



The Succession Time Bomb – Preparing Leaders for the Future

Many leaders behave as if they have a barcode marked on their heads showing their *'best before date'* clearly stamped for all to see. They focus almost exclusively on delivering results now and in the short term and get drawn into the complexity of day to day issues. As a result they often forget that the mark of a great leader is that the assets under their stewardship, especially the people assets, are enhanced and they leave the ship in far better shape than when they boarded.

Many of the organisations we work with today are experiencing the implications of this reality, many of our client's talk of:

- A lack of depth in the leadership cadre and not enough talent to deliver great results consistently across the organisation;
- Pockets of excellence and larger pockets of mediocrity in the leadership cadre;
- High attrition rates with younger promising individuals leaving the organisations;
- High investment in 'attraction strategies' to get the right calibre of young leaders into the organisation, rather than let their results and success in that space speak for themselves and be the attraction.

According to Ivan Lansberg, one of America's top family business consultants, *'80% of first generation companies never make it to the second generation, and only 10% make it to the third'*. This succession issue is a time bomb which is not exclusive to family firms. In large corporations the desire to find a successor and prepare them well is seen as important but rarely urgent and as such it gets scant attention in the executive agenda. Effective succession planning is a medium to long term investment in time and effort so as Churchill said to his gardener when he was informed that the Oak sapling he was preparing would take over 30 years to grow into a real tree 'then we better plant it today!' Preparing leaders for the future is a job that is best started early.

At Sensei we are committed to helping our clients gain a deeper understanding of how they can use **Human Performance** to deliver strategically significant results. In 2011 we commissioned a piece of research resulting in a white paper, focussed on the importance of developing a talent pipeline and to examine how the best organisations are identifying and developing their Leaders of the Future.

To help us gain insights into the challenges organisations face in this space, we interviewed leaders from a number of organisations in different sectors: Global Manufacturing Companies, Public Sector, Professional Services Firms, European Facilities Management Providers, Global Engineering & Technology Services and Financial Services Organisations. Each leader participated in a confidential, structured interview and the insights they provided have been used to calibrate our own thinking.

To complement the current leaders' views, we also interviewed a number of recently graduated young professionals from a similar range of organisations to get their perspective on this topic. We compared



their aspirations with what current leaders think and drew some conclusions which can benefit all leaders who are wondering how best to leave the ship in a better state than when they boarded.

If you are interested in reading our Leaders of the Future white paper then please click on <http://www.sensei-international.com/ideas/white-papers/> to download the results.