

Succession Planning Is: A Springboard for Planning

Dictionary.com defines the word "[Springboard](#)" as "*something that supplies the impetus or conditions for a beginning, change, or progress; a point of departure.*"

This translates well into the topic of leadership transitions. Succession Planning is a process that "supplies impetus or conditions for a beginning, change, or progress; a point of departure"

Effective succession plans have four *springboards* built into the process. Most leadership teams, however, only take time to build two. Smart organizations, the ones paying attention and planning well, build all four.

Leadership Springboard 1: PROGRESS

This is the springboard built for the leader that is transitioning out. Maybe "Progress" isn't the word you would have chosen to associate with someone's retirement. Consider the difference between *leaving* something and *transitioning to* something else. Smart leaders not only understand this principle, they plan for it. A retirement based transition doesn't mark the end of a leader's journey, rather the natural progression of life. The process of succession planning, for the retiring leader, is the gateway to their next season of influence. This is also true for leaders trying to navigate a mid-career change. The healthy implementation of a transition plan actually increases a leader's level of influence in their next season.

Leadership Springboard 2: BEGINNING

This leadership springboard has to do with the person stepping into the role of successor. I find it interesting to see how a person's leadership capacity instantly grows when thrust into new roles. It's not that something mystical happens, but stepping into something new allows a person to express their leadership in ways they were not able to in a previous role. In the same way a springboard launches a gymnast to heights they could not achieve on their own, a well planned transition strategy will increase the leadership capacity of the successor.

It is a reality, however, that not all successors succeed. There are several reasons for this, but let me offer a word of caution in a specific area. Don't assume the successor has developed every skill needed for success in their new role. No one is perfect. We all have blind spots.

Not creating capacity day 1 for the successor to grow is an all too common mistake.

Organizations tend to assume (insert joke here!) that the new leader will have everything needed to move them forward. Not necessarily. Depending on the size and scope of responsibilities, it is anywhere from 6-9 months when their leadership deficiencies become exposed. We've all seen it. We even have a cute phrase to describe this phenomenon. You can fill in the blank. "The _____ period is over!"

There is no need to fall into this trap. Build the successor a springboard to help them launch well.

Leadership Springboard 3: CHANGE

It's rare to see a leadership transition that impacts only one person. It is more common for a key leadership change to spark a series of other staffing changes. The result is that additional opportunities are created for increased responsibility for other people within the organization.

Transitions create "opt-in" opportunities.

Be prepared for this by building springboards into your transition strategy that propel others within the existing organizational structure. This is a unique opportunity to reward and promote talent from within. Even if the springboard isn't a full promotion, expanding the areas of responsibility for key people can be just as effective in affirming their contribution and building morale.

Leadership Springboard 4: A POINT OF DEPARTURE

Yes, Succession Planning is a springboard for Leadership, but not always within your organization. The reality is that sometimes leadership transitions at the top levels of an organization lead to voluntary (or non-voluntary) departures at other levels. Don't be too quick to assume this is the response of an immature employee that lacks loyalty. The transition of a key leader could very well be the specific circumstance God uses to spark a desire to transition for others.

Transitions create "opt-out" opportunities.

Don't be caught off guard by this reality. Instead, embrace it. Not doing so comes across as small minded and defensive. Instead, give yourself enough time to help your staff process where they are. Have open and honest dialogue. Invest in their career path and progression. You are doing everything possible to springboard your retiring leader into their next season. Carve out room to do the same for others as well. Be proactive in building springboards to help serve as healthy points of departure for everyone.

Let me close with this final thought – **Nothing exposes leadership like a leadership transition.**

Investing the time and energy to build each springboard is an important part of developing a holistic succession planning strategy. But it goes deeper than that. Being intentional about building all four springboards into your process is the ultimate litmus test for how effective you are as a leader. Nothing exposes leadership like a leadership transition.

> [Read more from Will.](#)

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