

What Will They Do When You're Gone?

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Think about the future of your organization. In what capacity do you see yourself? Do you have more responsibility? Greater influence?

Now think a little farther into the future. Go about a year beyond when you are no longer part of the organization. Maybe you'll be promoted or transferred. Perhaps you'll retire or resign to put your energies against some other worthy effort. Even if you just keep going and going and going, some day you will die. What will the people who look to you now for guidance do after you're gone?

Every leader needs an exit strategy. Yet many leaders don't have one. Thinking about leaving an organization that you've shaped and improved over many years is not fun! However, whether you have an exit strategy or not, you won't be a part of your organization forever.

If you leave, one of two things will happen. The organization will live on or it will die. If it lives on, the organization may prosper, or it may limp along weakly, or something between those extremes.

Right now, however, you devote your physical and emotional energy and huge amounts of time to your organization. You don't want the organization to struggle to survive, now or in the future!

After you leave the organization, you want to have established a culture with systems that allow the organization to continue to thrive, even though you are no longer personally involved.

Some organizational leaders are not strategic thinkers. Entrepreneurs especially are focused on finding a need and filling it NOW. Maybe you think the world is changing too quickly to spend valuable time planning! Who predicted gasoline would be selling at \$4 a gallon? Who imagined you could order just about anything in this world with just a few clicks on your computer?

Further, you are probably too busy with today's problems and opportunities to think about what will happen when you are gone! "Let the folks who are around then worry about replacing me!"

When you leave, one of two things will happen. Either somebody already associated with the organization will replace you, or somebody from the outside will be hired. "It happens all the time, so why should I be concerned? Who ever thinks about succession planning anyway?"

Maybe you should. You have a relationship with all the people under your authority. They assume that you are looking out for their future welfare. These people assume you have a plan for continuing the leadership they've come to expect from you!

Okay. Let's say you are concerned about the future leadership of your organization. What could you do about it? I suggest one (or both) of the following action steps.

Work to generate a very strong hiring process. If a future leader is going to come from the outside, you'll have to find a competent, dedicated individual to fill your shoes. You'd better establish a strong recruiting and selection process.

If you want your organization's future leaders to come from within, you need a strong leadership development process. If you don't have a couple of obvious replacement candidates already, that's an indication that you haven't been putting appropriate energy toward building future leaders.

Conduct a brief strategic planning session with your colleagues and immediate direct reports. Think collectively about the advantages of hiring future leaders from the outside, and about the advantages of developing your future leaders internally. Then generate a plan to strengthen your hiring systems or your leadership development systems--or both!

Dennis Hooper helps leaders build organizations of excellence. E-mail him at dhooper2@juno.com, or call him at 478-988-0237. His website is www.buildingfutureleaders.com.