

Succession Planning That Works: The Critical Path of Leadership Development

Michael Timms

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This is an invaluable guide for identifying, and taking advantage of, talent within organizations.

In his timely, excellent book, *Succession Planning that Works*, management consultant Michael Timms describes the “critical path” steps to successful succession planning.

Why is succession planning for key positions so important to companies right now? Because, writes Timms, it “answers arguably the greatest talent management question of the 21st century: How will organizations fill the void left by baby boomers?” To drive home the point, Timms’s consulting firm, Avail Leadership, conducted in-depth interviews with senior executives from nearly fifty organizations across various industries that ranged in size from 70 to 235,000 employees. The study, along with input from other leadership development experts, forms the basis for this book.

The book begins by laying out thirteen arguments supporting the case for succession planning, not the least of which is preventing the “loss of institutional knowledge.” But just as important for companies’ HR departments is the fact that recruiting from outside an organization, while very common, is costly and time-consuming. In fact, filling the position from within, writes Timms, “minimizes or even eliminates the downtime associated with turnover of critical positions, thereby speeding up the recruiting process.”

As strong, succinct, and well written as the first chapter is, however, the book’s real strength lies in its clear, concise, yet comprehensive description of each of the twenty-one steps in the author’s critical path for succession planning. Timms divides the critical path into three logical sections that cover seven steps each: “Fundamentals of Talent Management,” “Fundamentals of Succession Planning,” and “Scale It Up.” A chapter is devoted to every step, with content that is short and to the point, often augmented by a brief case study, a pertinent chart, or sample forms. The end of each chapter includes a section entitled “Keeping It Simple” that reinforces the notion that succession planning need not be complicated or difficult to implement.

Throughout the book come key insights that put succession planning into a real-world context. At the close of the first section, these are evident in a simple three-step process for calculating the opportunity cost of vacancies, while in the second section, the methodology described for identifying “High Potentials” will likely be of direct value to the HR department of any size company. Similarly, a discussion of “the cost/benefit of recruiting vs. developing” and the helpful tips from other companies regarding how to implement a leadership development program could easily result in senior executives completely rethinking their recruiting practices. The book includes access to downloads of all of the tools and templates.

Succession Planning that Works makes a strong case for taking advantage of existing talent and demonstrates how to help develop that talent and fill vacancies from within. This book should prove to be a top-notch resource for any executive responsible for hiring and personnel development.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (June 29, 2016)

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