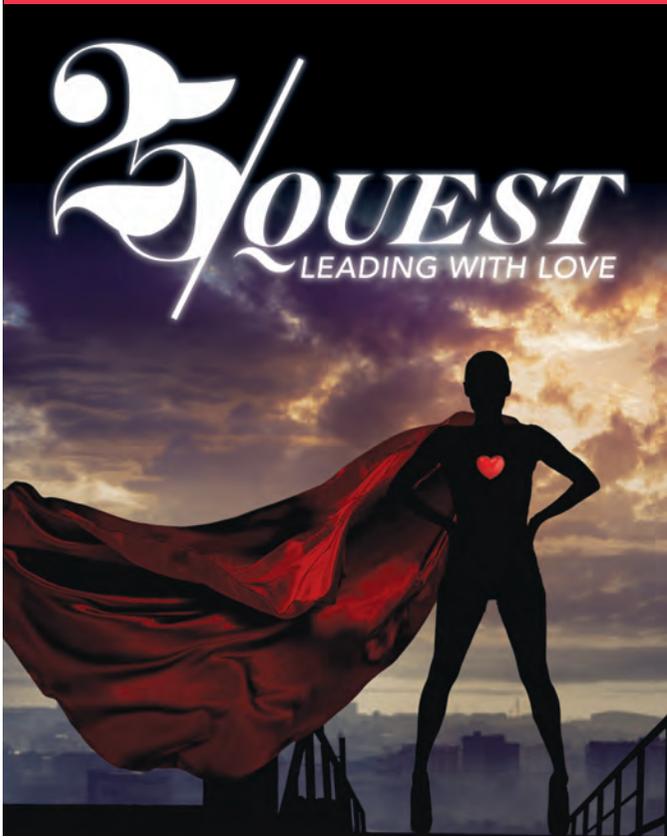


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Succession Planning: GETTING READY TO PASS THE TORCH

BY SHARLENE FRANCOIS LAIRSCEY
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Leading with love matters, and when your company is preparing for the future, succession planning should be at the heart of the organization. Quest Corporation of America, Inc. (Quest) was a startup company in 1995, and now as we celebrate our 25th year in business, we must also prepare for the next 25 years.

Succession planning is critical to ensure your company is prepared for the future. I believe it starts at the top. Not only was it my responsibility to establish a clear guide for advancement, encourage team members to plan for internal growth, and to build loyalty, but also, as owner/president/CEO of a DBE/MBE/SBE/WBE business, I knew it was about filling my position first.

Our employees are happy, and it is the desire of our associates to keep our business moving forward. As you can imagine, I did not want to mess with that.

At our 20-year mark, our grooming process began. I was open and honest with my strongest performers, who deserved to know where their careers were heading. I introduced the idea of a Leadership Launch Team where each of us would identify our replacement, then serve as mentors. What I didn't want to do was to overburden my managers, try to do too much at once, or confuse replacement planning with succession planning.

When it comes to finding your replacement, remember that your highest-potential employees will be lifelong learners who are both self-aware and socially aware. They'll also be great problem solvers, adaptable and able to take on more responsibility. You are looking for solid performers at every level of your organization. Also, it's good to know that senior leadership must forcefully advocate for it, and all parties must be held accountable. I wanted a culture of continuous employee learning and development that gives our people the possibility to thrive.

At Quest, our succession planning is an ongoing effort. Since 2015, our plan has been a living, breathing thing that gets reviewed and refreshed on a regular basis. It's a process that once you start, you need to continue.



In breaking it down, it is important that you know who you are as a company. Our vision is to become the nation's premier provider of strategic communications services. I see succession planning as a chance to engage and advance a workforce that is committed to our organization's values and vision. Our employees are the backbone of our company, especially the ones who do a good, solid job, day in and day out. I want to form a pipeline of amazing people ready for new roles.

Next, we looked at the entire organization. We identified key positions and key employees, recognizing that sometimes key employees are not in upper leadership but in support positions. Next came strategy. Did we want a complete succession plan that included every position and employee in the organization? Or, did we want a plan that covered only upper management and other important leadership positions? For us, it was the latter.

What was our goal? First and foremost, it was to protect the company should something ever happen to me. In 2018, my daughter Jessica Francois became an equal partner and is committed to the business and our daily operations.

Now it was time to identify our rock stars. We identified key positions and found a few employees who would make good successors for each of those critical roles. We look at employee performance objectively, and we communicate openly and honestly with everyone.

Today, our Leadership Launch representatives, together with my management team members and other key personnel, meet monthly to share progress and lessons learned. It's fluid, but I can assure you that I have a loving group of individuals who are preparing the workforce of tomorrow.

All we needed was a plan, a road map, some courage and a little bit of love.



About the Author

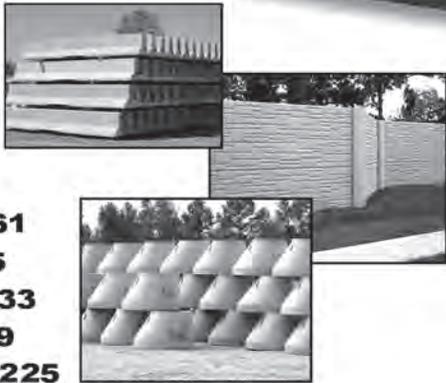
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