



# AWWA DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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## *Succession Planning*

**A**S THE WATER AND WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE NATION AND IN ARIZONA AGES, so does its workforce and its knowledge base. Consequently, succession planning is now a must. The skills and experience of those who leave long-held positions are critical to the future success of those who follow and our industry as a whole. If the exiting knowledge base can be combined with the specifically selected traits of the appropriate successors – we will have a winning combination.

What goes into the type of professional wisdom of which I speak? Well, here is just a short list of concepts and words that come to mind: big picture thinking, detail-oriented thinking, problem-solving skills, communication skills, political savvy, intuition, know-how, judgment, character, up-to-date classroom and on-the-job training, real-life experiences, innovative management, low maintenance personality, team-oriented outlook, strategic analysis, highly developed inter-personal skills, short-term and long-term thinking.

How do you articulate these needs, cultivate each individual, and pass along the accumulated tacit and explicit knowledge needed to move our industry forward? In my utility, Phoenix Water Services, a great example is our O&M Technician training. It takes place not just in the classroom but in the field with experienced professionals who have dealt with the ever increasing complexity of

our industry for years. This is the type of success-oriented transfer of skills that is needed. And it can involve all forms of leadership and technical staff.

This culture of communication must be instilled at the earliest stage possible for each individual. New employees receiving guidance and coaching can produce more effectively, energize the organization and succeed at various levels, but we must recognize that they will learn in different ways from their predecessors. We must create an organization culture where employees leaving your workforce will end their time with you as mentors, knowing that their experiences have a place in the future. The transfer of this “wisdom” must be a deliberate, structured and clear, as well as accepted by all involved. The infusion of new talent instilled with the accumulated knowledge of the past will allow the industry to develop a progressive and wise workforce capable of continuity and the challenges that lie ahead in our industry.



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