

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

How managers and directors can prepare their staff for succession.

By Stephen Martini

*When I'm gone, When I'm gone
You're gonna miss me when I'm gone
You're gonna miss me by my hair
You're gonna miss me everywhere, oh
You're gonna miss me when I'm gone.*
— Cups — Pitch Perfect's "When I'm Gone"¹

This isn't just a catchy tune to which you can use a cup to tap out a fun rhythm; it's also a reality for every one of us. The job we have today will be filled by someone else in the future.

According to Simon Sinek, a thought leader on business leadership, we are either playing a finite game with winners and losers, or we are playing an infinite game, where the purpose of participating is simply to keep the game going. In his keynote "The Infinite Game" at John Maxwell's Live2Lead Event in Atlanta in October 2016, Sinek described an infinite game as having "known or unknown players where the rules are changeable, and the objective is to keep the game in play — to perpetuate the game."

Imagine a circle of people kicking a ball with the objective of keeping the ball from hitting the ground. Players can come and go as they please, being replaced by others, and can use any means necessary (hand, foot, head, etc.) to prevent the ball from landing on the ground. After several hours or several days, the entire group of people playing the game may change while the ball and the objective continue.

In much the same way, public safety communications is an infinite game — answering

the cry for help. In the early 1600s, Dutch colonists on what is now Manhattan Island carried wooden noisemakers that rattled loudly to summon other volunteer law enforcement to assist in times of emergency.² Through the years, the rattles evolved to bells, fireboxes, radios and telephones to the systems we use today. Someone started kicking the "ball," and, through the years, the players have changed, but the infinite game of providing help to those who request it remains. And it will outlast all of us.

So how are you preparing the next person to replace you?

The concept of succession planning can be daunting. We want to grow leaders within our organizations to one day take our place. But





The concept of succession planning can be daunting. We want to grow leaders within our organizations to one day take our place. But what if we do such a great job, or they learn so quickly, they are ready to lead (and others are ready to follow them) before you're ready to step out of your role?

what if we do such a great job, or they learn so quickly, they are ready to lead (and others are ready to follow them) before you're ready to step out of your role? Fearing obsolescence, we tend to pull our punches and keep from equipping those around us to fill our shoes until we're ready to step away. We can't hold people down because we're afraid they might pass us up.

The first step to succession planning is recognizing a rising tide truly does lift all boats. Imagine a captain sailing his vessel headlong into a storm. If only the captain knows what to do next, while his eyes are on the stormy horizon all the eyes of his crew will be on him awaiting their next order. If the captain prepares the crew to also keep their

eyes on the horizon and know the actions needed to prepare the ship for the storm, then the crew can leap into action without delay — saving precious time, energy and even lives.

In the same way, we need to prepare our future leaders to watch the horizon and spot the storms. Standing shoulder to shoulder with those who currently answer to you and collectively assessing the risks and opportunities will help your leadership team understand how to navigate pitfalls and steer into successes when you're not around.

Start with the short-term in mind — identifying depth around key positions where a single point of failure exists.

You need to prepare your current and future leadership team to make decisions

in your immediate absence — in the evenings, on the weekends, on holidays and when you're away.

Frontline team members are often guided by policies and procedures designed to give direction for 80% of situations they may encounter. For situations that fall into the

remaining 20%, supervisors or managers are present to help navigate the decision-making until the frontline employee builds enough experience and confidence to take action.

The same guidance doesn't exist higher up the chain of command. Many times, there are key positions within an organization where policy or procedure guides 20% of the situations, while the remaining majority are decided through collaboration, experience, research, trial, error and recalibration. Additionally, these roles are likely single points of failure — one person with a lot of institutional knowledge and limited or no backup. The only way to prepare promising frontline team members to thrive in those roles is by offering the opportunity to assume those roles on a consistent basis.

So how do we do that?

Provide voluntary training opportunities for the frontline team members to understand how decisions are made at the senior levels of the organization.

Our agency uses a six-hour training program (offered on a single day or over the course of six weeks) adapted from Adam Timm's book, "People Driven Leadership," to share an understanding of how we:

- Solve adaptive challenges (those without a clear answer or solution).
- Enhance a priority on the perspective and experience of people within the organization.
- Apply our mission, vision and values statements to our everyday actions.
- Understand the critical nature of trust to support the infinite game.
- Provide feedback that motivates through coaching rather than discipline.
- Understand the role of the change agent.

Many times, there are key positions within an organization where policy or procedure guides 20% of the situations, while the remaining majority are decided through collaboration, experience, research, trial, error and recalibration.

Training program attendance is mandatory for supervisors and voluntary for those serving as communications training officers or telecommunicators.

Secondly, we offer opportunities to participate in various aspects of the department through committee work: operations best practices, technology, policy and procedures, employee engagement, facility beautification, community outreach and public education, and training. In the near term, the agency benefits from feedback and opinions from all users. In the long term, frontline team members are exposed to the thought processes employed by existing leadership when tackling adaptive challenges.

Thirdly, for those who move into supervisory or management positions, the agency invests in leadership programs beyond basic supervisory coursework, such as APCO's Registered Public-Safety Leader Program, whether financed through agency funding or scholarship opportunities at the association or chapter level. Helping your agency leaders

realize that many of the challenges they face locally are experienced and shared regionally and nationally shifts their focus from within the emergency communication center (ECC) to the broader horizon of public safety communications. Your middle management team then builds their network of professionals they can lean on to research and navigate future issues.

Fourthly, as leaders we must delegate authority to make decisions as far forward in the organization as possible. Doing so empowers leaders to lead and fosters innovation, which is critical to progress. The downside? Delegating authority and empowering innovation inevitably means someone is going to make a mistake during the learning process, so this approach requires leaders to have a tolerance for risk.

In Craig Groeschel's blog, "8 Habits of Great Decision Makers," the pastor, speaker and author on leadership said, "If you don't delegate decisions, you won't develop leaders. If you're the only one who can make most of the decisions, then here's a promise to you — your need to control will become your greatest limiting factor. Within our church, we have a big tolerance for errors because we have a big appetite for growth."

Groeschel went on to say, "Your importance isn't a reflection of what happens in your presence, but what happens in your absence."

In short, our organizations are best prepared to succeed when they function as well without us as they do with us. Want to help your people prosper? Take a vacation. Commit some of your time to volunteering with APCO. Build in opportunities for your team to operate without your immediate feedback so they have the confidence to achieve the mission in all situations.

Finally, it's essential to build opportunities to expose leaders to all aspects of leading each division of the organization. Consider rotational assignments among your leadership team — six months to two years — with the intent to develop talent and increase familiarity with project work.

If the role is specialized (rotating your technology or finance manager, for example), a rotational assignment may not work. However, training, quality assurance, hiring and recruiting, records, compliance standards, and operations each have a focus on supporting the broader agency mission.

Managers are accustomed to doing a variety of tasks and often adapt well. Assignment

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPERATIVES AS YOU GROW FUTURE LEADERS

- Prioritize diversity and inclusion, ensuring every individual has equal opportunities for development and advancement.
- Regularly review the progress of potential successors and adjust development plans as needed based on your changing business needs and individual performance.
- Keep employees informed about succession planning efforts and involve them in the process by soliciting feedback, providing opportunities for input and communicating the importance of leadership development to the organization's success.

stagnation is the enemy of retention, so offering the opportunity for our leaders to rotate through other roles and learn how to tackle various projects that support the broader mission from multiple angles broadens the individual and prepares the agency for future successes.

Succession is a vital function for any organization that hopes to endure, and public safety communications organizations are no exception. Agency leaders may be missed

when they're gone, but prioritizing the capability and competence among public safety telecommunicators, supervisors and managers means the emergency-response ball is never dropped. ●

Stephen Martini, RPL, CPE, is APCO First Vice President and Director, Metro Nashville (Tennessee) Department of Emergency Communications. He can be reached at Stephen.Martini@nashville.gov.

REFERENCES

- 1 "When I'm Gone" lyrics. ©BMG Rights Management. Peermusic Publishing.
- 2 U.S. Dept. of Justice 145539, National Institute of Justice. "The History of the New York City Police Department." Raymond W. Kelly, Police Commissioner. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnib-pcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ Digitization/145539NCJRS.pdf

CDE EXAM #67612

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. According to Simon Sinek, the objective of _____ game is "to keep the game in play — to perpetuate the game." <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. An infinite b. A finite c. A winning d. A losing 2. The role you are currently filling at your agency will ultimately be filled by someone else. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 3. What is one reason mentioned in the text why we hesitate to grow leaders in our organization? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Leaders don't care about growing more leaders. b. Leaders just don't have the time to invest in helping others. c. Future leaders may be ready to lead before the existing leader is ready to leave. d. Middle management doesn't want to promote. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Like a sea captain, those who succeed you should learn to recognize the storms on the horizon. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 5. Where should you start focusing when building a succession plan? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Long-term vision — replacing the director in 10 years. b. Short-term vision — identifying current single points of failure around key positions. c. Tunnel vision — focus on your own position and planning your replacement. d. No vision — seek out the most energetic team member and start preparing them to promote. 6. Frontline team members should be provided _____ training opportunities to understand how leadership make decisions. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Voluntary b. Mandatory c. Innovative d. Routine | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Committee work is a productive way to expose team members to the thought processes employed by existing leadership when tackling adaptive challenges. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 8. Those promoted into supervisor positions should not be encouraged to complete leadership programs beyond basic supervisory coursework, such as APCO's Registered Public Safety Leader program. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 9. Delegation is a key to empowering future leaders to innovate but requires existing leaders to have a tolerance for _____ . <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Delay b. Other people's opinions c. Dairy d. Risk 10. Rotational assignments are an option to develop talent and increase familiarity with project work. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False |
|--|---|--|

FOR CREDIT TOWARD APCO RECERTIFICATION(S)

Each CDE article is equal to one credit hour of continuing education

1. Study the CDE article in this issue.
2. Answer the test questions online (see below for online exam instructions) or on the exam page from the magazine article (photocopies are not required).
3. Add/upload your CDE article information and certificate of achievement in the "My Classes Taken" section of APCO's Training Central at www.apointl.org/trainingcentral.

Questions? Call us at (386) 322-2500.

You can access the CDE exam online! To receive a complimentary certificate of completion, you may take the CDE exam online. Go to <http://apco.remote-learner.net/login/index.php> to create your username and password. Enter CDE in the search box, and click on "Succession," then click on "enroll me" and choose "**Succession (67612)**" to begin the exam. Upon successful completion of the quiz, a certificate of achievement will be available for download/printing.