

Lasting leadership impact

Don't leave well enough alone — leave well

When it comes time to transition out of your role, many executives have the gift of advance knowledge and time to prepare for the succession. Some are even invited into the conversation about who succeeds them. Regardless of your degree of involvement in your transition, know this: A big part of your legacy will be how your successor finds the organization/function/team after you depart.



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“Well enough” isn’t good enough — not when it comes to ensuring sustainability and organizational capability upon your departure. Leadership transitions can be immensely destabilizing to teams and organizations, regardless of who initiated your moving on.

Whether your impending departure is public or not, you can quietly take three important steps to help ensure there will be minimal performance decline upon your absence. These actions will maximize the lasting impact of your leadership long after you are gone.

Ensure you leave the strongest possible team

Don’t delegate the handling of people issues to your successor. He or she will have their hands full learning the business and role. You have years of data on people; they have none.

Ensure the team is as unequivocally strong as possible as you prepare to transition. If hard conversations are necessary with underperformers, have those conversations. Or, work with human resources to activate more significant steps if you feel performance improvement is unlikely.

Create more exposure for colleagues prior to your transition

Leverage your platform, contacts and/or network to connect your colleagues and successor to your strong relationships. Include them in board and analyst presentations where possible. Pave the way for them to have continuing connection to people of power and influence without your direct involvement.

This will be immensely helpful, and it creates a gift that will keep on giving in your absence.

Don't pass the trash

If you are aware of any business issues or problems, fix them before you leave. It’s not good enough to “try” to fix them. In the Nike spirit: Just Do It. Your successor won’t have the same intel and history that you do, for years.

Take the time to correct issues under your control before you transition. Not doing so will impact the business and cast a negative shadow on your legacy.

The excellence of your strategies, the quality of teams you recruited and built, and the capability of businesses you led may not be fully realized until after you depart. This is true for many executives.

Recognize that your legacy is determined as much by how you transition out of the organization and what you leave behind as it is by what you did while in the role. Don’t leave well enough alone — leave well. ●