

Your Succession Plan

By Mike Lucas, Wastewater Technician

What is your succession plan? Do you have one? A succession plan involves cross training others to replace you should you leave your current position or worse yet there is an untimely demise. It's very important that you have a plan and it should be in full cooperation with the governing body. The goal is to allow for a smooth transition.

As a multi-talented utility employee, it is extremely difficult to find a replacement for you. I often hear that the public or Boards/Councils think that they can just hire anyone off the street to replace you. **“THEY ARE WRONG,”** not in today's world. Maybe in the old days they could, but not today. Today a utility person needs to have computer skills, maintain compliance with ever more stringent environmental laws, have social and negotiating skills, many times they are subject to “on call” 24 hours a day seven days a week, often are required to pass tests and maintain multiple certifications, and on and on. Also, nobody has the institutional knowledge of the system that you have. Bar none! Every time an employee leaves, a huge public investment is lost.

Governing bodies also need to be informed regarding “comparability” both in regard to benefits and salaries if they ever hope to hire anyone that is remotely qualified. Don't give me this, “Nobody wants to work anymore,” either. Consider the new hire that wants to do a good job and gets discouraged because the former employee left with no direction regarding the job requirements. Many times I've heard that a long-time employee retires and in order for the Board to hire a replacement they have to give them a much higher salary and better benefits than the former employee received because the Board hasn't kept up with inflation and comparability. When this happens, there is unrest throughout the employee ranks and good luck trying to get assistance from the former employee.

I hear all sort of reasons why people don't want to cross train others, such as, no one helped me, job security, it may require an additional employee, and so forth. Your rate paying owners of the system deserve better. It is incumbent on both employees and governing bodies to have an updated current succession plan.

NeRWA, and certainly myself personally, stand ready to help systems, Boards and employees as requested. Please feel free to share this article with your governing body.