

TIP SHEET: Succession Planning Mistakes

From *Coaching, Mentoring and Succession Planning*
by Clark Reed and his associates at Netgain Partners Inc.
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Succession planning is one of those initiatives many cultural organizations simply don't have the time for. You're already working as hard as you can to simply maintain a fully staffed and functioning operation *today*. But you could be hit with it head-on in the not-too-distant future. Looking ahead as your organization grows, you would be well-advised to consider succession planning seriously.

The following tips identify some problem areas that could hamper your succession planning efforts.

1. **Keeping the plan a secret.** How many promising employees might you have lost to other cultural organizations because they had no idea you had them in your sights as "promising"? The more you can involve the entire organization in your efforts, the more successful you will be.
2. **Underestimating the talent within.** Why is it that we frequently overlook the talent that we have within our organization in favour of recruiting from a vast pool of unknowns?
3. **Narrow-minded thinking.** Overlooking employees who are thought to be too young, too old, too rough around the edges or too different.
4. **Focusing exclusively on hard skills.** Organizations are finding that soft skills (usually interpersonal) are often more important in determining an employee's success than the more traditional hard skills or technical abilities that we tend to value. Consider organizational culture and teamwork needs in addition to specific job-related requirements when considering succession possibilities.
5. **Not offering appropriate training and developmental opportunities.** Don't leave employees and their managers to fend for themselves in building their skills. Even if yours is one of the many cultural organizations who have severely-limited financial resources for training, do everything you can to make some kind of staff development a part of your program.
6. **Expecting employees to self-identify.** Identification of employees with potential to fill future needs is a joint responsibility between the organization and its employees.
7. **Considering only upward succession.** Lateral succession may be an option in your organization as well.
8. **Developing a one-size-fits-all program.** Offering generic leadership development programs is an ineffective way to deal with succession planning. Individual succession plans should be developed based on specific organizational needs, and specific individual skill and training needs.