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Why are you involved in succession planning and when did you begin thinking about this topic?

I attended the Southeast Leadership Institute two years ago and completed a project on succession planning. Also, last year the State Health Officer for the Alabama Department of Health initiated an effort to focus on succession planning after he learned about the number of department employees that would retire in the next five years.

For about a year now, Alabama has been offering leadership training workshops to address future state succession needs. Every other week, the state holds a week-long training session in Montgomery and about 50 to 60 people from local, regional and state public health departments attend. Instructors for the program are from Auburn University. Attendees are asked to develop a leadership project which is presented to the health officer. Mentoring and grooming by seasoned public health leaders is also integrated into the training.

I attended the training as a seasoned leader and was surprised at how really good it was, how much we needed it and unexpectedly how much fun it was! It was a great opportunity to learn but also an unexpected opportunity to better appreciate what each of us does to promote public health in Alabama. It is exciting to see so many people interested in public health.

While attending this year's ASTPHND Annual Meeting I participated in the session on succession planning. I had an "ah-ha" moment. While in Alabama we are training general public health leaders, I decided more needed to be done for public health nutritionists, so I decided to develop a specific program for them. I am taking the state public health leaders training to a more detailed step and providing leadership training to nutritionists on my staff and throughout the state.

The training program for nutritionists is in the planning stages and we look to roll it out in the coming year. I started by talking with our human resources office and asked for a list of staff that would be eligible for retirement in the next five years. I also spoke with the WIC Director and the Training Coordinator. Now we are beginning to develop a training plan for the state that will use competency-based training and reach out to counties, regional offices and the state to identify staff interested in moving up. Once we know who is interested we will then initiate a training program.

I have also talked to people at the University of Alabama at Auburn to identify nutrition students who may want to work in public health. We are also looking at ways to inform academics looking for positions about any opening at the universities as they are also facing the same dilemma regarding retirement and hiring.

Where do you find your greatest support?

Our human resources director was very helpful in getting me the information I needed and providing encouragement. My colleagues have also been very supportive, especially the WIC Director and the Training Coordinators. ASTPHND also really helped

by having an emerging issues roundtable at the Annual Meeting in 2007 and the session on succession planning this year.

What are the greatest barriers to developing an effective succession management program?

Time is a barrier; there are so many other activities that need to be taken care of that I get sidetrack from this project. Also, some people have trouble seeing the big picture and just don't consider this a problem that they will have to address. The way our county agencies are structured is also a challenge. It is hard to train and groom someone in a one-person agency. I am not sure how we will implement this approach in a structured way at the county level.

What advice do you have for others?

Just start! It may take you a few years to get this project up and running because of all the other things that come up. If you don't start you are going to be competing with everyone else for only a few qualified people. In our agency we may lose ten seasoned staff within ten years. Not only do we lose the experienced person, we will also lose all of the institutional knowledge they have built up over the years. It is really important to benefit from the successes and the mistakes that our staff have made. So I would encourage people to talk to their personnel office and find out how many people will be retiring. It will help you decide if you have a problem or not.

What are your best resources?

My colleague Kathe Briggs at East Alabama Medical Center has started a leadership reading club that is very successful. The Director of Leadership Development is the book group leader. All members are encouraged to suggest a book. We have weekly assignments. The group meets each Friday at lunch time and discusses the assignment. There is no penalty for not reading the material and everyone is encouraged to attend whether or not they have read the book. The reading club is a great opportunity for networking; attendees are from diverse backgrounds and we learn so much from each other.

Leadership Book Club Suggestions

Getting Things Done - David Allen

Influencer: The Power to Change Anything - Kerry Patterson

Emergenetics: Tap into the New Science Of Success - Geil Browing

Leading Change - John P. Kotter

Leadership is an Art - Max DePress

Who Moved My Cheese? - Spenser Johnson

**Phyllis Allen, MS, RD, LD, State Director
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September 26, 2008

Why are you involved in succession planning and when did you begin thinking about this topic?

The Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Regions and Professional Services of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) requested that I participate in a committee looking at workforce development and continuity planning. Our Deputy Commissioner for Health Services, Dr. Lisa Waddell, was concerned because of the significant number of people retiring from key leadership and management positions, as well as the number of retirements expected within the next five years.

Nearly 85 percent of employees in public health nutrition leadership and management positions in the regions and central office are over 40 years of age, so we must prepare for the loss of most of our current nutrition leaders within the next ten to fifteen years. I was concerned because many public health nutritionists I work with are also nearing eligibility for retirement. In the state office, only two of eleven people in central office nutrition management positions are younger than 40

The team appointed by Dr. Waddell developed the Workforce Development and Continuity plan. The document is a proactive effort to ensure management/leadership continuity. The plan encourages individual advancement by cultivating and nurturing internal talent through leadership development activities. The plan includes comprehensive job description templates for health department positions as well as a Sample Roadmap that outlines the training, experiences and skills needed to become eligible for each position.

The Office of Public Health Nutrition also has a Workforce Development and Continuity Plan that lays out strategies to address short and long-term professional development and educational needs. The Office is developing career ladders for nutritionists who want to advance within our agency. A nutrition intern is working with me to survey the 175 registered dietitians and nutritionists employed by DHEC. The survey will help us better understand their training needs and better prepare them for future employment opportunities. For example, I don't think we are using the non-RD nutrition staff to their fullest potential, and we want to develop individuals with potential. We are also thinking about how to help staff get the training they need for advancement. For example, community-based personnel appreciate shadowing state office nutritionists to learn more about their work. However, this is not always easy to accomplish; because of the distance to Columbia, it is difficult to schedule time away from their work in clinics and funds to cover travel are very limited.

Where do you find your greatest support?

The Deputy Commissioner for Health Services and my immediate supervisor are both enthusiastic supporters of this project. It is also very helpful to have the resources of Health Services and the Office of Human resources behind this effort.

What are the greatest barriers to developing an effective succession management program?

Insufficient funds to provide the training for staff interested in preparing for public health nutrition management and leadership positions is a huge barrier. Currently, Health Services staff are able to participate in the Management Academy for Public Health and the Southeast Public Health Leadership Institute offered by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. However, there are only a limited number of slots available and competition for those openings is great.

Health Services sets aside funds to support the Health Care Recruitment and Retention Program to help address our critical needs for registered dietitians, social workers and nurses. The program offers various incentives to assist in recruiting and retaining employees such as tuition assistance and paid practicum time to complete health care degrees. Although the program is authorized, current funding is insufficient to meet the demand and assistance to employees is less available than in the past.

What advice do you have for others?

You can't do this project in isolation and it is best to be part of an overall agency initiative to help you secure the resources you need to complete this work.

What are your best resources?

- The Health Services Planning Committee that worked together to develop the [Workforce Development and Continuity Plan](#).
- Health Services Office of Human Resources.
- The Office of Public Health Nutrition Workforce Development and Continuity Plan.
- Southeast Public Health Leadership Institute <http://www.sephli.org>.
- The Management Institute for Public Health <http://www.maph.unc.edu>.