



## SUCCESSION PLANNING - QUICK TIPS

*Creating opportunities for potential leaders to develop can contribute to long-term strength and stability of your unit and larger institution. It is your job as a leader to manage for the future, including one in which you are no longer in your role. Here are some quick tips to help you think about how to identify, foster, and encourage potential leaders to build institutional leadership capacity.*

### *Start With the Basics*

When considering who might move into future positions, including your own, start by inventorying the elements fundamentally required for success. Create a list for yourself, including such items as:

- Potential candidates: who within your department consistently sees the larger picture, asks the right questions when encountering difficult situations, and acts with integrity?
- Leadership characteristics: Is this an individual who can act to support a larger mission beyond a personal agenda? Is this a person who develops others? Listens effectively?
- Readiness: Some may be “ready now,” while others might be “ready soon,” or “ready later.”

### *Do Not Try to Read Minds or Choose for Others*

When considering a field of possible future leaders, do not make assumptions about levels of interest or potential availability for taking on a leadership role over time.

- Some people may be reluctant or modest about their suitability for a leadership position, and need encouragement to overcome their hesitations. ‘Nudge’ those you see having potential in a leadership direction without being overbearing. Provide multiple opportunities for each to gain exposure and experience. Lay out how an opportunity might simultaneously serve the institution and might also contribute to a positive career trajectory and open options.
- A researcher with a particularly productive project, or a person with family constraints from young children or elderly parents requiring much care, may decline an opportunity the first time it is offered. Or, the individual might be open to it even though already very busy—his or her time management skills are likely stellar. The only way to discover interest is to ask, and not to assume the answer, especially if rooted in your own values. Persistence is a virtue: keep asking periodically, even if early opportunities are declined.

### *Assess and Foster Potential*

Make it a habit to assess ways your potential leaders could build skills and gain exposure to other parts of your discipline and university, and to other parts of your community. Systematically and thoughtfully try to provide experiences for growth and development.

- Recommend those you think could develop into future leaders for service opportunities within the unit and beyond:
  - ➔ Include younger faculty on important decision-making committees so they can observe the processes in your unit and institution;
  - ➔ Suggest such individuals for roles in larger endeavors (standing or *ad hoc* committees; task forces, etc.) at the college or campus level.
- Nominate people you have identified for programs that might provide wider perspectives:
  - ➔ Expose potential leaders to more than just your own department and university; point them towards leadership or service opportunities in your discipline or societies in your field.





- Make assignments that broaden experience and exposure.
  - ➔ Thoughtfully design ways to rotate each through specific areas for a strong understanding of the functions of a strong department: budget exposure; promotion and tenure or other personnel functions; fundraising experience; curriculum; strategic planning; etc.
- Consider horizon-broadening options including mentoring connections or opportunities to observe how other peer departments/universities function.

## *After a Stumble, Offer Perspective and a Chance to Learn*

If you assign someone to a task at which he or she performs poorly, take time to debrief what occurred, why it happened, and what could have been done differently for a better outcome. Cultivate a growth mindset.

- Assess whether a second opportunity is warranted and would help recover and grow.
- Depending on the resources of your environment, you may not be able to simply “hire new talent” if someone falls short. Often you just have to work with what you have ... and it may turn out that what you have could be great if you invest in thoughtful mentoring, growth, and improvement.

## *Think Ahead*

Strive for a long view by looking beyond current needs. Succession planning requires a medium- and even long-term perspective. Look down the road five to ten years in the future:

- The qualities needed in current leadership may not be the same as those that will help meet the demands of out-years.
- Think internally and externally: when hiring, consider how candidates might prepare and equip your unit for its future.
- The entry cohorts of today will be the leaders of tomorrow; cultivate healthy and respectful relationships to model the culture and leadership tone sought now and in the future.

Planning for succession also means considering how knowledge that is commonly unspoken within your institution is kept and passed on. A surprising amount of that knowledge may often exist only within the more experienced members of your team. This can include things like:

- Understanding organizational structure and roles outside the unit;
- Expectations for feedback and processes for review, best practices;
- A range of compliance procedures and expectations;
- Budgeting assumptions and what is controlled at which levels in the institution;
- How your departmental curriculum interacts with others across the institution.

Collect core policies and procedures, update them regularly and maintain an efficient system for the orientation of those new to the unit or their roles to minimize the loss of critical knowledge at all levels of your unit. Institutionalize the documentation of all tangible commitments and promises to members of the unit, especially related to financial matters, space allocation, or career trajectories (“you will receive an early tenure review”, or “the next endowed appointment that opens will be yours.”)

Create a culture in which all understand that “it’s not a deal if it is not recorded.” Do not leave future leaders without a written trail to reference for managing fallout from those who feel the institution has not kept its promises to them.

