

Who's Next?

Cultivating the Next Generation of Leaders

BY LISA SIVY

Cultivating leadership in the next generation is an often-missed critical element that can impact the organization for years to come.

Nonprofits and corporations alike must take action to identify their next generation of leaders and begin to prepare them to succeed. Unfortunately, both nonprofits and corporations sometimes forget to ask this question either early or often enough. The lack of succession planning produces a lack of leadership development, which will only hurt the long-term performance of the organization. This can be avoided by encouraging involvement in nonprofit leadership roles.

A lack of succession planning is oftentimes seen in the nonprofit sector. Some of today's nonprofit organizations view their Board of Directors primarily as a source of revenue. Consequently, these organizations look for individuals who have the personal wealth and network of connections to financially contribute. Ideally they also involve their Board in setting the strategic direction for the organization, in which case they typically target seasoned individuals with the firsthand experience to contribute to organizational strategy. While tenure often does help, many critical skills, such as innovation, comfort with technology, and a strong belief in social responsibility are the sweet spot of generation X and Millennial leaders.

So how do we address the problems of succession planning and leadership development? For nonprofits, you must first understand the demographics of your volunteers and staff. Do you have younger people

interested in supporting you and your cause? How do they contribute? Organizations sometimes assume that young people volunteer their time simply because they do not have the ability to give financially. However, you are missing an opportunity if you do not solicit these volunteers. The contributions may be smaller increments initially, but it is usually much easier to increase the donation of a returning donor than to ask for a larger donation from a first-time donor. In addition, your volunteers are already familiar with your cause, supportive of your mission, and have demonstrated a desire to be involved.

All organizations reap benefits by attracting new supporters and contributors on a regular basis. If you do not have younger volunteers and contributors, do you understand why? It may be time to conduct an organizational and market analysis with your staff and Board to identify your strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, threats, and a plan to address them. Assuming that you do have younger people supporting you, examine your leadership structure. What is the composition of your current Board and committees? Is anyone under 40? Under 30? Do you have a mix of professional and personal backgrounds, skill sets, races, and both sexes represented in order to bring diverse experiences and perspectives into the planning process? If not, then why?



Are you using your corporate social responsibility initiatives as an opportunity to develop your junior leaders? Do you encourage your up-and-coming leaders to get involved in the community as a way to network and practice key leadership skills, such as facilitation, managing budgets, and conflict resolution? Allowing these leaders to perfect their expertise with your community partners is a mutually beneficial experience that will advance your brand while developing the skill set of the individual and providing valuable assistance to the nonprofit.

Experience and reinforcement increases an individual's likelihood of retaining information. For this reason, executives should take part in hands-on learning opportunities, such as serving on a volunteer committee or planning an event. Organizations have had great success with junior committees and boards, as well as young advisor events and programs. Nonprofits must identify a way to involve younger leaders in a meaningful way within reasonable financial expectations. These programs become a great way to leverage new and different perspectives while developing the next generation of leaders. Give that young person a chance to contribute and methodically increase their responsibilities. Soon you will have groomed your next committee chair, Board member or project manager. Businesses must recognize the value of this experience and reward these developing leaders accordingly.

Begin to groom young leaders now, and all parties will benefit. Businesses will gain a work force tenured at an earlier point in their career, armed with the leadership skills to make the critical decisions to grow your footprint while advancing your brand in the community. For the individual, it is a chance to build their skills, increasing their likelihood for success, while personally making a difference in the community. For nonprofits, cultivate these young leaders now, and ideally, they will become your long-term donors, bringing leadership and strategic direction, innovative perspectives, increased brand awareness, and additional revenue streams. Never stop asking, "Who's next?"

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