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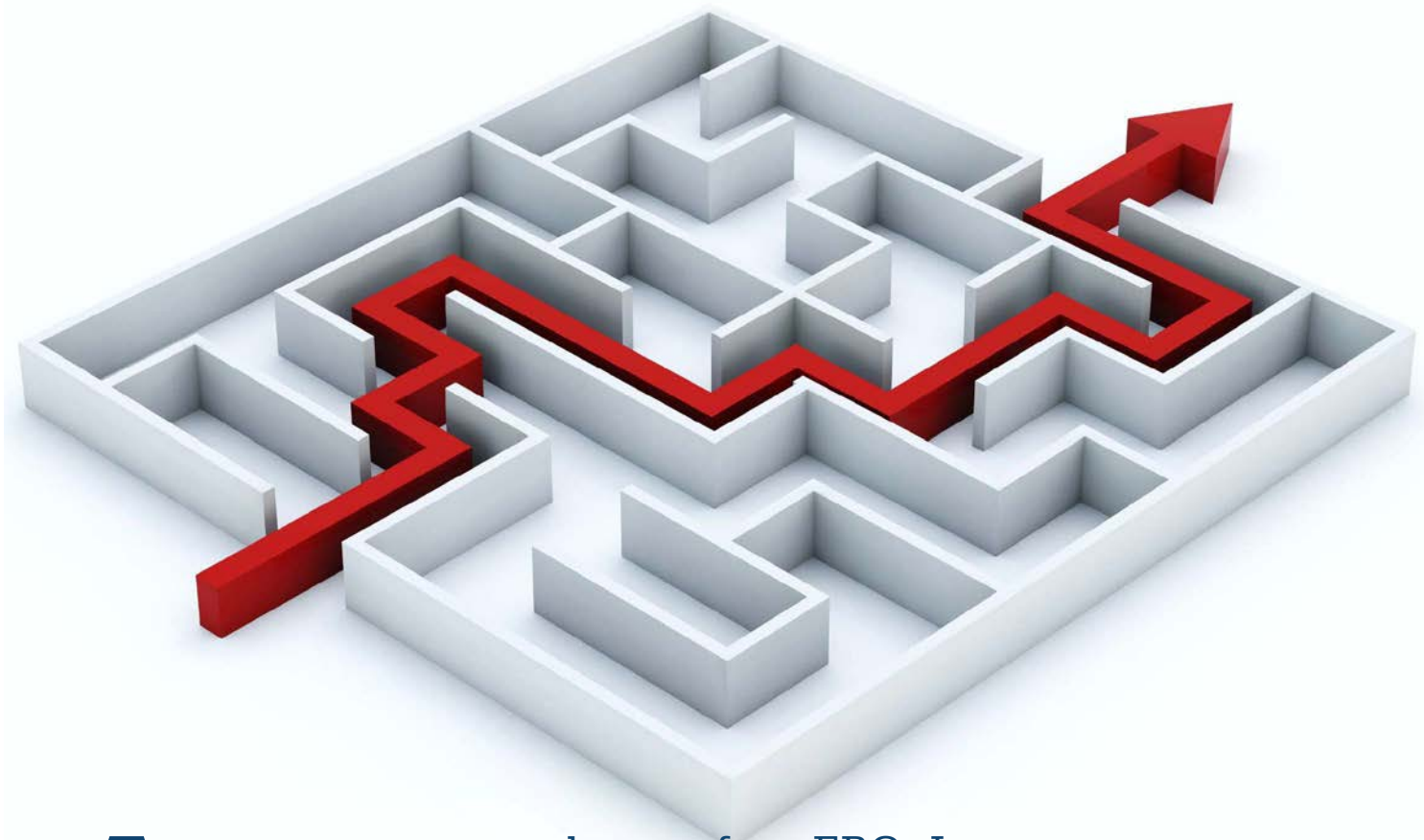
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Employee Development:

It's Easier Than You Think



As a young employee of an FBO, I was fortunate to have very forward thinking managers. To be sure, they were my mentors; not just my managers. I might add they were very, very patient mentors, for which I remain eternally grateful. When I had a question, the answer was always a generous “Let me show you...” as opposed to a curt “... because that is the policy.”

Further, save for a strong tuition assistance program, no formal employee development program existed at the time as an internal offering from my employer. It seemed navigating the unpublished map of advancement within the FBO was a combination of luck and persistence. Notably, it struck me that the path to the general manager’s seat of the FBO was far from clear. Because it simply wasn’t published.

This was almost 20 years ago.

Today, with very few exceptions this phenomena hasn’t changed. There remains no clear, industry-recognized path to the FBO general manager’s seat. Or for that matter, the path is unclear on a number of advanced positions within the FBO industry. Coupled

with record low unemployment in the U.S., the result has been catastrophic. Like the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico that strengthen a tropical depression into a hurricane, a failure to develop front-line employees has turned a brewing generational storm into a monster; one that has impacted FBOs across the country in the form of a shortage of qualified managers. Though it is tempting to Monday morning quarterback the reasons behind this phenomena, the storm made landfall long ago. It's time to rebuild.

The question is, where to begin? On its surface, the creation of an employee development program from whole cloth appears daunting; an undertaking best left for a human resources professional. Such thinking is both nonsensical and dismissive of innate skills we each carry within us. The ability to teach exists in every human being, regardless of age or experience. It involves a mere willingness to try — to communicate what we know well to another. Moreover, just like beginning a regimen of regular exercise, it matters less what form the exercise is; it matters more that it is regular. This exercise analogy bears consideration.

In order to get “in shape,” one usually picks a form of training. Weight lifting, running, biking, or swimming for example, all are all forms of training. Within each form of training are various activities. To use weight lifting as our example, one might use free weights, machines or both to strengthen their arms, legs, chest, back, shoulders and so on. Hence, a form of exercise is chosen and within it, various activities strengthen the body.

Though the analogy is an oversimplification, an employee development program is truly no different. The form of training, or employee development program, can be in the form of one-on-one mentoring, a classroom setting with multiple employees, online training, videos, or otherwise.

The easiest and lowest risk form of employee development is simply mentoring in a one-on-one environment. It requires zero skills; it merely requires a willingness to teach. Next is determining the activities, or exercises, within the chosen form of training

or mentoring. This too is simple; perhaps deceptively so.

Consider your company's organization: What departments must one be proficient in, in order to be a general manager? The term “general manager” itself gives a hint as to the context; it connotes one who is highly conversant in multiple subjects, even if not an expert in any particular subject. Departmentally at an FBO, this individual must have a working understanding of leadership, management, operations, sales, marketing, customer service, accounting, real estate, human resources and legal skills, such as contracts and a host of other areas. Each area, or department, is akin to each body part that must be exercised, such as arms, chest or back. And the chosen form of exercise, is mentoring.



What might that mentoring look like? First, is adopting a mentor's philosophy. Job security doesn't come from being the only human being at an organization that knows everything. Job security comes from training the next generation of leaders. The former is the monetization of tribal knowledge, whereas the latter is leadership personified- the selfless betterment of others.

Next, find your mentees. Offer a monthly “lunch and learn” for your employees on specific subjects from the list above — or one you create — in which you can mentor others. A simple email offering an optional-yet-paid hour in which “...any employee interested can come enjoy a free lunch from the ‘boss,’ and learn about (insert subject).” Say for example, “the basics of an income statement will be covered next Wednesday from Noon to 1 p.m., for anyone interested.”

After sending the email invite, an interminable wait will be followed by two or

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three responses, expressing interest. In the intervening days, the manager leading the “lunch and learn” need not create a complex PowerPoint presentation, or type a lengthy tome about the chosen subject. A simple handout, or a whiteboard and markers are the most complex tools required. Formality is not the goal. In fact, formality is the antithesis of the goal, for it creates a rigid structure in which learners are uncomfortable asking questions. An environment in which questions are encouraged and open discussion is the norm is the target. This is not only comfortable for the mentee, it eases anxiety on that of mentor.

When the training day comes, rather than have a room with employees you might have thought would have responded to such an offering, you'll instead find the most thoughtful candidates that exist — those who self-select. Without question, human psychology plays a role here. Yet, the handful of employees that show up for such a mentorship opportunity as simple as a “lunch and learn” are motivated by something not teachable — a willingness to learn. Coupled with a mentor that has a willingness to teach, any business — aviation or otherwise — will find a continuous pipeline of qualified future leaders.

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