

# Cultivating the Next Generation of Leadership Talent

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Leadership development doesn't just happen. It takes a strategic view to understand how to bring in new talent and cultivate existing talent. Talent cultivation is an essential component to a thriving organization's culture. The key to ensuring leadership cultivation is to create and maintain robust performance appraisal and management systems for the entire staff.

Vibrant organizations have strong, strategic leaders who recognize the importance of continual talent cultivation. They foster a culture of growth and development for all managers and staff that cascades leadership development to all levels. This includes creating an environment where each staff member experiences a sense of ownership, leadership, responsibility, and accountability and is supported in knowing that he or she is a positive, contributing member of the team.

The opportunity for individuals at all levels to exercise leadership brings out the best strengths of those involved and reduces the sense of frustration that can occur when

information and decision-making are concentrated in the hands of the founder or long-term leader. Effective leaders know the importance of sharing information and decision-making with their boards and their staffs. This is especially true when more dramatic changes occur in the organization. It is a much better experience for each individual to be on board and to contribute positively to the evolution of the organization than for people to feel forced into a corner by changes other people have initiated with little input into the future. Often, the impetus to identify potential leaders and address their professional development comes from the recognition that a change in leadership might take place.

Uniform and timely processes help to assess the effectiveness of leadership development. These should cascade from the chief executive to senior leadership. Processes should be based on clearly defined goals, enabling the organization to realistically mark what is working and what needs to be refined. Goals, objectives, and expectations must be articulated, and each person's performance should be evaluated against these. This performance management system should both measure accomplishments and prescribe appropriate development opportunities, goals, and objectives for every staff member, beginning with the chief executive.

With these processes in place as part of the regular evaluation and development of the growth of each staff member, the chief executive can be at liberty to look more

broadly at how he or she can create an organizational culture focused on the continued building and expansion of that talent. The bottom line is that every organization should have a process and plan in place to invest in their staff. The following are features of organizations that are prepared to invest in leadership development and succession planning:

Organizations can establish a learning culture, continually looking for opportunities that enable staff to cultivate strengths.

All levels of staff are given opportunities to grow and learn new skills.

Development opportunities can be created that include involvement in decision-making and shared leadership, such as rotating facilitation of staff meetings.

At all levels, staff roles in decision-making can be expanded.

Senior staff members are specifically evaluated on their ability to provide coaching and development for their direct reports.

The organization supports staff in volunteering outside the organization.

Senior leadership can be encouraged to participate on other boards or committees to broaden their perspective and skills.

The organization has a prescribed process to identify and develop individuals who demonstrate greater than average potential talent by creating stretch goals and

growth opportunities.

The best way to support talent cultivation and align individual and organizational growth is by establishing thriving leadership practices. When organizations invest in the growth and development of staff, they stand a better chance of cultivating leadership talent internally.

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