

Four Keys to Developing Future Leaders

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In today's fast-paced business landscape, the development of future leaders is a critical aspect of your success. Companies have to think beyond merely creating efficient managers; they must invest in the development of individuals who will navigate complexity, embrace change, and inspire those around them.

In 2019 the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) published a "best practices" report based on 13 member-firms that had successfully navigated succession planning. One of the key findings in the report was the timing of developing future leaders and what development activities had the most significant impact. This article is based on the results of that study. The examples given are from my own experience.

Key #1: Starting Early

The first key to developing future leaders is to initiate the process early. Most organizations agree that the groundwork for effective leadership development should begin at least 10 years before a leadership transition. Starting early ensures that potential leaders receive ample time to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience for leadership roles.

Key #2: Strategic Development Assignments

Strategic development assignments are often the cornerstone of leadership development. These assignments range from



"business topics" like project work, client service, and business development, to "people topics" such as team management and leadership skills.

High-performing organizations consistently employ strategic assignments, especially for mid-career professionals, starting around seven to 10 years before they are expected to enter senior executive positions. Some companies even use these assignments earlier in the careers of high-potential employees. The assignments are meant to challenge individuals and equip them with the skills necessary for leadership roles.

Example: One fruitful technique is the use of job rotations so that individuals have a better understanding of the business as a whole. This can mean having a site supervisor "come inside" and work in business development for a year, or having that supervisor rotate among private and public projects so that they get different owner perspectives. One client, a state DOT,



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for Chief Learning Office magazine, Forbes, and MBA World and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as Inc. Radio and America's Workforce Radio.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is *Future-Proofing Your Organization*.

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