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## Leadership Development and Succession: A Review of Best Practices with Insights for Mission Leadership

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# BOUBAKAR SANOU

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION: A REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES WITH INSIGHTS FOR MISSION LEADERSHIP

**Abstract:** Leadership development and succession planning are of critical importance to any organization's performance and long-term sustenance. Unfortunately, the need to plan for leadership succession remains a challenge to most organizations, both secular and faith-based. This article explores the risks of not having a succession plan in organizations, the inhibitors of successful leadership transition management, and best practices for leadership development and transition. The last section explores ways to prepare the next generations for missions. The emphasis is on how intentional mentoring can help address the challenge of leadership development and succession at all levels of an organization.

**Keywords:** *leadership; transition; succession; planning; mission; discipleship*

### Introduction

Leadership succession planning is of critical importance to the performance and sustainability of any organization. It ensures that organizations are always led by the right people for the job. This is illustrated by the stock market, which often reacts to the mere announcement of leadership succession in some organizations (ELMO, 2016; Hagerty & Tita, 2010; Harrell, 2016, p. 72). Thus, preparing the next generation of leaders should be an urgent business necessity for every organization desiring success and sustainability in today's complex, uncertain, and volatile marketplace (Miles, 2011; Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019, pp. 40–48). Unfortunately, the need to plan for leadership succession often remains a frequently discussed topic about which many organizations do little (Cascio, 2011; Charan, 2005, p. 80; Harrell, 2016, pp. 1–74; Miles, 2011; Ogden & Wood, 2008).

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For example, the Canadian Financial Executives Research Foundation estimates that “only 40% of Canadian private companies have a clear business ownership succession plan in place” (The Competency Group, n.d., n.p.). A 2018 Robert Half Management Resources survey also found that nearly half of United States of America organizations do not have a succession plan in place for their chief financial officers (CFOs) (Robert Half Management Resources, 2018). A Robert Half UK survey of 200 United Kingdom financial directors concluded that 55% of them had no known successor should they leave their organizations (Robert Half UK, 2013). The results of these surveys highlight the lack of succession planning in organizations on a global level. The same is true of preparing the next generations for missions (Barna & the International Mission Board, 2020; Kinnaman, 2011; Hollinger, 2013; Vanderbloemen & Bird, 2014; Weese & Crabtree, 2004).

Either planned or unplanned, changes in the organizational, societal, or political landscape are an ever-present, unavoidable reality. These changes can happen either quickly or gradually. Change happens whether one is thinking about it or not. When change is carefully planned, it goes through a process of change plan implementation, transition, and achieves the desired outcomes. When it is unplanned and abrupt, it goes through a process of reaction to the change, a turbulent period of transition, and then a more or less desired new situation (Vrazel, 2013, p. 3).

This article is divided into four main sections. The first three sections review literature on leadership succession by respectively exploring the risks of not having a succession plan in organizations, inhibitors of successful leadership transition management, and best practices for leadership development in organizations. The last section focuses on mission leadership by exploring ways to prepare the next generations for missions.

## **Risks of Not Having a Plan for Succession in Organizations**

Organizations face potentially devastating consequences associated with a poor leadership succession plan or by not having one at all. Below are the six most discussed consequences in leadership literature.

### *Impairment of Internal Professional Development*

Lack of planning for leadership succession inevitably results in the ill-preparedness of up-and-comers to undertake the full array of organizational responsibilities, especially in times of crisis, such as the unexpected loss of a senior leader. Often this is because these up-and-comers did not have ample opportunity to cultivate their leadership abilities (Robert Half Management

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Resources, 2018; The Competency Group, n.d.). Much harm can be done when these ill-prepared up-and-comers are propelled to senior executive positions. Whenever leaders whose skill sets do not fit the context find themselves at the helm, organizations risk derailment or, at the least impairment of internal professional development (Ciampa, 2016, p. 62; Conger & Fulmer, 2003, pp. 76–77; Harrell, 2016, p. 72; Stern, 2013).

### *Disruption of Organizational Productivity*

A sudden vacancy at the helm of an organization with no well-planned succession process in place has the potential of experiencing a disruption in organizational productivity, specifically by putting the organization at financial risk. Such was the case of Hewlett Packard, a company that experienced an 8.3% plunge in shares when its CEO stepped down in 2010 with no readily available successor in view (ELMO, 2016; Robert Half Management Resources, 2018).

### *Power Struggles*

The departure of a top leader from an organization without a clear succession plan may trigger a chain of power struggles between those who see themselves as potential candidates to fill the vacancy. Power struggles can create unhealthy work environments, eroding employee morale (Delfs & Donahue, 2019). It is important to note that power struggles can also occur despite advance planning for leadership succession; however, the difference is that a carefully planned leadership transition can help mitigate the extent and effects of power struggles.

### *Loss of Legacy Knowledge and Expertise*

The absence of clearly defined leadership development and professional advancement protocols potentially hinder internal promotions and undermine employees' confidence in their organizations. With no prospect of internal promotion, high-performing employees will likely leave their organizations (Beeson, 2009, pp. 101–105; T. Allen, 2019). High employee turnover is always costly to organizations. Employees who leave their organizations not only take away with them valuable knowledge and experience gained while working there, but those organizations risk losing potential customers and stakeholders (ELMO, 2016; Federer, 2015; Robert Half Management Resources, 2018).

### *Risk of a Protracted Leadership Void*

Without a leadership succession plan in place, the unexpected departure of a high-level executive from an organization frequently leads to the appointment of an interim leader from within the organization to temporarily fill the vacancy. During this time, the board often searches for a new leader. In some

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cases, the search for a qualified leader can last longer than expected. The risk is that the interim leader may be ill-prepared for the position or whose leadership skills are not trusted by his peers or stakeholders. If doubts about the interim's leadership abilities are founded or s/he fumbles in the position, this appointment can sink his or her career instead of elevating it. In addition, if the process of making this interim appointment does not go through a formal review process, the interim appointee will lack the sense of legitimacy and credibility to exercise authority (Vaillancourt, 2018).

### *Risk of an Organizational Disruption*

The various Arab nations' revolutions and their ensuing widespread destruction of human life, infrastructure, and economy are good examples of the consequences of unplanned change in leadership at the country level. Many of the leaders of these Arab nations (e.g., Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Sudan) were not prepared for change, likely because they did not see it as a priority or they simply failed to recognize critical leadership transition points in the history of their nations. The immediate outcomes of the unplanned leadership transitions in most of those countries were confusion, anarchy, regression, and uncertainty (Blakemore, 2019; Dabashi, 2012; Habbal & Hasnawi, 2019).

Commenting on the tragic turn of events in Syria, Marc Lynch (2013) notes that

hopes for peaceful change have been replaced by sectarian animosity and unending bloodshed. . . . The promise of the Arab spring [gave] way to Syria's highly visible and protracted violence, divisive identity politics, focus on international intervention, crushing of expectations, fragmentation of the media landscape, state failure, and strategic proxy warfare. . . . Like other protracted civil wars, Syria's sectarian and political violence has created and entrenched divisions that didn't previously have the same salience. No matter how many noble plans for transitional justice and post-Assad reconciliation are crafted, it is difficult to imagine that Syrians will move past this cruelty and horror any time soon. (n.p.)

The risks mentioned above are a few illustrations of how the lack of a succession plan can cause detrimental disruptions to any organization's success, stability, and sustainability.

### **Inhibitors of Successful Leadership Transition Management**

Before reviewing some of the best practices for leadership succession planning, it is important to briefly discuss factors that militate against such practices. Below are five commonly mentioned inhibitors of successful leadership transition management.

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*Lack of Planning for Leadership Succession*

Although senior leaders constantly rank leadership succession planning as one of their most essential duties, the vast majority of them do very little about it (Charan, 2005, pp. 72–81). Some organizations, especially those that generate high profit, get caught up in the day-to-day management of their accomplishment or are too busy focusing on other concerns that they procrastinate devising an exit strategy for their current CEOs (Federer, 2015).

*Resistance from Some Senior Executives*

According to the 2018 Robert Half Management Resources survey on planning for leadership succession, nearly half of US organizations do not have a succession plan for their CFOs. The number one reason for this lack of succession plan is that 64% of surveyed CFOs were “not planning to leave soon” (Robert Half Management Resources, 2018, n.p.). Dayton Ogden and John Wood (2018) contend that at the heart of this attitude toward succession planning “lie personality, ego, power, and, most important, mortality” (n.p.). Eben Harrell believes that the lack of organizations’ involvement in internally grooming promising executives for succession may be “the result of CEOs’ efforts to stymie boards: The absence of clear successors keeps incumbents in the job longer and gives them more bargaining power with boards” (Harrell, 2016, p. 72). Stefan Stern (2013) takes Ogden, Wood, and Harrell’s perspectives further by suggesting that

having worked hard to get to the top, the last thing that many will want to think about is their successor. Exercising power may have an intoxicating effect on leaders. They may form an exaggerated sense both of their competence and their indispensability—and then fail to detect much merit in anyone else around them. (n.p.)

Therefore, it could be argued that because some leaders equate the prospect of leadership succession with personal failure, enhancing the careers of potential contenders may not look like a good idea for them. Thus, these senior leaders take their organizations hostage for personal conveniences, putting their sustainability at risk. Such leaders will hardly invest in potential candidates for fear of competition. That may also be the reason 17% of the CFOs surveyed by Robert Half Management Resources said they had not yet identified a successor because there were “no qualified candidates at the company” (Robert Half Management Resources, 2018, n.p.). An associated risk with lengthy tenures of senior leaders is that they lead to inertia, making it hard for their successors to initiate timely strategic change (Cascio, 2011).

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### *Lack of Active Assimilation and Accelerated Integration*

Another inhibitor is a lack of assimilation and accelerated integration support for newly appointed senior executives. According to some estimates, “one-third to one-half of new chief executives fail within their first 18 months” (Ciampa, 2016, p. 62). Although some of these failures are because of factors such as boards hiring executives who did not have the requisite qualities for the job or executives who made poor strategic choices (Stern, 2013; Ciampa, 2016, p. 62), the lack of active assimilation and accelerated integration support strategy is also thought to be an important contributing factor (Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017, p. 85; Conger & Fulmer, 2003, p. 76). This support aims at doing what it takes to make a newly appointed executive “a fully functioning member of the team as quickly and smoothly as possible” (Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017, p. 80).

Unfortunately, providing assimilation and integration support is not a common practice in organizations. Mark Byford, Michael D. Watkins, and Lean Triantogiannis observe that “nearly all large companies are competent at the administrative basics of signing leaders up. . . . [but] after that, he or she is expected to know what to do or to sort things out with little or no guidance” (Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017, p. 80). Hence, almost 70% of the participants in a recent global survey of 588 company executives who had recently transitioned into new roles at the vice president level and above reported that “organizational culture and politics, not lack of competence or managerial skills, were the primary reasons for [their] failure” (Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017, p. 80).

### *Squelching Differences of Opinion*

Some senior executives forcefully suppress those who disagree with management decisions. Senior executives with such a culture of handling differences of opinion drive out promising leaders from their organizations and often remain with those who, regardless of personal convictions, always comply with all management decisions, including unethical behaviors. This approach to handling conflicting perspectives kills the spirit of innovation, breeds disengagement and mediocrity, and robs organizations of “the benefit of hiring [internally] great people with experiences, skills, and creativity” (T. Allen, 2019, n.p.; Cascio, 2011).

### *Poor Intergenerational Leadership Competence*

Defined as “an identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages” (Tobize, 2008, p. 1), generations are currently grouped as follows: Greatest Generation (before

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1928), Silent Generation (born 1928–1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Gen Xers (born 1965–1980), and Millennials (born 1981–1997) (Pew Research Center, 2015). Some experts estimate that at any given time, roughly three generations rub shoulders in the workforce (Boyle et al., 2018, p. 641). Thus, today's workforce is multigenerational. With each generation molded by a wide variety of complex dynamics, the interaction of different generations in the workforce has enormous implications for organizational leadership, in general, and planning for leadership succession, in particular. A person's age is one of the most common contributing factors to differences in attitudes and behaviors (Pew Research Center, 2015; Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007, pp. 47–74). Thus, although a leader's expected attributes have remained relatively stable from generation to generation, each generation focuses differently on core values (Arsenault, 2004, pp. 124–141; Tavares, Sobral, Goldszmidt, & Araújo, 2018). For example, while Baby Boomers very often focus singularly on work, Gen Xers and Millennials prefer a balanced life, making them less likely to sacrifice personal and family interests for a professional career (Benest, 2003b, p. 2).

Other scholars see generations as seasons with different characteristics.

The Silent Generation or Traditionalists (winter/reap) are motivated by recognition and symbols, but boomers (autumn/harvest) appreciate recognition and status. Gen Xers (summer/till) are motivated by personal feedback and variety, while millennials (spring/sow) prefer intellectual challenges and a personal and public chance to develop. (Boyle et al., 2018, p. 641)

In light of the presence of these generations simultaneously in the workforce, senior executives must refine their leadership styles and skills, strategically adapting them to reflect generational differences in their organizations. Failure to effectively engage diverse generations in the workforce has harmed organizations' ability to successfully prepare the next generation leaders (Boyle et al., 2018, pp. 641–643).

## Best Practices for Leadership Development in Organizations

Despite the crisis in leadership development in organizations, management experts are optimistic that it is possible for organizations to reliably produce great senior leaders (Cascio, 2011; Charan, 2005, p. 80; Harrell, 2016, p. 72). The literature on leadership transitions suggests a number of contributing factors to successful leadership transition between generations. Commenting on the role that both senior leaders and middle ones should play for successful leadership transition, Frank Cespedes and Robert Galford (2004) point out that “any good succession plan has to encompass not just the people being groomed for succession but those they would replace” (p. 38).



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### *Best Practices by Senior Leaders and Organizations*

Writing from the perspective of local government management, Frank Benest observes that “local government management is in the midst of a quiet crisis: Baby-boomer managers are nearing the age of retirement, and there are fewer Generation X professionals (those born between 1964 and 1977) prepared to fill their roles” (2003c, p. v). He imputes the ill-preparedness of the next generation leaders in government to the fact that “local governments rarely develop succession plans to replenish senior management. . . . [M]any local government managers define their primary roles as administrators, problem solvers, community leaders, or catalysts. Few consider the critical job of developing talent” (Benest, 2003b, p. 2).

Local governments are not the only ones failing in leadership development. Many commentators agree with Charan’s observation that “few companies know how to get their best people the experiences that would prepare them for the CEO role” (Charan, 2005, p. 75; see also Cascio, 2011; Miles, 2011; Ogden & Wood, 2008). To address this failure in leadership succession planning, management experts urge senior executives to invest significant energy in preparing the next generation leaders by focusing on their neglected role as talent developers.

Senior leaders can play an active role in preparing the next generation of leaders in their organizations by providing adequate support and a well-designed structure for developing talents. Below is a list of four best practices from senior leaders. These best practices deal with what senior executives and their boards can do to catalyze leadership development across their organizations because of the executive power they hold and the practical leadership opportunities they can provide to up-and-comers (Benest, 2003a, pp. 42–44; 2003b, pp. 2–3; Bradt, 2016; Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017, pp. 78–86; Ciampa, 2016, pp. 60–68; Conger & Fulmer, 2003, pp. 76–84; DeZure, Shaw, & Rojewski, 2014, pp. 6–12; Simpson, 2019).

#### **Plan for Leadership Succession**

Senior leaders who care about the success and sustainability of their organizations are intentional about benchmarking and developing talents to prepare for leadership succession. For them, succession planning and leadership development are the two sides of the same coin (Conger & Fulmer, 2003, p. 76). On benchmarking talents, Ogden and Wood (2008) suggest that

the first [step] is to ensure a board has more than cursory exposure to its company’s senior management. Directors should get to know the senior leadership well through presentations in the boardroom and regular meetings outside of it. . . . Secondly, boards should benchmark potential leadership. Benchmarking puts a continuous talent-spotting process in place that

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includes collecting information about potential successors, but it doesn't normally include approaching executives directly. Benchmarking provides boards with in-depth profiles of potential leaders, putting the board in a better position to assemble quickly a list of potential CEO candidates. (n.p.)

Once a list of potential CEO candidates is assembled, the next step is to formally provide them with the extra training and the experiences needed "so they, as aspiring managers, are ready to move up in the organization when opportunities arise" (Benest, 2003b, p. 2). Because succession planning is essential for every organization's performance and sustainability, it should be recognized as of the same importance as other highly visible executive management tasks and included in organizations' strategic planning as a key organizational priority. It is even suggested that "boards should start planning for succession the day a new CEO is appointed" (C. Allen, 2018), and "regularly include [succession planning] on executive session agendas" (Simpson, 2019). Such an intentional approach to talent development creates an empowerment culture in organizations (Cascio, 2011).

The point of this is that leadership development needs to be integrated in the day-to-day operations of every organization by mapping its human capital and providing its members with leadership opportunities. This enhances the development of skills across all functions of an organization (Olive Grove & Vista Global Coaching, 2014, p. 14) because of the understanding that "in highly effective organizations there are leaders at every level, not just at the top" (Marquet, 2015, n.p.; see also Erstad, 1997, p. 325). For David Marquet, the solution to a successful leadership transition is to fundamentally alter the way organizations are designed and run "so that people can exercise the natural power that comes from being a human" (Marquet, 2015, n.p.). This implies that leaders acknowledge that every human being has a reservoir of potential ready to be developed. What is therefore needed, Marquet argues, is for senior leaders to give other members of their organizations "the voice and authority to exercise the empowerment they naturally have" (Marquet, 2015, n.p.). However, he adds that this paradigm shift requires leaders to ensure that those they lead have the necessary competence to make the right decisions by intentionally investing in technical and management training. This helps minimize the risk of failure and chaos on the part of the empowered employees.

Senior leaders with best practices materialize this first step in the process of preparing the next generation leaders by:

1. Defining the leadership competencies (aptitudes, attitudes, and skills) needed in their organizations. Succession planning starts "with a vision of what the organization should be and build the strengths they need to get there" (Bradt, 2016, n.p.).

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2. Developing comprehensive, objective, and ongoing leadership development procedures that guide the process of identifying, training, equipping, and retaining leaders.

3. Redesigning organizational structures to reflect and reinforce leadership development procedures (Benest, 2003a, pp. 42–48; C. Allen, 2018; Cascio, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Marquet, 2015; Simpson, 2019).

### **Enable Others to Act**

Senior leaders who perceive the task of preparing the next generation leaders in their organizations as part of their developmental role do not limit their actions to defining leadership competencies needed in their organizations, establishing an ongoing talent oversight, and aligning their organizational structures to reflect and reinforce that process. They see this first step, though essential, as just part of the solution. They proceed a step further to provide hands-on leadership development opportunities to up-and-comers by involving them in a supervised process of self-development (Charan, 2005, p. 78). They invest time, attention, and resources on potential successors as a way of ensuring that they “have the tools they need, in the form of technical competence and organizational clarity, to be successful when making decisions” (Marquet, 2015, n.p.). They also create specific opportunities for these young talents to engage in conversations about the big picture and the policies of the organization, develop both hard and soft skills, fulfill technical responsibilities, gain broader internal experience through their involvement in cross-functional projects, acquire supervisory experience, and take part in professional development activities and other networking and educational events.

Through this shared leadership and mentoring intervention, potential candidates to senior leadership positions also get a broad exposure through rotations across various organizational functions and units, gaining visibility through interactions with board members, stakeholders, and other professionals from whom they can learn to deal with organizational complexities (C. Allen, 2018; Cascio, 2011; Grubb, 2017, p. 84; Nalbantian & Guzzo, 2009, pp. 76–84). All along, senior leaders are open to differences of opinion and aspiring leaders are allowed to take missteps and reflect on them to learn from their mistakes (Benest, 2003a, p. 43; Cascio, 2011).

### **Manage the Transition Period between Outgoing and Incoming Executives**

A well-defined transition process is needed to avoid confusion over the person who is in charge during the period between naming a new senior leader and when that person actually assumes their new role (C. Allen, 2018).

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Ideally, a transition process should be planned ahead of time, regardless of if an executive is planning to transition out.

**Provide Active Assimilation and Accelerated Integration**

Planning a leadership succession should not be limited only to benchmarking potential successors and appropriately building their strengths. Neither does it end when a new chief executive is hired. It needs to also include an integration support strategy for all newly-appointed senior leaders, whether they are promoted from within or hired from the outside. The integration support process involves a systematic induction scheme covering all layers of the organization, including internal and external stakeholders. For example, through meetings with key stakeholders, team-building workshops, and other activities, the board, the chief human resource officer, and the outgoing chief executive ensure a transfer of knowledge about the organization and its culture, politics, and strategic priorities to the newcomer. That will enable him or her to quickly assimilate organizational norms, expectations, and team dynamics, skillfully navigate organizational networks, gain early momentum, and make timely strategic impact (Bradt, 2016; Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017, p. 85; Ciampa, 2016, pp. 60–68).

The above four points mostly describe an ideal circumstance where potential successors are prepared internally. Internally preparing auspicious executives gives them an advantage over outside successors because of their knowledge of the organization's culture, its key players, and its business subtleties. Although many commentators believe the internal grooming of potential executives can help avoid costly interregnums (Harrell, 2016, p. 72; Tichy, 2014), others suggest that at some critical moments in the life of an organization, when it takes change rather than continuity to infuse in it a fresh perspective critical for its stability, it would be preferable for its board to look outside for a potential successor (Cascio, 2011; Robert Half Australia, n.d.).

***Recommended Best Practices for Aspiring Leaders***

Preparedness for leadership succession is not only the responsibility of senior executives. Aspiring leaders must also be proactive in taking responsibility for their own development in an effort to broaden their range of knowledge, talents, and experiences. Common barriers to leadership development experienced by aspiring leaders include a lack of first-hand exposure to crisis management, lack of cross-departmental experience, insufficient understanding of their organization's big picture, lack of mentoring on developing career goals and paths, lack of exposure to different leadership philosophies, and a weak spot in key technical skills (e.g., budgeting) and/or soft skills (e.g., team

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building and conflict resolution) (Seymour, 2003, pp. 38–39). Below is a set of ten self-development strategies for which aspiring leaders must take responsibility (Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018, pp. 37–47; Priest, Kliewer, Hornung, & Youngblood, 2018, pp. 23–35; Seymour, 2003, pp. 39–41; Yarborough, 2018, pp. 49–61).

### **Get in Touch with What Excites You**

Get in touch with what excites you about your organization and make a commitment to keep this excitement alive. This should be written down, accessible, and frequently revisited. Constantly remembering what motivates you in your organization creates a compelling passion that has the potential of not only increasing your job satisfaction and effectiveness but also making other organization members eager to team up with you (Seymour, 2003, p. 39).

### **Clearly Articulate Your Leadership Philosophy**

Clearly articulating your leadership philosophy involves developing a mental picture of the leader you want to be, the leadership goals you want to accomplish, the values you want to embody, and the leaders you want to have as your role models. Well-developed, this vision helps focus you on your acquisition of skills and experiences. This will also benefit you when interviewing for advancement or when you ask to be considered for a special assignment (Nora & Crisp, 2009, pp. 178–179; Seymour, 2003, p. 39).

### **Be Aware of Your Emotions and Personal Attributes**

Be aware of how your emotions and personal attributes may impact your leadership. Referring to a previous study (Nalbandian, 2002, p. 254), Seymour (2003) points out the following emotional and personal attributes as necessary to be an effective leader.

The capacity to be stimulated by crises rather than to be exhausted by them; the capacity to bear high levels of responsibility without becoming paralyzed, the ability to exercise power and make difficult decisions without guilt or shame, and a spirit of inquiry about how things really work, including a commitment to one's own learning and growth. (p. 39–40)

### **Objectively Evaluate Yourself**

Objectively evaluate your strengths and weaknesses, and strategize how to capitalize on your strengths and remedy your weaknesses. This practice has to do with objective self-assessment to address the biggest barriers to you becoming an effective leader. To achieve this, you need to develop a learning plan with detailed goals, actions, and timelines in active consultation with

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your supervisors and peers. Seeking special assignments (e.g., volunteering to take the lead and proposing a plan or project to address a need in your organization, regularly attending your organization meetings to get exposure to the issues it is dealing with, joining professional associations and actively participating in their meetings) are ways of beefing up both the breadth and depth of your knowledge and leadership experience (Nora & Crisp, 2009, p. 179; Seymour, 2003, p. 40).

**Ask for In-depth Feedback**

Asking your direct supervisor, peers, or any other senior leader in your organization to help you prepare for a special assignment and being open to their feedback on your performance and suggestions on what you could have done better are examples of real-time learning. Being part of such informal continuing education will give you opportunities to learn on the job while doing your work (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019, pp. 44, 46; Seymour, 2003, p. 40).

**Get Supervisory Experience**

Mentoring others (directing and supporting their work) is a key step in the long process of learning and growth toward becoming an effective leader. Aspiring leaders who do not yet have supervisory experience can build such experiences by volunteering for responsibilities in which other team members will report to them (Seymour, 2003, p. 41).

**Build Relationships**

People are the most valuable assets any organization has. Effective leaders invest in and nurture relationships, thus creating communities where trust and collaboration flourish. Describing the essential role of trust and relationship-building in leadership, James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2017) observe that

leaders who spend the most time and energy developing cooperative relationships among the people they work with are viewed by their direct reports as the most effective, and, in turn, have the highest levels of engagement by their direct reports. Trust is required to build collaboration and promote relationships where people work together cooperatively. (p. 197)

**Strive for Work-life Effectiveness—Not Work-life Balance**

Managing conflicting demands in work and life and avoiding letting any adverse effects of work affect their personal lives is an everyday dilemma for many people working hard to climb organizational ladders. Christine Riordan (2013) remarks that

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research has, in fact, shown that employees who believe they do not have time for the personal life feel drained and distracted while they are at work. In addition, the spillover of negative aspect of work into an employee's personal life can lead to job exhaustion, disruption of relationships with family and friends, loss of enjoyment, and increased stress. (n.d.)

Contrary to some others, Riordan prefers the term “work-life effectiveness” to “work-life balance.” For her, whereas “work-life balance implies that one dedicates an equal portion of time to work and life,” work-life effectiveness “suggests striving for a situation where work fits with other aspects of your life” (Riordan, 2013, n.p.). With job burnout now recognized as an official medical condition (Kirsch, 2019), it is important to accept that loving your job or working hard to build your career should not be done at the expense of personal and family life.

Riordan suggests that to avoid “negative spillover” from work into personal life and vice versa, each leader striving for life-work effectiveness needs to take action on three things. First, they need to realign their personal priorities of family, work, health, and well-being. Second, they need to define success on their own terms and in all categories of their lives. On the need to define success on one's own terms, Anna Quindlen is right when she states that “if your success is not on your own terms, if it looks good to the world but does not feel good in your heart, it is not success at all” (Quindlen, 1999, n.p.). Third, they need to maintain control of their lives by setting boundaries and proactively managing the direction and meaning of their work (Riordan, 2013). On work-life effectiveness, Frits van Paasschen, the CEO of Starwood Hotels, clearly notes that

it's important not to be so immersed in your work that there isn't anything else. Taking care of your body and your mindset, carving out time to be with your family, doing things that recharge you—these all make you more productive in the end. (Kwoh, 2013, n.p.)

### **Look for Mentors**

Finding mentors who are willing and able to help you improve your leadership abilities with understanding of how your organization works are great assets in the process of your development as an effective leader (Nora & Crisp, 2009, p. 177–194). A variety of individuals in and outside your organization context can serve as mentors to you. These experienced guides can help you formulate and grow in your leadership identity and your aptitude for exercising effective leadership by providing you a practical and individualized approach to leadership development that builds your ability to achieve your

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goals (Nora & Crisp, 2009, pp. 179–194; Priest et al., 2018, p. 23).

Nora and Crisp list four types of mentor support aspiring leaders can tap into: psychological and emotional support, support with setting goals and choosing a career path, subject knowledge support, and role modeling (Nora & Crisp, 2009, pp. 177–194; Yarborough, 2018, pp. 49–61). Additionally, Valerie Grubb suggests a four-step process in finding a mentor and getting the most out of the relationship: determine what you want to gain in the mentoring relationship and what you can offer to make the relationship worthwhile for your mentor, identify a potential mentor inside or outside your organization who can help you achieve your goal, make the initial contact with the person, and always make a good impression by appreciating your mentor’s investment in you and by being respectful of their time and preferred modes of interaction (Grubb, 2017, pp. 143–145).

### **Market Your Potential**

Market your potential so that others are aware of your desire to learn and have confidence in your potential. Seymour notes that “this doesn’t mean engaging in shameless self-promotion. It means taking active responsibility for building your credibility and people’s confidence in your abilities” (Seymour, 2003, p. 41). This will help you when requesting special assignments.

### **Additional Insights for Christian Organizations**

As previously noted, leadership succession planning is not only a challenge for secular organizations. Christian organizations also share the same burden. Some observe that instead of carefully investing in leadership development and succession planning, many faith-based organizations look for charismatic corporate saviors from the outside whose experience and abilities may not match the organization’s needs nor exceed those of their own executives (Khurana, 2002, p. 51). The exception is often seen in cases where the successor might be the organization founder’s child (Dingman, Gyertson, & Kidd, 2014, p. 19). This disregard for intentional leadership development for a successful transition should be of particular concern to all Christian leaders in light of 1 Peter 4:10–11:

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. (NKJV)

Therefore, as stewards of various gifts, talents, experiences, and other



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divine entrusted means, the privilege and responsibility of stewardship are bestowed on each Christian to use whatever abilities they have to enhance the potentials of others as a way of building God's Kingdom. The privilege and responsibility of stewardship is also a reminder that each person will be called one day to render account to God for how they have used their gifts and talents to serve Him and others (Matt. 25:14–30; see also Torkko, Adams, & Adams, 2009).

### *Preparing the Next Generations for Missions*

In a detailed study on the future of global missions, the Barna Group and the International Mission Board point out significant intergenerational differences on global missions, noting a lack of conviction about missions' urgency and efficacy among Millennials and Gen Z. To remedy the decline of the younger generation's commitment to missions, they argue that to some extent, the future of missions depends on the practice of good leadership by all age groups in the church (Barna Group & the International Mission Board, 2020, p. 95). In addition to the best practices for leadership development in organizations discussed above, from which church and mission leaders can significantly benefit, below are three others that could be essential for preparing the next generation for missions.

#### **Model the Way**

In *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2017) outline five practical and evidence-based practices of exemplary leadership as the foundation and strategic plan for developing leadership skills in organizations. The first of those practices of exemplary leadership focuses on setting a good example for others to follow. They emphatically state that outstanding leaders

take every opportunity to show others by their own example that they're deeply committed to the values and aspirations they espouse. No one will believe you're serious until they see you doing what you're asking of others. Either you either lead by example or you don't lead at all. This is how you provide the evidence that you're personally committed. It's how you make your values tangible. (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 72)

What is suggested here is that a credible leader connects what they say with what they do; it is their consistency in words and deeds that gives them the integrity to lead and the aptitude to become exemplary role models in their organizations (Kouzes & Posner 2017, pp. 49, 73). Likewise, Barna and the International Mission Board's research points out that parents' perceptions of and attitudes towards missions have an impact on their children's interest in and preparedness for missions (2020, pp. 87–93).

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**Enable Others to Act**

Effective leadership development is indispensable to the sustainability of every organization. The story of Barnabas teaches important lessons about leadership development for missions. One of his primary concerns as a church leader was to develop others' talents so that they could serve God's cause with their maximum potentials. The Apostle Paul was one of those Barnabas sought and championed when others attempted to exclude him (Acts 9:26–30; 11:25–26). When Paul was exiled to Tarsus because of the persecution that ensued due to his early ministry in Jerusalem (Acts 9:29–30), Barnabas searched for him there, brought him to Antioch, and gave him another ministry opportunity (Acts 11:25–26). This proved to be a springboard for Paul's ministry.

When a sharp disagreement later broke out between him and Paul over John Mark's participation in their second missionary journey, following John Mark's desertion of their first missionary team in Perga to return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13), Barnabas stood his ground on behalf of John Mark. The issue at the heart of their disagreement over John Mark could be stated as follows: "Should something important be entrusted to one who has already proved himself untrustworthy?" Paul's opinion was, "Absolutely not" while Barnabas's opinion was, "Yes." While Barnabas may have argued his case from a pastoral concern, Paul appeared to have focused on the requirements of missionary work (Schnabel, 2012, p. 662). In other words, while Barnabas saw people as preeminent, for Paul, the mission took precedence over any investment in John Mark, who had once proved himself unreliable. Whereas Paul focused on human weaknesses that might prevent the successful achievement of a missionary task (he probably viewed John Mark as unreliable), Barnabas's concern was to mentor younger Christians despite their weaknesses or past failures, helping them grow in their faith as well as in their commitment to serve God.

There is no indication that Barnabas disagreed that what John Mark did was wrong (Kucicki, 2015, p. 95). Rather than being inflexible on team discipline, Barnabas demonstrated his usual virtue of clemency towards John Mark. He may have even discerned in him latent qualities that could be developed (Bruce, 1988, p. 302; Keener, 2014, p. 2303). Accepting to give a second chance to John Mark says a lot about Barnabas' high level of acceptance of risk in mentoring others. Barnabas may have taken him on board during their first missionary journey, ready to accept the possibility that he might fail. He is a good example of Godly leaders who do not neglect the real growth needs of people for the sake of only meeting agendas and abiding by policies. Since what divided Paul and Barnabas was clearly matters of team discipline and

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not doctrine, Barnabas seemed to have believed that strong stands should not be taken on issues of no salvific implication while minimizing issues of greatest significance in mission and ministry (Blue, 1993, p. 89).

Because John Mark was given another opportunity to demonstrate his fitness for service, he became a key player in the early church's life (1 Pet. 5:13; 2 Tim. 4:11). Scholars seem to agree that John Mark wrote the second Gospel after having been Peter's interpreter (Fernando, 1998, p. 434). Ironically, Barnabas redeemed John Mark for Paul's benefit. Another vivid example is Peter to whom Jesus graciously gave a second chance after he vehemently denied knowing Him (Matt. 26:69–75). Jesus not only forgave Peter, but also recommissioned him to the office of apostle (John 21:15–17). This is an invitation for leaders to look at people with the eyes of hope grounded in the unlimited possibilities of God's grace in a person's life (Fernando, 1998, p. 435). Despite a person's past mistakes, God can still call him or her back into leadership.

Barnabas teaches contemporary mission leaders that a hand of fellowship and service opportunity, devoid of any suspicion, should be extended to those who have failed, repented, and learned valuable lessons from their mistakes. The way he treated John Mark is akin to God's dealing with Adam and Eve at the Fall. Genesis 3:7–15 not only reminds Christians of the reality and impact of sin on humans' relationships with God and each other, but also gives a biblical precedent on how to deal with poor choices people make. There were at least three options that were available to God when Adam and Eve willfully disobeyed Him. First, He could have simply discarded them, that is, let them die as the result of their sin, and then create new human beings. Second, He could have let them languish forever under the consequences of their bad choice. The third option, which God chose, was redemption. The Fall narrative shows Christians that to lead after God's own heart is to deal with people's poor choices in a redemptive way by graciously seeking them (Gen. 3:7–10), graciously confronting them (Gen. 3:11–13), and graciously offering them reconciliation and restoration (Gen. 3:14–15). It also suggests that God's expression of His justice and holiness is just as essential to Him as is His expression of His love and compassion (Walton, 2001, p. 258).

### **Cast a Vision for Vocational Discipleship**

Ellen White (1894) points out that

everyone who has seen the evidence and light of truth and accepts the truth, professing his faith in Jesus Christ, is a missionary in the highest sense of the word. He is the receiver of heavenly treasures, and it is his duty to impart them, to diffuse that which he has received. (p. 155)

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Likewise, Michael Wilkins states that taking an active part in the fulfilment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) is an ongoing mandatory requirement of being Christ’s disciples (2004, p. 951). Thus, by virtue of the Gospel commission, all Christians are called, in whatever capacity, to share their faith. However, research has established that churches are not doing well at vocationally discipling their members, that is, helping them connect their professions with their missionary mandate (Kinnaman, 2011, pp. 41, 341). To address that challenge, Miroslav Volf (2008) suggests that churches

need to build and strengthen mature communities of vision and character who celebrate faith as a way of life as they gather before God for worship and who, sent by God, live it out as they scatter to pursue various tasks in the world. (p. 108)

With a compelling vision for vocational discipleship, work becomes a vocation rather than just an occupation.

The following three things can help the next generations live up to their missionary mandate in every area of life, including work. First, churches need mission-minded mentors to guide them on how to connect their professional dreams deeply with their faith in Christ and missionary mandate (Francis, 2009, p. 76; Kinnaman, 2011, p. 41). Second, since it has been proven that with the right approach to discipleship and ongoing support, parents can enhance their children’s missionary potentials; churches should invest in parents’ discipling on how to reframe their responsibility of raising their children into a calling to make disciples (Barna Group & the International Mission Board, 2020, pp. 93, 99–100). Third, all Christians need to make strong work ethic part of Christian witness. Scripture enjoins Christians to maintain a God-honoring character in their professional lives as it commands them to put forth their best in what they do as if they were working for God (Col. 3:23–24). When believers view their jobs as part of God’s calling on their lives, they add new meaning to Christian witness. Maintaining integrity, striving for excellence, being trustworthy and reliable, and treating others with respect in the workplace are qualities that can give Christians a platform to share their faith (Klett, 2018).

## **A Practical Model of Leadership Development and Succession**

A model of leadership development and succession planning that caught my attention during this research is that of Adventist Frontier Missions Inc. (AFM).<sup>1</sup> AFM is an independent, Seventh-day Adventist Christian ministry dedicated to establishing church-planting movements among unreached people groups. To ensure that future human resource needs are anticipated and

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provided for, from 2015 onwards, AFM put in place a succession planning mechanism at all levels of its organization, as shown in the table below (C. Vine, personal communication, February 9, 2021).

Table 1

*Adventist Frontier Missions: Succession Planning*

ROLE	SUCCESION PLANNING MECHANISM
<b>Field Personnel</b>	
Career Missionary	AFM operates a student missionary/short-term missionary program, allowing individuals to serve for one-year cycles, enabling the individuals and AFM to identify potential career missionaries.
Field Director	The international field director and president review all career missionaries twice annually to identify field director needs in the next two to five years. Suitable career missionaries are identified and invited to join the "Field Director Development Track," which is a two-year orientation training tailored to the career missionary's skill-set and technical skills to prepare the career missionary to transition to serve as a field director.
<b>Office Personnel</b>	
All Office Positions	Each position prepares a detailed process-description of each key task associated with the position. The process-description includes detailed written instructions, video tutorials, and samples of the work in progress. Each departmental director works with his/her departmental staff to ensure that the detailed process-description is prepared for each office position.
<b>Departmental Directors</b>	
Department Directors	AFM administration identifies with each departmental director one to two potential replacements and the additional training requirements/ responsibility opportunities for such individuals.
<b>AFM Officers</b>	
Treasurer	The key process functions of the treasurer are being documented and described in detail for a future treasurer to be able to implement basic process functions at short notice. Suitable replacements for the treasurer are being identified to ensure that should the current treasurer leave, there are at least two candidates who could be invited to assume the role of treasurer at short notice.
President	The chair of the board has been provided with the names of two individuals who could assume the role of president in the event of a short-term incapacitation of the current president. The names of three potential long-term replacements for the current president have been provided to the chair of the board. Additional training and responsibility opportunities are given to these individuals.

<sup>1</sup>Learn more about Adventist Frontier Missions Inc. at [www.afmonline.org](http://www.afmonline.org).

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A brief analysis of the AFM model of succession planning identifies five basic elements. First, the board of directors is intimately involved in leadership development and succession planning. Second, AFM has a long-term perspective. Third, they have a structured talent development process at all levels of the organization. Fourth, they create a pool of candidates for key positions and provide them opportunities to further develop their leadership capabilities. Fifth, they align potential successors with each key position. To avoid creating competition and conflict among colleagues, succession planning and mentoring for executive roles is done informally. Everything else is done officially. In this way, AFM has a steady source of executive talent for all its organizational positions. This approach also signals to AFM's stakeholders and constituents that its objectives and activities will remain uninterrupted during a leadership transition.

Intentionally planning for leadership succession has not always been the norm at AFM. Past experiences have taught them that for the successful completion of Christ's mandate to make disciples of all nations, there is no derogation to the rule for Christian organizations in leadership development and proactive succession planning. Their example shows that every willing Christian organization can objectively reevaluate its administrative structures, policies, and procedures, creating a culture where the conversation about leadership succession is normal and ongoing, supported by effective institutional structures for grooming the next generation of leaders.

## Conclusion

Leadership development and succession planning are important activities that take place in organizations. Senior leaders' courses of action (what they do or fail to do) can significantly impact organizations for better or for worse. Whether or not planned, leadership succession is an inevitable issue for every organization and its positional leaders. Every organization will one day lose its leader, no matter the uniqueness of such a leader. What happens next to that organization depends greatly on what was invested in preparing potential successors.

Because it is critical to organizational performance and sustainability, leadership succession planning should be considered an ongoing and dynamic process, rather than an event. As an ongoing and dynamic process, succession planning should not be set in stone. Plans have to change when key organizational or marketplace variables change. No one is irreplaceable or indispensable to the wellbeing of an organization. Succession planning aims to enable organizations to continue to thrive, even if key players leave. For that reason, succession planning needs to be an integral part of the way orga-

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nizations are managed. Senior leaders and organizations with good practices for leadership succession do not consider this task an ad hoc activity. Instead, they are intentional and strategic about preparing potential next generation leaders. Such organizations' focus is on their future needs rather than their past achievements. With organizational success, stability, and sustainability, advance planning and an operative process for leadership succession is the best policy.

One of the key measures of successful leadership is how best a leader has prepared his or her succession. Great leaders do not simply make room for others around them to grow; they play a catalytic role in that growth. Todd Adkins (2017) rightly observes, "the defining legacy of any leader is the quality of those [they] develop and [their] ability to transition out of [their] role—at any time and for any reason, with little drama or disruption" (n.p.).

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