

## CORNERSTONE

• LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND TEAM DEVELOPMENT •

June 2008



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## Succession Planning: Blowing up Conventional Wisdom

A major responsibility of leadership is the selection and development of potential leaders. Succession planning is a means to perpetuate future organizational success. Identifying and preparing promotable candidates through mentoring, training and job rotation remains a high priority in successful organizations. Identifying the most qualified person requires a level of objectivity and insight into critical factors, which are not always found in today's organizations. The increased importance and complexity of succession planning is due to the current exit of baby boomers from the work force.

### The Problem with Conventional Wisdom

Conventional wisdom calls for promoting the person with the best collection of experience, technical intelligence and skills. This same wisdom dictates that individuals who perform well at one level of an organization, are prime candidates for moving up in the organization and typically are the first considered for promotion. It is rare to find a succession plan that uses other human leadership factors to identify candidates capable of moving up the organizational ladder. Using conventional wisdom guarantees organizations will continue to erode leadership performance by promoting candidates not ideally suited for additional responsibility. The time has come to blow up this wisdom.

### The Missing Ingredients

Experience, intelligence and determination are certainly crucial factors for success, yet even with all three of these skills in abundance, one is not always assured of success at the next organizational level. Think of someone in your organization who performed brilliantly at one level and then failed at the next. Which of the three factors broke down? Did the person suddenly lose intelligence? Or experience? Or lose their skill? Certainly not; there

must be missing ingredients in this trio causing the breakdown. Leaders are discovering these missing ingredients to be talent at people skills (emotional intelligence) and character. Best defined, talent is an ingrained pattern of thought, feeling or behavior that can be productively applied. It's what comes naturally to some of us. Talent cannot be taught easily; it takes focus from the person's entry into their career.

Character on the other hand, is best defined as the traits within an individual that determine his/her response to circumstance. It is what defines how we will react in any setting. Character can also be developed. In fact, character is developing every minute of every day by the decisions we make or by those we observe in our supervisors. Character is continuously developing in one direction or another, either stronger or weaker.

### Succession Planning Step 1: Talent Analysis

Talent and character are actually the starting point for improved succession planning. Strong leaders begin the selection process by identifying those with the right talent for the job. Being a great accountant doesn't automatically qualify one to run the finance de-

partment any more than being a great teacher qualifies one for the principal's position, nor being a great policeman qualify one to be a Chief. The examples can go on and on. Talent analysis is **step one** in succession planning. There are many fine diagnostic tools in today's market in determining one's talents. Strong organizations are learning to rely on these tools not only in succession planning but also during pre-employment screening.

### **Succession Planning Step 2: Character Diagnosis**

Character is more difficult to diagnose, yet is the single most important ingredient employees bring to work. Conventional wisdom is that we hire and promote based on skills, yet in reality we find that we must complete negative performance evaluations or even terminate people most frequently for emotional intelligence missteps and character issues. Character is the best predictor of future behavior. Diagnosing critical character traits for a position and finding candidates to match is a vast departure from conventional wisdom. Character diagnosis thus becomes the **second step** in improved succession planning. Diagnosing character, individually and organizationally, can be difficult without proper diagnostic tools. (Citygate Associates, LLC has training designed to specifically identify individual and organizational character.)

### **Avoiding Costly Mistakes**

Match a person to a specific job first by determining if they are

*already well* suited for a more challenging and complex position and secondly, if they have the necessary *character* traits to be successful. Resist the practice of moving candidates to the next rung on the organizational ladder without using these two steps as part of the process, thus forcing candidates to eventually reach a level of ineffectiveness. After these two new steps, then and only then, should one go to the conventional methods of measuring candidates by performance, experience and education. These five steps will insulate an organization from succession mistakes costing thousands of dollars.

Citygate Associates has leadership training specifically designed to aid you in developing a robust succession planning process. Talent, values and character will continue to be foundational in identifying potential high performers as well as entry level candidates. Citygate tailors all leadership training to the specific needs of each organization. Citygate's passion for improving leadership perspectives, teamwork and strengthening organizational trust in both the public and private sectors is a large part of our mission as a consulting entity. Please visit our website at [www.citygateassociates.com](http://www.citygateassociates.com) for further information on our services.

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If you would like to discuss leadership training and how it can be tailored to fit your organization, please contact Rick by phone at (916) 458-5103. You may also contact him via email at [rcarr@citygateassociates.com](mailto:rcarr@citygateassociates.com).



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