key positions. After identifying the critical skills and competencies, many programs and processes can be developed to ensure the high-potential employees are provided with appropriate opportunities, along with the time to learn and hone these competencies. These programs could include some or all of the following:

- Job rotations – Gives the employee an opportunity to develop skills in a new area and build their value to the organization by cross training in other areas. Allows management to broaden their teams and build bench strength while giving the employees high visibility in the organization.
- Special projects or assignments – Allows a high-potential employee or group of employees to focus on a particular business issue or need. For example, a project could be to accomplish a task the organization's executive team may have identified. Such assignments should be business related and provide high visibility for the project member(s) while providing a work output that is important to the organization.

- Working group/team or “think tank” – Bring together several high-potential employees to work on a specific organizational problem or issue, and set a time-frame to report and make their recommendation. This initiative provides the group with a “real-life” experience, exposure to several layers of senior management, and a cross-functional team experience.
- Classroom training – For technical or operational areas where the employee may need specific training or instruction on a particular topic.

The ability to nurture and grow, high-potential leaders in an organization has been and will continue to be, a critical success factor in the long-term health of organizations. The leadership pipeline has increased in importance in the last ten years, as many organizations have downsized and eliminated positions and roles that previously were fertile training grounds for leaders who would eventually move into senior management positions. A strategic initiative of the executive team should be to implement a plan for the development of future leaders and to monitor the progress and success of the program.

In the rapidly changing world of healthcare, the ability to plan ahead, look around corners, and prepare for the unexpected is more critical now than ever. Having a robust pipeline of capable and prepared leaders to fill key roles will make the organization more flexible, dynamic, and successful over the long term.

Please share your thoughts about Leadership Development and Succession Planning  
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