

Good succession plans need great training programmes

When a financial advice firm's leaders begin to think about stepping away from the operational side of their business, succession planning becomes key. Get it right, and the process of handing over control should be smooth and relatively stress-free. Get it wrong, and the firm could end up losing knowledge, productivity, staff and even clients.

Many elements go into a successful succession plan, but perhaps the most important is a well-defined training programme.

Why do you need a training programme?

With the right training and development initiatives in place, firms can develop a pool of professionals who are ready and willing to take on key roles whenever they're needed.

As well as improving business continuity by creating a talent pipeline, equipping people with the skills and knowledge to handle greater responsibilities also boosts their confidence, which in turn makes them more likely to deliver good client service.

Creating a culture of continuous learning also helps to improve employee engagement and retention, as well as attracting talented people to join the company.

What should be taught, to whom?

When developing an effective training program, it's important to consider what it will cover, and how that aligns with your firm's wider strategic goals and values. That means focusing on developing skills and competencies that are directly relevant to your firm's mission and client needs.

You also need to zero in on who the potential successors in your firm are, and what specific training needs they have.

What specific skills might be covered?

Potential leaders of a firm could benefit from training in any of the following areas:

1. **Leadership and strategic planning:** This might include modules on decision-making processes, how to set long-term goals, formulating business strategies, and adapting to changes in the financial industry.

2. **Financial management and risk assessment:** Topics covered here would range from financial statement analysis and investment evaluation, to risk management strategies and issues around regulatory compliance.
3. **Client relationship management:** This could include effective techniques for client acquisition and retention, as well as strategies to address particular client needs and concerns.
4. **Technological advancements and industry trends:** Sessions here would look at industry trends, regulations and compliance requirements, as well as emerging technologies that are relevant to financial advisory services – such as artificial intelligence, robo-advice and blockchain.
5. **Communication and team building:** Training on interpersonal skills, effective communication techniques, conflict resolution and team building might all be included here.
6. **Personal development and wellbeing:** Modules in this section would explain the importance of stress management, work-life balance, good time management and self-care.

How will the training be delivered?

External training providers will create bespoke programmes to meet your specific requirements, but there are other ways to deliver training that can either complement or even entirely replace the input from external experts.

On-the-job training is a great way to develop skills and experience. If you've identified somebody as a potential future leader, get them to shadow a more senior colleague for a while to see how their experience helps them tackle real-world situations.

Other alternatives to formal, face-to-face training include online learning platforms, videos, webinars and even quizzes. All of these can be used as short, punchy learning sessions that are easier for busy employees to fit around their normal work commitments.

How can you encourage participation?

A training programme can only be successful if people willingly take part in it and embrace the opportunities it offers. The key here is to create a truly supportive learning

environment, where employees are encouraged to participate actively.

Managers and leaders can play a vital role in championing the training programme and setting a positive example if they engage in continuous learning themselves. By demonstrating the value of training, leaders inspire their staff to invest time and effort in their own development.

It's also essential to provide the resources and support people will need in order to fully engage with the training programme. That includes tangible things like training materials and tools, as well as more practical considerations, like setting aside dedicated time for learning within the working day.

Is the learning programme working?

There's no point persisting with a learning programme that doesn't work. Regular evaluation will help you measure your programme's effectiveness and show where improvements should be made.

Surveys and feedback from participants can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the training programme from a learner's perspective. You can also track key performance indicators, like client satisfaction, employee productivity and retention rates in order to gauge the overall impact the training programme is having on your firm's success.

What about smaller firms with limited resources?

For smaller financial advice firms, which often lack the resources of larger companies, it's vital to adopt a focused and efficient approach to training. Here are some good ways to maximise the effectiveness of your training budget:

- Carefully prioritise essential skills:** Narrow down the scope of your training so it focuses only on areas that are directly linked to your particular firm's services, client needs, and strategic objectives.
 - Embrace blended learning:** Using both online and offline training resources gives greater flexibility and allows for self-paced learning – enabling staff to access training materials and resources at their convenience.
 - Microlearning and bite-sized content:** Breaking down training materials into small, easily digestible modules or lessons makes it easier for employees to fit learning into their busy schedules.
- On-the-job training:** Leverage the power of on-the-job training to combine learning with practical experience. It's a great way to encourage employees to take on new responsibilities and learn from more experienced members of the team.
 - External training partnerships:** Consider partnering with external training providers or industry experts who can deliver focused and customised training programmes. External trainers can bring expertise and tailored content to address your specific training needs, ensuring maximum efficiency in a limited timeframe.
 - Continuous learning culture:** Foster a culture of continuous learning within the firm by encouraging employees to allocate dedicated time for professional development and skill enhancement. This can be achieved by setting aside regular 'learning hours' or incorporating training discussions into team meetings. By emphasising the importance of learning, it becomes a shared responsibility and a natural part of the firm's workflow.