



BEST PRACTICES

STEPS TO STEPPING DOWN

Rapport consults former president of HCA Hospice Care, Dr Seet Ai Mee, for her thoughts on succession planning for board leaders in a VWO.

"

'm one president who doesn't feel you have to stay on forever," revealed Dr Seet Ai Mee, who recently stepped down as president of the HCA Hospice Care (HCA). She was talking to *Rapport* about succession planning for board leaders in a VWO.

Serving definite terms ensures that younger members have the opportunity to step up in an organisation. This in turn enables the organisation to stay in touch with the community and address its ever-changing needs.

The challenge is finding qualified people for VWOs such as HCA. When death and suffering are part of one's work experience, it's difficult for even the most well-meaning people to stay on.

PLANNING FOR SUCCESSION

A typical framework in succession planning for board leaders may not be feasible in VWOs. This is due to the nature of VWO board members, who are mainly volunteers. Finding volunteers to fill leadership positions becomes trickier because career advancement within a VWO would not be a priority; rather, they are doing it for a cause they believe in.

It is then important to also look beyond one's organisation, with a keen understanding of the roles



and responsibilities required of an organisation's key positions. This, Dr Seet believes, allows not only the identification of suitable candidates, but also the recognition of their abilities even when—due to circumstances in life—they have to leave.

BEING OPEN

For Dr Seet, succession planning is a constant process, not something that's done only when the need arises. "In that sense, I have been looking for a successor since I stepped into HCA," she commented. "Right from the beginning, leaders must plan for people to take over."

Three years ago, she was introduced to Dr Tan Poh Kiang and could tell that he was leadership material. Dr Tan was no stranger to palliative care and, according to Dr Seet, "has the vision and dedication,

making him a prime candidate to take over."

Dr Tan formally joined the HCA council in 2013 and took over as President in Mar 2014.

NO 'I' IN TEAM

Succession planning does not only entail leadership grooming; it also includes building up other staff in the organisation so that key personnel have a competent team to work with after they take over. "Succession planning is about the whole team, not an individual," Dr Seet insisted.

According to her, it's important to fit the person to the task. Additionally, a leader needs to map out the entire team's career paths clearly. "When I ask someone to fill a role, I'll tell him or her why we need that person and for how long. People feel better if they know when they can expect to step down and not feel like they have to volunteer for life," Dr Seet advocated.

Understanding the voluntary nature of a VWO will pave the way for an efficacious succession plan, with a strong team to back the new leader. In closing, Dr Seet shared this last tidbit about hospice work: "Our work has nothing to do with money; it's all heart. Some of us believe that we are in this world for more than just earning money, so we volunteer."