

# Perspectives

Community College  
Leadership for the  
21st Century

NOVEMBER 2014

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*Succession planning, when intentionally designed and conducted, provides an orderly process to develop appropriate leadership resources for the future to insure the sustainability of the college's long-term mission and goals.*

- Donald Cameron

*As the global workforce ages and the skills gap increases, increasing attention will be paid to establishing and maintaining effective succession planning programs.*

- William Rothwell

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## Succession Planning: A President's Perspective

**George Mihel, Ed.D.**

President, Sauk Valley Community College  
Dixon, Illinois

### Current Need

It has been well documented that community college presidents are getting older and a large percentage of them will be retiring over the next few years. Further, much of the community college administration and faculty are also nearing retirement. It seems like good people are getting harder to find. Where will replacements be found and who needs to find them?

As community college presidents plan their next career challenge as Wal-Mart greeters, they need to consider succession planning throughout their institutions. In this context, succession planning refers to the personal involvement of the college president in the creation, encouragement, and support for employees to seek positions of increased responsibility.

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*I believe the president has an obligation to create opportunities for the next generation to lead institutions in these ever challenging times.*

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While succession considerations should be part of overall operational planning, the personal involvement of the college president to create and encourage opportunities for employees can play a key role and be a major influence. Being involved in the coaching of employees not only enhances opportunities for employees, but also has a positive effect on morale and is good for the institution. Not everyone seeks more challenges and responsibility, but when given an appropriate opportunity and proper encouragement, most people are willing to take on roles of greater responsibility.

As a current president nearing retirement, I believe the president has an obligation to create opportunities for the next generation to lead institutions in these ever challenging times. Leadership is a quality that generally tops the list of desirable characteristics for high performing employees. In my opinion, creating opportunities for advancement while empowering others is the highest form of leadership. Having employees thrive at positions of greater responsibility is something of which I am most proud and a highlight of my career.

Our colleges create options for students to develop skills to make a better future. It makes sense also to create

career opportunities for faculty, staff, and administration to help create a better future for both the employees and the college. An important component of a president's job not part of the formal job description is to identify and encourage staff members to seek greater opportunities and challenges. Many colleges have formal succession plans and organized leadership training. Formal programs may be useful, but there is tremendous strength in the president serving as a mentor.

### Benefits and Limitations

Certain factors can limit effective succession planning, while others make it mandatory.

1. **Inbreeding** – Potential candidates who are homegrown may have limited perspectives on how colleges operate if they only have experience at one college. However, we can encourage employees who already have an established track record of excellence to visit other colleges for new ideas and be accepting of other methods of procedure.
2. **Location** – In a small, rural community college, the pool of internal talent is obviously reduced due to the small staff size. Despite this limitation, promotion from within can be a necessity because a rural or more isolated area may not easily attract outside candidates. The political or financial climate may also impose barriers to attract external candidates.

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3. **Internal Resistance** – At times there can be peer pressure on "over-achievers". For a multitude of reasons, those who rise to the top of their peer group may be shunned by others. Faculty may feel a fellow faculty member who becomes an administrator has crossed over to the "dark side". Candidates should be prepared to find out who their true friends are and also be prepared to realize their future career opportunities may be at other colleges.
4. **Increasing Complexity** - Increasing accountability and transparency to government and accrediting agencies renders the thought of advancement into

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## EMERGING LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES

The challenges of the future will demand special talent. Those organizations that are successful at developing and attracting the needed talent to meet future leadership and workforce needs will have a competitive advantage moving forward. To meet future leadership and staffing needs, purposeful succession planning can guide college leaders as they strive to attract, develop, and retain talented employees. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below.

### James F. Kelly, M.A.

Chair, Board of Trustees  
Macomb Community College, Warren, Michigan

Although succession planning is often thought of and discussed as a singular concept, to be effective, it should be a component of a larger scheme that includes strategic planning and professional development. That is, organizations need to envision what their future looks like, what skills will be needed for effective leadership, and how they can best support their people to become competent in the needed leadership skills of tomorrow.

Fostering an environment that encourages professional development will evolve within organizations that diligently and continually work to imagine their future. To be effective, with the active involvement and participation of staff, the entire institution should adopt a mindset that envisions such things as who our students will be, how will they best be supported and learn, what resources will be required, and perhaps most importantly, what skills will be required of our staff and leaders. This is not an isolated activity, but rather an ongoing process requiring the participation of the entire institutional community.

Engaging our staff in such a visioning process will, hopefully, enhance their engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Kim (2002) found that the use of such participatory management practices in public agencies "is significantly associated with employee job satisfaction." And, importantly, "that a participative strategic planning process positively affects employee satisfaction." A significant element of such ongoing activity should include intentional efforts to support staff in developing their competencies to meet their needs and those of future students as well as those of the institution.

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Such an atmosphere of envisioning the future as well as developing skills and competencies will create fertile ground in which a culture of purposeful succession planning can grow and flourish. Directed work can then be undertaken to collaborate with staff to identify potential areas of growth, participate in planning their career goals and opportunities, and establishing a clear and mutually beneficial career path. Only in such a deliberate manner, can the gaps between today's competencies and tomorrow's identified needs be closed and a cultural environment of succession planning be established.

#### References

Kim, S. (2002), Participative Management and Job Satisfaction: Lessons for Management Leadership. *Public Administration Review*, 62: 231-241. doi: 10.1111/0033-3352.00173

James F. Kelly serves as an elected Trustee at Macomb Community College, Warren, Michigan, and is the current Board Chairperson. He is employed in the nonprofit human services field and also as adjunct faculty at Baker College. He earned his Masters of Arts degree from Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, in Rehabilitation Counseling & Community Inclusion. Currently, he is a student in Ferris State University's Doctorate in Community College Leadership (DCCL) program.



#### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**What are some meaningful approaches leaders can employ to advance succession planning while infusing it into the college culture?**

### Don MacMaster, Ed.D.

Vice-President, Alpena Community College  
Alpena, Michigan

Succession planning at the presidential level is among the most important responsibilities facing a Board of Trustees and community college presidents. Several factors of internal succession can impact the process:

**Board perceptions.** When the sitting president announces a departure, the Board must implement an orderly succession process leading to the best successor, determine whether an internal candidate has the essential qualities for the job, and whether there is sufficient comfort to forego a formal search.

Deciding upon a formal search is a tough call, requiring an engaged Board Chair and supportive incumbent president to navigate this dynamic process.

**Internal stakeholder perceptions.** The Board often takes a cue from senior administrators, faculty, and staff regarding the internal candidate. An internal candidate who enjoys widespread support offers a wealth of potential. Yet, most searches result in an external candidate assuming the presidency. To quantify the process, Alpena Community College (MI) developed a Mentoring Plan with a reporting mechanism to track progress of an internal candidate toward a set of Board-approved presidential characteristics.

**External stakeholder perceptions.** Engaging external stakeholders such as the Foundation Board, community leaders, elected officials, business, industry, and past presidents is helpful for an internal succession process. Quality leadership, including the community track record of the internal candidate, is paramount. An aspiring internal candidate must be engaged in the community, yet avoid being stretched too thin. Focus is important during this transition.

**Internal candidate perceptions.** The period leading up to the departure of the incumbent constitutes a lengthy job interview during which the Board assesses whether the internal candidate has what it takes to do the job. The internal candidate should:

- ▲ Learn to supervise those who were peers or outranked you.
- ▲ Reassess previous work and determine to whom you can delegate.
- ▲ Learn to communicate effectively with the Board without undermining the leadership of the current president.
- ▲ Establish your vision and leadership style, while focusing on short- and long-term goals.
- ▲ Don't panic if the process takes an unexpected turn; rather, stay positive, champion loyalty, keep working, and seek growth opportunities.

The succession literature indicates that rarely does an internal candidate work up through the ranks to the presidency. Generally, to move up, a person must be willing to move along. However, for those internal candidates who successfully make the jump, a thoughtful succession plan, implemented early in the process, is invaluable.

Dr. Don MacMaster currently serves as the Vice-President for Workforce Development at Alpena Community College, Alpena, Michigan. He previously served Alpena as the Director of the World Center for Concrete Technology and as the Dean for Workforce Development. He is a professional grant writer with 23 years' experience at ACC. Don received his Master's Degree from Central Michigan University and is a graduate of the Ferris State University DCCL program.



# NATIONAL LEADER PERSPECTIVE

The challenges of the future will demand special talent. Those organizations that are successful at developing and attracting the needed talent to meet future leadership and workforce needs will have a competitive advantage moving forward. To meet future leadership and staffing needs, purposeful succession planning can guide college leaders as they strive to attract, develop, and retain talented employees. We posed the following question to emerging and national leaders; their answers appear below.

## Succession Planning

**Olin Joynton, Ph.D.**

President, Alpena Community College  
Alpena, Michigan

Succession planning (SP) belongs to a broader topic of business continuity planning which describes how an organization would continue operations in spite of disruptions of all kinds, including vacancies in key positions (both expected and unexpected), natural disasters, civil emergencies, major shifts in markets for its products/services, legal challenges, sudden truncations of revenue streams, labor actions, pandemics, and flanking maneuvers of competitors.

An organization considering SP would do well to weigh the costs and benefits.

	Not engaging in SP	Engaging in SP
<b>Costs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Temporary loss of critical functions.</li> <li>▲ Inconsistency of ad hoc decisions.</li> <li>▲ Likelihood of error due to hasty decisions.</li> <li>▲ Element of surprise, with attendant elements of anxiety and chaos.</li> <li>▲ Missed opportunity for buy-in that comes with a thoroughly vetted plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Resources necessary for composing, vetting, and maintaining currency of plan.</li> <li>▲ Significant resources for professional development.</li> <li>▲ Potential erosion of equal opportunity as required by law.</li> <li>▲ Crown prince syndrome (performance of heir apparent slackens).</li> <li>▲ Potential of evolution or disappearance of target positions.</li> <li>▲ Challenge of encouraging individuals to grow but not promising positions to them.</li> </ul>
<b>Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Focus of resources on other, possibly more important priorities.</li> <li>▲ Greater maneuverability.</li> <li>▲ Avoidance of cynicism and disillusionment when events deviate from plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Ability to respond quickly to emergency vacancies and maintain continuity of critical services.</li> <li>▲ Calm and order rather than anxiety and chaos.</li> <li>▲ Preparation of successors to assume designated roles.</li> <li>▲ Climate of opportunity and hope for internal advancement.</li> <li>▲ Predictability to support long-term financial and other types of planning.</li> </ul>

There are two basic kinds of SP, emergency and orderly. Emergency succession occurs when an executive or similarly critical position is suddenly vacated by unexpected death, disability, family emergency, incarceration, or immediate termination of the incumbent. These events cannot be predicted but require preparation for continuation of critical college operations. At Alpena Community College, emergency successors have been identified for the following positions:

- ▲ President
- ▲ Vice President of Instruction
- ▲ Vice President of Administration and Finance
- ▲ Management Information Systems Co-Directors
- ▲ Financial Aid Director
- ▲ Director of Facilities Management

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

**What are some meaningful approaches leaders can employ to advance succession planning while infusing it into the college culture?**

Emergency SP readies the organization for prompt appointment of an interim officer – someone familiar enough with the work to keep things going for up to six months while a permanent replacement is found. The interim appointee need not be interested in the permanent position and would not necessarily possess all of the qualifications appropriate for the permanent replacement.

Orderly SP represents a commitment by the organization to groom selected internal aspirants for higher office whose talents are highly valued and who may well depart should opportunities for fulfilling their ambitions look brighter else-

where. Aspirants typically show good faith by very high levels of job performance and pursuit of intensive professional development. The organization's responsibility is structured mentoring, support/encouragement, and avoidance of over-promising or premature promising. It's also important that all employees have a fair opportunity to express their aspirations and be groomed appropriately.

### Annotated Bibliography

**Growing Your Company's Leaders** by Robert M. Fulmer and Jay Alden Conger (AMACOM 2004).

Old way was a secret, rigid slate of successors for top executive positions only, with attention to replacement. In the 1980s, the focus was on training and education for leadership development without any real attention to succession planning.

Since 2000, succession management has undergone reinvention to incorporate both development and replacement features. Potential counts for more, not just recent performance. Newer plans tend to be fluid, transparent, and open to input/participation from all employees.

**Effective Succession Planning** by William J. Rothwell (3rd edition AMACOM 2005).

Succession planning is a process of developing/grooming talent to meet the needs of the organization now and in the future. It is different from replacement planning, which is about finding backups to fill vacancies on an organization chart.

Factors driving interest in succession planning: aftereffects of 9/11, aftereffects of corporate scandals, aging of the workforce, increasing awareness of importance of institutional memory in a knowledge-based economy.



Dr. Olin Joynton is in his eleventh year as president of Alpena Community College in Alpena, Michigan. During his administration partnerships have multiplied, technical programs have been strengthened by over \$10 million in federal workforce development grants, renovation and new construction projects have been completed, and for several years now the ACC has maintained first or second place among Michigan community colleges in graduation rates. Dr. Joynton came to ACC from Lone Star College –Montgomery in the northern Houston suburbs, where he served as vice president and chief academic officer. He holds the Ph.D. degree from Rice University and the B.A. degree from Wheaton College in Illinois.



**QUICK TAKES**  
**Highlights**  
**from the Field**

**Higher Ed Succession Planning: Who Will Follow the Leader?** by Carol Patton

The author explores the expansion of succession planning from the private sector to higher education. The high costs of employee turnover and lost productivity are discussed with a focus on how succession plans are being used to grow and promote in-house talent at all levels of the campus organization. Internal succession program benefits include the provision of an internal pathway for talented employees and opportunities for career advancement within the college, with the goal of retaining key employees. Read the complete study at: <http://bit.ly/1tO5Jrd>

**Anticipating the Community College Leadership Void**, by Jonah Rice & Steve O'Keefe

This paper from the HLC 2014 Conference discusses the development of the leadership void in community colleges driven by the retirements of the baby boom generation, resulting in diminished pools of seasoned leaders. The authors stress that community colleges facing leadership turnover in the coming years would benefit from implementing internal leadership programs. Practical, informal, and formal strategies for leadership development are explored, with a focus on what colleges can do to prepare future leaders for tomorrow. Read the complete article at: <http://bit.ly/1GCThkX>

To receive a copy of this publication, please send your email address to: [thoman13@ferris.edu](mailto:thoman13@ferris.edu)



Published by the Alliance for Community College Excellence in Practice, Ferris State University, Doctorate in Community College Leadership Big Rapids, Michigan

**Succession Planning: A President's Perspective**

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administration more ominous and stressful. While many individuals like the idea of higher-level positions, it may seem safer to avoid promotion.

Regardless of the drawbacks, presidents should consider taking on the role of mentor to encourage their employees to prepare for advanced roles.

**How to Identify Future Leaders**

By-in-large, everyone on campus recognizes the highly productive individuals from those who are not; those who go the extra distance from the ones along for the ride. It boils down to work ethic, dedication, talent, and desire. Certainly, employees in all categories are seeking recognition, challenges, and opportunities. Generally, those individuals who are candidates for greater responsibility are readily identifiable and should be recognized and encouraged to pursue personal and professional growth. Support staff do most of the work at the college, but are often overlooked as a potential pool of leadership talent and frequently believe they have limited pathways for advancement.

Usually colleges have degree requirements for most support positions that fall beyond what most support staff possess. In anticipation of future openings, support staff should be provided opportunities for leadership and encouraged to obtain more advanced credentials. Very often our own colleges can be the source for required credentials. I have had good success in waiving, or at least postponing, degree requirements in anticipation of future completion in order to promote a staff member to a higher-paying managerial position.

Faculty are the largest pool of talent at the college. Many faculty have selected their roles because they enjoy the contact with students, extended time-off, and flexibility. My major success in recruiting faculty to become administrators generally centers around their desire to make a more global difference and have greater influence on students and college operations.

Encouraging administrators to become presidents can constitute a wise strategy. For the reasons outlined earlier, there are many justifications to not become a college president. The persuasive argument is not only to make more of a difference, but encourage the administrator to take on the challenge, along with the risk, to lead an institution. To convince administrators to consider this move requires honesty about the real-life challenges and rewards of the job. It is crucial to mentor individuals with whom one can be totally honest so they can be involved in the breadth of decisions and have real input in helping solve problems.

**Four Keys to Succession Planning**

For those individuals who have demonstrated the desire and ability to take on greater challenges, I suggest four possible pathways.

1. **Formal Education** – As institutions of higher education, we sell degrees as the ticket to a better future. We need to encourage the attainment of a higher level of formal education. This can include taking classes in our own institutions and creating policies that encourage and make it financially feasible for employees to gain additional credentials elsewhere.

2. **Informal Training** – Encourage attendance at local, state, and national conferences to create exposure and provide networking opportunities while serving on external committees. Involvement with the accreditation process is always helpful for aspiring campus leaders. This can provide meaningful opportunities for many to be engaged with a vital element of college operations.

3. **Create Challenges** – Identify significant and challenging projects to create opportunities for problem-solving and people-management skills.

4. **Personal Involvement** – For me, this is the most important and most difficult. It can be challenging to create a trusting work environment that enables a free exchange of ideas and personal passions, as well as facilitating effective decision-making. A team must be comfortable sharing personal thoughts and feelings - the candid "behind the scenes" factors in decision-making. Those of us who are fortunate to become college presidents have an exciting and challenging job. These jobs can be stressful and difficult, but also rewarding. We have an obligation to encourage the next generation of leaders, not to clone ourselves, but to share history, experiences, and thoughts for the new leaders to build upon. There is a critical need to attract new leaders who are more ambitious, creative, and flexible.

*We have an obligation to encourage the next generation of leaders, not to clone ourselves, but to share history, experiences, and thoughts for the new leaders to build upon.*

Right now I have two outstanding administrators who are completing doctorate degrees at Ferris State University in the community college leadership program. Both of them will be tremendous college presidents in the very near future. I have been fortunate to be involved in helping a number of individuals advance their careers, including clerical staff who have become faculty and administration, faculty who have become effective administrators, and outstanding presidents. It is extremely rewarding to observe the highly effective people I have advised and mentored now pass on their expertise and do the same for others.

**Dr. George Mihel** serves as president of Sauk Valley Community College in Dixon, Illinois, and plans to retire from SVCC in June, 2015, after ten years in the presidency. He is a community college product, having attended Lyons Junior College prior to earning his bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois. He earned his M.S. in Instructional Technology and his Ed.D., both at Northern Illinois University. Dr. Mihel taught math and science in both high school and college, and from 1982 to 2014, served as a college administrator in Michigan, Nebraska, Kansas, and Illinois.

