

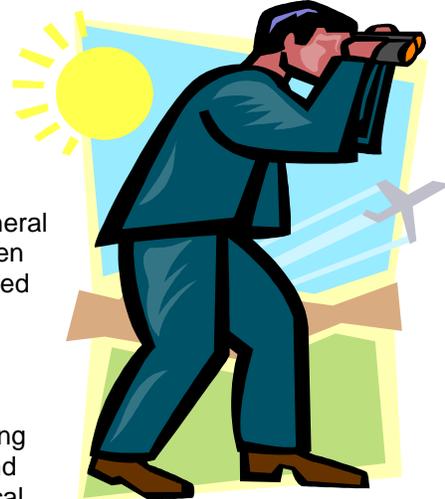
SUCCESSION PLANNING

What to Seek In Identifying Future Leaders

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Introduction

There is perhaps no more important or complex challenge for senior executives than the selection and development of future leaders for an organization. Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great* points to the selection of quality successors as a hallmark of great leadership. Despite the importance of leadership succession, the track record for success in this undertaking has been humbling. For privately held companies, the disappointments in leadership succession sometimes result from a reluctance to initiate proactive succession plans. For others, the problems may stem from the seductive influence of candidates with bigger than life personalities and egos and general confusion about the essential qualities of effective leaders. Even more frustrating is the likelihood that the humility and understated nature of candidates with the superior leadership potential too often make them invisible to succession planning committees.



This article endeavors to summarize the research on effective leadership in a way that can be leveraged in succession planning and leadership development initiatives. Clinical terminology and theoretical arguments are set aside in favor of clear and practical descriptors that can be attributed to individuals who merit consideration as future leaders.

Benchmarks of Effective Leaders

1. Leaders are Persuasive



Persuasive/Influential

Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan (1994) may have said it best when they described leadership as persuasion. Effective leaders inspire others through their enthusiasm and optimistic view of the future. Their behavior engenders a loyalty that allows followers to identify with the leader and his/her vision for the organization. Leaders articulate their vision through persuasive language and influential strategies that stimulate confidence throughout an organization.

Persuasive Leaders are:

- Verbally proficient
- Articulate and confident communicators
- Interested in persuading and influencing others
- Willing to offer opinions

2. Leaders are Considerate



Considerate

Before concluding that larger than life sales people are the most effective leaders, Collins (2001) reminds us of the genuine humility, modesty, and personal warmth that embody great leaders. The best leaders are often understated, warm, and approachable individuals who are sought out as coaches, role models, and mentors. Their sensitivity to the needs of others is revealed in a passion for developing others and a profound joy in seeing others succeed.

- **Considerate Leaders are:**
 - Sociable, friendly, and engaging
 - Cooperative
 - Actively engaged in group endeavors
 - Socially responsible and willing to serve others
 - Concerned and respectful of followers

3. Leaders are Proactive

Accompanying the emphasis on consideration is a powerful commitment to goal attainment. The passion for results is manifest in how expectations are structured, problems are anticipated, decisions are made and corrective actions are implemented. Effective leaders engage in situations where their presence is truly needed and move quickly to resolve issues that may interfere with the attainment of desired results. They seldom subscribe to the belief that followers will naturally seek them out when the situation demands their assistance.



Proactive

- **Proactive Leaders are:**
 - Competitive
 - Direct in addressing conflicts
 - Logical and objective
 - Initiators of plans for action
 - Interested in directing others
 - Willing to assume responsibility

4. Leaders are Consistent



Consistent

Goals are achieved and results are delivered through pronounced self-discipline and a strong sense of direction. The best leaders commit to a plan. Their need to achieve prompts them to establish accountability, monitor progress, follow through on commitments, and reward accomplishments. Yet, the self-disciplined commitment of effective leaders goes deeper than their passion for results. Their commitment to ethical behavior and high moral values is equally powerful and commands the trust and loyalty of followers.

- **Consistent Leaders are:**
 - Goal oriented
 - Principled
 - Confident in their self-worth
 - Hard working
 - Efficient in achieving results

5. Leaders are Intelligent

A leader's proficiency in acquiring and applying knowledge stimulates new ideas in a manner that empowers innovation and instills the needed confidence to take calculated risks. The best leaders are imaginative, curious, and resourceful. New ideas are entertained with the anticipation of discovering new ways to deliver results. These leaders are smart enough to ask the right questions and challenge assumptions, as opposed to merely striving to give the "right" answers.



Intelligence

- **Intelligent Leaders are:**
 - Cognitively adept, proficient learners
 - Energized by new ideas
 - Attracted to variety and change
 - Flexible
 - Interested in both the arts and sciences

Conclusion

Delivering superior leadership is extraordinarily challenging and identifying candidates with the potential to emerge and develop as successful leaders is no less daunting. Complete competency in the five qualities of persuasion, consideration, propensity for action, consistency, and intelligence is an ideal that possibly only a few may achieve. However, these dimensions provide a useful template to guide succession planning discussions. Unfortunately, the humility and understated nature of potentially great leaders may make these candidates easy to overlook. That's an oversight that few organizations can afford. Perhaps an increased awareness of these qualities can prevent some potentially gifted leaders from going unrecognized.

Additional Resources

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