

Succession Plan???

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October 2018

Lately, when I run into people I know, somewhere during our conversation, this question comes up, “So, have you given any thought of retiring?” I am hoping that this question emerges more from my age than my ability, but one never knows! Often, the person inquiring is retired and will proceed to extol the joy of their retirement. As the conversation continues, I usually respond by admitting that this topic comes up more and more. While I am not quite ready to retire, I’m beginning to give it more serious thought. Those in business, who know I am the executive director of a non-profit, will then slip this question in, “Do you have a succession plan?”



Yikes! For those of us who have helped create and grow and sustain a small non-profit, one of the questions we try to avoid is, “What will happen if something happens to you?” We know that so much of the history and everyday activities of the non-profit for which we work, and love is something that has become part of our DNA. “What do you mean if something happens to me?” “Well, you know...” “You mean if I become ill or die or decide to take off and move to Hawaii?” “Yeah. Will your non-profit survive that? Do you have a succession plan in place?” “Uh, no.”

Small non-profits are so preoccupied with surviving and doing the work or ministry that God has called us to do, that long-term goals, while needed and necessary, are often placed far back on the burner. We do better with crisis management and meeting the needs of those we serve.

But, if we expect and want all that hard and foundational work we have invested in building our non-profit to have long-range significance, thinking about future leadership is not only necessary, but it is also critical. So, a phone call to Ayanna Watkins of the National Benevolent Association was in order. “We need a succession plan. Can you help us.?”

And just like that, we began to work on a succession plan with a coach who helped us not only develop a comprehensive plan but also assisted us in creating a current job description for the executive director. It took a while. We are still working on it and our board has not given its final stamp of approval, but I am sleeping a lot better now. Confident if something happened to me, the founder of our non-profit, its life would go on, even if mine didn't. That's comforting.

There are templates and coaches and conversations that make the process of developing a succession plan much easier. Several of our board members joined me in this process. And while none of us woke up in the morning with great anticipation thinking, "Yes, today I get to work on the succession plan!" we all know that it is a wise thing to do and the right thing to do. And it was a lot easier than we thought. So now when asked, "Do you have a succession plan?" With relief and a smile, I say, "Working on it.!"

The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at nbacares.org/incubate or by contacting Rev. Ayanna Johnson Watkins, Director of the NBA Incubate Initiative, at awatkins@nbacares.org.