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Solving the Talent Drain Problem

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Projections indicate that in the near future, and even well past the 2030's, the US is likely to see a mass exodus of upper level management and at the C-suite as the Baby Boom generation journeys into retirement. Because of this, there will be a drastic increase in the number of executive-level management positions, creating vast opportunity for the remaining Gen X and Y-ers while presenting vacancies at both mid and entry-level level positions. Without a robust bench of candidates with strong potential, most organizations will be left unable to fill these crucial positions.

Maintaining the appropriate depth and skill of management-level bench personnel is both a crucial task and a significant area of concern for many companies. Nearly 60% of organizations report that they are experiencing a leadership shortage right now, an increase of 40 percentage points from just one year ago; of these, 76% are less than confident they will be able to adequately fill these positions. Inevitable as the talent drain seems, corporations must create and cultivate an effective bench of qualified resources to ensure economic survival.

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Building incendiary talent into the bench can be a time consuming and expensive task, but is one that will pay dividends in the long run. Successful bench planning requires a strategic approach predicated by a significant recruiting investment. Developing a bench management process to identify, cultivate, and track candidates will ensure your talent inventory is both current and optimized. Most companies remain reactive, and fill openings only as they become vacant. An ongoing planning process that addresses staffing needs across business units can significantly help when developing strong candidates with leadership potential. This type of active planning and review can greatly impact an organization's succession management to quickly identify talent gaps.

In addition to building onto technical capabilities, cultivating soft skills will give candidates a polished, professional edge that many lack. While it may seem elementary, focus on the basic elements of effective communication and build on to them. Many executive-level candidates with impressive backgrounds fall behind when it comes to basic writing skills. It is not uncommon to read a company-wide email from a C-level executive peppered with spelling and grammatical errors, which can have an immediate detrimental effect on his or her credibility. Articulate communication and a professional appearance are both critical when overall

impressions are based heavily on the first few minutes of the interview. Image coaching may be appropriate to build onto technical skill to construct the ideal overall package.

Internal succession planning that aggregates and assesses the company's talent pool should also be part of an effective bench management strategy. As senior-level executives approach retirement age, many companies will be hard-pressed to replace that talent and could end up making costly hiring mistakes.

It is no surprise that jobs that require high levels of education and skill pay higher wages than jobs that require fewer skills and little education. Statistics from the Department of Labor's [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS) show that the unemployment rate among people who have a professional degree is significantly lower than that of people who have a high school diploma or less than a complete high school education. In light of this, it is imperative, specifically for executive-level candidates, to ensure education is strongly emphasized. Effective bench management should place special emphasis on furthering a candidate's education.

Conversely, individuals who possess very high levels of education may inadvertently put off prospective job seekers. Presenting a PhD-level or multi-degreed Master's candidate for a mid-level management position may actually present a red flag to hiring managers. Unless a degree beyond that of a Master's is required, such as in doctoral-level teaching or research positions, extreme levels of education could put a candidate out of contention for a position.

Educational planning has always been a consideration for effective bench management, and while effective, is no substitute for on the job experience. Keeping up technical and occupational certifications can be accomplished while on the bench, but ensuring candidates are continually challenged and exposed to new environments in their assignments will add to their marketability. Challenging your staff forces them to develop secondary and tertiary skills that will round out their background, increasing their marketability and enabling placement with a broader range of clients.

Most companies reward star performance by promoting a person out of the very role in which he or she has excelled. Taking a high-performing executive out of his or her current role potentially creates a gap that is two-fold: one in the vacated position and one in the new position. Removing an executive from a position at which he or she shined for something new is a risk that could jeopardize performance and longevity. The remaining vacancy may be filled with yet another individual new to the position who may unfortunately flounder. Though a pessimistic outlook on promoting top-performers, it's a possibility that should not be overlooked. Expanding the existing role rather than promoting to a new role may enable the

employee to continue his or her success while tackling additional, more rewarding duties without creating new job vacancies.

Identifying, cultivating and selecting future leaders are all critical to an organization's long-term growth and success. Many organizations, however, put little rigor into managing the talent drain by putting investment into their bench. Strategic planning and acute foresight make successful bench-building challenging if not daunting. Working with a professional retained search firm like Slayton Search Partners greatly increases the likelihood of success when cultivating talent with flexibility and longevity. Get started with an assessment on your current talent matrix and how to financially optimize your bench for successful growth.

Corporate Leadership Council, <https://clc.executiveboard.com/Public/CurrentResearch.aspx>,
Creating a Talent Management Response to Urgent Leadership Shortages, 2012
Department of Labor Statistics, <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/wages/educational.htm>,