

SUCCESSION PLANNING:**PREPARING FUTURE
CORRECTIONS LEADERS — NOW**

By Carl Nink, Debbie Boyer and Joyce Fogg

It is probable that many of the employees in correctional agencies today will not be there in five years. Who will replace them? This is a critical question that agency management must address to maintain a safe and orderly operation. Experts in human resources have estimated that 85 percent of organizations either do inadequate succession planning or fail to do it entirely.¹ It is important for organizations that fall into this group to take action now.

WHAT IS SUCCESSION PLANNING?

According to L. Scott Kimball, Ph.D., succession planning is defined as “a dynamic, ongoing process of systematically identifying, assessing and developing leadership and management talent; and assessing, developing and recognizing ‘key contributors’ to meet future organizational strategic and operational needs.”²

Endorsement by the agency head and executive staff is a cornerstone of the succession planning process. The plan must be developed by a multifunctional team of managers and line supervisors. When the plan is understood by the employees and the organizational culture “owns the process,” the future of the agency is strengthened.

Effective organizations recognize talent in certain employees and cultivate that talent. Employees are counseled to complete their college degrees and certification, tackle difficult assignments, and work various shifts and functions to prepare them for future promotion.

Many agencies approach staff selection by functional area (e.g., security, programs, maintenance, etc.). However, true succession planning requires all areas to work together to fully implement strategies, development and training programs. Effective agencies continuously look for individuals with potential to fill critical positions (i.e., leadership, managerial and supervisory), mostly focusing on an internal search for needed talent.

RECRUITMENT OF TALENT

Internal recruiting reduces costs and assists with retention through upward mobility. With an internal strategy, staff believe there is an opportunity for them to advance in the system and to gain a greater salary and more authority. The talent-management model should encourage proactive employee activities that result in organizational success and progress.

The succession plan must be aligned with the agency’s strategic plan to ensure that future talent needs are addressed. The plan’s complexity increases based on the size of the organization, and its development includes an

assessment of the skills and knowledge required for successful operation of the identified critical positions. Following the analysis of the talent needed, a systematic process is undertaken to identify a pool of staff that can be developed for future leadership positions.

Some agencies look externally for executives. Although this obviously brings in some new ideas and approaches to business, it must be balanced with internal appointments. The process must be as competitively transparent as possible to avoid favoritism and morale problems within the agency. Some of the rationale for seeking external candidates and rehiring recently retired staff probably reflects the lack of a succession planning initiative to develop mid-level staff. With changes in government, agency leadership will also change. However, the skills and responsibilities needed normally do not significantly change.

SUCCESSION PLANNING IS ESSENTIAL

The 2002 Corrections Yearbook identified the average tenure of wardens across the United States as being 15.2 years.³ What is important about this statistic is that a number of agencies have a 20-year retirement option. Many agencies are undoubtedly dealing with turnover in the elite ranks of warden, which will cause ripples among, if not direct impact upon, the lower ranks as well. An increase in the number of managerial positions is projected by the U.S. Census Bureau to be 9.4 percent during the next eight years as well.⁴

About 80 percent of senior and middle managers in the federal government are eligible for retirement.⁵ According to the Census Bureau, 46.3 percent of government workers are age 45 or older.⁶ In comparison, just 31.2 percent of private sector employees are 45 or older. Clearly the government has a more critical need to deal with the work force retirement trend.

According to Patrick Ibarra,⁷ “Best practice organizations use succession planning to develop and maintain strong leadership and to ensure that they address all the competencies required for today’s and tomorrow’s work environment. Effective planning engages managers at all

levels of the organization and is not just another [human resources]-driven initiative.” A study by the Spherion Corp.,⁸ a nationwide recruiting and staffing company, found that only about “one in five U.S. employers is well positioned to attract and retain top talent.”

BASIC COMPONENTS OF THE SUCCESSION PLAN

Agencies must have a plan to work from to ensure that new managers succeed in strategically moving the organization toward the future. The keystones of the plan should include the following five components⁹:

- A system supported by top management, to identify the knowledge, skills and abilities, which complement the strategic short- and long-term mission of the agency;
- Methods to identify skill gaps and deliver structured training, mentoring, education and tasking to enable selected “key contributors” to assume leadership roles;
- A selection system using the most talented internal leaders to evaluate and select future leaders based on education, character, integrity, ability to develop staff, teamwork and perceived potential;
- Public disclosure of the selection system and who is identified in the pool of potential future leaders, as well as the ability to review/include new talent; and
- An approach to training (e.g., internal and external experiences) that provides for continual updating and improvements to the system so that those selected will receive what they need to fully develop their skills and talents.

The critical question is whether the agency succession plan is well thought out in advance and ongoing or only surfaces at times of crisis. Failure to address succession planning could force the agency to deal with that burden at the worst possible time.

A variety of strategies should be included in an employee development program. There should be an individual development plan to address perceived gaps in knowledge, skills and abilities. There should be tasks, knowledge-expanding experiences and activities that are available to meet the needs of the pool of potential supervisory/managerial staff. The list of strategies should include:

- Job assignments;
- In-service training;
- Regional and national conferences;
- Job shadowing;
- Reading materials;
- Outside training opportunities (e.g., National Institute of Corrections);
- Educational courses;
- Online training opportunities;
- Mentoring; and
- Agency work-group assignments.

Employees identified by the succession plan who are the focus of training and development should take on a certain amount of responsibility for the plan. This helps keep them motivated.

WHERE CAN FUTURE TALENT BE FOUND?

According to a recent study by Right Management Consultants,¹⁰ 71 percent of organizations are cultivating their own senior-level executives. According to the results of the study, the most desired abilities of these future leaders include talent in motivating and engaging others, communication skills and thinking strategically.

A report by Hewitt Associates¹¹ illustrates the process it undertook to identify the top 20 companies out of 373 leading public and private companies in the United States and how they grow great leaders under their succession plans. The top 20 companies make serious investments in their high potential staff. In the top 20 companies, 100 percent of the CEOs and executive staff actively manage and develop their top talent, compared with only 65 percent in other companies.

The survey results also demonstrate that all of the 20 top companies have strategies for selecting high-potential leaders from within the company and use leadership competencies in succession planning activities. In comparison, only about half of the other companies engage in these practices.

Top-20 companies use developmental assignments 89 percent of the time compared with 43 percent of other companies. Senior management is available (i.e., regular meetings) to high potential candidates in 95 percent of the top 20 companies. Middle managers are selected as a part of the succession plan in 65 percent of top companies. These activities are all done in support of the company business strategies.

Top-20 companies formally hold their leaders accountable in performance reviews for the identification, development, exposure and retention of potential leaders. One of the top companies measures its succession planning selections three years after placement. Diversity is also a formal part of top company leadership strategies in 95 percent of the companies. Most top-20 companies (90 percent) also measure performance on leadership competencies and monitor progress against those competencies. It is clear that better-performing companies hold their senior management accountable for succession plan implementation, use quality standards of employee measurement and involve agency heads in developing leadership talent.

ARIZONA'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Arizona Department of Corrections has been developing a program designed to assist staff who are interested in preparing themselves for future promotional opportunities. According to John Hallahan, training bureau administrator, the department conducted a critical assessment identifying the competencies for a correctional manager and detailing assorted tasks associated with demonstrating ability within the competency area.

The agency also is finalizing a multilevel (i.e., nonsupervisor and supervisor/manager) prepromotional and personal development program that describes a series of work experiences. The program includes individual readings and self-paced opportunities, including certification through ACA, seminars, projects and multiple-day classroom sessions. This program aims to address all functional areas within the agency (e.g., security, programs, health, maintenance, etc.). The program also is designed to match up with career pathways to selected positions and includes recommendations for the completion of post-secondary education at an accredited college.

Individual projects submitted by candidates addressing job-related issues that are completed have been shared with regional operations directors. This ensures that the work of those who are in the program is shared with senior agency executives. A certificate of completion is awarded after the employee satisfies all second-level requirements and all applicable professional in-service academies as identified by the employee's "individual career pathways." The estimated time to complete the requirements is about one year.

OKLAHOMA'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections (DOC) offers a comprehensive program designed to provide developmental opportunities to supervisors and managers at all levels in the agency. The Correctional Leadership Development Program is progressive in design and supports the values, mission and vision of the agency at every level. The program begins with an introduction to correctional leadership development, which provides participants with basic principles of leadership and supervisory management.

There are four distinct levels in this program. Each component provides increasingly more complex knowledge and skill applications, using assessment tools to help program participants strengthen selected performance areas, as well as their individual perceptions and judgments. Additionally, each section provides staff with structured training to enhance knowledge levels. Mentors are assigned to assist participants during the fourth level of the Correctional Leadership Development Program.

The department also offers mentor development training to those who have completed the third and fourth levels of the program and want to mentor future leadership development participants.

In partnership with the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), individuals may also participate in Management Development for the Future, a three-week program delivered in three separate sessions — with personal and group development project work assignments between each session.

The final component of the Correctional Leadership Development Program is offered to those in a position to impact positive change in the agency's culture. This section of the program uses a leadership styles inventory and an organizational culture inventory, and participants develop initiatives and problem-solving techniques to address organizational needs.

The Oklahoma DOC also offers a wide range of in-service training opportunities as well as tuition assistance (based on available funding) to further assist employees in career development efforts.

VIRGINIA'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Virginia Department of Corrections recently assembled a Probation and Parole Officer (PO) work group to update the job structure, pay structure and related practices for POs, aligning them with the strategic succession planning direction of community corrections in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The objective of this initiative was to improve internal work force development and succession planning efforts.

The agency has also assigned staff to work with institutions specifically on their succession planning activities. This involves training, teambuilding and action planning, as well as ACA's Leadership Development Training Program.

AVAILABLE CORRECTIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

In its *2003 Environmental Scan Update*,¹² NIC found the average tenure of a correctional employee to be at "an all-time low of 3.6 years." Further, approximately "29 percent of all executive corrections positions were filled within the past 12 months and 60 percent of all corrections executives will be eligible to retire within the next five years." In the *Environmental Scan Update - 2005*, prison executives responded to a new NIC survey that succession planning was the second leading issue needing attention. Jail executives likewise identified development of managers/supervisors in the top five issues.¹³

NIC also recently published the *Correctional Leadership Competencies for the 21st Century*, which defines the skills and abilities needed in current and future correctional managers. The publication provides resource information on managerial profiles, ethics and values, interpersonal relationships, communications and employee motivation.

The American Correctional Association's Correctional Certification Program enhances the skills of corrections professionals. According to Bob Levinson, ACA certification specialist, increasing numbers of long-term personnel are pursuing certification. Currently, 51 percent of all applicants possess more than 10 years of full-time corrections experience. Thirty-one percent of those successfully completing the corrections executive certification (i.e., individuals who oversee the development and implementation of agency policies and procedures) have more than 10 years of full-time corrections experience. Besides aiding in the recruitment of new, talented staff members, the program enhances staff potential for advancement and can be used for academic credit at a number of colleges/universities.

According to Bill Sondervan, ACA's former director of professional development, the Correctional Certification Program is being used by several state departments of corrections, in conjunction with ACA's new Leadership Development Training Program, to provide agency-selected key staff with the knowledge needed to become the next generation of the agency's top leaders.

The Leadership Development Training Program was pilot-tested in Ohio, implemented in Alabama and Virginia, and is currently planned for Oklahoma. The program consists of two one-week sessions of intensive training separated by several months, during which participants plan, develop and work on independent projects related to current agency problem areas. Participants who successfully complete this program may apply for credits toward an academic degree at specific colleges and universities. State correctional leaders have recognized the need for succession planning, and the Leadership Development Training Program is being used as a vital component in developing future senior staff.

PREPARE NOW FOR THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

Succession planning is a complex process requiring the support of the agency head and a team of committed senior executives, managers and supervisors to develop, market and oversee the plan. Processes and promising practices have been presented, as well as some innovative programs that can guide the corrections field into a strong future. The data is clear that the "storm" is brewing and those who are not adequately prepared will suffer for their inaction. The time to act is now.

ENDNOTES

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