

# PUTTING YOUR COMPANY UNDER A MICROSCOPE

A CONTINUING SERIES OF MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS FROM THE JENNINGS GROUP

## TRAINING YOUR REPLACEMENT

By Kate Kaynak, Ph.D.  
President of The Jennings Group

**F**orward-thinking corporate leaders identify the rising stars among their direct reports and choose to mentor them as future leaders. Whether looking toward succession planning or preparing someone to step into your current role when you move up in the organization, a **“deep bench” of effective leaders makes a company more nimble, effective, and profitable.** Training replacements for leadership positions makes transitions far less stressful on the staffers and their families, as well. We at The Jennings Group have some suggestions for training leadership successors to make the process run more smoothly.

### Identify the Best Candidates

Consider the strengths and weaknesses of your direct reports. Where will they be most effective? Where will they need coaching and mentoring to grow their strengths? **Consider not only where your company is now, but where your company plans to be in the next decade and beyond,** and candidly assess where each person needs to improve in order to be most effective. Be mindful of their interpersonal abilities, as well—technical expertise is important, but leadership roles require interpersonal skills for team-building, client-relations, mentoring, and implementing change. Don't rule out promising candidates because they “aren't like me”—leaders can have different management styles, different areas of technical expertise, and different approaches to solving problems and still be extremely effective leaders.

### Invest in Your Rising Stars

Mentoring is key. Get to know your rising stars, and pay special attention to their own professional goals and life priorities. Training a replacement is a waste of everyone's time and effort if the individual then decides to leave the company or go in another



direction. **Invest in people who are willing and eager to invest in your company and will put their hearts and heads into their leadership roles.** Focus your energies on your top performers, in order to train and retain the best people in the field. If you are concerned that this might be seen as “playing favorites,” make sure each of your direct reports knows what he or she needs to do to be considered a “rising star,” and invest in the ones who choose to go that extra mile.

### Remember the “People” Side of Business

As people move up from entry-level positions, technical skills become less central to their role, while **people-skills become more central to their success.** Don't neglect mentoring your rising stars in client interactions and leading teams. For example, consider bringing a direct report along as second chair at a client meeting. He or she will learn how client meetings work and can start to develop a relationship with the client. You also can use the car ride to and from the meeting as mentoring time.

### Use Missteps as Learning Experiences

Recognize that your direct reports may have different approaches than you do. In some cases, they may have more efficient or effective methods—if so, let them do things their way. In other cases, ask them if they would like some suggestions on how to get started or a checklist of important aspects of the project that must be addressed in their work. In some cases, direct reports will benefit from learning what *not* to do. **If a direct report is on the wrong track, resist the impulse to take the project back and do it yourself.** Instead, discuss the situation and offer suggestions that get them back on track.

The individual will gain experience and will be significantly more effective on similar tasks in the future.

### Take the Time for a Smooth Transition

Identify the best candidates and make sure each person has a leadership role in your organization or on a specific project. Effective delegation is key—give your people successively larger tasks and responsibilities over several months, with an eye on building a full leadership skill-set for your top performers within a year or two. Don't micromanage, but communicate frequently and have regular status updates, so that you know where each project is and can discuss how to deal with problems as they arise. Usually, a

scheduled weekly meeting works well for this, but on time-sensitive projects, daily updates might be appropriate. **Consider the time spent meeting and mentoring as an investment in the people and their skills**—as they grow in their competency, they will be able to take more work off of your own desk, freeing you to focus on the things that only you can do.

Investing in your people and their leadership potential will lead to long-term benefits, including increased job satisfaction, higher retention rates, increased motivation, and a “deep bench” of leaders who can make your company more nimble and responsive in the face of industry changes and leadership transitions.



**Kate Kaynak, Ph.D.** has taught undergraduate and graduate courses at the Johns Hopkins University, The University of Maryland, American University, Marymount University, and Rutgers University. A consultant to The Jennings Group for more than a decade, she has been a facilitator for leadership development programs since 2011. Kate Kaynak was the founder of Spencer Hill Press, which was acquired in 2014 by a New York publishing company. She has received degrees in psychology from Yale University and Rutgers University.



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Kate Kaynak  
President  
kkaynak@thejenningsgroup.com  
603-856-1281

Laura Jennings  
Chairperson  
ljennings@thejenningsgroup.com  
908-475-1100

PO Box 247  
Contoocook, NH 03229 USA

39 Ramseyburg Road  
Columbia, NJ 07832 USA