

Real Succession Planning

By Doug Griffiths, President & CEO, 13 Ways Inc.

Note: Thank you for downloading one of our 13 Ways Syndicated Articles! We have included a boilerplate about the author and 13 Ways at the end of each article. When publishing the article content below please ensure that the boilerplate information is included.

Succession planning is critical to a community's future, and by community I don't simply mean a town. I mean any group of people with a common purpose that wants to see continued success well into its future. If you don't plan for who will replace you, and others in your organization, then you are planning to fail. It's just that simple. The challenge is that we all think we know how to do succession planning. However, we seldom do all that is required for successful succession planning. Below are the five reasons why our succession planning fails.

We start too late. Succession planning must begin early and with vigor. It should be a cultural mindset within your community or organization. I was reminded by an old friend of mine that shortly after I won my first election (I served through 4 elections in 13 years), I asked him if he was interested in running to replace me someday. I asked a lot of good young people if they were interested. They thought it was strange that I was seeking my replacement, but we should begin finding our replacement the day we start a new role. Too often we wait until a few months before we are set to leave. By then it is too late, and the reason why it is too late is the next point.

Real succession planning requires **time to teach** and mentor others to take on new responsibilities, eventually replacing you. When we don't start the process soon enough, we ensure those with the talent to fill our shoes don't have the skills to fill our role. That is a recipe for failure, as those who come next are unprepared for the challenges they will face. However, it is equally detrimental to good succession planning to over-coach those who would replace us. We over-coach, hoping they will be just like us and will make the same decisions we do, because we often presume our way is the best and only way. That kills creativity and talent in those who would replace us.

We should allow **room to be creative** for those we mentor. I recall a great saying: "Don't tell people how to do something. Tell them the problem and you will be amazed by the solutions they come up with." We tend to value someone for their talent, but teach them exactly how everything needs to be done, and then criticize them for their lack of creativity and problem-solving skills when they face challenges. If you let someone explore new ways to address issues, they may surprise you with a brilliant solution. Of course, they may fail on occasion too.

There are un-celebrated **benefits to failure**. We learn more from our failures than we do our successes. In fact, our successes teach us nothing. We expect our successors to do as we do, and seldom give them latitude to try new things. However, when we do, and they fail, we are often quick to declare they don't have what it takes, rather than helping them work through, and learn from, the experience. Teaching someone how to fail properly is the rarest and yet most important part of proper succession planning.

Finally, so many of us have egos that simply don't allow us to properly **turn over our role** and the power that goes with it when the time comes. We come up with all sorts of excuses to justify our continued control, but in the end, they are only empty excuses. An old friend of mine reminded me of that: "My Grandpa didn't teach me to drive by always sitting me in the passenger seat. He put me in the driver's seat and let me try." That is one of the most important items of succession planning. At some point, you need to let them take the wheel.

Success isn't a sprint. It doesn't happen overnight. But neither is it a marathon where one person runs the entire 26 miles. Success, for your community, is a baton race that never ends. One person runs their leg at full speed, and then hands off the baton to someone else who is already at full speed, who carries on for their leg of the race. And so on. That is how you get legacies. That is how you build strong communities.

This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit www.13ways.ca, or we can start the conversation at info@13ways.ca.