

Developing a Talent Pipeline for the Future of Food



The food industry is faced with the reality of [numerous macro shocks and volatility](#) in the market. Not only will the global population reach [9.7 billion by 2050](#), but climate change, geopolitical conflicts, and still-reeling complications from the pandemic are leading to what Kearney [predicts](#) to be “the most significant margin compression in recent history.”

As the already urgent demand for safe, sustainable food production becomes more acute, food businesses must recruit and retain innovative, adaptable leadership to position themselves competitively. These executives must not only have keen economic intuition but also awareness of geopolitical trends and their impact on the food business value chain.

Those who don't will fall behind—and fast.

However, within the food industry C-suite, turnover remains high and talent markets are tight, putting food businesses at risk of losing key executive talent and struggling to re-fill those roles. Leadership talent pipelining may be the only way to ensure a company's long-term vision is protected and fulfilled.

How Talent Pipelining for Food Leadership Can Mitigate Risks

Talent pipelining is a proactive, strategic approach to identifying and cultivating high-value leadership candidates. While traditional recruitment strategies prioritize immediate hiring needs, strategic talent pipelining prioritizes long-term organizational goals and needs.

By slowly and methodically building a pool of executive talent whose skills, knowledge, and abilities align with the organization's needs, food businesses can prepare for inevitable C-suite turnover, whether through resignations or retirement.

Talent pipelining works to align an individual's long-term growth goals with the high-level objectives of the organization. This strategy not only works to ensure future leadership talent will align with the company as it evolves, but it also presents an appealing opportunity for candidates. Organizations that are able to offer serious growth opportunities can position themselves as an employer of choice, attracting potential future food leaders as well as retaining and upskilling current talent.

As the food business landscape grows more competitive, the specific skills and experiences demanded of leaders are becoming more niche. Given the competitiveness of the current market, recruiting an executive who meets all your requirements is becoming harder, and the process slower. If, however, an organization can proactively forecast potential leadership openings, they can work to seek out potential fits without the time pressure of an immediate need. Then, when it's time to hire, there are multiple candidates ready to vie for the role.

Building a Comprehensive Talent Pipelining Strategy in the Food Industry

A comprehensive talent pipelining strategy focuses on four key areas, a series of interlocking parts that reinforce each other to make the whole process work.

Talent forecasting

Scrambling to fill an open leadership position almost always leads to a talent disconnect—the consequences of which can be significantly harmful to the organization. Talent pipelining only works when there is enough advance notice to plan ahead and take the time to develop the pipeline.

What are the organization's growth projections? What new markets or business arms are on the horizon? Use of data and predictive forecasting is critical to identifying potential talent needs well before they come to fruition.

Diverse talent sourcing

Despite widespread efforts to improve diversity and equity across business sectors, women and ethnic minorities are still dramatically underrepresented at the leadership level. This presents a serious problem, as it limits an already small talent pool.

Working with an executive search partner with [deep, diverse talent networks](#) can help provide opportunities to expand sourcing strategies to not only find underrepresented quality executive talent but also work to reverse these systemic barriers.

Succession planning

A tumultuous talent market places an increased emphasis on the importance of succession planning—particularly in [family businesses](#), where the reality of generational decline and evolving business trends add to the burden. No leader is going to stay in their role forever. Eventually, you have to plan to hand over the reins.

Talent pipelining means you aren't waiting for this reality to come to fruition but taking the bull by the horns to identify and develop internal candidates. Not only do you need people who have the right skills and experiences, but you need [cultural fits](#) who can navigate a smooth transition.

Talent engagement

Finally, talent pipelining won't work unless the people in that pipeline are engaged and eager to take a new role when it becomes available. For internal leadership development, this means fostering a positive work environment and driving retention through competitive benefits, recognition and mentorship programs, and work-life balance initiatives. For

external talent, this typically means partnering with an [executive search firm](#) that can nurture relationships with talent over time by providing an exceptional candidate experience.

The food industry is evolving at an ever-increasing rate. Finding the leaders to spearhead changes, adapt to trends, and drive innovation is dependent on an effective talent pipelining strategy. What does your talent pipelining strategy look like?