

PLANNED SUCCESSION CASE STUDIES:

Organization and individual's names have been changed

ABC ARTS ORGANIZATION - \$1 Million Budget/ 20 Employees
Planned succession with inside candidate groomed to assume leadership

Jessica Jones, longtime Executive Director announces that she's planning to start working towards retirement in the next few years.

Jessica asks Tina Torres, a staff member with twelve years' experience with the organization, her feelings on working towards being the next Executive Director. She proposes a two-year transition plan and names Tina as Associate Director, who begins to take a more active role in the organization including attending Exec Committee meetings, Finance Committee meetings, and all other board level meetings. She had already been attending full board meetings for years. At this point, all staff begin reporting directly to both Tina and Jessica. Tina assumed the daily management of the organization while Jessica continued in a reduced role working closely on development, strategic planning and external relations.

Six months later Jessica announces to board that she would like Tina to become ED effective within 12 months. Some board members express concern about the process so a compromise was initiated with Tina being named Interim Executive Director.

At this point Tina attends a three-week intensive professional development seminar, specifically designed for Arts Management professionals which was extremely valuable and provided excellent training and preparation to enable her to fully expand her role as ED.

Within a few months the Board votes to approve Tina as Executive Director and the term "interim" is dropped. By this time, the majority of the board members are comfortable with Tina in her new role and the situation has continued to improve in the intervening period.

At the end of the twelve-month period as Co-Executive Directors, Jessica Jones officially ends her tenure with the organization after the realization after the second year of that two-year transition period was not necessary.

Tina and Jessica both believe that the reason their succession plan was successful was that Jessica and Tina had an excellent working relationship. There had been concern by some that Jessica's continued presence in an office onsite would be a problem, but that never occurred, and to Jessica's credit, she was truly able to step back and let Tina take charge.

THE CULTURE SOURCE - \$6 Million, 63 Employees
Planned Succession with consideration of both inside candidates and external candidates utilizing a search firm.

The Culture Source included succession planning in their Long Range Plan about ten years ago. The Board directed Andrea Welch, who served as Executive Director for 35 years, to identify and groom someone to step into the role when she retired. Andrea selected a candidate and began grooming him as her replacement with the understanding that the final decision would be up to the board. But as Andrea's final months approached, the Board decided to not only look at internal candidates, but to also conduct a full-fledged national search. This decision came after reviewing the needs of the agency and the skills the new person needed to bring to the position.

They hired a local search firm* that specializes in nonprofit placement. The firm looked for people with skills that matched their needs and placed ads in a variety of media online and in trade publications. There were initially over 100 applicants. The firm selected the most qualified candidates for phone interviews and narrowed the number to six candidates that were interviewed by the Board Search Committee and the Staff leadership. The list was then narrowed to the final two who were brought back for a second round of interviews with Board and Staff and a consensus decision was reached to select one of the outside candidates. There was a brief transition period to allow the new Director to phase in while Andrea began phasing out.

This is an example of prudent planning on the part of the longtime Executive Director and the Board to ensure smooth transition with new organizational leadership. They gave consideration of the internal candidate but also found an outside candidate with superb skills and experience and made the decision to select her. The transition was very smoothly and the organization is thriving.

*Search Firms can be expensive so may not be an option for small organizations with limited budgets.

THE DANCE AND MUSIC ACADEMY (DAMA)- \$1 Million, 16 Employees

Planned succession with candidate brought in by Executive Director but no clear plan for how and when succession would occur

Founder and Executive Director, Thomas Andrews, has served DAMA for more than 35 years. In 2016 he brought in James Green as Associate Executive Director and designated successor. He is from area and previous to his position at DAMA, he worked in several nonprofit organizations. He founded a small theater company so had some experience in managing a small arts organization. Thomas began to groom him to eventually take over the organization although no timetable had been set.

James worked closely with Thomas on all aspects of the organization's management and closely supervised artistic productions. However, as time went on, Thomas began to feel that James was not adhering as closely to his management protocols as he would like and began to take back some of the duties he had assigned to James. It became clear to James that the situation was not ideal, and he resigned to focus on another opportunity. Thomas has continued in his role as Executive Director and currently has no further plans to retire.

This may have worked better if the succession plan and timeline had been more clear cut, and it can be difficult for a founder to let go of their organization.

NOTES ON SUCCESSION PLANNING:

There is no 100% right way to do a planned succession, but it is essential that the board and the Executive Director include meaningful succession planning in their long range and strategic planning efforts and have a clear idea of the options. If there is no one within the organization with the skills and leadership qualities the organization needs, then it is wise to consider how to approach an outside search within the financial limits of the organization, and to plan how the current leadership would work with the board and the new incoming leader to ensure that the organization will continue to operate smoothly and no loss of revenue and status.