

Not Successor Ready?

Not having a ready-now successor for a critical role is common, but it's also a signal to take focused action.

Here's how to respond strategically:

1. Acknowledge the Gap – Don't Avoid It

Pretending a successor exists when they don't, creates risk. Be honest about the gap and document it in your succession plan. "At this point, we don't have anyone who could step into this role immediately. Let's build a plan to close that gap."

2. Review Internal Talent Pipeline

Are there emerging talents who, with development, could be ready in 1–3 years? **Use your 9-box grid or talent review process to identify employees with high potential, even if they're not fully developed yet.**

3. Create a Development Fast-Track

If someone shows promise, map out an accelerated development plan:

- Assign them stretch projects
- Offer coaching or mentoring
- Expose them to key responsibilities of the target role

4. Consider External Succession Options

In parallel, work with HR or senior managers to:

- Benchmark external talent for this role
- Build an external pipeline in case internal development won't close the gap in time

5. Strengthen Role Documentation & Knowledge Transfer

Without a ready successor, it's crucial to reduce knowledge loss risk:

- Document key processes and decisions
- Start job shadowing or cross-training within the team
- Ensure no one person is a single point of failure

6. Communicate Upward

- Flag the succession risk to senior leadership or HR:
- Be solution-focused (e.g., "Here's the gap — here's our development plan")
- Ask for support or resources if needed (coaching, training, etc.)

7. Build Long-Term

Treat this as a wake-up call to invest more intentionally in talent development early and continuously, not just when a role becomes vacant.