

New and Noteworthy

Planning for the Future: Sources to Explore About Succession Planning

Elizabeth Blakesley

A few months ago, when Steve Jobs announced he was taking another medical leave, there were headlines regarding the steps toward succession planning that had been taken by Apple. The shareholders ultimately rejected a proposal for the succession plans to be published and formally assessed, but it was clear that the Board of Directors were having discussions about the future of the company's management. Another oft-cited example from the corporate world stems from the sudden death of McDonald's CEO Jim Catalupo in 2004; the new CEO was named within hours.¹

The concept of succession planning emerged in the business literature in the late 1960s. Paul S. Ostrowski's 1968 article entitled "Prerequisites for Effective Succession Planning" introduced a number of concepts commonly considered today.² In 1973, Walter R. Mahler and William F. Wrightnour published *Executive Continuity: How to Build and Retain an Effective Management Team*, which looks closely at the practices for cultivating leaders within an organizational structure that Mahler and Ted LeVino had created at General Electric.³

There has been much written about the "graying" of our profession, but as Emily Osburn Bermes points out, in an article about succession planning in small businesses, "it's not news that baby boomers are reaching retirement age."⁴ Recent articles in the business literature address succession planning needs in the trucking industry, health care management, and in family-owned businesses, just to name a few.⁵ William J. Rothwell produced a research article on succession and replacement planning with a case study involving a small public utility.⁶ Keith Meyer discusses reasons why some organizations see more benefits from succession planning. A major pitfall he identifies is the "misguided attempt to impose a standardized 'cookie cutter' approach" to the process, further noting that "when it comes to succession planning, we have found that 'one size fits one'."⁷

Recent economic trends have impacted library operations and strategic planning in profound ways. At the Washington State University Libraries, we once had discussions among the library faculty about how we would be able to hire three new entry-level positions with the money from every two retirements. With that outlook in mind, we even voted to recommend that salary compression be addressed with funds from lines that were vacant at that time. The current situation is that the dozen vacancies that have accumulated over the past few years have all been used to cover the budget cuts, not to replace existing positions, create new positions, or provide infrastructure for new initiatives.

Succession planning may increasingly be viewed as just a part of strategic planning processes, as we decide what must be done and what can be given up, and how to reallocate, retrain, and realign the people who remain in our organizations.

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has tackled succession planning through its Research Libraries Leadership Fellows program (RLLF). The *Journal of Library Administration* devoted an issue to this program in late 2009. In addition to the two pieces discussed below, the issue also includes articles from some of the program participants, outlining their experiences and the projects they completed.

Camila Alire also presented on this program at ACRL 2011 in Philadelphia.⁸ Alire described the RLLF program and issued a call to action for the American Library Association to address the issue.

Duane E. Webster and DeEtta Jones Young outline the RLLF plan in great detail in their contribution to the journal.⁹ The program brings together groups of assistant and associate deans/directors/university librarians from ARL institutions and provides a two-year program including site visits, weeklong institutes and participation at ARL membership meetings to enhance their leadership skills, build networks, and learn about the top level of leadership and management in ARL member libraries from the inside. This issue also includes an article about a similar program launched a couple of years before the RLLF by the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries in conjunction with the National Library of Medicine.¹⁰ In this article, Carolyn E. Lipscomb, Elaine R. Martin and Wayne J. Peay address the planning and implementation of the Leadership Fellows Program, which was launched in response to the realization that half of the directors of health sciences librarians would likely retire around the same time frame.

Although the topic has been on the radar in our profession since the late 1990s, interestingly, it has been addressed mostly by Australian, British and Canadian librarians. In one of the first articles published on succession planning in academic libraries, Angela Bridgland outlined benefits and challenges, noting that people and positions must be reviewed to ensure that the strategic plan or core values are being served.¹¹ Most studies of succession planning in the U.S. have focused on public libraries. Vicki Whitmell has also written and consulted widely with libraries on this topic. Her 2002 article addresses generational issues, and given the timing focuses on Boomers and Generation X. With that caveat, the article still serves as a useful primer to the basic issues.¹² Another Canadian librarian, William M. Curran, addressed the topic in 2003, noting that shifting demographics are causing extremes in a number of areas.¹³ He specifically mentions public schools in Quebec, where a stable group of teachers had worked for decades and then began to retire in the same time frame. Curran notes that this situation will likely occur in libraries and lead to “fierce competition” among institutions that have long worked collaboratively in most arenas.¹⁴ Anne Murray contributed an interesting case study of the succession planning experiences at the Cambridge University Libraries in 2007.¹⁵ Murray outlines a process which was very closely modeled on corporate planning, and she addresses the value of the Frye Leadership Institute and a Future Leaders program in the U.K.

Consultants Paula M. Singer and Gail Griffin recently published a book entitled *Succession Planning in the Library: Developing Leaders, Managing Change*.¹⁶ This handbook expands on themes introduced briefly in an earlier article Singer published with two other colleagues in *Library Journal*.¹⁷ Singer and Griffin provide helpful checklists, extensive data and useful worksheets as they walk through the various aspects of analyzing an organization and creating a succession plan. Although most of their clients are public libraries, the general principles and guidance should be useful and applicable to a variety of library settings. Singer and Griffin strike a good balance between providing tools and advice while emphasizing that each institution will have different needs and situations to face.

Although the economy has delayed some of the retirements that were being predicted, changes in scholarly communication, the emergence of data curation, and the changing technological landscape in our profession continue to impact the positions we need to fill in order accomplish the work that needs to be done. Succession planning may be more important than ever.

¹ Hymowitz, Carol and Joann S. Lublin. "McDonald's CEO Tragedy Holds Lessons." *Wall Street Journal* April 20, 2004: B1.

² Ostrowski, Paul S. "Prerequisites for Effective Succession Planning." *Management of Personnel Quarterly* Spring 1968: 10-16.

³ Mahler, Walter R. and William F. Wrightnour. *Executive Continuity: How to Build and Retain an Effective Management Team*. Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1973.

⁴ Bermes, Emily Osburn. "Succession Planning for the Small Business." *Business People* February 2011, 60.

⁵ Examples include: Driscoll, Suzanne. "Ten Ways Your Succession Plan Can Go Wrong." *Family Business* Spring 2011: 16-18; "How to Plan for Succession." *Commercial Carrier Journal* March 2011: 130-131; and "Study Sees Looming Crisis for Healthcare Leadership." *Medical Benefits* 28.7 (April 15, 2011): 10-11.

⁶ Rothwell, William J. "Replacement Planning: A Starting Point for Succession Planning and Talent Management." *International Journal of Training and Development* 15.1 (2011): 87-99.

⁷ Meyer, Keith. "Demystifying the CEO Succession Process." *NACD Directorship* April/May 2011: 73.

⁸ Alire, Camila. "Stepping Up The Ladder: Succession Planning in Academic Libraries in the 21st Century." Presentation at ACRL Philadelphia 2011. Slides online s3.goeshow.com/acrl/.../ACRL2011-succession%20planning-POST.pptx

⁹ Webster, Duane E. and DeEtta Jones Young. "Our Collective Wisdom: Succession Planning and the ARL Research Library Leadership Fellows Program." *Journal of Library Administration* 49.8 (2009): 781-793.

¹⁰ Lipscomb, Carolyn E., Elaine R. Martin, and Wayne J. Peay. "Building the Next Generation of Leaders: The NLM/AAHSL Leadership Fellows Program." *Journal of Library Administration* 49.8 (2009): 847-867.

¹¹ Bridgland, Angela. "To Fill, or How to Fill – That is the Question: Succession Planning and Leadership Development in Academic Libraries." *Australian Academic and Research Libraries* 30, no. 1 (March 1999): 20-29.

¹² Whitmell, Vicki. "Library Succession Planning: The Need and the Challenge." *Aplis* 15.4 (December 2002): 148-154.

¹³ Curran, William M. "Succession: The Next Ones at Bat." *College and Research Libraries* 64.2 (March 2003): 134-140.

¹⁴ Curran, p. 138.

¹⁵ Murray, Anne. "Growing Your Own: Developing Leaders through Succession Planning." *Liber Quarterly* 17.3/4 (2007): n.p.

¹⁶ Singer, Paula M. with Gail Griffith. *Succession Planning in the Library: Developing Leaders, Managing Change*. Chicago: ALA, 2010.

¹⁷ Singer, Paula, Jeanne Goodrich, and Linda Goldberg. "Your Library's Future." *Library Journal* October 15, 2004: 38-40.

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