

**FOR THE PLANNING TEAM****Leadership Avatar Exercise**

By definition, an avatar is an icon or representation of something else. For the purposes of succession planning, you can use this concept of creating an avatar to help define the essence of the perfect successor for your top executive. In other words, you can identify the ideal attributes, characteristics, skills, and talents of the best possible person to assume control of the company when your current leader departs. This succession avatar will give you a more quantitative way to evaluate candidates as you compare them with the fictitious gold standard.

1. **Select an elite team to help build your succession planning avatar. Limit the group to no more than five, and choose colleagues and peers who can add strategic and practical perspectives. Team members include:**

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2. **Make a list of your most outstanding employees, including those you would not want to lose (especially to competitors).**

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3. **Write down all of the skills and talents exhibited by these top-level employees that make them successful within your organization and your industry.**

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4. **Supplement that list with any other skills, talents, attributes, and competencies that would be required for the ideal version of your top executive.**

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5. **Bring your succession avatar to life by using those lists to vividly describe your perfect incoming leader using specific, detailed terms. "Our next leader is..."**

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6. **Visualize the human reflection of that description, and use the avatar as the benchmark for your talent search. While some people discount this exercise, it is extremely powerful and can tangibly elevate the quality of your chosen successor.**

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