

**Leadership Succession Planning**

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### **Abstract**

Succession planning in law enforcement organizations is more important now than ever before. Providing a clear mission statement and keeping our core values in mind, it is imperative to continually search for and groom the future leaders of an organization. It is our responsibility to establish continuity and stability amongst the leadership and organization, but more importantly to align our mission and vision with the expectations of the communities we serve. The importance of ensuring the appropriate leadership is in place to carry us forward into the next generation is a continuous process. This process begins with hiring people with the core values of our organization into entry level positions, with the foresight of developing the new generation of leaders. Within this research paper we will address current succession plans with our agencies, as well as what a successful local business is doing to address succession planning for the future. We will identify some of the pitfalls an agency can encounter by not having a succession plan and look at ways we can improve or implement succession as our legacy for future leaders.

## **Leadership Succession Planning**

Succession planning is the process of reviewing the agency for leadership talent, identifying possible successors, and then providing those individuals with the training, mentoring, and support they need to prepare themselves for critical roles within the organization when vacancies occur. Succession planning is often associated primarily with the chief executive's position, but it is also essential to identify and prepare leadership at all levels of the organization (Bratton, 2008). Having a succession plan at every leadership level ensures that no matter what the personnel change, there will be experienced and trained personnel ready to step into leadership positions without the disruption that would take place without a succession plan in place (Bratton, 2008). This reduces conflicts in an organization, aligning mission, vision and values, but also builds confidence with the communities we serve.

As law enforcement agencies continue to deal with Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA), we continue to learn how to manage our internal and external environments. It falls on leaders to understand it, prepare for it, mitigate it, and minimize the disruptive and destabilizing effects of it (Dugan, K. 2017). Having a succession plan in place can help an organization minimize the VUCA that is caused by changes in leadership. For this reason, leadership development for staff is critical for an agency of any size. (Bratton, S. 2008). As current law enforcement leadership ages towards retirement, it is vital that the next generation of leaders are adequately prepared to lead agencies forward. Lt. Col. Wellington Scott explains succession planning as the proactive approach to filling key vacancies, as well as a systematic and deliberate process to ensure continuity of leadership and positions. As part of succession planning, future leaders are created through a combination of competence, formal training, life experience, maturity, and growth in position (2017).

Current leadership needs to be able to recognize the traits, qualities and skills for the future. We often hear the expression that someone is a born leader or a natural leader (Bons, 1988, p. 4). We know now that people are not born as leaders, they are molded, groomed and tailored. Recruiting people that have the character qualities and virtues that align with the mission and vision of the organization are optimal. Lt. Colonel Wellington Scott gave several traits, qualities, and characteristics of future leaders: trustworthy, active listener, accountable, big picture thinking, optimism, humility, community engagement and personal integrity (2017). We know that with today's Generations X, Y and Z, there are specific qualities that they want from leaders: understanding, caring, respect, genuineness, and specificity (Anderson et al., p.40, 2017). As leaders we must strengthen these values, virtues, and qualities in ourselves, and more importantly, our future leaders through mentoring, coaching, and cross-training which helps avoid single points of failure when someone in leadership leaves (Scott, 2017).

### **Approaches to Succession**

Approaches to succession planning can vary from agency to agency with some taking a formalized approach and others taking a more informal approach to implementation. Whether it is formal or informal, the planning and implementation has to start with the buy-in, support, and leadership from the top of the organization to be successful. The formal approach to succession planning is a more rigid approach with a defined roadmap as to how succession planning will take place, along with well-defined stakeholders who will be leading the process and implementation. While law enforcement agencies tout the value and need for succession planning, few actually have or employ any formal plan. Succession planning is often fluid and more conceptual than tangible. A succession plan that is carried out is a tangible action. Once the plan is put into action, it is no longer succession planning, it is succession doing and that is when the value of such a plan can be realized by the organization (Borello, 2018).

Regardless of whether an agency takes an informal or formal route to succession, they must understand the four steps to the process: leadership selection, staff development, cross training, and mentoring. Selecting the right people to lead is no easy task and certainly should not be done haphazardly, leadership selection is critical. Finding people with the right combination of skill, personal ability, cultural diversity, and professionalism is key. The right people as leaders do not need to all look alike; however, selecting and developing leaders who have similar values and morals qualities that are in alignment with department values is critical (Scott, 2017). The importance of cross-training staff in the succession process is important for diversification of departmental knowledge. This helps remove the risk of single points of failure when limited staff have organization knowledge in specialized areas. Single points of failure can create an operational gap when people with the knowledge leave the organization. Mentoring is an excellent method of developing human resources. It's about guiding others and assisting them as they grow. Mentoring helps staff development with the day-to-day interactions that fortify skills, expand knowledge, and help further organizational values (Scott, 2017).

A major part of succession planning is leadership development. Kolzow (2014) stated that leadership development programs that are successful start with aligning the “leadership development to organizational strategy and an understanding of the type of leadership style/ styles needed to execute the strategy” (p. 285). As mentioned earlier, Generation X, Y and Z all want a leader with specific qualities, therefore it is important to identify the type of leadership styles that best fit succession planning. Once we recruit and hire the right people, we need the right leaders to make an impactful impression on them. Follow through from leadership in formal mentoring of the best and developing the rest would help the agency keep the bench deep,

but also have the reserves in development, waiting for their seat to open. Leadership is very impactful on molding these leaders, good or bad.

Authentic leadership plays a significant role on our newest staff. Authentic leaders have a purity about them because of their deep core values and beliefs. Success is not measured in what they do, but what those around them can achieve. The insight and process of deep core values is the backbone for this leader which builds trust and gives them the opportunity to take people under their wings. Dr. Normore (2017) explained the viewpoints of authentic leadership: intrapersonal, developmental, and interpersonal. This self-awareness is built from real life experience, reflection, and feedback. Authentic leaders are great as mentors for new officers because of the integrity they hold, the trust that they build and the inner drive that they have to initiate, influence and impact our future leaders. Authentic leaders will likely have referent power as the role model for those that follow. Recognizing your informal leaders with the character of authenticity would be highly impactful in an FTO program developing new officers.

Credible leaders impact our line staff every day in daily tasks. As employees gain experience and skill, they also seek advancement and more knowledge. It is essential that they learn from someone who is competent, honest, and can create a vision of the future. According to Kouzes, “If people don’t believe in the messenger, they won’t believe the message”, (YouTube, 2012, 0:47). Not too far off from the authentic leader, credible leaders gain their power from the trust they build with their followers. They are knowledgeable, competent, accountable and collaborative. Followers look to them as problem solvers which is why first line supervisors should have the values of a high credibility leader. Credible leaders, like servant leaders are here to serve, do the work, listen and build relationships (Long, 2017).

Succession Planning and Legacy Leadership are intertwined in the modern, proactive law enforcement agency (Blankenship, 2017). Current leaders must have the desire to not only leave their own legacy when they leave the organization, but also prepare the next generation to blaze new trails and take the organization even further. Our roles have changed drastically with the advent of technology, social media, generational shifts, and public expectations (Long, 2017). While the core duties of “To serve and protect” are still the base on which we stand, we must be open to changes that are necessary for our profession; failure to do so can be catastrophic. Although open to debate, it is Albert Einstein who is credited for saying; “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results” (Coohill, 2017). Gone are the days of “Because I said so” and “That’s the way we’ve always done it” as explanations of our actions. As stated in the article titled The Organizational Change Battle Plan; “For law enforcement, internal forces include a resistance to change as well as an ambiguity of plan and/or failure to understand why change is needed” (Ellis & Javidi, 2018). Succession Planning and Legacy Leadership are two tools that we can use to overcome that resistance.

As the current and future leaders of our respective agencies and Law Enforcement as a profession, we must embrace the tenants of Succession Planning and Legacy Leadership as both cornerstones and building blocks. Cornerstones because they are the base, the anchor of what we do as Law Enforcement professionals. But they are also building blocks, the way in which we will and must move onward and upward if we hope to meet society’s expectations of the modern Law Enforcement professional for the future. As we learned from one of the online lectures in Command College, it’s everyone’s responsibility to leave a legacy (Blankenship, 2017).

### **Current Succession Planning**

Now that there is an understanding of what Succession Planning is and why it is important, let's examine how the Rochester Police Department, Olmsted County Sherriff's Office, and the Washington County Sherriff's Office are implementing succession planning. Additionally, we'll look at succession planning from Powers Ventures, a local non-governmental business, to provide perspective between private and public sector related to succession planning.

#### **Rochester Police Department**

The Rochester Police Department is a municipal law enforcement agency located in Southeast Minnesota with 208 total staff, 150 of which are sworn personnel. Department leadership is comprised of 1 Chief of Police, 4 Captains, 9 Lieutenants, 26 Sergeants, 1 Administrative Services Manager, and 1 Professional Standards Manager. Rochester is the third largest city in the state. In conversations with Command Staff at the Rochester Police Department, it was determined that succession planning is not a formalized process but more of an informal process. Even as an informal process, the goals for succession planning are laid out in the goals and vision for the department as noted in the police departments document entitled, "A Blueprint for Re-envisioning Rochester Police Department." This document is certainly a strong informal succession plan for the police department's future. RPD's Vision statement is as follows: "We, the Rochester Police Department, are dedicated to becoming the premier law enforcement agency in Minnesota, one that is reflective of and responsive to the community that we serve." (Rochester Police Department, 2020, p.6). From this, a vision is outlined of how the mission will be accomplished. There is focus on department core values of Integrity, Respect, Service, Compassion, and Innovation. Additional focus on the 6 Pillars of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, with Pillar 5 having an emphasis on leadership succession planning with the department. The 5<sup>th</sup> Pillar focuses on Training and Education, Recruitment and Hiring. According to the Blueprint



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for Re-envisioning RPD, “To make this vision a reality, our agency must reward the hard-work, innovation, and resourcefulness exhibited by our employees and must offer state-of-the-art, training, professional development and career opportunities for advancement and retention. This will ensure that employees see RPD as a destination organization and strive to become the next generation of leaders.” (Rochester Police Department, 2020, p.7). In line with that statement, the Rochester Police Department leadership has placed strong importance on the development of future leaders through continued education and development.

Sergeants, Lieutenants, and Captains are highly encouraged to attend leadership training such as National Command and Staff College, National FBI Leadership Academy, PERF, MN Chief of Police Executive Training Institute and more. The Chief of Police embraces the theory on diversity of knowledge by encouraging movement and diversity of positions. The department has instituted term limits on specialty positions to facilitate movement and allow for staff to learn a variety of positions throughout the department. Staff at the rank of Lieutenant and above are moved in assignments solely at the discretion of the Chief of Police. This has been identified to increase departmental wide knowledge through a variety of positions. Rochester Police Department’s hiring and promotional processes, like other municipalities, are governed by Civil Service Rules and the Civil Service Commission. This can make succession planning a little more complicated when it comes to selection of future leaders as it relies heavily on a testing process and ranking system. Once the testing process is complete and approved by the Civil Service Commission, the Chief recommends the top three candidates for selection to the mayor. The focus is on leadership training, professional development, assignment diversity, opportunities to collaborate with leadership outside of our organization, accountability, and diverse recruitment of future leaders that are representative of the communities that we serve.

### **Olmsted County Sheriff's Office**

The Olmsted County Sheriff's Office, with the county seat in Rochester MN, is located in Southeast Minnesota with 186 total staff, including 78 sworn law enforcement personnel, 89 sworn non-licensed detention staff, and 19 support staff. Senior Command consists of the Sheriff, two Chief Deputies and 8 Captains, with other supervisory staff consisting of 1 Lieutenant and 16 Sergeants. The Sheriff has ideas about what future succession planning looks like, but nothing that has been formalized at this point. His current theory of succession planning is based on "Who is the best fit in the long run?" The Sheriff's Office has a Civil Service Commission that oversees all hiring and promotional processes, which does limit certain aspects of what succession planning may look like compared to an "open" process in other organizations. Promotions must come from within the office. The Sheriff can select from the top three of the certified lists.

Our Sheriff promotes training in Homeland Security, Emergency Management, Minnesota Sheriff's Association, Institute for Credible Leadership, Command College, and county leadership courses along with volunteerism, for anyone looking for promotion. In addition, our Vision Statement states that "We are an organization where all employees, regardless of rank or title, have the opportunity to contribute and grow." To go along with that, one of our Related Values is to "Attract, develop, motivate, and empower people who demonstrate professional competence, conduct, and courage." (Olmsted County Sheriff's Office website, 2021). Of special significance to this subject matter, 5 of the 8 Captains in our office have been in their positions for one year or less. In addition, the Chief Deputy of Law Enforcement will be retiring in under a year, further establishing the need for a succession plan to facilitate the smooth transition as (presumably) a current Captain is selected to fill that role.

This will create another domino effect as further promotions will be needed to fill the vacancies as staff are promoted up the command chain.

### **Washington County Sheriff's Office**

Washington County is located east of the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul) Minnesota, nestled along the border of Wisconsin. The Sheriff's office has 267 full time employees, and 30 temporary or seasonal employees. Besides the Sheriff and Chief Deputy, there are 5 Commanders that are appointed in command leadership positions. There are 30 sergeants, 4 special services supervisors and 7 corporals in the Sheriff's office. Washington County's plan for succession is informal due to the 4-year term limit of the Sheriff's elected position. The top level of leadership is also hand-picked or appointed by the sheriff and can be switched out from within or outside the organization at the next election. Importance of succession is to strengthen the bench of first line supervisors which are our sergeants. The goal is to place each sergeant in a position to make the next step to commander (Personal communication, 2021). This ensures the continuity of the mission, vision, and guiding principles for the agency. The Sheriff's office has 5 guiding principles, Recruitment and development is one of them. "Utilize career development to ensure well trained and knowledgeable employees. Recognize and reward significant contributions and high-quality achievements. Actively recruit high quality individuals" (Washington County Sheriff's Office Website, 2021). Commanders oversee the process and training of the sergeants in their teams. Sergeants mentor corporals and deputies with cross training in job tasks and continue to develop the staff they supervise. Key performers are encouraged to be involved as instructors, committee members, projects, and appointed positions. Those who that seek opportunities and responsibilities are the ones we recognize as tomorrow's leaders.

### **Powers Venture**

Powers Venture is a multi-million dollar privately owned company in Rochester, Minnesota. The business is focused on the food and service industry. Powers Venture employs 150 full-time and 200 part-time employees. Powers Venture is the umbrella corporation encompassing 6 branded business. Each business has managing directors who are overseen by Powers Ventures Board of Directors, CEO, and President. We met with the CEO of the organization to gain insight on succession planning in the private sector and Powers Ventures. Of special note, this CEO is a past member of the Rochester Fire Department Civil Service Commission and is currently a member of the Sheriff's Office Civil Service Commission. This gives him a unique perspective into understanding succession planning from both the public and private sector due to his involvement in both.

Succession planning within Powers Venture is an informal process focusing on leadership development with a high value placed on mentoring and coaching to identify emerging leaders within the organization. Leadership places less emphasis on formal school and more emphasis on learning all aspects of the business through diversity in positions to grow leaders from within. The CEO noted that one of the advantages the private sector has over public sector is that the private sector can cross-train staff at any time for any needed position, whereas the public sector has restrictions such as formal job titles and duties that prevent that flexibility (Personal Communication, 2021). Powers Venture prides itself on a corporate culture of employees being seen as family and placing employees before customers with the idea that if you put the employees first, they will in turn take care of the customers. The CEO emphasized that it is engrained in their culture that no employee from CEO to busboy is too good to jump in and help at any position when needed (Personal Communication, 2021).

Powers Venture has just undergone major steps in their leadership succession planning with the transition of leadership in the President and CEO positions. The company enlisted the help of St. Thomas University Succession Planning seminars to help them better understand the succession planning process. Their entire leadership team attends these seminars, and this continues to attend on a regular basis for the past three years to help guide them in the succession process. When asked what he sees as the biggest current failure in the public sector, he stated that succession planning has to come from the top, and that those at the top need to have an interest in the future which also includes being able to recognize when the next generation is ready to take over, and realizing that at some point, you must let go and let others lead. (Personal Communication, 2021).

### **Negative Impacts, Pitfalls, Ways to Improve**

In researching this topic, we came across several pitfalls that were identified by organizations when succession planning is not a priority. Pitfalls identified include loss of experience and knowledge, a diminished capacity to maintain desired internal culture, decreased ability to mentor, educate and influence personnel, a deficit in talent and expertise and a reduction in networking capabilities (Borrello, 2018). Additional pitfalls that can occur are gaps in organizational communication, increased resistance to change and failure to adequately prepare the future leaders of our organizations. Inability to adapt generational changes and culture. Failure to take a proactive approach to succession planning leads to a failure in to reinforcing the mission, vision, and values of the agency in the future leaders of the department.

Agencies should be continually looking for ways to improve their succession planning process. This can be accomplished by finding new and innovative ways to develop staff as noted in River City Police Department Succession Development Plan. In the plan Borrello (2018)

states “Police officers have a number of collateral duties and special assignments to choose from. Such diversity in assignments and duties allow officers to expand their experience, develop a broader and more in-depth view of the organization, and be better prepared to assume a supervisor or leadership role”, (p.5). Succession planning is important at every level of an agency. By developing formal and informal leaders at every level, an agency prepares itself for inevitable changes in personnel along the way. An example given at the officer level, in addition to the standard leadership training that we typically see, is an opportunity for an officer to be Sergeant-For-A-Day. The officer would be shadowed by a sergeant and allowed to be the acting sergeant for the day. This would include conducting roll-call training, approve reports, and answer officer questions. Development in promoted positions would benefit from assignment diversity and collateral assignments. This provides a broader view of an organization, which makes the person more prepared for a management role. Agencies need to continually look for ways to improve their own processes to include succession planning. This is not unique to an organization’s continual improvement; our processes can be accomplished through the sharing of ideas and methods.

### **Conclusion**

Many staff within our ranks are potential leaders waiting to be formed, and it is never too early to start developing prospective leaders. Succession planning starts at the top with the leadership, and whether formal or informal, a plan is necessary to minimize VUCA affecting organizational stability, leadership continuity, and community relationships. By not taking a proactive approach with succession planning, agencies are susceptible to the unnecessary pitfalls that are detrimental to agencies and can also cause a negative impact on the communities we serve. This is especially crucial now with our communities as we continue to strive to rebuild

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trust and relationships that were damaged over the past year and a half. Effective succession planning will reduce uncertainty and resistance to change, which will help prepare for unexpected events, and ensure that no matter what personnel changes occur, there will be experienced and trained staff ready to step into leadership positions to continue working towards our vision.

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