



Succession Planning: Tomorrow May Come Sooner Than You Think

Only when there *is not* a plan does leadership transition pose a serious threat to a nonprofit organization. Unfortunately, succession planning usually is near the bottom of a long list of other board obligations and priorities — if it makes the list at all.

That is certainly understandable. Board members are often reluctant to tackle such a time-consuming project — especially when they may be off the board before the plan is even needed. Others may fear “sending the wrong message” to an incumbent executive director. Still others believe that, when the time comes, a search committee will either identify an obvious candidate or put the position out for search.

Cut Through The Complacency

In the end, it is only the executive director of a nonprofit organization who can implement the strategic vision and drive the operational success of that organization. Making sure the right person is in the job is among the most important — if not the most important — responsibilities of a thoughtful board.

Plan now. A sound succession plan requires a substantial investment of time to prepare. If an organization urgently needs a new executive director and the board doesn't already have a succession plan in place, there's not likely to be enough time to create one.

Capitalize on valuable insight. Planning now also allows your board to partner with the existing executive director.

gaining valuable insights from the person best positioned to evaluate the organization's future leadership needs in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the current staff and the organization's management dynamics.

Get an outside opinion. Knowledgeable and objective third-party observers can offer assessments of how the potential executive director is perceived by the community at large. Likewise, query other pertinent stakeholders, such as the philanthropic community.

Don't look for a duplicate. It is often tempting for a board to try to replicate a director who has been successful. This is almost invariably a bad idea. Every executive director, no matter how capable, has at least one area of weakness.

Turn to our experienced professionals for expert guidance on developing a sound search and selection process for your organization.