



Building on Legacy: The Leadership Transition at Our Daily Bread Ministries

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Introduction

A leadership transition in a nonprofit organization is much like tending a garden through changing seasons. Outgoing CEOs spend years cultivating the soil—nurturing the mission, building relationships, and ensuring the organization thrives under their care. As they step away, their role is not merely to leave but to prepare the garden for new hands. The incoming CEO assumes stewardship, inheriting a landscape of established values and deep-rooted traditions while also introducing new techniques to sustain and expand growth.

Just as a garden requires careful attention to maintain its health through seasonal shifts, a successful CEO transition hinges on intentionality, planning, and an unwavering commitment to the mission.

The board, much like master gardeners overseeing the long-term health of the landscape, must ensure the roots—the organization’s purpose, culture, and values—remain strong while allowing for fresh growth. A well-managed transition does not merely preserve the organization; it strengthens its ability to flourish in new and dynamic ways.



Introduction

A roundtable with former Our Daily Bread Ministries President and CEO, Rick DeHaan, Board Chair Marty Doorn, current President and CEO, Dr. Matt Lucas, and Dr. Roger Spoelman, former nonprofit CEO, who served as a succession coach, share their insights into how nonprofit leadership transitions, when handled with care and foresight, can lead to renewed mission alignment, strategic growth, and sustained impact. These leaders of Our Daily Bread Ministries saw CEO succession as an act of stewardship rather than a moment of change. **Nonprofit boards can ensure that leadership transitions do not disrupt the mission but instead cultivate new opportunities for growth and long-term sustainability.** Just as a thriving garden depends on deep roots and careful tending, a successful transition honors the past while preparing for the future—ensuring the organization continues to bloom for generations.



**Our Daily Bread
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Our Daily Bread Ministries is a donor-supported, global organization dedicated to fueling a lifelong love for the Bible. Our 700 employees currently serve in 32 offices around the world to distribute content in 58 languages and in more than 150 countries. Often known for its daily devotional, the ministry produces Bible-based content across print, video, audio, and digital platforms to inspire a worldwide Bible-engagement movement. Since 1938, our mission has remained the same: to make the life-changing wisdom of the Bible understandable and accessible to all.

A Defining Moment

**It was classic Rick:
mission over ego.**

When Rick DeHaan realized his health made leading Our Daily Bread Ministries effectively more challenging, **he didn't wait for a crisis.** He made the tough, selfless decision to step aside for the good of the ministry. It was a moment that tested his leadership, faith, and trust in the organization's board of directors.

Rick gathered the board and shared his heart. "I can't let my health put this ministry at risk. It's time to start thinking about the next leader." It was classic Rick – mission over ego. That conversation set everything in motion.



Rick DeHaan, Former President, Our Daily Bread Ministries

Preparing for Change

The board had never navigated a leadership transition like this one. For decades, the DeHaan family led Our Daily Bread Ministries. Now, for the first time, they needed to look beyond the family for a new CEO. They knew they had to get it right—not just for the organization but for the millions who rely on its daily work.

Rather than rush the process, the board took its time, consulting with outside experts and leaning on trusted advisors. They called on Roger Spoelman, who coached Rick, the board, and eventually the new CEO to ensure a smooth transition. CarterBaldwin Executive Search was engaged to help them identify the right leader who would honor the past while building for the future.

Marty Doorn, Chairman of the Board, recalls the deliberation and prayer that went into every step of the process. **"Rick's decision to step down was an act of incredible humility. He put the ministry ahead of himself,** and we, as a board, had to rise to the occasion. We couldn't afford to make a hasty decision. We had to be intentional, thoughtful, and strategic."

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Welcoming a New Leader

The transition was intentional, respectful, and built on trust – the space allowed Matt to step into leadership on day one.

After a nationwide search led by Carter Baldwin, Matt Lucas, Chancellor of National and Global at Indiana Wesleyan University, emerged as the right fit. Although he was not from the DeHaan family, he was aligned with the mission and brought the leadership experience the ministry needed. Marty remembers the challenge of helping staff and donors embrace this significant change.

“For so long, Our Daily Bread Ministries was synonymous with the DeHaan name,” Marty shared. “Matt had big shoes to fill, but we knew he had the heart, vision, and capability to lead.”

Still, transitions like this don't happen overnight. The board encouraged Rick to step back gracefully well before Matt's tenure began. The space between Rick's departure and Matt's arrival allowed Matt to fully step into leadership on day one. But, before his retirement, Rick publicly endorsed Matt's leadership stating, "Matt's leadership will be different from mine, and that's a good thing. I completely trust him to carry forward what God has entrusted to us." The moment reassured the team and set the tone for a new era. The transition was intentional, respectful, and built on trust.

Navigating Cultural Change

From day one, Matt prioritized listening. While his leadership style differed from Rick's, he did not make any significant organizational changes for the first six months. Matt focused on getting to know the ministry, assessing the strengths of the executive team, and building a new executive team culture that would guide their work together.

Marty recalls another key moment when the board and senior leadership gathered to pray over Matt. "We knew the gravity of this moment. Rick had carried the torch for so long. It was Matt's turn, and we wanted to cover him in prayer and support as he stepped into the role."

Transitioning from a family-led organization to an external CEO was a significant cultural shift. Marty emphasized the board's role in managing this transition thoughtfully.

"One of the things we did early on was ensure Matt had the tools to understand our culture while allowing him space to lead in his own way. We didn't want to force him into a mold—he needed to make the role his own while staying true to the mission."

Matt took a "listen-first" approach, meeting with staff at all levels before implementing any significant changes.

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Lessons Learned

The journey at Our Daily Bread reinforced key lessons for any board navigating a leadership change:

Start Succession Planning Early

Don't wait for a crisis. Proactive planning ensures a smooth transition.

Engage External Expertise

Gain insight from other boards and CEOs who have successfully navigated a similar change. Engage transition coaches and a competent executive search firm to provide objectivity, insight, and access to a broader network of potential candidates.

Define roles clearly

Outgoing leaders should support, not overshadow. Boards should govern, not manage.

Balance Legacy and Innovation

A new leader should honor the past and listen first before moving forward.

Prioritize Onboarding

Structured onboarding helps new CEOs build trust and credibility quickly.



What Can Boards Do Now?

By following these structured steps, boards can confidently approach leadership transitions, ensuring stability and progress for their organizations.

Start Succession Planning Early

- Form a transition committee, define CEO competencies
12 to 24 months before transition
Responsibility: Board Chair and Governance

Engage External Advisors

- Hire an executive search firm
6-12 months before transition
Responsibility: Board and Search Committee

Prepare Staff & Donors

- Conduct stakeholder listening sessions
5 months before transition
Responsibility: Board Chair, Search Committee, Search Firm, and Fundraising Team

Onboard the New CEO

- Develop 90-day integration plan, formal mentoring
First 3-6 months following transition
Responsibility: Board, Executive Team, and Outgoing CEO

Conclusion: A Model for Mission-Driven Leadership



Dr. Matt Lucas, President, Our Daily Bread Ministries

Leadership transitions are defining moments for an organization. Done well, they create momentum, strengthen culture, and set the stage for long-term impact. If done poorly, they can disrupt the mission, fracture trust, and stall progress.

Rick's decision to step down, the board's thoughtful approach, and Matt's commitment to honoring the past while leading into the future created a textbook example of a successful leadership transition.

It wasn't always easy, but it was done with integrity, faith, and a deep commitment to the mission.

For other nonprofit boards and leaders facing a transition, the lessons from Our Daily Bread Ministries offer a roadmap: lead with humility, plan with intention, and always put the mission first.

About CarterBaldwin Executive Search

CarterBaldwin Executive Search serves organizations that are serious about mission and performance. Originally founded with a focus on corporate clients spanning private, public, and private-equity-backed companies, CarterBaldwin has built a complementary nonprofit practice leveraging best practices learned and developed in their corporate work. A highly experienced staff, an unrivaled search process that delivers excellent results for clients, and an exceptional candidate experience all contribute to Search Done Better for our nonprofit, higher education, K-12, association, and foundation clients. For more information, please visit www.carterbaldwin.com.

Next Steps

If you would like to know more about how CarterBaldwin can assist in your succession planning or pending executive search, email us at bpeterson@carterbaldwin.com.

About the Author



Bill Peterson is a partner with CarterBaldwin, serving at the helm of the nonprofit and higher education practice, specializing in recruiting chief executive officers, presidents, and senior leaders for universities and nonprofit entities. With over 25 years of experience in executive search, Bill has overseen hundreds of searches for key leadership positions, including chief executive officers, presidents, provosts, and associated roles within these organizations.