

Top Tips for Effective Succession Planning

Succession planning is a critical factor in the long-term success of your company. If a key executive retires, or if an unforeseen event removes top leadership from their role, you need to ensure that business will carry on.

Whether the changes are planned or not, if you do not have an effective succession strategy in place, your business continuity could be at risk. Here are some practical ideas you can implement now that will help you get better results from your succession planning efforts:

Don't Call it Planning

Planning is not where you will see the most significant gains. Development is a more precise term, as it more accurately describes the process.

If you spend too much time in the planning phase (and when there is no determinate finish line, this is a real concern) you may never reach the development phase.

Don't get hung up on checklists, meetings, evaluations, and charts. They give you a false sense of activity when what you're actually doing is collecting data. Spend less time planning and more time doing. That's what is going to get you where you want to be.

Pay Less Attention to the Process and More to the Outcome

Tracking progress against a defined set of goals is essential. If your leadership team is too busy to establish these goals and track progress towards them, your succession planning (ahem, development) may not work.

To change this paradigm, engage with senior leadership to establish a set of goals. This approach will also help you build support for the program and leadership development in general. The results you see will drive the process forward and help you make course corrections when needed.

Some of the goals you establish could include the percentage of high-level positions that are filled internally as opposed to external hires, or the number of promotions that come from your list of high-potential employees.

Don't Complicate Things

All too often, companies include complex and sometimes impossible variables to the succession process because they think that this improves the quality of the results.

Keep in mind that the planning process itself is just a tool to focus succession development, so don't get hung up on perfection. Once a candidate is in development, more complex assessments can be incorporated and then overseen by a qualified coach.

Keep it Real

Because succession planning is not an exact science, there is a tendency to shoot yourself in the foot with criteria that are either too rigid or lack a broader vision.

For example, the head of your IT department is a high-performer and a dynamic leader who has c-suite potential. The only barrier is that she has no sales experience. Her development plan includes putting her in charge of the sales division, but nobody is going to risk putting her in that position because she lacks experience in that area.

This example is just one of many. Even if you have a succession plan, if it is not realistic, it's probably not going to happen. Unfortunately, leading this person to believe there is a chance of succession when there clearly isn't will only lead to frustration. You may even lose a perfectly good leader in the process.

Whether changes in leadership are expected or not, if you do not have an effective succession strategy in place, your business operations flow could be in harm.

When going under these types of shifts, ask yourself, "Where does my company stand on succession planning?" If your response is "We don't have any plan" or "I've never thought of that before", reach out today to learn more about how we can help!