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## VIEWS FROM THE TOP

# Planned obsolescence

### Work yourself out of a job for career and business success

**A**s crazy as the notion sounds, business executives need to position their companies to function without them.

Let's first consider this concept as it applies to a business owner. When someone considers buying a business, if several key customer relationships are managed by the owner, or if day-to-day operations depend significantly on the owner's presence, then the value of the company decreases. Once the owner leaves, there's greater risk that revenues will fall and operational effectiveness will decrease or, in extreme situations, a total collapse of the business. Conversely, if the owner has developed the business so he or she is not required for day-to-day operations, the value of the business increases.

A similar paradigm can be applied to CEOs, senior managers and even department managers. If the business unit you oversee cannot function without you, you may be considered un-promotable. Ownership may not advance you to a new position for fear of the group collapsing upon your departure. And even for leaders who plan to eventually move on to another company, the last thing you want is to see your business unit suddenly suffer because you leave. The successful continuation of operations is important as a proof point for when you present your career credentials in the future.

In considering what it takes to work yourself out of a job, business leaders at all levels first need to assess how they spend their time across three major areas:

- Doing actual work, such as sales, marketing, production and finance
- Managing those who do the actual work and/or coaching managers
- Leading the unit by defining and designing improvements

To be truly successful, and to prepare to move to the next step — whether it's selling the business, a promotion within the company or advancement outside of the company — business leaders need to spend more time moving up the scale, from doing to managing to leading. The more time spent leading means the business unit will have greater stability when a successor takes over. If too much time is spent in the areas of doing and managing, the business unit will not grow and may run into major problems. Increased time spent on leading also provides several other benefits:

- Develops key people within the organization, thus helping to retain them
- Allows for future planning so the organization can capitalize on opportunities and prepare for threats
- Creates time for developing external business relationships with partners, industry and community
- Increases a leader's flexibility to spend their time the way they want to, at work and away from work

To begin your path toward spending more time leading, build a spreadsheet of your current activities and assess the following information:

- Define which tasks you are good at and which do you like? This helps determine which responsibilities to consider reassigning to others.
- Select one initial responsibility you can assign to someone else; start small and then assign others as you gain successes
- Consider starting with less risky responsibilities
- Ask your managers which responsibilities

they are interested in taking on; this helps earn their buy-in, and you may be surprised at their interests and enthusiasm

Give managers adequate time to succeed at their new responsibility. They will need time to learn the ropes, just like you did at one time. They will not approach the assignment exactly the way you did, but this can be good if you remain in an open, learning mode as they put their own spin on the assignment. Once you have started the program, review your progress at regular intervals. Together you will build momentum and successes.

Some leaders reach a point where they spend the majority of their working hours leading, but the balance is different for each person. Try to increase time spent leading, but ultimately it's up to you to determine what's best for the business and what gives you satisfaction.

Some owners and top executives may not be good at, or enjoy, leading responsibilities. They may prefer to spend the majority of their time managing or doing. In this case, they can supplement their strengths with other teammates or consultants who excel at responsibilities such as strategic planning.

There may also be cases where a leader is not a good manager or doer. It's critical to admit to yourself what you are good at, what you are not good at and then find help in the required areas. When one looks back on their career, it's hard to argue with this definition of success: "I spent my time the way I chose to."

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