

# Testing Leadership Strength in Real-Time

Kathy Baron, *Vice President*



*Vice President Kathy Baron talks about the implications of the pandemic on CEO succession planning.*

## Q. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected CEO succession planning?

**A:** Organizations have had to pivot strategy and operations very quickly during this crisis and it has tested every management team. Even those boards that haven't had to enact an emergency or temporary CEO succession plan have had the opportunity to observe prospective CEOs and other key executive candidates under extreme pressure.

The qualities of an exceptional leader include vision, decisiveness, resilience, adaptability, tenacity, empathy, and communication abilities; all of which have been put to this extreme test. Many boards and management teams have seen potential successors rise to the occasion, demonstrating these attributes. In other organizations it has exposed areas of the company and individuals where further development is clearly needed in order to strengthen the leadership bench. The pandemic may have also highlighted individuals who simply do not have the temperament to lead and succeed as CEO.

## Q. How can the board utilize this unexpected visibility into their talent pipeline?

**A:** Of course, one of the board's primary and fundamental responsibilities is to hire and manage the CEO role. To do this effectively, directors must have a clear picture of the leadership talent that's available internally, both for a strategic successor and to plan for emergency or temporary situations. Now would be the time to ask questions about potential candidates for the CEO role and understand how they have performed during the crisis. It's also an opportunity to understand the talent pipeline among the entire c-suite, as well as other critical positions.

Leadership under normal, stable conditions is very different than under pressure. Boards have been given new insight into the organization's leadership bench and this examination shouldn't be overlooked.

*“...directors must have a clear picture of the leadership talent that’s available internally, both for a strategic successor and to plan for emergency or temporary situations.”*

### **About Kathy Baron**

Kathy Baron is a vice president in Pearl Meyer’s Boston office, where she specializes in talent management issues, including executive leadership development, succession management, and coaching.

### **About Pearl Meyer**

Pearl Meyer is the leading advisor to boards and senior management on the alignment of executive compensation with business and leadership strategy, making pay programs a powerful catalyst for value creation and competitive advantage. Pearl Meyer’s global clients stand at the forefront of their industries and range from emerging high-growth, not-for-profit, and private companies to the Fortune 500 and FTSE 350. The firm has offices in Atlanta, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Houston, London, Los Angeles, New York, Raleigh, and San Jose.