

Why recruiters should be in on Succession Planning

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I've been involved in succession planning for organizations for many years, and one thing I've never understood is why recruiters aren't invited to join in the process more often. Having a sound succession plan to develop and promote people into more senior positions is not only smart management, but also good due diligence to reduce risk. But there will always be the contingency of an unexpected departure where no internal succession candidate is close to ready to move up.

That's why you need the experience and perspectives of a good recruitment consultant in your succession plan.

How recruiters fit into succession planning

As the succession planning process unfolds, it will become obvious where there are no internal candidates who can realistically meet the job requirements for some positions in the near and medium term, say 6 – 18 months. In those scenarios, why not have a short list of viable external candidates put together by an experienced recruiter?

Shorten the hiring cycle by getting ahead of the succession curve

If a position with no internal bench strength suddenly becomes vacant in the near to mid-term, the recruiter and hiring organization will have at least a viable short list of candidates to consider right out of the gate. Sure, not all of the names of the list will still be available, but enough will, possibly cutting weeks off of the hiring cycle and placing a good hire sooner. You can't do that unless you plan ahead.

Recruit top performers ahead of succession, not as a reaction to it

Front-end participation of recruiters in the succession planning process also gives the organization the option of hiring a top-performer who is currently available, in advance of an anticipated succession gap.

That way, the new hire can become familiar with the organization, its people, and processes ahead of a permanent placement. Equally important, having the recruitment process start before, rather than after, the fact increases the probability of making a difficult hire in a timely manner.

Recruiters who know about your staff and culture, recruit better fits

Recruiters who participate in succession planning have an evaluation of existing staff through the process, the overall culture of the organization, and where organizational strategy is headed. This, in turn, helps guide the 'fit' for candidate searches when there are no viable internal successors for a position.

Get an outside opinion on your real talent needs

A recruiter can help you identify positions where a slightly more junior person with some experience and good development potential may be a good hire, and with a knowledge of the market place for key positions, can give an organization a better sense of where they need to be flexible in filling a succession gap.

Succession may change your organizational structure

In a barren talent market segment, a good recruiter can steer the organization away from a long and fruitless search, for say, someone with a dual accounting and engineering background. Recruiters can also help look at structural alternatives which are better aligned with the realities of the talent market.

However you approach it, succession planning should be an annual exercise so that your plan stays current and retains validity, regardless of the scenarios that unfold. Adding recruitment perspectives and preparation, will only strengthen your plan.