

Who's Next In Line?

by Robert Adams

What do you see when you look around your office these days? Do you see a vibrant organization where new and eager employees are being hired periodically to complement the seasoned veterans? Are there “individual advancement plans” in place for all staff, allowing employees to actively participate in their own skills enhancement decisions, while helping them choose their career path? Does your organization follow through on its commitment to its employees with promotions and new opportunities for growth? When someone leaves the organization, is there a replacement already prepared and ready to fill the void?

OR DOES ANY OF THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

Staff have been in the same position for many years;
There always seems to be a hiring freeze, meaning no new staff are added to the organization;
There are fewer staff than five years ago with everyone taking on more responsibilities;
Training opportunities seem to be occurring less frequently;
Recruitment occurs from the outside to compensate for lack of in-house experience;
If one of your veteran staff leaves, the operation suffers; or
Some of the brightest staff leave because they lack a career path.

If you answered yes to the first set of questions – Congratulations! You are part of a well-managed, forward thinking organization that recognizes the value of its employees and wants to prepare them for lifelong careers. Provided you enjoy your work, you could spend a long time in this organization and feel your efforts are appreciated and rewarded.

However, if any of the second set of statements rings a bell, it is possible that your organization lacks one of the major management practices used by Fortune 500 companies, profit and non-profit organizations, and many large and small businesses - “Succession Planning.”

Simply defined, *Succession Planning* is the identification of potential replacements for individuals in key jobs to ensure as little disruption as possible as a result of resignations, promotions or factors beyond the organization's control. Once identified, these potential successors are developed through training, special assignments and other means to build their capabilities to advance into key roles within the organization when the opportunities present themselves.

Succession Planning is critical for all organizations, including the WAP operations at both the state and local levels. It is the way we can continue the business of weatherizing low-income homes without disrupting the flow of resources or reducing our production. It is the way we avoid costly mistakes by having those who follow us learn from our experience rather than by error. And it is the way we ensure that the future of the Program reflects the great achievements of our past and builds on our successes.

It may be helpful to think about *Succession Planning* as part of your strategic planning process. *Succession Planning* is not an exercise that will make an overnight difference. Taking a more

strategic view will make it easier for you to integrate it into the overall goals and objectives developed to help steer your WAP operation.

Devising a Plan that outlines who will operate your organization when you are no longer there is not an exact science. There simply isn't one approach that is right for every situation. Here are a few tips that can help you begin formulating your own specific *Succession Plan* for your WAP operation:

IDENTIFY THE KEY TASKS THAT ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO YOUR SUCCESS

Use your job description or simply sit down and list those things you do each day, week, or month to complete your responsibilities within the organization. When listing the task, define the skills you use to complete the task. This will help design the skill set and identify the gaps in potential candidates who may fit the role as your future replacement.

IDENTIFY HIGH-PERFORMANCE OR HIGH-POTENTIAL INDIVIDUALS AS POSSIBLE SUCCESSORS

It is extremely difficult to choose a successor for your own job, especially when you have no plans to leave any time soon. This will be an intensive effort that calls for you to examine all those you believe have the talent and potential. You may want to seek the advice of those above you who understand and support your initiative.

ASSESS THE GAPS BETWEEN THE SUCCESSORS'

CURRENT SKILLS AND THE SKILLS NEEDED IN THE NEW ROLES

Remember to use your task and skills list from above in selecting candidates and determining their strengths and areas where improvement will be needed. Experts generally estimate that *Succession Planning* should begin 5 to 15 years before you intend to leave. This will give you ample time to oversee your successor as he or she learns the WAP business and hones his or her skills.

DEVELOP A TRAINING STRATEGY FOR THE

SUCCESSORS

Help your successor(s) develop a training program that addresses the critical need of the job. It is recommended that as training occurs, the successor is given ever-increasing job responsibilities. This may sound simple enough, but there is a certain amount of "letting go" that goes along with teaching your successor by allowing him or her to learn, grow and make mistakes before assuming the helm. By creating a culture that encourages the person to take charge within broad guidelines, you establish space for your successors to fit into the operation.

If we wish to continue this business known as “ Weatherization ” beyond our generation, the Program’s leaders – meaning you – must engage today in the forward thinking strategy of *Succession Planning*. Look around your office, your department, your organization, and your network. Find that person or those people you feel have the talent and potential to take the reins when you are no longer there. Meet with them and talk about a plan for ensuring they have the skills to be considered when the opportunity arises. Start a training program that fills whatever gaps exist in their experience and education to take your place. When the day arrives for you to accept a new job or promotion, change your career, or retire to pursue personal interests, you can leave knowing that the Program will be in safe hands and the low-income families will continue to receive outstanding services. What a great feeling and a wonderful legacy!

(Please plan to attend this year's joint workshop on Succession Training being offered at the NASCSP Mid-Winter Training Conference. Visit www.nascsp.org for details.)