

Preparing for Change

Succession planning gets into full swing.

Last year's *Milwaukee Magazine* Charitable Events Guide feature story, "Training Tomorrow's Leaders," introduced you to Mindy Lubar Price, project manager of the Executive Transitions Initiative, a program housed at the Donors Forum of Wisconsin which focuses on planning for turnover of nonprofit executives. At first, many nonprofit leaders and board members were reluctant to discuss the issue of succession planning, even though research showed that many execs would be leaving their jobs due to retirement or other reasons within the next five years.

These days, that initial hesitance to tackle the issue is gone.

"There's sort of a general buzz about it now, whereas previously I don't think people were paying much attention to it," says Jim Marks, vice president of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, which is supporting the initiative with a two-year, \$40,000 grant.

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The topic has also gotten national attention through publications such as *Daring to Lead 2006*, a study of the changing leadership needs in the nonprofit sector published by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and The Meyer Foundation. And Milwaukee's first community-wide succession planning conference, held in June 2006, sold out in just one week.

This tells Price, who is also president and chief executive officer of consulting firm Leading Transitions LLC, that they've hit a nerve. More than 40 executive directors and 30 board members attended the conference. "People realized this is an important capacity-building and sustainability function for the organization and not just about a person leaving," says Price. "This takes it from the emotional to the practical level."

As for 2007, another conference may be in the works, as well as "toolkits" for leadership transitions and/or workshops on the three types of succession planning: emergency, ongoing and departure defined.

The next question, says Marks, is how to best cultivate strong new candidates for the top nonprofit jobs. The Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee, for instance, offers executive training programs, "leader circles" for new executive directors and one-on-one mentoring. And the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit Management now boasts the state's only master's degree in nonprofit management.

Says Marks: "We're hoping that [the institute] will do a lot to cultivate a new wave of leaders." **(Julie Sensat Waldren)**