

SUSTAINABILITY & SUCCESSION

By Kevin Maine

As mentioned in past articles, sustainability is becoming ever more present in our daily vernacular. Oftentimes when we think of sustainability, we are thinking financially. Is the budget adequate? No doubt we've done our homework e.g., vulnerability assessment, emergency response plan, wet weather plan etc.

One item we tend to overlook during our sustainability assessment is succession and succession planning. Since 2020, till now COVID-19 and its variants have been a major staffing concern, i.e., alternate shift scheduling, quarantine, fallen ill for an extended periods – even worse succumbing to the COVID-19 or its variants. Hopefully, these situations are temporary, and we should have plans in place filling any gaps in coverage.

Poaching: With the ever-increasing certified operations specialist shortage, systems have been poaching staff from each other. Typically, as one system loses experienced staff, they begin recruiting already certified /experienced staff from other systems. Unfortunately, smaller systems cannot afford or have the resources to keep staff from moving on.

As we begin the new year, many operations specialists are planning their retirement. Often when training, we take a survey how close to retirement is everyone in the room. There is always several in the room with a year or less to go. When turning in our retirement request – many systems are shocked to think someone will retire and no plan for succession or transition into the open position.

In many instances, there is a plan for the deputy or assistant operations specialist to transition into the operations specialist in responsible charge/chief operations specialist's position. However, they soon discover the assistant has the proper certification for their current position but does not possess the proper credentials to simply transition into the chief operations specialist's position. In many cases to become certified at the higher level may require additional classroom training and extended amount of time on the job.

What are some solutions to these situations? Have a plan. If your succession plan is to promote the assistant to the chief or lead operations specialists position, be sure they possess the proper credentials, or begin the necessary training well in advance of the chief's departure. When hiring new staff again, hire them well advanced of the certified operations specialists departure. Many times, I hear complain they cannot afford to hire and have the extra staff in place prior to the operations specialists departure. However, you cannot afford not to hire someone in advance of the certified operations specialists departure.

If your operations specialist leaves without a certified operations specialist in place, the system risks being under

a consent order. In this scenario, not having an appropriately certified operations specialist with a consent order could result in a potential fine of \$37,500 per day penalty. Another option to avoid the possibility of this situation, have new staff or staff upgrading their certification enroll in the apprenticeship program. Keeping in mind the program is a two-year program at no charge to the system. Whether your current staff is upgrading their certification on a new hire -remember that succession planning should be done well in advance avoiding any legal or training entanglements!



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