



AIA Best Practices: Know your next-gen leaders, inside and out

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Summary

Leadership transition is one of the toughest challenges facing executives in today's architectural, engineering, and environmental consulting industry. The industry's next-in-line leaders are a smart, hard-working, and capable generation of professionals. Many of them are starving for the direction they need to take on new leadership responsibilities. This Best Practice offers guidance on supporting emerging leaders.

Determining strengths

Before you blow your coach's whistle, start by determining the strengths of each up-and-comer. Avoid listing general areas of expertise such as marketing, project management, or operations. Instead, focus on identifying his or her talents or natural abilities and patterns.

For example, consider the following:

- Can they turn thoughts into action?
- Do they show an ability to organize resources to maximize productivity?
- Can they put clear thoughts into words and writing?
- Do they take control of situations and make good, fast decisions?
- Do they have an uncanny knack for seeing where the puck will be?
- Can they connect dots and find alternative ways for achieving group goals?
- Are they expert relationship builders?

Determining performance styles

Next, find out what their performance styles are and what drives them so you can set them up for success.

Performance styles represent preferred approaches to roles or specific tasks as well as preferred communication styles. Think of performance styles as being observable, or above the waterline.

Evaluate the following characteristics:

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- Do they solve problems on their own or do they like to collaborate?
- Are they outgoing and sociable or are they more reserved and reflective?
- Do they prefer a steady work environment or a dynamic, more unpredictable one?
- Are protocol and rules important to them or do they thrive when developing ideas independent of a formal structure?

Determining drivers

While behaviors (performance styles) are out there for everyone to see, underneath are the drivers that help shape them. When individuals are aligned with goals and business cultures that also align with their personal drivers, they feel particularly engaged and satisfied in their roles, responsibilities, and the firm. Gaining insight into each individual's top ambitions will help you create the right blend of roles and rewards at the top of your organization.

The following questions can help determine personal drivers:

- Do they aspire to be unique?
- Are they driven to be true to their convictions?
- Are they focused on bottom-line results?
- Do they compete hard to advance their position?
- Are they inspired by being creative?
- Do they want to understand and learn?
- Are they driven to help others succeed?

Then find out where they think they are along their development track. Their feedback will help you gauge whether they have blind spots so you can address them where necessary.

Ask the following questions:

- What do they think they are good at?
- What are they learning to do better?
- What needs more of their attention?

Determining focus

Finally, based on the knowledge you gather, figure out where you need them to be and by when, and start moving them in that direction.

Decide which areas they should focus on:

- Establishing new key client relationships
- Becoming an influential figure in the business community
- Transforming how the company produces its work product
- Creating high-performance teams throughout the organization

The future of your firm depends on getting to know your next-in-line leaders.

About the contributor

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