

Should You Train Someone to Take Your Job?

By Lin Gensing-Pophal, Contributing Editor Feb 17, 2020 HR Daily Advisor



In some organizations and for some people, the prospect of training another employee to do what they do can be intimidating. For others, it can be empowering.

What makes the difference, and how can companies and their learning and development staff create an environment where “working themselves out of a job” becomes the norm and not something to be feared? We sought input from some experts on the topic.

Should You or Shouldn't You: What the Experts Have to Say

One of the biggest reasons you definitely *should* train someone to take over your job is that if you don't and a big opportunity opens up, you may not be able to shift into that role.

“Far too often this has held many leaders and employees back from new opportunities,” says Stephen Hensley, President at [Hensley Consulting, LLC](#). They may never realize it, but employees' fear of sharing and, in their minds, helping another employee be as good as them, if not better, is intimidating.

The reverse is actually true, says Paden Simmons, Senior Vice President for [Nigel Frank International](#), a global leader in Microsoft recruitment. “Employees who are willing to share their knowledge are more likely to gain recognition for their talent value to the business,” says Simmons. “If their ambition is to move up the ladder, it's often imperative to show they can lead a team. Actively demonstrating leadership skills in the form of teaching, as well as listening to new ideas, will give managers a strong incentive to start promoting them.”

From an organizational standpoint, there are benefits, as well. Ensuring employees are poised to step into roles that may become vacant due to promotion, retirement, or attrition builds bench strength. It makes the company less vulnerable when a key employee takes on a new role.

In addition, offering this type of training can help engage employees who might otherwise feel stagnant in their positions. Research indicates that employees' belief that their company is committed to their personal and professional development keeps them on the job.

In fact, [LinkedIn research](#) also indicates that 94% of employees would stay longer at a company that invests in their career.

Are there any drawbacks to training someone to take your job? Only if you're insecure, says Hensley—and that, he says, “is a much bigger problem.”

Supporting a Learning Culture

There's a lot that companies, and their learning and development staff, can do to help support a culture where employees will feel confident about training others to do their work.

"I think the stigma of employees withholding their expertise from colleagues, in fear of being replaced by a new candidate, can be prevented if their company actively encourages a learning culture," says Simmons. "Having a work environment with an engaging learning culture is great for everyone."

"For the company it can increase productivity, refine business strategies and improve client relationships," says Simmons. "For individual employees, it can help generate new ideas, enhance skillsets, and provide better opportunities to be recognized in the workplace."

Jeff Miller, AVP of learning and organizational effectiveness at [Cornerstone](#), agrees. Organizations, he says, need to "always maintain a succession mindset." Encouraging that type of mind-set, he says, helps ensure that people will be motivated to train others to do their jobs.

"If no timeframe is established, people may lose motivation and good people may leave," he says. "It's important to set realistic timeframes for promotion and include instructions for training others below them to make this all possible," says Miller.

[MyRoofingPal](#), an online marketplace that connects people with local residential and commercial home improvement contractors, is a company that has done just that, says Courtney Keene, Director of Operations.

It's a company that values learning and advancement and actively encourages employees to train others in the responsibilities of their job, where appropriate, she says.

"We want everyone on our team to adopt a philosophy of learning every single day, and this is just one of the ways we try to achieve that," says Keene. "We also believe these teaching moments help encourage cooperation and establish relationships between employees. If an employee does advance, they'll then have an established rapport with their reports, since they trained them before the promotion."

Doing It Well

At MyRoofingPal, says Keene, "We've avoided resentment or fears of replacement by making sure all employees know where they stand. Those that want to advance have the option to do so, and those that want to stay where they are aren't going to get forced out by a younger employee they helped train," she says.

That type of transparency is critical in building the type of trust required to support a culture of succession, says Keene.

"I would encourage companies to be very transparent when doing this. Make sure employees understand why they're being asked to train others. If they have fears about being replaced, show them those fears are unfounded and provide *them* with training, too. These considerations will go a long way toward easing any tension," Keene adds.

Not all employees may be interested in advancement or taking on new roles. In addition, there may be employees who are not tapped for these opportunities for various reasons. Those reasons should be shared with them, advises Miller, who says it's important "to be honest with those who aren't in the line of succession so that they can make other plans, hopefully within the same company."

Importantly, organizations that are committed to developing an environment that encourages employees to "work themselves out of their jobs" need to show, through word and deed, that these efforts will lead to reward, not punishment.

Employees believe what they see more than what they hear. Because of this, it also can be a good idea to make a big deal out of situations when employees train others to take over their role, or a part of their role, so they can move on to other things.

Celebrate succession visibly to support the culture you wish to build.