Succession Planning

Succession planning permits organizations to identify and develop internal personnel who have the potential to fill key or critical organizational positions. Library directors should be actively involved in this process so that talented employees are mentored and receive training and opportunities to help them flourish.

The “Succession Planning Check List for the Chief Executive” was prepared by the United Way of King County. The current library director can be extremely helpful to the board by providing answers to the questions and comments on the check list.

Rothwell, William J. Effective Succession Planning: Ensuring Leadership Continuity and Building Talent from Within. 4th ed. New York: AMACOM, American Management Association, 2010. Available through Access Pennsylvania Database. Topics include case studies, trends, use of competencies and values, change management, internal and external resources and much more. The table of contents and an overview are available on the publisher’s website.

Marshall Goldsmith, the CEO of an executive coaching firm, posted his thoughts about succession planning on Facebook. He writes: “Plans do not develop anyone — only development experiences develop people.”

If you are just beginning to think about succession planning, then look at the slides from Nina Malyshew from Giving Voice Consulting who presented a program at the Public Library Association Conference, March 2010, “Cultivating Tomorrow’s Leaders Today: The Discipline of Succession Planning.”

The Department of Justice Libraries’ Libraries Succession Plan: Findings and Recommendations was developed by an internal committee. Although the components may be a bit more sophisticated than the needs of many public libraries, many aspects of their report can be adapted for smaller public libraries.

The federal government’s Office of Personnel Management developed a “Workforce Planning Model,” a tool that the library director and board will find helpful for succession planning. “Workforce planning is the systematic process for identifying and addressing the gaps between the workforce of today and the human capital needs of tomorrow.”


Available through Access Pennsylvania Database. The table of contents, an overview and an excerpt are available on the publisher’s website.


The best of plans can be thwarted if job openings don’t occur. William C. Byham, co-founder, chairman and CEO of Development Dimensions International and a global talent management expert, wrote an article for the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, July 7, 2009. “Private Sector: Delayed Retirements Clog Pipeline.”