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## TALKING POINTS

# Plan for transition from a magical leader

By Pam Butterfield

**T**he recent announcements by Steven Jobs of Apple and Tennessee women's basketball coach Pat Summitt remind us of the dramatic impact one individual can have on an organization.

What happens to those organizations when these magical leaders have to face the need to change their role? How do they go on and continue the success these magical leaders have inspired? With planning, a dedication to their employees and an acceptance that things change.

New leadership at the top, when done well, continues the magic. When done ineffectively, it can spell the end for a previously successful organization and a life's legacy.

You can't duplicate a Jobs or a Summitt. It won't work. That duplicate is bound to fail because, well, they are not the original. And smart organizations don't try to make them so.

Let's start with what makes them magical, because those qualities can be emulated. Passion is the number one ingredient. Both Steve and Pat are passionate about what they have created. It fuels their ability to be strong, visionary leaders.

Given the way each of these leaders has lived their lives, I suspect their organizations are well prepared for the change. Strategy has been the hallmarks of their reigns and I imagine that led them to build succession plans. For leaders who want to emulate their strategic departures, I offer these suggestions:

**Pass it on with compassion:** If you're a



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magical leader, it's been about you for awhile and you're used to that. Remember that you have built and run your organization for years. Think about what you know and how you learned it. You developed your knowledge in many ways over time — through formal education; assignments and projects that have given you hands-on-experiences; people you have known and worked with, both the stellar and less than stellar. In many cases, your best teachers have been the problems, errors and mistakes that you and others have made. All these things have taken time and it will take time for the next leader to learn and know a great deal about your organization. Be patient with that process.

**Support your successors' success:** There is nothing admirable about a leader so wrapped in him or herself and so afraid of a loss of identity that they do all they can to trip up their successor. Setting the stage for your successor is the best last gift you can give to the organization. You do that by clearly communicating your expectations to that person before he or she signs on. And by creating a culture of accountability, based on developing clear key accountabilities for each position and integrating these key accountabilities into a scorecard that aligns you're your organization's mission, vision, strategy, processes, structure and systems.

**Set the stage for ongoing succession:** Use your departure as a "teachable moment" for all of your key people. Develop a succession culture in which each key person thinks about his or her heir. It can take an organization up to three years to prepare for these kinds of changes. Use the next three years to get ready.

**Get used to turnover:** Today's demographics are setting the stage for a major talent departure so expect more

"magicians" to disappear on a pretty regular basis. And they will not be replaced by workers willing to stay as long as they did. Today's business owners have workers ages 55 — 64 and have benefitted by them staying in a job, on average, for 10 years. They will be replaced by generations of workers who will stay, on average, only 4.1 years. And those folks may very well leave before they can pass on their magic. Higher employee turnover will be disruptive. Lack of the vital knowledge necessary to train the replacements will be devastating.

**Get smarter about ways to compete for and keep the right employees who will be capable successors.** Much has been made about the role of branding in advertising, but there's also something called an "Employer Brand." This solidifies and puts into play the reasons that someone wants to join and stay with your organization. Create it, learn it, teach it and practice it.

**Create a "FIT" organization.** FIT organizations have people who are placed in the right positions to contribute to the organization's success. Their leaders make sure each person fits with the role, the culture, the boss and the team.

What all this means is that the magic can and should continue even after the magician has left the stage. Organizations that prepare for this eventuality do it by building a culture of accountability and respect for each individual. They make succession everyone's business. These are the organizations that continue their success long after their "Fearless Leader" has stepped to the sidelines. ■

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