



EffortlessHR August 2009 Employer's Advantage Newsletter



FYI – Is Succession Planning REALLY Important?

I was the VP of HR for a fairly large organization several years ago when the terrible unexpected happened. You always think, "This can't be happening to us" only to find that it can and does happen. What is it that happened?

The second in command, who had been brought in to run the company when the founder retired, was killed in a terrible car accident. No one was prepared for the aftermath of that tragedy - especially the owner of the company as he had to regroup and rethink his retirement plans. The rest of the company also had to regroup and come to grip with a terrible loss and uncertainty as to what would happen next.

Can organizations prepare for this type of loss? You can never be fully prepared for a tragic loss, however a succession plan will go a long way in minimizing the effect of loss. The loss in this case was an untimely death, but many organizations today face the risk of losing a seasoned executive through age, retirement, and even hiring away by a competitor. It is therefore important to consider the issue of succession NOW rather than later. This will help with staffing changes and minimal disruption to not only the internal business operations but even to the external marketplace.

There are some key steps an organization can take to set up an effective succession plan.

1. Make sure you have identified the skills and competencies you need in a particular position. This might include the ability to delegate responsibility, think strategically, ability to make decisions, etc. While some think of this step as time-consuming, it is an important first step.
2. Make sure the top management team is on board and directing the plan. A succession plan is only successful if it comes from the top. Remember, some managers may resist establishing a plan and need to be brought on board. This may happen by making them an important part of the process.
3. Develop a pool of employees that you can identify that have the potential to grow. The challenge is to find, develop, and encourage these employees. They need to be continually trained and given opportunities to advance. You need to make sure they want the added responsibilities and if not, they should be removed from the pool being considered.

4. Understand and identify skill and knowledge gaps. Work to fill those gaps by determining needs to happen with an individual or individuals to move them into new positions. Help these employees prepare for higher level positions.

5. Encourage employees to be proactive and identify themselves as possible candidates. The individual is the final person to determine availability and capability. When in doubt, ask them.

Don't be caught unprepared - it can be detrimental to the whole organization. Have a plan and be prepared to keep it current - just in case.

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FROM JIM SIRBASKU'S DESK

Good Hiring Requires More than Good Luck

Lucky is the organization that has the right people in the right place at the right time. These organizations operate like high-performance luxury automobiles, zooming along the highway while lesser engines chug, sputter, and die.

But does luck really drive them? We might think so as we watch from a distant perch. But a closer look shows something else at work when a company continuously operates at peak performance. We should look for the method of its people—the ones doing the driving as well as those regularly checking under the hood and kicking the tires.

If your workers are not helping your organization drive or maintain the car, then it's time to see what might be amiss. Do your managers size up applicants up fairly, skillfully and efficiently by checking them out before they ever step foot in your organization? Or do they glance at resumes and fall for what they see on paper? The latter is the equivalent of purchasing a car without even seeing it, much less test driving it.

Consider Amanda, who had to fill several jobs quickly for an expansion project. An absentee manager because of her other duties, Amanda needed a diverse group of employees: a supervisor; strong self-starters who could be trained quickly and work with minimal supervision; and at least one task-oriented worker.

Amanda based her selections on job applications, resumes, and personal interviews, but she chose too quickly. She filled her available positions with good people, but could find no supervisory stand-in, only one self-starter, and four task-oriented individuals. In the absence of a strong team leader, the task-

oriented workers completed each day's duties speedily, but not necessarily efficiently or correctly. They often had to redo projects. The self-starter had a completely different problem: he did not fit the culture.

The employees were like mismatched sparkplugs, and no one ever checked under the hood. The new workers became bored. They gossiped, which led to bad feelings. At the end of the day, the employees accomplished little—sometimes not even the tasks Amanda specifically assigned. The self-starter quit and the rest were frustrated. The project sputtered to a dead halt.

Amanda needed a plan—a picture of the kinds of people she wanted—before she ever sought out applicants. Once people showed interest in the jobs, she needed to narrow the field by picking those whose skills fit the tasks to be completed.

Unfortunately, even the best managers can be led astray by a sparkling resume or charming chitchat. When a manager hires without a clear picture of the kinds of people she needs, she hires an applicant, puts him on the job, trains him, and hopes for the best. This is where managers need luck; but luck is too often fleeting. Managerial hopes slide as the employee makes mistakes, forgets assigned duties and cannot get along with co-workers. He's not a bad worker, just a mismatch for the job.

This happens because good workers are difficult to find, and when we find applicants who engage us, we are often blinded by qualities that have nothing to do with the job. It happens because potential candidates sell themselves. They believe they really want the job, not realizing they are ill-suited for it.

Finding people who fit the job is not an impossible task. Assessments are available that provide snapshots of high-performing "sparkplugs" and tell us what makes them good at their jobs. From that snapshot, we can develop a profile of a superb performer and hire employees that match the profile. And because nothing performs well without preventive maintenance, it's imperative that we constantly check under the hood.

Jim Sirbasku, CEO
Profiles International

POP QUIZ

1. What is the purpose of setting a specific time frame for accomplishing a goal?
 - a. To write something on your to-do list so that you can cross it off
 - b. To establish a sense of urgency
 - c. To ensure that you accomplish what you set out to do

2. Which of these goals is most attainable, and why?

- a. By the end of the year, my team will ensure all that of our department's employees are trained on technical standards by setting up weekly training sessions.
- b. I will improve my interpersonal relationships with all departments.
- c. My sales team will improve performance by 50 percent.

3. An employee's goals should be aligned with organizational priorities because:

- a. Helping an employee align his goals with the organization's gives leaders a chance to reinforce the organization's priorities on a regular basis.
- b. Effective employees channel their efforts toward the organization's success.
- c. Everyone needs to work toward the same overall goals.

4. Why is it important to measure progress toward a goal?

- a. To compare one employee to another
- b. To compare this year to last year
- c. To stay on track

5. What makes a goal realistic?

- a. It's easy.
- b. I've done it in the past.
- c. I believe I can accomplish it.

Answers:

1. Both b and c. If a goal's deadline is sometime in the hazy future, then an employee can do it next week, next month, next year, or never. Setting a serious, challenging and attainable goal—with a deadline—instills discipline and commitment.

2. Go for a. It answers the most important "W" questions—who, what, when—as well as how, but it needs some fine-tuning. For example, who will do the training? Does everyone understand why this is important? Even if you don't tweak the goal, though, it puts the employee on the right track.

3. All of the above! Employees can lose track of organizational priorities if leaders don't review them. And managers should always look at individual employees' goals through the lens of, "How does this advance the company's stated priorities?"

4. The answer is c—to stay on track. It's fun to achieve what you set out to do, and this motivates employees to keep working toward the goals they set. Of course, showing clear progress is always helpful (b).

5. Both b and c are correct. A goal is realistic if you truly believe you can do it, and/or if you have done it in the past. As for (a), easy goals are OK, but successful workers strive for the growth that comes with meeting a challenge.

How did you score? Helping workers develop their goals helps you as a manager to focus on development, motivation and organizational success.

Product Focus

No Joke—Profiles Team Analysis™ = Group Harmony

An ongoing popular comic strip focuses on an office team that's harmonious only in its dysfunction. The gag is on the boss who inherited a new group of workers 1) who want to work only on projects they enjoy, 2) who would rather do anything except work, and 3) who don't engage in anything that happens in the office.

Although comics and jokes exaggerate life, they can often point uncomfortably toward the truth. Leaders who want to make sure the joke is not on them need Profiles Team Analysis™.

PTA helps team developers understand the artistry of building an effective team that can move past individual differences. More valuable than a job interview, or even repeated "getting to know you" conversations, PTA analyzes team members in 12 different areas including patience, ambition, and precision. It even tells the leader whether the employee is team oriented and/or quality oriented.

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These are the kinds of issues that an in-tune leader might learn over the course of a year or more—well after the team has disbanded because it never managed to accomplish anything.

The PTA report comes in four sections to help improve the team's balance, effectiveness and performance:

1. The Team Balance Table. This visual summary of the team leader's score and each team member's score on each of the 12 factors allows the leader to see the team's overall representation—where it's heavy and where it's light.
2. Overall Team Balance. This section explores those characteristics that are not well represented on the team. The leader must be aware of these shortcomings to ensure that the team completes its mission successfully.
3. Behavioral Factors. Team players' scores in each of 12 factors are identified so that the leader can match the natural characteristics of team members with team goals.

4. Action Summary. Specific steps help the leader get the greatest contribution from every member of the team.

Comic strips are a great diversion. In real life, we want to work with teams willing and able to get the job done. Profiles International will help leaders ensure that the jokes remain in the funnies.

For more information, call EffortlessHR at (520) 546-3947.

STRATEGIES FOR WINNING --

Day Before Vacation*

Prioritize and Commit for Success

Jim and I were honored to be inducted into the Sales Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. After the ceremony we looked at the exhibits, including a striking representation of the motivational guru Zig Ziglar (www.zigziglar.com) delivering a speech. For decades, Zig has motivated and inspired millions of people to be better at whatever they do for a living. Zig's ideas about creating a sense of urgency are exemplified in his "Day Before Vacation" story. The exhibit inspired us to include the following strategy. This technique can have a tremendous effect on your productivity, so use it!

Think about your last day at work before you went on your most recent vacation. Didn't you get as much done in that day as you would normally get done in two, three, or even four days? (Be honest!) Look at what Zig says you did on the day before vacation:

On the night preceding the day before your vacation, you likely sat down with a piece of paper and listed all of the things that had to get finished the following day—your gottas ("I gotta do this and I gotta..."). Then you committed to completing them all before you left the office the next day, right?

On the morning of the day before your vacation, you arrived at the office on time—maybe even early. But you didn't head for the coffee machine. No, you headed straight for the first gotta on your list. You probably also did things out of order. You took your least favorite, most distasteful task on your list and got it out of the way quickly, instead of having it hanging overhead all day long (the way you normally would!) With that tough one out of the way, you were feeling pretty good, and so you tore into the next task on your list, and then the next one after that. When someone came to chat about last night's game, you politely but firmly informed that person that you were just too busy—and then you got back to business.

As you completed each of your gottas, you felt your energy rising, so that by halfway through the day you were buzzing with a sense of accomplishment that drove your enthusiasm level ever higher. Your obviously energized and enthusiastic demeanor infected your colleagues. They started to ramp up their efforts and became similarly enthusiastic. The atmosphere in the office got a little extra spark, and this lifted you even further.

At the end of the day, you had all of your gottas completed. You were as high as if you'd been on high-octane caffeine, even if you hadn't had a drop all day! You felt good. Now that's focus!

So what did you do that day to get so focused? Let's have a look.

First, You Created a Vision -- "By the time I leave tomorrow, I'll have cleared my desk and put my affairs in order so that I am free to be away for two weeks."

When your vision gets knocked offline by events around you, you are like a \$10 billion guided missile without a target. You can fly around in circles looking pretty impressive, but eventually you're going to run out of fuel and crash and burn. If your vision has been hammered by recent economic changes, get working on a new one—now! Take time to figure out what you really want for yourself, your family and your business. Envision your target clearly in your head and paint it in front of you every day.

Second, you Formulated a Set of Goals ...that would guarantee delivery of your vision—your gottas. Having a great vision is useless unless you formulate clear, achievable goals to ensure that your vision becomes reality. You must plot a course to take you from where you are now to your target, with checkpoints that let you know when you go off course.

Third, You Made a Commitment "I absolutely must get these tasks completed by the time I leave the office tomorrow."

This is the most common stumbling block, even if its victims are used to creating compelling visions and formulating achievable goals—they fail to commit. If you've ever made a New Year's resolution you failed to complete, you know what happens to plans that aren't backed by commitment. If there's no commitment then your vision simply isn't compelling enough. Otherwise, the commitment naturally would follow. If you were fatally ill and had just one month to live, but could get a cure if you had \$1 million more than your current total net worth, would you get the money? Of course you would. Or you'd kill yourself trying even before the month was out! You know that your vision is right when it has the same sense of urgency. A real commitment immediately gets you off the ground and in search of your target.

Before you spend one more day out of focus, stop and look carefully at your life. Be sure that your guidance mechanism has a clear target encoded into it, and that you've mapped a route to the target that makes you want to take off right now. Get the Day-Before-Vacation feeling every day!

*From the book 40 STRATEGIES FOR WINNING IN BUSINESS by Bud Haney and Jim Sirbasku. © S&H Publishing Co., 5205 Lake Shore Drive, Waco, Texas 76710-1732. All rights reserved. Contact S&H Publishing Co., (254) 751-1644, for reprint permission.

Announcement:

What would you do with additional time/money if you had an affordable HR solution for your clients?

EffortlessHR is an Internet based HRAS (Human Resource Administration System) that can help the busy HR department/administrator free up time to work on other projects. You are most likely all ready considered to be a trusted advisor to your clients. EffortlessHR is pleased to announce the establishing of an Authorized Advisor program, which will allow you to provide added value to your clients.

The Authorized Advisor program is a win-win-win program for everyone. It is a win for your client because EffortlessHR is a comprehensive, user friendly and affordable HR program. It is a win for you as you can add a new revenue stream to your business. And, it is a win for EffortlessHR as we grow our business and provide a needed tool to many business owners,

If you are interested in learning more about EffortlessHR and the Authorized Advisor program, please contact us at lola@effortlesshr.com or 520 546-3947.

Keep your ideas and comments coming. We appreciate it and look forward to serving you in the future.

