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# Four Essential Steps to Successful Succession Planning

**W**e all know that succession planning is important. When an essential leader leaves the company, it's too late to create a plan or start a search for his or her replacement. By its very nature, succession planning takes years of careful planning to be successful. Long-term success of the company depends on having a ready successor to step in as each essential leader leaves.

Done right, succession planning is built into the rhythm of your company; reviewing talent is as routine as reviewing financials. It's an ongoing, everyday effort to identify and develop future leaders.

Here are four essential steps to make your succession planning efforts successful.

**1 STEP ONE: Start at the Top.** At its core, succession planning is about preparing your organization for the future. It doesn't always demand the same attention as more urgent needs and short-term goals, but enlightened executives embrace succession planning as an essential and natural business priority.

**C-Level Engagement:** It's up to CEOs, CFOs, COOs and other C-level executives to set the stage and agenda for succession. When leadership clearly communicates about the role of succession planning and the process your company has in place, [employees will feel reassured about the long-term vision for the company](#) and excited by the opportunities for professional growth.

**HR Involvement:** Be sure your HR leadership has a seat at the executive table, to ensure that succession planning strikes that fine balance between a data-driven initiative and a people-centric approach to talent management.

**Future Planning:** Exec teams are preparing the company – and your future leaders – for long-term success. As leadership roles rapidly evolve



in our digital age, the succession plan and profiles of future leaders must keep up.

**2 STEP TWO: Take a Standard Approach to Assessment.** Good succession planning is bigger than simply not promoting the wrong candidate. It's about intentionally building a portfolio of diverse leaders who have the skills to lead, a strong cultural fit, and the ability to shape and support your organization through its next stage of growth.

**Multi-Level Plan:** Put a plan in place for each of your critical roles, including one, two or even three levels below the senior leader. You'll want to ensure that the company fills gaps at *all* levels when your essential employees are promoted or leave the company.

**Competency Assessment:** Strong leaders require a solid mix of the right skills, knowledge, and behaviors for each role at every level in the organization. Use your competency management system to systematically assess employees' competencies – and to measure growth as future leaders close their knowledge and skills gaps over time.

**Unconscious Bias:** Many organizations find that the women and culturally diverse employees don't quite have the experience and skills they need to become top leaders. Be sure you're expunging unconscious bias in your systems and your culture, so your assessments and succession plans reflect gender-neutral and race-neutral standards.

**Potential and Performance:** The 9-Box Grid is a handy way to chart employees' performance and potential for growth. Remember, though, it's a tool for communication, not assessment. You still need a sophisticated, standardized way to **assess** the competencies that lead to your conclusions.

**3 STEP THREE: Develop Potential Leaders.** For employees, succession planning presents opportunities to take on more responsibility, build new skills, and increase their value to the team. Especially for Millennials, remember to find out what's important to your employees – for their own careers and for your company – before steering them toward the management track.

**Stretch Roles:** Some of the most successful companies build in opportunities for future leaders to take on roles with more responsibility, to help build the skill sets they'll need for what's next.

**Lateral Experience:** Have employees take on lateral moves. Broadening their skills, knowledge, and relationships will only help when they are promoted to a higher level of leadership.

**Smart Support:** Ensure that new female and culturally diverse leaders have the experiences and resources they need to move up, including networks, mentors, and advocates who challenge and support them.



**4 STEP FOUR: Supplement with Outside Expertise.** Even companies with robust succession plans can benefit from outside talent that brings fresh skills, experiences, and market perspectives to the organization.

**Growth Fit:** Most senior leaders are best suited to certain size companies at certain growth stages. There are leaders who shine at starting companies, spearheading partnerships or mergers and acquisitions, or repositioning established companies for growth. To some degree, the same is true for leaders at every level of your organization. A new leader from the outside may be just the right fit to guide your company through its next inflection point.

■ ■ ■ **Market Perspective:** If your organization is preparing to enter a new market, a leader who has “been there, done that” can add invaluable insight to charting a course for success.

Long-term company success means the team keeps moving even when essential leaders are gone. Your well-defined and well-executed succession will help you achieve mission-critical outcomes well into your future.

Need help shoring up your succession plan? Contact Avilar to discuss how our competency management system, [WebMentor Skills™](#), can help you assess and manage competencies for your future leaders.

## About Avilar

Avilar – The Competency Company™ is a leader in web-based competency management and learning solutions for corporations, government, and non-profit organizations. Formed in 1997, Avilar was a pioneer with its award-winning WebMentor™ product line and has built itself on the basis of superior customer service and highly adaptable product design.

Let Avilar help you transform your organization from ordinary to extraordinary. [Visit our website](#) to schedule a demo of our competency management system or our LMS. You can be confident that we will listen to your organization’s specific needs and help you find the best solutions to the talent management challenges you’re facing.

