

Sewell
GMT-I

mentorship

motivation

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promotional paths

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As the workforce ages and the retirement of millions of workers looms, succession planning has risen to the forefront of awareness, particularly in the EMS field. Done correctly, a succession plan can bolster an organization's ability to competently undertake a smooth leadership transition, without a lot of workplace disruption and wasted time and money. JEMS took the opportunity to speak to a handful of people—all in various stages of their careers—about succession planning. Their insights highlight what they believe to be the most important aspects of mentoring, motivation and the leadership characteristics needed to ensure that an organization's succession plan can be effectively implemented when the time comes.



Into the Future

IDENTIFYING & MENTORING YOUR SUCCESSOR MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU DO

>> BY CYNTHIA KINCAID

As the workforce ages and the retirement of millions of workers looms, succession planning has risen to the forefront of awareness, particularly in the EMS field. Done correctly, a succession plan can bolster an organization's ability to competently undertake a smooth leadership transition, without a lot of workplace disruption and wasted time and money.

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THE NEED FOR A FORMAL PLAN

Many organizations lack a formalized succession plan, and in some cases, realize they're in critical need of one only when a key officer unexpectedly leaves, retires or dies. Without a formal plan, unprepared organizations can find themselves quickly in crisis.

As president and chief executive officer (CEO) for Road Safety International, Jerry Overton has had his company create formal, written job descriptions of every position within the organization as a first step in its succession planning process. It's a lesson he learned after he failed to do so in his previous position.

"Those descriptions are routinely used by human resources for either the promotion or selection of new employees," says Overton, who was also CEO for the Richmond Ambulance Authority for 18 years. "That extends from entry-level positions to the chief executive officer."


Walt Alan Stoy, Ph.D., EMT-P, professor and director of the emergency medicine program at the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh, says he's been actively looking for a replacement for when he retires, which he estimates is still many years off. "Each year, I inform my students: 'One of you needs to replace me,'" he says. "Time will tell." Stoy is also executive director of UPMC/HMC Partnership—Qatar's International and Commercial Services Division.

One of the best steps to take when creating a succession plan is to look closely at the internal talent already contributing to the organization. That's exactly what the Stafford County (Va.) Fire and Rescue department has begun doing, according to Chief Rob Brown. "The county administrator and I have begun discussing our internal 'bench strength' and moving toward more formal succession planning," says Brown.

7 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL SUCCESSION

As a current leader in EMS, you should:

1. Identify the "bench strength" of your internal talent
2. Have (and communicate) a formalized succession plan
3. Create opportunities for people to prove themselves
4. Involve rising stars in the future of your organization
5. Don't over-coach your successor
6. Be flexible, trustworthy and self-motivated
7. Continually improve your own people skills



SERENDIPITOUS PROMOTIONS

Many leaders find that their careers have sometimes taken unplanned excursions that have led them to the leadership positions they now hold. In putting together a succession plan, look for those potential leaders that have operated a bit outside the box. Their variety of experiences can add a measure of richness to the organization.

When Overton started his career some 26 years ago, he found the

EMS profession lacking an emphasis on systems and systems management. As a result, he decided to focus his career on government, while obtaining his EMT and paramedic licenses. “Interestingly, my promotions were the result of the failure of those above me who could not combine the two,” he says.

As a volunteer EMT, Yoni Litwok has found the promotion process similar to that of a paid EMT. “You start out on the bottom of the ladder, more as an observer and an extra hand,” he says. “After some experience, whether having a certain number of responses under your belt, or having been active for a certain amount of time, you’re given more responsibility. Then you can treat patients on your own, ride in the back of the ambulance and make medical decisions.”

‘Sharing information and trust are keys to succession,’ —paramedic Jason Friesen

Brown credits his fire chief for his promotional opportunities. “I was extremely fortunate to serve under a very dynamic and visionary fire chief, who groomed me for promotion,” he says. “He allowed me to try new and innovative programs and also allowed me to create the Office of Public Information. He set high expectations and let me run with my assignments—full well knowing I would skin my knees. He expected 110%.”

THE POWER OF MENTORING

As might be expected, mentoring can play a significant role in grooming future leaders to take over the reins of organizational leadership. Jason Friesen, NREMT-P, is new to the EMS field, with just three years of service. He currently works as a paramedic for American Medical Response and has found a trusting mentor in a senior paramedic, who took note of Friesen during his initial EMT-B skills testing.

“Since the first day we met, he has been instrumental in grooming me and preparing me for many of the things I’m now involved in that I would’ve never considered beforehand,” Friesen says.

Walt Stoy credits not only people as the mentors who have assisted him throughout his career, but also education as a guide. “Dr. Ronald D. Stewart and Dr. Paul M. Paris were two primary individuals sharing wit, wisdom and wealth on my journey,” says Stoy. “I also have hundreds, if not thousands, of audio tapes, books and journals on leadership, in addition to my formal education.”

SOURCES OF MOTIVATION

In general, the proper motivation of a potential leader can make all the difference in how executive skills are developed and honed. For Overton, who has directly or indirectly supervised more than 1,000 people during his career, motivation thrives best in an environment that rewards success, encourages creativity and allows the understanding that different people have different needs.

“Talented people tend to be attracted to superior system designs because talented and motivated people can produce good results from a bad design, but not for extended periods of time,” he says.

Friesen has found opportunities to be the foundation of motivation for many of the people he has observed at work. "If there's an opportunity for someone to get involved in something that they possess a talent for, I think it almost comes as a natural or intuitive impulse to act on the potential that that opportunity presents," he says. "A major motivator for people involved in EMS is a desire to be in the middle of the action that it provides, with the positive changes and immediate results that we can effect being a huge bonus. These qualities could be easily translated to many other settings."

Litwok, who has been a volunteer EMT-B for the past six years, believes that talented individuals are motivated when they find passion in what they're doing. "When they work harder and put more effort in, simply because they want to improve, that's where motivation starts," he says. "Eventually incentives may motivate people to work harder, but it starts with you."

'If we want to hang on to the truly talented, we must serve as mentors and pull them from the trenches and involve them in the future of EMS,' —Stafford County (Va.) Fire and Rescue Department Chief Rob Brown

Brown believes truly talented people find motivation from within. "With ongoing personal and professional growth, these people will develop an inner culture that lights a fire in their hearts and their minds," he says. "As this fire comes in contact with life experiences, these individuals develop a 'personal code' that fuels their motivation."

However, he cautions that EMS leaders can't just sit back and expect inner motivation to last the duration of an EMS career. "If we want to hang on to the truly talented, we must serve as mentors and pull them from the trenches and involve them in the future of EMS," he says. "We must feed their motivation by supporting further education, embracing new ideas, and providing the nurturing support that those who have gone before us did for us."

As far as their own motivation goes, the themes of helping others and the opportunity to learn proved to be cornerstones of engagement. "I am motivated because I want to stand out; I want to be the best that I can be," says Litwok. "I always want to prove to others and to myself that I am capable of doing any job I am given. I am always motivated to keep working hard at becoming a better EMT, knowing that others are relying on me, and that there is always room for more learning."

Brown admits he was motivated to enter the EMS field because of the death of his father when he was just nine years old. "My dad and I watched the television show *Emergency!* together every Saturday

night,” he says. “I was convinced that had my community had paramedics, he might have lived. I made the decision that evening that I wanted to find a way to keep this from happening to other kids, and I have never looked back.” Brown has been in the EMS field for 31 years.

ASSESSING TALENT

In terms of grooming a replacement for succession, Overton believes it's never too early to start. “While I was never afraid to delegate individual responsibilities, I always felt the need to be involved in all aspects of the system,” he says. “Sharing information and trust are keys to succession.”

Friesen believes that grooming should begin with the recognition of potential and motivation and should be undertaken by many people. “I believe that an organization should actively cultivate any and all talent that presents itself,” he says. “The high turnover in EMS has a lot to do with a perceived lack of advancement potential. But in reality, EMS is such a new field that the possibilities for advancement haven't been fully uncovered yet, so grooming the talents of future players could be a highly prosperous practice for any organization.”

Stoy believes, however, that timing is critical. “You don't want to be around too long after you have your replacement, but you also want to be there long enough to share everything they need to know,” he says.

Litwok agrees with this assessment. “You want to make sure there is ample time, so your replacement is comfortable with his or her new position, but ‘over-coaching’ can be detrimental,” he says.

Brown believes a leader should begin grooming their replacement on the day they take their job by carefully watching subordinates. “Eventually one will rise to the challenge and then more formal mentoring should begin,” he says.

In looking for the qualities of a good supervisor or manager, Overton seeks people who have the ability to make difficult decisions and then take responsibility for those decisions. “Another important quality is the ability to communicate, communicate, communicate,” he says. “It's difficult to effectively communicate to those both above and below, but it must be done, whether

you are a supervisor or a manager.”

Stoy, who has been in EMS for 35 years, would like to see future leaders embody flexibility, leadership, trustworthiness and self-motivation. He believes his own flexibility and adaptability have positioned him for the promotions he has received throughout his career. “I am always looking for new ways to make life work,” he says.

For Litwok, a good leader needs to have excellent people skills. “They don't have to be the best providers on the squad, but they do need to be capable of handling any issue that may arise,” he says. “Without people skills, a leader will never have the respect of his or her peers, and will never be able to communicate well and be a strong leader.”

Brown, who has supervised some 640 people over his career, looks for honest, hard-working, technically competent self-starters. “I want a person who is smarter than me, has a demonstrated work ethic, and the motivation to do the right thing,” he says. “I want a person with the moral courage to withstand the temptation to do only what comes easy, someone who can stand up to peer and public scrutiny in a quest for the greater good.”

DO IT FOR THEM & YOU

Those leaders who take the time and effort to recognize and nurture their existing talent will find a smoother succession planning process. They'll also have the satisfaction of having supported and shaped the leaders of the future, which is going to be increasingly important in the EMS field.

Chief Brown knows this satisfaction firsthand. “Five individuals that have served as assistant chiefs on my command staff have gone on to serve as fire chiefs themselves,” he says.

There can be no greater satisfaction than that. [JEMS](#)

Cynthia Kincaid is an award-winning writer who has written numerous articles for medical and health-care publications and organizations. She was the recipient of a 2007 Excellence in Journalism award from the Society of Professional Journalists. Cynthia holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in public administration.