

Member Communication Experience

Why Transparency Builds Better Leaders in Construction

Written by: Dr. Nanette Miner, Managing Consultant/Succession Strategist, The Training Doctor

The best leadership transitions happen in plain sight – where everyone knows what’s expected, who’s being developed, and how they can raise their hand to be part of the future.

Yet, in too many companies, succession planning still feels like a secret club. A handful of senior leaders know who might be “next,” but the rest of the organization is left guessing. In fact, often the people in line for future leadership roles don’t even know they are candidates! That ambiguity breeds disengagement. When people don’t know if there is a future with your company, they don’t work harder – they do less.

Here’s a case study that may sound familiar.

A mid-sized commercial construction firm in the Southeast had been doing well for decades under the leadership of two partners. They had loyal project managers (PMs), foremen who’d been with the company 15+ years, and a strong book of business. But when one of the partners announced his retirement, there was confusion – not just about who would fill his role, but about whether anyone on staff was even being considered.

One PM said, “I always thought I’d move up, but no one’s ever talked to me about it. I figured I wasn’t what they were looking for.”

The owners had quietly selected a successor: a detail-oriented estimator who had strong relationships with the company’s largest client. The choice wasn’t bad – but it blindsided the rest of the team, many of whom were capable and interested



in growing. Morale dropped. One senior super left for a competitor where he felt he had a clearer career path.

Succession secrecy costs trust, retention, and the very talent you may need in the future.

So how can you improve the process?

1. Make the Evaluation Process Visible

Every company evaluates talent – but not every company explains how they do it. If you’re looking for future leaders who show strategic thinking, initiative, or extraordinary people development skills, say so. If readiness requires understanding budgets or how clients are managed, spell that out.

Don’t let your standards live only in executive meetings or your

own head. Instead, develop a clear framework that identifies the competencies, behaviors, and results you expect in leaders. Share it with everyone and use it during performance reviews.

The goal is not to promise promotions — it's to paint a picture of what “leadership readiness” looks like.

2. Treat Leadership Development as a Job Responsibility

If you're serious about building a strong bench, make development part of every leader's job. Executives, managers, even department heads should all have developing future leaders as a performance objective.

That means mentoring, delegating stretch assignments, recommending candidates for internal training, and giving actionable feedback. If someone's in a leadership role but isn't actively developing others, they're not really leading — they're just performing at a higher level.

At one company we've helped, the president included a unique question on annual evaluations: “How did you grow talent this year?” It helped to shift the mindset from “get the work done” to “get the work done and take the time to grow the next generation.”

3. Give Feedback Often — Not Just During Reviews

If you only talk about performance once a year, you're missing opportunities to coach in real time. Feedback should be continuous, clear, and tied to the expectations you've made transparent.

Telling a superintendent, “Great job on that schedule compression,” is nice. Adding, “You showed the kind of foresight and collaboration we expect from our senior leaders,” is better.

When employees see the connection between their daily work and their long-term potential, they stay engaged, and they start acting like the leaders you want them to become.

4. Be Honest About the Pipeline

It's okay to say, “We don't know who the next COO will be yet, but we're looking at a few internal people, and here's what we're watching for.” That's not favoritism; that's honesty.

It tells people there is a process — and if they want to be part of it, they know what to do.

At its core, transparent succession planning sends one powerful message: We believe in our people enough to grow them. In construction, where loyalty and hands-on experience matter more than flashy résumés, that message goes a long way.

So put the plan out in the open. Name leadership development as an organizational priority. And let everyone see what it takes to lead — because when people see their future, they start working toward it. 🦋



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is an expert in building ready and capable leadership teams for succession and exit.

Any views and opinions expressed in this article may or may not reflect the views and opinions of the Construction Management Association of America (CMAA). By publishing this piece, CMAA is not expressing endorsement of the individual, the article, or their association, organization, or company.