

In Defense of Dispensable

By Anne Sedler

Sadly, Governor Corzine won't be in today, and he may be out for quite some time. Because he is so important, there is a plan in the NJ state constitution for a successor to fill his shoes during his recovery. But what would happen in your company if the unlikely actually happened and one of your people was suddenly gone? People have accidents, become ill, quit, and are "let go." With indispensable people, it's likely that the company wouldn't survive if the indispensable one was no longer available.

Many large corporations have identified and budgeted for successors to key people. However, small, mid-sized, and family held companies often do not have succession plans in place for company leadership. Typically, succession planning is not a high priority until it hits a company head-on, and then the circumstances may be too stressful and too complicated to allow for best-case strategies.

Most businesses, large and small, don't think about what would happen if a worker within a department is laid up for a few days, weeks, or longer. It's no secret that turning to outside resources to fill big or small shoes can become a financial nightmare. Not to mention the time that the new person will spend getting up to speed on the organization's mission and culture and the job itself. This often results in hidden costs and a negative impact on the bottom line.

That is enough reason to think about filling shoes, if possible, from within. There should be a succession plan in place for all positions within a company in order to maintain productivity. Top leaders, managers, and especially the "worker bees" all impact a great company, as described by Jim Collins in his book, *"Good To Great."*

Let's think about keeping your company together in the face of a missing member, What if it's you? What would happen if you can't go to work tomorrow? Pretend you'll be out for a day, or a week, or for months. What would happen to the projects, the hot prospects, your best clients or customers, your work team? Would it be relatively easy to hand the reigns to someone else? If not, why? Think about what it takes to create less of a nightmare and more of a strategy for continuing the flow.

I'll bet much of the discomfort I may have just created for you has to do with the way you presently manage paper and electronic information. Many times, individuals tell me they know exactly where a specific document or a phone number is located. They know just which pile to look through and just how many inches down from the top of the heap a particular item is. Let's assume for a minute that's actually true. If the same individual becomes an absentee, how would someone step in to take over? Who else knows just which stack and which measurement will yield the piece of paper or the file that will ensure continuity of work?

To manage the unexpected, think about the whole picture, including managing work flow and information retrieval in the event of long- or short-term replacement of a leader or a staff member. How can this be done? The answer is: a company-endorsed system of managing paper and electronic files and a method of filing follow-up items. With the right skills and tools, any organization can keep the work on an even keel, no matter what. Don't allow yourself or anyone else in your organization to be indispensable simply because no one could possibly find what needs to get done.