

## HR lessons from late night TV feuds

If you don't know about the late night television employment war at NBC, where have you been? Quick recap to catch you up if you are not in the know: In the fall, the *Tonight Show* torch was passed from Jay Leno to Conan O'Brien.

As NBC's career succession plan, which was years in the making, came to fruition, it decided to make a new job for Leno, doing pretty much exactly the same thing — just at a different time.

Leno — the older, wiser, long-loved employee — has not done as well as predicted in his new time. His overall productivity (jokes and parodies) just hasn't been working and, hence, his profitability (measured in ratings and advertising dollars) has been sliding.

O'Brien, on the other hand, spent the last few years preparing for his new role. In replacing the older employee (Leno), he has constantly been measured against the success of his predecessor — who is still working for the company.

People, being people, always expect the newbie to be like the "old guy" and work the same way. And it doesn't help matters when the old guy is still hanging around. So NBC has a real employee night-



### ■ GUEST COMMENTARY

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mare or, quoting from a recent tweet I read, a real "*Tonightmare*" on its hands.

In the real world, companies can't afford to behave this way. Companies need to be smart, especially in the current economy. There has been tremendous change over the last year and workplaces will continue to experience change from now until 2018 when the last of the baby boomers are expected to retire. As a successful company, now is the time to set the path for those qualified people you recognize as top talent. Succession planning is a great idea. Employers want to be sure they have the right person in place for the job — someone who is ready, knowledgeable and capable when an employee retires.

Start evaluating what your top talent is doing. Before key people retire, say 18 months prior, ask

them to keep a few notes on what they do well and what they think would be challenges for a new person. As an employer, keep detailed performance reviews so you have a good picture as to the extent of the skills needed to fill those shoes and make notes about the types of skills a position might need in the future.

Talk to future retirees and ask them if they think there are internal candidates who might make a good successor — sometimes it's hard to spot an obvious successor.

Take time to begin to mentor that person, allow him to take on a few tasks the outgoing employee does and involve him in the decision-making and problem-solving processes.

Can't find the perfect candidate internally? No need to worry, the top talent is out there. Keep notes and detailed performance reviews, as mentioned above, and work with your retiree to find that perfect replacement.

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