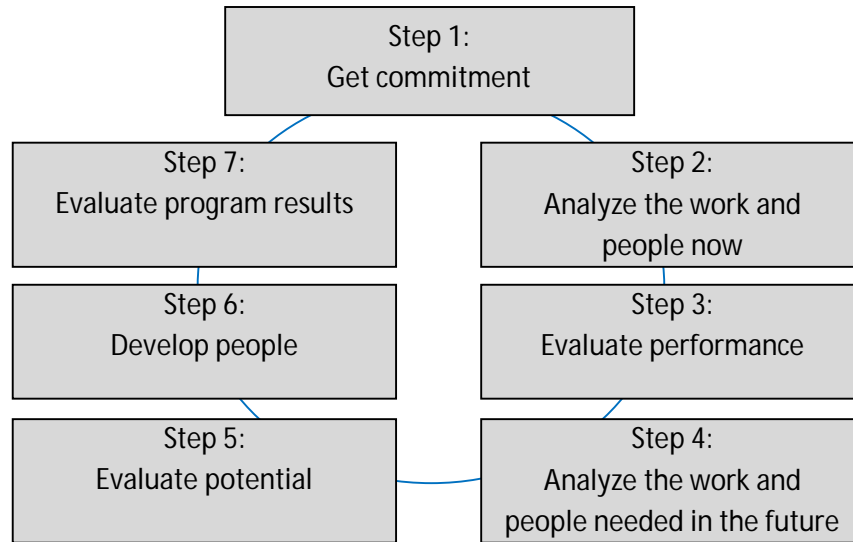# A Roadmap to Effective Succession Planning

Any exceptional succession planning program will be organized around a roadmap that integrates all its components and emphasizes the internal development of existing employees in the organization. What follows is a step-by-step description of this roadmap.[1]

```
                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │       Step 1:           │
                    │    Get commitment       │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
   ┌──────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
   │      Step 7:         │        │      Step 2:         │
   │ Evaluate program    │        │ Analyze the work and │
   │     results         │        │     people now       │
   └──────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
   ┌──────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
   │      Step 6:         │        │      Step 3:         │
   │  Develop people     │        │ Evaluate performance │
   └──────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
   ┌──────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
   │      Step 5:         │        │      Step 4:         │
   │ Evaluate potential  │        │ Analyze the work and │
   │                     │        │ people needed in the future │
   └──────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
```

Step 1: Get Commitment

No succession planning program can work without managers and employees at all levels clearly understanding why a succession program is needed. A compelling case must be made for it. At the same time, executives, managers, supervisors and employees must clearly understand their role in the program.

Step 2: Analyze the Work and the People Now

To prepare successors, managers must know what work is done, how it is done, and what kinds of people do it best. This step requires the creation of up-to-date job descriptions, clear work outputs and work accountabilities, and job competency models to describe the characteristics of the people who do the work best.

Step 3: Evaluate Performance

Step 3 refers to *performance management*, the process of planning, managing and appraising worker performance over time. This step is important in a good succession planning program because individuals must be held accountable for the work they do, the responsibilities they shoulder, and the competencies they demonstrate. It is worth emphasizing that it is not enough to have any performance management system; rather, the performance management system must

measure people against what they are expected to do, what results they are expected to achieve, and what competencies and behaviors they are expected to demonstrate.

Step 4: Analyze the Work and People Needed in the Future

The future will not necessarily be like the past. In this step, decision makers align the organization's strategic objectives with the work and competencies needed to realize those objectives. The organization's future requirements should be driven down to each level, job and function. The result should be expected future job descriptions and future competency models.

Step 5: Evaluate Potential

The potential for promotion to higher level responsibilities should be considered against the backdrop of the future. In other words, every individual who seeks promotion is really working to be developed on an escalator because the competitive environment within which the organization performs is not static. Things are changing as individuals are being developed. It is not enough to assume that successful performance in the past will guarantee successful performance in the future. Instead, organizational leaders must find objective ways to determine how well individuals will function at a future time and at a higher level of responsibility.

Step 6: Develop People

Step 6 focuses on closing developmental gaps found by comparing the results of steps 4 and 5. To carry out this step successfully, organizational leaders should establish an individual development plan (IDP) for each employee to narrow gaps between what the individual does now and what he or she must do successfully in the future to function at higher levels of responsibility.

An IDP is like a learning contract. It is usually negotiated between an individual and his or her supervisor on an annual basis. Individuals are encouraged to identify, and plan for using, resources to help them build the competencies they need at higher levels of responsibility. Resources may include training courses inside the organization, seminars or conferences outside the organization, internal job rotation experiences, and many other competency building efforts.

Step 7: Evaluate Program Results

How can the results of a succession planning program be evaluated? The answer to this question must be obtained by measuring program success against the objectives established for the program in Step 1.

---

[1] Adapted from Rothwell, W. (2005a). Effective succession planning: Ensuring leadership continuity and building talent from within. 3rd ed. New York: Amacom.