

## 'Unsexy' succession planning falls by the wayside

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Organisations will rely more on HR to reduce barriers to growth in an uncertain market, and this means succession planning must come to the fore, a leadership expert says.

"The problem is that succession planning isn't sexy. Building a culture that people love is sexy, executing a strategy that grows revenues at a fast rate is sexy. But your job isn't meant to be sexy," **Brad Giles** says in his new book, [Made to Thrive](#).

"You could produce the best accountability framework, be an amazing ambassador, win the best places to work awards through your culture efforts and have a strategy growing revenues. But it is all worthless if you can't deliver consistently. Consistent delivery occurs through succession planning, by having a 'plan B'."

Meanwhile leaders have a 'dream' about how recruitment works, that doesn't quite align with reality, Giles says.

They imagine that once a role is vacant, a single, over-experienced and over-qualified person applies, asks for well below the allocated salary because it isn't disclosed, and is able to start the next day.

"This dream is so deeply rooted in the subconscious of so many leaders, they don't do the hiring process justice. Consequently, they end up with mediocre staff. They spend less time hiring and as a result end up spending a lot more time performance managing and firing. Or at the very least managing mediocrity in their teams."

### Virtual benches in practice

The first step to effective succession planning involves dispelling this notion, and positioning HR as custodian of the core values and productivity of employees, Giles says.

"If you make a new hire who isn't a strong cultural fit or doesn't achieve the required numbers, that person will damage the culture and your decision will be to blame."

He then recommends formulating a virtual bench "to uncover the A players within the market for a role, well before you would need those people".

The goal should be to have a virtual bench for each significant role, with at least two people who are contacted quarterly.

"But the first step to achieving that goal is to identify what are the significant roles you need for a virtual bench. If you had people who were in the top 10% of available candidates at the pay rate you provide, in which three roles would these A players have the most impact?"

"Once you have determined the two bench members for each role, consider what is your next step for each role. It could be a coffee meeting or a phone call or a reference check. But maintain a next step for each role at all times.

"Then begin to connect with and meet potential candidates. This doesn't need to be a job offer, and it doesn't need to be a commitment to a job offer."

Meeting with people is essential: regardless of how good they appear on paper a meeting will help in determining whether it's worth keeping them on the virtual bench.

Then, if a vacancy does become available, they can be encouraged to apply for the role. "With this approach there is no commitment that they have the job, and it is clear that they will be competing against other candidates, but they should be sufficiently interested from your previous meetings to put in a good effort."

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