



Overcoming Blunders Organizations Make in Succession Planning

By TRISH “DOC” HOLLIDAY

Succession planning often becomes an afterthought for organizations because of the rapid changing work environment that exists in today’s workplaces. Between five generations learning how to co-exist with one another, the desire to have an innovative and inclusive work environment, and the rise of skill shortages to fill mission critical roles, managers often become disheartened with planning for the future.

The frustrations of positions left unfilled and significant activities put on hold due to the lack of personnel can be discouraging for managers who desire to serve the customers with excellence and exceed expectations. These are just a few of the challenges facing organizational leaders in today’s modern workplace.

Recognizing the importance of creating a talent pipeline for the company is one of the most strategic necessities a leader can address. It is difficult to accomplish organizational goals without the right talent. There is an increased sense of urgency in making succession planning a priority. A well designed succession plan helps organizations become future ready and stay competitive in an ever-changing market.

There are three types of succession planning to consider when developing a robust succession strategy for an organization. The first type of succession planning is individual based and focuses on identifying specific employees for the next in line opportunity for a specific role. The second type is called role based succession planning and is a good approach for leaders who have specific roles that are critical to the success of the business and are hard to fill roles. The role based approach requires leaders to identify individuals that would meet the job qualifications and develop them specifically for that specific role in the organization.

The third type of succession planning is pool based and allows organizations to enhance the overall talent pool within the company by developing high performing and high potential employees for future responsibilities. The pool based approach offers leaders a talent bench strength that positions the organization in a future ready state and creates broad internal promotion ready candidates.

Sheldon Adelson stated, “Why do I need a succession plan? I’m very alert. I’m very vibrant. I have no intention to retire.” How often do we find ourselves thinking this way? Working with leaders at all levels within an organization, I have heard comments like:

“We do not have time for succession planning so I encourage my managers to do it organically on their teams.”

“There is too much financial commitment needed to do a comprehensive succession plan with programming because organizational loyalty is low.”

“We do not have the resources to develop a large amount of employees in our workforce so to be fair we just encourage everyone to learn and grow on their own.”

The above comments represent just a few of the mindsets that exist regarding succession planning and why many organizations choose to not make it a priority. Research presents a different mindset with a different perspective regarding succession planning. The facts support having a robust workforce development platform that creates future sustainability and helps to increase employee engagement and retain high performers and high potentials.

I would encourage leaders to bring the learning and development professionals to the planning table when creating the strategy for the future of the organization. It is important that learning and development become a part of the front end of decisions rather than an afterthought when decisions are already made. When learning and development are considered in the early stages of decisions, the needs of the workforce are addressed, allowing for greater success in the implementation of decisions.

When development is viewed as a priority within a company, the workforce is more likely to commit to helping the company achieve the desired goals. When employees feel invested in, their engagement levels rise and productivity increases. A significant step to demonstrating a focus on workforce development is creating a comprehensive succession strategy within the organization.

As leaders begin the process of succession planning, it is important to recognize the challenges that can occur if the plan is not designed with the whole organization in mind. A critical part of the succession planning process is to ensure it is connected to the overall strategic goals. Avoiding the most common blunders can help leaders design a future ready plan for success.

The top five blunders organizations make when creating and implementing a succession plan are:

Blunder #1: Focusing development only on “A” players and missing out on discovering talent that is ready for coaching and new opportunities to grow

Blunder #2: Not focusing on developing others as a priority of the organization, positioning learning and development as an afterthought

Blunder #3: Offering limited appreciation and recognition within the culture, creating low morale and motivation among the workforce

Blunder #4: Pushing ahead at rapid speed without any time to demonstrate growth and success among the workforce

Blunder #5: Limited information and access, creating poor communication and visibility which drive a lack of engagement among teams

Fortunately, there is a way for organizational leaders to avoid these blunders of succession planning. First, leaders must first define the behaviors of high performing and high potential in order for employees to understand the expectations established for advancement. It is important for leaders to create an environment where employees recognize their opportunities for growth and create career paths that are multi-directional.

Some of the most sustainable plans within an organization starts with discovery. Leaders must look wider and deeper for talent, acknowledging that great talent and potential exist at all levels of an organization. It is important to support employees' desire to grow and advance by recognizing their strengths and capitalizing on those strengths for the greater good.

Build a culture of appreciation that is grounded in the idea that everyone matters and has something to offer. Move away from simple generic compliments and offer employees specific valued behaviors and actions that help the company progress in the mission and vision. Employees are attracted to roles where they can have a voice and make an impact, and in order to have an impact employees need access to information, vision, and the big picture of how the organization functions.

High performing organizations recognize the importance of creating a culture of knowledge sharing and supporting a robust communication strategy that informs the workforce and generates dedication and excitement towards achieving the desired goals of the business.

When there is a commitment towards improving the employee experience by developing the workforce, leaders are able to improve employee engagement, increase productivity, and experience optimal organizational performance. By focusing on creating a learning culture that drives innovation and promotes inclusion, organizations will attract and retain high potentials and remain competitive in the race for top talent. Therefore, organizational excellence occurs when leaders embrace succession planning as a priority.

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 - » Anticipate the pace of change
 - » Increase innovation and creativity
- » Improve engagement and performance
 - » Plan for the impact of changing workforce demographics

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