

Case Study: Post Hire of an Internal Candidate



Selwyn Ray
Executive Director
Maryland Mentoring Partnership
(Baltimore, MD)

The Maryland Mentoring Partnership is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is “to develop and support high-quality, sustainable youth mentoring programs in Maryland.” Toward the achievement of this mission, Maryland Mentoring Partnership serves as an expert resource, a statewide advocate and clearinghouse to increase youth mentoring relationships and quality programs. Maryland Mentoring Partnership provides comprehensive services and programs that include multi-sector collaboratives, innovative program development, training, technical assistance, public awareness, and public policy.

Maryland Mentoring Partnership has emerged as a leader in the mentoring movement. The organization works with a network of over 280 mentoring programs throughout the state that are sponsored by corporations, faith communities, government agencies and educational institutions. Together these programs are responsible for over 45,000 mentoring matches, where caring adults mentor a young person. MMP is a member of MENTOR/ National Mentoring Partnership, a network of 38 state and local mentoring partnerships that provides national research, advocacy, best practices and technical assistance.

In 2007, Maryland Mentoring Partnership contracted with TransitionGuides to perform a national executive search and manage a seamless leadership transition. The departing Executive Director, Linda Stewart, had been the organization’s Executive Director for the past eleven years. Linda decided it was time to change careers but made sure her successor would inherit a well-respected organization in sound financial condition with a great staff team, a dedicated board and an array of well-developed programs.

On October 15, 2007, Selwyn Ray assumed his new position as the Executive Director of Maryland Mentoring Partnership. Selwyn previously served as the Director of Recruitment and Partnerships of Maryland Mentoring Partnership since 2001. Prior to joining Maryland Mentoring Partnership, Selwyn served as Director of Community Relations for the Safe and Sound Campaign in Baltimore. Previously, Ray held executive positions in public health agencies. Early in his career, he served as a judicial law clerk for the Circuit Court for Baltimore City and as a legislative assistant in the Maryland General Assembly.

As an internal candidate selected as the new Executive Director, we asked Selwyn to share how his new role has impacted the organization as a whole in terms of its stakeholders, board and staff. Selwyn responded, “I have enjoyed the challenge of the new position and I believe that my transition as a staff member of five years from inside the Maryland Mentoring Partnership provided a level of comfort and stability that the staff, board and stakeholders appreciated. I was a known commodity that knew the organization and that familiarity was reassuring.”

At times we have found that senior management who assume a larger role within the organization, like in the case of Selwyn, meet many challenges along the way. Some of these challenges include networking, funding and having to face the fact that they are not filling the shoes of the successor, but rather walking in new shoes. What helped Selwyn to face these challenges and be successful was his ability to “put to use all of the great advice provided by the Weinberg Fellows Program, my predecessor, the Board and TransitionGuides. The key is to use what you know and trust the support systems that are in place.” Through advice and various support systems, a newly hired executive can find themselves overcoming many challenges more easily than having to attempt to do it all on their own with nothing to draw upon.

Selwyn finds that, “the confidence and support that the board, staff, stakeholders and funders display in me in the new position as well as the opportunity to lead the organization is very rewarding. When people believe in something, it’s very inspiring and powerful!” This has proven to be rewarding and reassuring as he carries out his responsibilities in his new role.

When new executives start their new roles, despite their preexisting tenure with the organization, there is a phase where learning the job becomes a reality to them. The learning curve can seem to be overwhelmingly long at times. Some organizations have various processes in place to assist new executives in becoming acclimated to their roles, functions and duties. Other organizations have ways of providing assistance from external sources. We asked Selwyn what assistance he received after he was hired and he responded, “The Weinberg Foundation provided great leadership instruction, the Board co-chairs provided excellent coaching along with other board members and other Executive Directors gave me great advice. Don Tebbe of TransitionGuides gave me some wisdom that made the transition smooth and less burdensome. Don’s experience with other transitions was invaluable.” It is essential to provide necessary support to the executive so the executive can be successful in their new role.

After a year of service as the organization’s Executive Director, Selwyn continues to provide excellent leadership and continues to maintain the respect and reputation of the organization as a whole. The organization has experienced many successes within the year and it continues to make advancement. In reflection on the organization’s progress, Selwyn notices, “the organization is moving forward and there is a spirit of accomplishment and a desire to work even harder to provide the services that are so desperately needed in the mentoring arena.”

It is important for the incoming executive to feel that their leadership of the organization makes a difference and that taking the position was the right thing to do. Unfortunately, when there is lack of feedback regarding this to the executive, the executive can begin to question their leadership, vision and direction. We asked Selwyn what has helped him to affirm that he was the right person selected for the Executive Director position at the Maryland Mentoring Partnership and he said, “When board members say I am doing a good job. When staff members are happy about their work, and when community people say ‘I am so glad you got the job I was rooting for you,’ those affirmations are comforting.”

As organizations hire new executives, whether externally or through internal promotion of top talent, it is important to consider the support needed to ensure they are successful in their new roles.

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