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MASTERCLASS

Succession planning is not a one-session review. It is a project that takes time and a strategy, and helps demonstrate leadership, writes **Charlotte Rimmer**.



Every business leader knows planning doesn't happen organically. It takes strategic thinking and the commitment of time. So why do executives look at me blankly when I ask them about their succession plan?

Setting up your division or company with an expectation that everyone requires a succession plan is excellent leadership, risk mitigation and policy. Succession planning is valuable for unexpected crisis management, but there are other reasons to do it.

While it is often presumed to be part of an exit strategy, succession planning can be part of your career advancement. If you are a department manager in a planning meeting and confirm you have thought ahead 12 to 24 months, others take notice.

I've spoken to many senior executives and business leaders to discuss their next career step, and one of the most common questions is: "But what happens to my team? I recruited them to join me on the path." Consider the long game and work on a solution to benefit the organisation as well as the individuals. Setting up and sponsoring successors is crucial leadership.

A culture of succession planning acknowledges that everyone moves on at

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some point. Those in the C-suite or heading that way will incorporate growth and development as an integral aspect of their career. It also provides transparency, which is critical for a trusted management team. It demonstrates you have considered the business and the effect of your exit, and you are doing something about it.

But succession planning is not a one-session review. It is a project that takes time and a strategy.

Working productively to ensure you are skilled and ready for the next promotion requires your team or chosen individuals to be prepared to step into your shoes. Once you have identified the key movers and completed the planning, implementation can take months or even years, so start early.

Here are the steps to follow to ensure smooth and successful succession planning.

1. Plan

Identify your trusty lieutenant or HR provider and explain your reasons for considering succession planning, and the reasons for continuing to develop yourself and those around you. It is best for the business and for effective planning, and it creates transparency. Explaining the "why"



Well-thought-out succession planning is a sign of competent leadership.

invites collaboration and will help them be a true sounding board. This meeting should take about one hour.

2. Workshop

Set up in a room with a whiteboard. On one side, define the significant accountabilities of your role. Don't overthink this, just write the five major processes you manage. If you struggle to narrow them down, it might be time to revisit your job description. Take a helicopter view and identify key staff who support you. As part of this process, which should take at least two hours, ask the following questions:

- Who are the strongest?
- Could they ease into your role?
- Are they good in a crisis?
- What skills do they demonstrate?
- Are they respected by their peers?

You might not always want the same people you rely on in the short term to be considered for a permanent move.

3. Review and discuss

Working with the knowledge of the candidates, identify your preferred choice for a succession plan. Challenge your unconscious bias, mull over how they fit the needs. Choose two or three people and, through subtle questioning in your regular catch-up, progressively discount or escalate individuals. This process is ongoing and, until you have agreed on a strategy, should not be disclosed to your candidates.

Are they prepared to develop their skills? Can you dedicate time to ensure training and development? Is this the right timing for them and for you? Are you the best person to coach and mentor them to the promotion?

Timing is important. Announcing a successor too early, without due diligence, can create discomfort within the team. Your priority is to develop all in your circle.

4. Develop the strategy

By taking an active approach to identifying and training emerging team leaders who could take on your role, you will improve your leadership skills and self-awareness.

Through learning about your own developmental areas, you will accrue essential knowledge to help you reach or maintain your hold on the C-suite. This is relevant if you have achieved C-suite level and are ready to move to a new organisation, or are considering your next internal promotion to the C-suite for the first time.

You can develop your plan independently or with an adviser or someone you trust as a sounding board. It is easy to get sidetracked so it's a good idea to set monthly milestones. If you have an accountability framework, you are more likely to achieve results.

From the CEO to the CFO to the board, everyone needs a succession plan to ensure they are not only doing the job they've been paid to do, but they have also covered that role for the future. It is about sponsoring future leaders, mitigating risk and ensuring continuity of delivery for the business.

Don't be the leader who is so caught up in daily activity you have forgotten to look ahead – you will only stand out for the wrong reasons. Demonstrate security, accountability and leadership.

Back-filling your own role will create a more defined purpose, collaboration and transparency that will make you more appealing to the outside world.

Your team will seem strong, and a mutual understanding of each other's levels of responsibility will demonstrate a thoughtful approach to business management. **AFR**

Charlotte Rimmer is managing director of leadership coaching consultancy Aide de MD.

BUSINESS TRAVELLER FROM HOME

Scott Russell is the Asia Pacific and Japan president for enterprise software company SAP.



Where are you based at the moment?

I'm actually in Ocean Grove, which is near Geelong on the surf coast in Victoria. I'm usually based in Singapore, where I've been living for the past 10 years. My wife has been in Australia with the children since Christmas. I had some business travel in the middle of March and decided to spend a couple of weeks here. That turned into many months.

How many planes would you normally catch a year?

I don't know how many, but I would be on a plane in 11 out of every 13 weeks in a quarter. So I would be pretty much travelling every week except for the first and the last one as part of my role of looking after our business across Asia Pacific and Japan.

Where did you mainly travel to?

Japan, India, Korea and Australia at least once every quarter, but often twice a quarter.

How are you finding not travelling?

It has been a blessing because you have the opportunity to do some of the normal things at home. Clearly, from a business point of view, it introduced a lot of challenges. But I have a saying of controlling the controllables, so it was a matter of identifying what I could put into place that would allow me to be effective and productive.

After about six weeks, there was the realisation that this could be for a long period of time so I needed to establish behaviours and methods in the way that I run the business and what I do personally.

There are things about travel that we often underestimate how much we miss.

Do you miss travel at all?

I have missed it for a few reasons. I love meeting clients and my teams. And, like many people who travel, I really enjoy those different experiences. And there is the diversity of the Asia Pacific – the sights, the smells, the environment, the traffic.

But the other part I miss, actually, is the solitude. I love reading books, so whenever I'm on a plane I love that ability to put on my headphones and switch off. I hadn't had a routine at home where I would read books, so I had to establish new ones.

But probably the major reason I miss travel is I love exercising wherever I go. I would go to different gyms or go for a jog outside – you see the environment around you. There are things about travel that we often underestimate how much we miss.

Do you think you will fly around the world again as you used to?

It will definitely be different. I talk to clients every day by Zoom, WebEx or Microsoft Teams so I will maintain an element of that, which I think means the need for travel will reduce.

I have realised I was going to a location to collaborate, to share ideas, so I think my travel will be much more targeted around that, sharing ideation and understanding, but not to work for a week, which is what I would often do. I guess that means I would



Scott Russell used to be a frequent flyer but the coronavirus has changed all that.

have a bit more balance between the travel and the non-travel.

So do you think travel might fall by half?

I think so. I'm expecting there'll be an initial spike again because we want to see everybody. But then I'm expecting I will travel in five or six weeks a quarter.

What's in your home office?

I've made a makeshift office in my youngest kid's bedroom. I have two lamps, plants, a height-adjustable desk. And I've got a Tupperware container that holds my Logitech camera. I like a clean desk.

How many hours a day would you spend on video calls?

Probably seven to eight hours. I try to run according to the Singapore calendar. I get up in the morning, go to the gym every day. I've got my own coffee machine now because I figure I'm gonna be at home and make my own coffee. I start my day at about 9am and work until about 6pm. I'll have a couple of hours to see my family and have dinner, then I might do another Zoom call.

I find concentrating in video meetings is a lot more difficult. And at the end of the day, I'm probably a little bit more drained – it's just the lack of movement, even the ability to walk from one meeting room to another in the office or get into a car.

When you can travel again, where would you go first?

I'm obviously looking forward to getting back to Singapore, where I live, and seeing friends and colleagues. Japan is our biggest market in the region so it will be high on the list. I must admit, I love going to Japan – the people, the culture, the food, the business. I'll probably go around the region and just try to reconnect with everybody, then I'll hopefully get back into a more normal routine. The other place I'll undoubtedly go to is Germany, which is where our head office is.

Do you have any favourite gadgets at the moment?

My coffee machine, which is a La Marzocco Linea Mini. It makes beautiful coffee. I'm trying to become a semi-professional barista at home and practising my latte art. The other favourite gadget is my Garmin fitness tracker, which tracks calories burnt, activities and so on. I must admit, it's become a bit of an addiction to see what I've done every day. And I guess it's a way for me to keep healthy. **AFR**