

Leadership Starts at Recruitment

Written by: Dr. Nanette Miner, Leadership Development and Workplace-Learning Strategy Consultant, The Training Doctor

I recently began working with a small engineering firm to help them with their CEO and COO succession plan. In their favor... they are planning two to 10 years in advance (two years for one role and 10 years for the other) and they have three potential internal candidates whom they hope will rise to the C-Suite. Unfortunately, they were unaware that they also have a looming leadership crisis.

As I always do before starting work with a new client, I asked for some HR data: how many employees are over the age of 50, what is the rate of turnover, what is the average tenure, etc. The bar-chart they provided me, depicting tenure, was alarming – there is a large gap in mid-career professionals! The employees at this company have been there for eight years or less, or 20+ years. There really is no one who has been there for 10 to 20 years. While the firm’s leadership was looking at their upcoming succession, I am looking down the road to the next one. Right now, it appears they will not successfully have another succession without some major decisions about grooming their younger workers to accelerate their leadership capabilities or potentially hiring from outside the organization so that the new CEO doesn’t turn around in 10 years and realize there’s no one to pass the baton to.

A recent [Korn Ferry article](#) tells me that this situation is going to be more and more common in the coming decade. When it comes to the current job market, firms may be sacrificing tomorrow’s leaders for today’s needs, states the article. Some of the concerns addressed in the article include:



- » Budget cuts in the last two years have hit training and development hard; young hires are getting less professional development than in the past.
- » At the same time, many companies have laid off layers of middle managers who could be natural “trainers” and coaches for young employees; and the remaining middle managers are stretched too thin to give much quality time to new hires.

Both of these situations then impact the number of younger employees hired, because companies don’t have the wherewithal to train entry-level workers – so they aren’t hiring them.

Kate Shattuck, a global co-leader at Korn Ferry, sums up the future: Firms risk creating a leadership and management


vacuum by not building a bench of young talent. It sets the stage for a crisis 10 years from now when you don't have people to take over.

If you see your own organization in this situation, here are a few solutions to avert a future crisis.

Spend quality time (two to four days) creating career paths for all the entry level roles in your company. [You can access a recent article I wrote on career paths, [here](#).] Identify what skills will be learned in each role and how those skills might be utilized in different roles (aka lateral moves). Smaller organizations don't have the ability to "promote" everyone, but they do have the ability to move people around in the company to gain new skills and ultimately provide more value to the organization. Use these career paths when recruiting. Young people today would like to have a long-term career at your firm, but most of them don't "see" it as a possibility simply because you have not spelled it out for them.

Create a mentoring "program," which doesn't have to be anything more formal than pairing more experienced employees with younger ones who are currently in the organization. For the mentoring relationships to be successful, be sure to require regular check-ins and have each pair establish measurable outcomes (for instance, the younger employee will work on a cross-functional project this year or will gain a new certification such as in 3D modeling or sustainable construction techniques).

Look outside the firm for mid-career professionals. Act now to recruit employees with 10+ years of experience to fill-in "the middle." Not only can this bring fresh perspectives and skills to the company today, it will also give you a good window of time to groom these new hires as potential future leaders. One word of caution however: ensure that the hiring process emphasizes cultural fit and long-term potential; you're not just looking to fill a gap in experience, you're looking at the long-term future of the company.

By implementing these strategies, your organization can build a pipeline of future leaders to fill the "next" succession plan, not just the most immediate one. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for Chief Learning Office magazine, Forbes, and MBA World and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as Inc. Radio and America's Workforce Radio.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is Future-Proofing Your Organization.

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