Developing Staff and Succession Planning

Lesson Objective: Members should be able to explain why developing staff and planning their successors is of vital importance to the organization.

Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):

1. Understand the challenges in finding and developing members for key leadership roles
2. Identify and utilize the strengths of volunteers to fulfill key staff and leadership roles
3. Understand how to best prepare members to assume senior leadership roles and maintain continuity
4. Clearly delineate the methods of training the future leaders in your Region and nationally.
5. Become familiar with the methods to ensure that the best qualified members are able and willing to assume the role of senior leadership to prevent an interruption in command and implementation of strategic plans and operations

Scheduled Lesson Time: 60 minutes

Introduction

One of the most vital functions of leaders at any level is developing their staff and preparing for the next leader to take over. It is time consuming and requires a lot of effort if it's being started from scratch. Once appointed to a leadership role, succession planning starts day one and even prior to that. It takes deliberate thought and action to be done properly. The same goes for even being in a staff position. The intent should never be that we are going to fill a role indefinitely. We should always have in mind a replacement that we are bringing along that can carry the torch once it is passed. This is how an organization can remain robust. If key personnel were removed from your unit right now, would it continue to function at a high level? If the answer is no, then a review should be done by all leaders and staff on how to implement succession planning.

1. The challenges in finding and developing members for key leadership roles

Selecting the right person for the right job is of course, easier said than done. At the lower levels it is difficult due to limited to the available personnel that are typically few in numbers. As we move up the chain, it can still be difficult to say fulfill a Group role without completely devastating the underlying units of their key personnel. If this sounds familiar, then the first focus should be on recruiting more members so the load can be spread more evenly. Many personnel may end up holding multiple duty assignments at multiple levels within the organization. This may not be an ideal situation, but it does allow for members to gain additional experience at higher levels without sacrificing their time and skills at the lower levels. The last thing anyone wants is for there to be a vacuum created that is difficult to backfill. Typically, at the Region level and above, positions are posted for candidates to apply. At a minimum they should submit a resume. Ideally, it should cover both their professional and CAP experience, so you have a complete picture of the member's skillset. This should then be followed up with interviews. Interviews should be conducted in person if possible. Nothing can replace the gut instinct we have for interacting with people face to face. It also is a chance to

allow the member to display how much they desire the position they are seeking. Do they come in a uniform that is squared away? How do they hold themselves? Are the answers they provide confident, arrogant, or timid? Phone interviews are the next best thing if geography or timing does not allow for in-person interviews to be conducted. National staff positions are typically phone interviews if the candidate makes it past the initial selection process.

For leadership specific roles, perhaps the candidates should be asked to submit a packet similar to what would be asked of a Region Commander candidate. Have them include their resume, letters of recommendation, then have them describe their leadership philosophy, followed by some questions you want all candidates to answer in writing. This will allow you to build a good picture of each of the candidates. Once you decide on an initial screening who you would like to interview you can notify the candidates of their next steps. What do you do for those who do not make the initial cut? A recommendation would be providing their current commander feedback and what opportunities the candidate needs to improve on to be more competitive in the future. No matter the outcome for all the candidates, most should have potential for high level leadership even if some skills require further development. A training plan should be put together, so the member has feedback to work from to improve for the next opportunity that they can apply for.

2. How to identify and utilize the strengths of volunteers to fulfill key staff and leadership roles

Our members capabilities are sometimes apparent to us right out of the gate. Other times we need to flush them out and see what they are capable of. Since we closely mirror the Air Force in structure, we can progressively provide our members with more responsibility and risk as they prove themselves over time. Take for example, Incident Command, we do not just allow a member to be an Incident Commander right out of the gate, there is a system of progression they must go through in order to prove themselves and demonstrate the necessary skills required. The same goes for staff and leadership roles, although it is a lot less formalized.

Identity Members Suitable for Leadership Positions in Your Region or nationally	
• They show a higher level of engagement • They're comfortable but not complacent with failure • They have great written and oral communication skills • They know how and when to listen • They keep their ego in check	• They bring the best out of others • They can multitask • They strive for continuous education • They have integrity and are reliable • They are receptive of feedback provided

3. How to best prepare members to assume senior leadership roles and maintain continuity

There is no clear-cut path from new member to Region Commander. It is typically an amalgamation of various roles held over a span of many years that finally culminates in securing high level command. Some may compare potential candidates' experiences against prior Region Commanders who had highly successful terms of office. Regions should be encouraged to formalize their selection process for all the roles they have. This helps upcoming

members see what will be required of them if they decide to seek higher level positions. There should also be an active mentorship program that is working with developing members. Matching potential future candidates up with current or former members who have held those positions that can assist the upcoming member with honing their skills. Implementing these two items will help create a training pipeline that members can move through in their professional development. This helps streamline development of potential future staff and makes their strengths known to all involved.

4. Clearly delineate the methods of training the future leaders in your Region and Nationally

It is important to formalize a training pipeline or methodology for your Region and nationally. If the members know how you are identifying the next generations of leaders and staff, they will be more likely to participate in the process. It sets the expectations of what is needed of them if they want to be a competitive candidate. It also ties back in with continuity. If the Region and national can develop a surefire way of bringing the membership up to the higher levels effectively, the next batch of leaders will be able to just continue the trend and improve upon it.

- Don't allow politics or rivalry to shortchange high-potential nominations for key leadership roles
- Define potential consistently so that everyone views the process as fair and objective
- Ensure your skilled members include diverse skill sets and mindsets and grow them to their unique potential
- Separate potential from performance from readiness
- Equip senior leaders to become talent scouts for their own future subordinate support staff

5. Become familiar with the methods of ensuring that the best qualified members are able and willing to assume the role of senior leadership to prevent an interruption in command and implementation of strategic plans and operations

"Succession planning is defined as a process for identifying and developing new leaders who can replace leaders when they retire, die or leave an organization. It's a process based on developing a plan that increases the availability of experienced and capable employees who are prepared to assume leadership roles."

The largest opportunity we all have as leaders is documenting what we do and why we do it. Think of all the Subordinate Unit Inspections you have been a part of. What is the number one thing that gets most units? Documenting what they are doing. In order to help members best prepare themselves for higher level roles and maintain continuity they need to form the habit of documenting what they are doing. In theory, the outgoing Commander or staff should be able to hand the incoming member a binder or cloud storage access that shows everything that was accomplished during their term. Additionally, the incoming member should know what the vision was of the outgoing member. Can they effectively merge where they want to take the role with what the prior member was doing? If the answer is yes, then there was good continuity established. If the incoming member wants to do a 180 from the prior member, this should be heavily scrutinized before being allowed to go through. This is because most people react badly to change, mainly because the reason behind the change is poorly communicated. They will

need to know *why* you are changing things and for *what* reasons. If the why is not communicated, you can fully expect there to be backlash, member exodus, and more.

Lesson Summary and Closure

Through your readings and discussion, you can see how vital it is to start developing a succession plan even before accepting a role. We must foster a pipeline that is continually flowing with our member's development. The more cross-trained our members are to fulfill various roles the more robust the organization will be to deal with unexpected changes with minimal interruptions to our operational capabilities.

ASSIGNMENT: Assume you are a newly appointed Region Commander or NCSA Director. How are you going to develop your staff to ensure that once your term is up the next team is ready to take over with minimal disruption? Present this in a short report to your instructor.