



Brandon Hall Group
**EXCELLENCE
AT WORK**

Executive Interview

with **Sarah Woods**,
Head of Office, BTS Boston

and **Lisa Sprenkle**,
Executive Advisor and Consultant, BTS Boston

and **Michael Lehman**,
Senior Director, BTS

Succession Planning for Executives and Leaders



About BTS

BTS is a global professional services firm that partners with clients to enable strategy execution. We provide the skills, tools and knowledge so people understand how their daily work impacts business results. We are experts in behavior change, care deeply about delivering results and inspire people to do the best work of their lives. It's strategy made personal. For more information, visit bts.com.



Recognition

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EXCELLENCE IN HCM AWARDS



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13 Gold Awards | 4 Silver Awards | 6 Bronze Awards

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8 Gold Awards | 6 Silver Awards | 3 Bronze Awards

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

1 Gold Award | 1 Silver Award

Sales Performance

3 Silver Awards

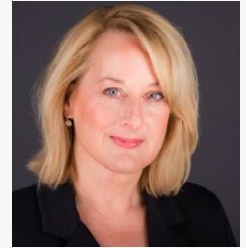
Talent Management

1 Gold Award | 1 Silver Awards | 1 Bronze Award

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About Sarah Woods



Sarah Woods is the Head of Office for BTS Boston, formerly Bates Communications, a global consultancy that improves performance through communicative leadership. Sarah leads major client relationships and offers advisory and consulting to boards, CEOs and their teams, and provides oversight for the office and our business targets. Prior to joining Bates in 2007, Sarah spent over 20 years as a sales/marketing leader within global businesses, start-ups and consultancies. She has served on the leadership teams of multiple start-up companies, consulting with CEOs on communicating key value messages and developing corporate sales strategies. A dynamic keynote speaker and thought leader, Sarah has been quoted in dozens of publications including *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Business Review USA* and *The Standard*.



About Lisa Sprenkle

Lisa Sprenkle is an Executive Advisor and Consultant with BTS Boston. She partners with clients from nonprofits to global Fortune 100 companies to develop outstanding leaders and effective teams for positive organizational impact. She works closely with boards and senior leaders to align leadership needs with strategy, identify gaps and implement a process to ensure the right leadership is in place.

Prior to joining BTS Bates, Lisa was a founding partner in DHR International's Leadership Consulting practice. She developed the Board Evaluation, Succession Planning, Onboarding and Team Effectiveness IP, managed the Executive Coaching process, and led business development and client delivery. Prior to DHR, Lisa was a partner in a boutique consulting firm and held consulting management positions at Deloitte, Andersen and Willis Towers Watson.

About Michael Lehman



Michael Lehman has over 20 years of experience designing and implementing assessment solutions for roles spanning from individual contributors to C-Suite executives for selection, succession and development. Michael also provides consulting services related to developing high-performing leadership teams. He has provided consulting services to clients in over 25 countries. Currently, Michael is responsible for BTS Leader Labs, used by clients to develop their leaders' understanding of strategy, business/financial acumen and leadership skills.



About Rachel Cooke

Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group's Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.

Q RACHEL

Sarah, how do you define succession planning?

A SARAH

It can be a confusing term, which is why it's not always done successfully. There's an important distinction between succession planning and replacement planning. I define the first as advanced preparation for the departure of a specific leader, either expected or unexpected. Succession planning also considers the future needs of the organization. Replacement planning, however, happens when there's an unexpected departure. It replaces a leader in the role without really considering the future needs of the organization.

Succession management for senior and top leaders usually fails because of a lack of planning. It's the number-one reason why succession wouldn't work. In the 15 years that I've been coaching new CEOs into their roles, I've learned a lot about the scenarios where the CEO was able to succeed versus where it was bumpy. The 'aha' moment came for me in the third CEO transition that I was supporting. I came to understand that the CEO's success didn't happen in that transition, it started years before that. This particular CEO had been part of an artfully planned internal succession that started five years prior. He went on to lead that company to significant growth for the next decade.

The more disastrous ones happened when the board was caught short or had very little planning around how to replace the CEO and had to make a fast decision and maybe bring someone in from the outside. That's usually what creates the challenge. Another potential cause of poor succession is that it can happen inside a silo within the organization. Organizations should have had somebody to succeed and stay ahead of that business segment but they weren't opening it up to candidates across the organization who might have just as much or greater success in that role. The third thing is, sometimes it just gets delegated as "the job of HR." It's not just the job of HR, it's the job of executive leadership led by the CEO.

Q RACHEL

Michael, how can we further ensure that these new successors thrive?

A MICHAEL

Once you have identified potential successors, what are you going to do with them? How are you going to make them ready? Getting them ready can take a lot of different forms. Sometimes, it's the experiences that people must have. Sometimes, they must get one-on-one coaching. It has to be customized for the individual to set them up for success.

(continued)

You also must look forward versus backward. If you try to put people in the mold of what made someone successful five or seven years ago and don't look at the changing world, it won't work. The other part here, which is very specific to some organizations, is how you announce who is on the list. Some clients keep it secret while others are very public about saying who is on the list. I can't say one way is better than another — it's what is important to that organization. But if you use one method over another, you must make sure it's consistent so there isn't degrading trust.

Also, a lot of clients don't think about the domino effect. We're working with an organization right now that's elevating people into group president positions. They found themselves scrambling for the next layers down and identifying successors for those levels. You must think about succession management not just from that individual, per se, but about their team and what's the best routine through planning — upward and downward.



RACHEL

Lisa, what has changed around executive succession planning since the pandemic?



LISA

In the early days of the pandemic, when hospitalization rates were high, it highlighted the critical need for succession planning. If boards weren't already actively engaged, they became engaged quickly, especially in emergency replacement plans. Research shows most organizations really don't have robust succession plans. Candidates might be ready now or in one to three years or five-plus years. That emergency replacement might be the ready-now candidate, but often it's a well-respected leader or it might be a board member who could manage the position permanently but either doesn't want to or it's not the right fit for a long-term replacement. They could step in and have those capabilities.

The first thing we saw change was not only the need for succession planning and development but "we don't even have a replacement plan in place." Boards started becoming more engaged in succession planning than they ever have. The second thing we saw during the pandemic was the need for authentic leadership. We mean leaders who are self-aware and transparent about communication and what's happening in the organization. They bring in other points of view and foster high degrees of trust. This resonated with employees and made a difference in engagement, which made a difference in performance as well.

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The third thing that changed was that new leaders emerged. This was a surprise to us. It prompted boards and leadership teams to reevaluate their current definition of high-potential and succession candidates. A lot of clients shared stories where employees stepped up and demonstrated leadership. They might not have been on the current pipeline, but now are. On the opposite side, we heard stories of leaders just crumbling under the pressure. They couldn't make decisions or communicate with employees, which derailed their high-potential status. The pandemic highlighted to organizations what was missing in their succession plans.

Q **RACHEL**

What is succession planning like today and what will it be for the future?

A **LISA**

Crisis situations like we are in today are such a great opportunity to accelerate leadership development because leaders have to try new things. They're having to use different approaches and explore and reflect. While every organization is different, there are some key things such as adaptability, resilience, collaboration and risk management. Organizations need to ask, what can I do to accelerate leadership development? More importantly, what experiences can I provide?

Q **RACHEL**

Sarah, what are your thoughts on how to adapt to succession planning?

A **SARAH**

The number-one thing we're hearing globally is to develop executive successors who have an Enterprise mindset. They need to be able to think across the organization, make connections, different types of decisions, manage risk, cultivate innovation across the organization to bring up the best ideas through the rest of the organization, build talent differently and increase the mobility of talent. It's a different way of leading right now.

The pandemic challenged CEOs and executive leadership in a way that has forever changed the expectations for CEO and executive success. We're never going back from the theme of transparency. There needs to be a level of trust that leaders are advancing in the organization so that there's a lot of faith in leaders who will rise to take the company forward. All of that has shifted the requirements of leadership at the top of the house.

Q **RACHEL**

Michael, what drives results?

MICHAEL

A It has a lot to do with transparency and being inclusive. Those are considered soft skills, but those soft skills are becoming extremely critical. Our clients say they are inching toward a recession, so you must have the right leader at the right time. You have some CEOs who have seen that play before and know what to do. You must think about what's going on in the ecosystem to make sure you set that person up for success.

RACHEL

Q What are the three things that leaders need to do to ensure their succession planning helps them achieve the future they envision?

SARAH

A First, evaluate what's changing about the company's business, strategy, future requirements and aspirations. CEOs, in particular, need to be very close to their own metrics right now and deeply understand what's happening in their market sector and their business. That's not going to change. The dynamics of the marketplace and the global environment are such that they really need to understand their business and their sector. Knowing what's going to be required in the coming years is critical.

Second, do a needs analysis of leadership requirements for that strategy and create role profiles based on that future strategy as opposed to looking back. Eighteen months or three years ago is the distant past now — things are moving quickly.

Third, you need to look at it with fresh eyes every six months; things are changing that quickly. Plan three to five years out but keep it fresh. Continually look at the evolving strategy and requirements of the company and evaluate your succession plan based on that. It's not replacement planning — it's development planning. The question you will continue to raise is, how will you prepare employees to lead the company into the future?

Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:



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About Brandon Hall Group

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

Professional Certifications

Self-paced certification programs. Virtual group sessions for companies. In-person conferences and summits.

Membership

Individual and Enterprise Membership Options: Includes research assets, advisory support, a client success plan and more.

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recognizes world-class HCM programs that transform their organization and achieve breakthrough results. This designation is the next step beyond the HCM Excellence Awards, which focus on a single program, and looks at the department as a whole.



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