6 Ways to Meet Succession Challenges
Federal government agencies face big challenges today: sequestration, increased community demands, and significantly fewer resources. Amid these challenges, Baby Boomers are already overdue for a mass exodus, with some three to four years past retirement eligibility. Yet Gen Xers haven’t been sufficiently groomed for succession, and Millennial employees, unless engaged with meaningful work, may not stay with any single agency long enough to warrant leadership development.

While succession planning is important for any industry, it’s even more crucial for the federal government, whose agencies must ensure continuity of service to communities, regardless of internal challenges. How, then, can the federal government begin preparing the next generation of leaders today?

Consider these six succession planning tactics:
1 Radically embrace Millennials

The media is fond of name calling when it comes to Millennials: entitled, lazy, flaky. This is a gross misinterpretation of the generation’s capabilities and motivations. Unlike Baby Boomers, Millennials are willing to integrate work 24/7—as long as there’s flexibility and feedback. They want to make a difference, they’re less interested in promotions, and they enjoy the job at hand.

Engage this unique workforce by offering a variety of learning opportunities, new technology, and real-time feedback. In return, you’ll gain highly skilled, tech-savvy employees passionate about their jobs—and willing to make lateral moves for the joy of learning. Capture their desire for innovation, and you’ll be rewarded with a future workforce of smart, flexible leaders.

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The responsibility for succession planning is on everyone, not just the organization’s top tier. Every level of management has a responsibility. While chief executives have a bird’s eyes view of talent across the organization, top- and middle-tier managers must take the initiative to have open conversations with employees, identify star employees, and broadcast leadership criteria. This in turn may require upgrading existing performance management processes, e.g., integrating competencies and development activities, prioritizing year-round goal setting, and finding better ways to track and quantify high potential. Employees are then responsible for actively seeking learning opportunities and creating ways to practice their leadership skills.

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By 2016, 58% of senior executives and 45% of GS-15s will be eligible to retire. How then can agencies capture employee knowledge, quickly and at low cost? Record the leaders, using a smartphone, how they've succeeded, their advice for moving forward, and mistakes they wish they hadn't made. Dr. Rachel Day, senior consultant for ICF International, asks leaders to imagine their successor is in front of them. “We ask, ‘What would you tell them?’” Organizations can catalogue the videos online to create a powerful bank of on-demand knowledge.
Begin developing leaders from the moment new employees walk through the door. Peter Shelby, associate dean at the National Intelligence University, suggests taking a cue from the military: “Careers in the military are built on succession planning... The army manages your career all the way through.” Assign occupational advocates, and let leaders know that mentoring is a performance objective.

Expand succession planning for mid-level positions.
Implement Unified Talent Management systems

Getting the big picture of bench strength is impossible when HR processes are siloed, either through cumbersome manual tracking (spreadsheets hidden in a file cabinet) or discrete software systems. *Unified talent management systems* effortlessly connect recruiting, development, performance, compensation, and goals, key to managing the *entire* employee lifecycle. An integrated system makes it easier to address skill gaps, identify high performers, high potentials and provide a real-time view of performance.

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Real learning happens on the job, amid day-to-day challenges. Offer development opportunities and move employees around to ensure they understand how the agency works as a whole. Development doesn’t have to be resource intensive: shadowing and mentoring are effective ways to prepare employees for succession.

One-on-one training is significant for the bottom line, as well. According to the Institute for Corporate Productivity, 40% of high-performing organizations used job shadowing to facilitate succession and skills development. Only 9.1% of low-performing organizations made shadowing the same priority.⁴

“Offer development opportunities in the context of real work...”
More than 1,500 organizations around the globe rely on Cornerstone OnDemand's specialized integrated talent management suite to recruit top talent, manage performance, plan for succession, and deliver professional development opportunities.

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