HealthManagement
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Survival Plan Needed to Cope With Leadership Change

Since hospital CEOs tend to have shorter tenures than sports coaches, the key to keeping an organisation thriving is to have a survival plan in place, and to be actively implementing it year round—not just right after the CEO gives notice.

When a senior hospital executive departs, he or she may give many months' notice, but sometimes, departure comes swiftly, and the HR department and administration must make decisive choices quickly. John McCabe, MD, CEO and senior vice president of hospital affairs for SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse had been chair of the department of emergency medicine at his hospital for most of his career when the previous CEO announced his departure in 2004. This threw his colleagues into a race to find a leader from the inside who would be trusted by both the medical staff and administration.

McCabe's tenure with the university began in 1987, so he was a known quantity, and the hospital's administration thought his being physician would help make the staff more comfortable with him.

Not only did this work well for McCabe, but, the organisation faced no real interruption in the wake of its last CEO's departure.

Finding good leaders—especially just after losing one—is not always so easy, but human resources leaders can make the transition more seamless by following two strategic best practices:

1. Re-Recruit the C-Suite – When a CEO departs, there is always lots of uncertainty. Everyone asks themselves, 'what does this mean for me?' which can lead to high C-suite turnover.

The turnover trend can trickle down all the way to caregivers, which can lead to a loss of momentum and strategic direction—and even negatively impact quality of care.

See Also: Hospital Execs In Soul Search For Leadership

So, re-recruiting top performers is going be key by schedule a one-on-one meeting with each member of the current C-Suite, explaining to them how valuable they are to the organisation and telling them that they will be part of the selection process for the new leader. This will make them feel included, and keep them incorporated in the executive search process.

2. Be Prepared and Don't Panic — Make sure the entire organisation is aware that the hospital will continue to operate as usual and everything from being put on hold, from construction projects to research, until each department is sure that the new leadership will stand behind each project.

HR leaders use this time to seek out interim leadership, launch a full-scale executive search and use any succession plan already in place. It's key to be proactive and get an interim or acting executive in to the role as quickly as possible to keep the wheels turning.

Ultimately, don't panic. No one should be irreplaceable.

McCabe believes in training promising employees to jump in to an open job at a moment's notice, if need be—just like he did. McCabe acknowledges that this may be an easier process to set up in a for-profit healthcare setting, and says that he definitely thinks it's a tougher subject to broach in an academic medical centre.

"Always be prepared," advises McCabe. "Push the leadership team to talk succession planning. Make sure everyone has a clear understanding of what their team will have to do in the weeks and months after an announcement is made."

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