

## “PROMOTIONS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WITH CARE”



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When a managerial opening occurs, an organization can be challenged by the process of choosing a replacement. All too frequently, there is an automatic response: the “next in line” with tenure becomes the assumed choice. The assistant director becomes the director, the director becomes the vice president, etc. This follows an assumption that the person, by virtue of title, is qualified and capable to assume the next level of leadership. This assumption can be a dangerous one. Not all people who are next in line have well developed management skills or leadership ability.

Another common mistake is when a top performing individual - such as a brilliant engineer or top salesperson - is promoted into management due to their high visibility and stellar reputation in their functional role. It is not uncommon to see those professionals who were tops as an individual contributor struggle in their new managerial role, due to poor suitability. When this happens, the employee finds himself feeling like a failure, and may gravitate to his former success zone – individual contributor – by going into job search mode to save face. In this case, the company loses both a manager and their former top contributor.

For the organization, it can be most convenient and expedient to promote the next in line, or a top performer. After all, it is rationalized, this person knows the organization and the culture, and is a “known quantity.” But without prior planning, preparation and support, these kinds of promotion won’t last long, or the persons will linger in chronic mediocrity.

Succession planning for the organization and career development for individuals must go hand in hand, and considered in advanced of need. Here are some steps that can make the promotional decision a successful one:

- During the interview process, talk to your candidates about their career goals. Ask about how they want to grow professionally. Ask questions that would give an initial indication of the person’s viability as a future manager in your organization.
- Once on board, continue career discussions and evaluations. Remember that just because someone desires to move up, does not mean that they will be skilled at leadership. Evaluate their management potential through ongoing dialogue, purposeful observations, and leadership assessments to validate that they would have a high probability of success if and when promoted.
- Create a development plan, with the participation of the person’s manager that will address any gaps in readiness. The plan might include pursuing a college degree, taking targeted classes, receiving coaching or mentoring support, or a combination of these.
- Do not put all your eggs in one basket. Circumstances change and people make life and career decisions that don’t always fit for their employer. Identify several “high potentials” who can be developed, offering a choice of internal candidates when the need arises.

Timing, of course, is everything. If a position becomes vacant, and the organization does not feel that there is anyone internally who is ready, the decision-maker must have the courage to have an honest discussion about it with those who might be expecting to be offered the promotion. Never raise the hopes of someone who is not ready or is not considered to be management material. And never offer anyone the job out of convenience. Both the organization and the employee are bound to lose.

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