



The Coach's Guide to Succession Planning

In the past, we have written in detail about the differences between a Manager and a Coach. We have helped our Learning Dynamics clients create effective ways to differentiate between the two roles. While we have worked hard to help managers and leaders understand the differences of each role, there are many areas where the two roles overlap. One of those areas is succession planning.

When we wear the coach's hat, the idea of assuring that we have a solid pipeline of players for our key positions is clearly a requirement. As the coach of the team, we know that each position on the team includes detailed knowledge of the skills and behaviors the employee in that role needs. That inventory of the criteria needed for successful performance is typically generated independently from the incumbent in the position. The need to assess positional requirements, without focusing on current employees, is a key skill for effective coaches.

That logic is the core of succession planning. Leaders with a thought toward sustaining success for the long run are always thinking ahead of the current reality. Their focus is a combination of seeing what generates success today along with what will ensure success in the future. Sometimes the differences between those two viewpoints can be distinct and complex.

For example, twenty years ago, while the changes in technology were significant, by comparison to today, they were meager. As leaders are thinking now of what criteria they'll need in their organizations to handle the continuous and often radical

changes in technology, the need to plan for and develop skills internally becomes clear and crucial. Each of those clear targets for future development also includes the requirement of effectively managing and supervising people with those skill sets.

Effective succession planning requires a disciplined approach to separating the skills, behaviors and criteria needed in every key position identified by the incumbent. The thought is focused on "What would happen if Gladys wasn't available to work? Are we completely clear on the requirements needed to fill Gladys' role? Who is ready, or nearly so, to fill her position? Have we had clear communication with others who might backfill Gladys' role? Should we be looking outside for others with that capability?"

When we multiply that analysis by the number of positions that are vital to the organization's success, we begin to see why the need for succession planning is vital and also complex. In fact, the succession planning process causes an important ripple effect throughout the whole company and quickly increases our requirement for effective succession management at every level.

Our experience with large corporations shows us that for many organizations, one of the leading reasons that high performing middle managers are overlooked for advancement is because they have not prepared anyone to take the role they'd be vacating when they moved up. Typically, the formal succession plan is focused on the most senior positions, and the ripple effect that plan causes becomes an informal factor to be managed as the need becomes evident.

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Again, the thought patterns and subsequent behaviors associated with succession planning are second nature for good coaches. They have focused on what it takes for their team to excel. They know who possesses certain skills, often above and beyond what an individual's current role requires. They are working on continual development among their staff with a view of the current situation as well as the future.

When companies can take that logical and realistic approach to succession planning, what follows is an increased capability to be ready for the future with a proactive response. Well managed succession planning has a positive impact on employee engagement and motivation. It expands employees' view of their own job and increases the likelihood of a broader understanding of the company's success.

