

Ca-ICMA Coaching Session “Having It All...Building a Great Career and Life”

3:00 – 4:00 p.m., Thursday, February 17, 2005

Moderator:
Don Maruska

Panelists:
Rita Geldert, City Manager, Vista
Bob LaSala, City Manager, Lancaster
Rod Wood, City Manager, Beverley Hills

Panel Questions:

Don begins discussion by talking about the perception of how an executive level job will take a negative toll on work-life balance. Asks each panelist to answer the following question and begin with a brief history.

1. How can you have a high profile local government executive job and a quality personal life?
 - a. Bob LaSala – I have served in government for 30 years in four states and held positions in county and city governments. I learned that it takes discipline and certain techniques to have a quality personal life. I envy this generation because they raise this question. I suggest that you need to be structured and disciplined in managing yourself. You need to understand yourself and your learning style. An executive needs to organize work and free time. She also needs to recognize what keeps herself fresh. Things such as exercise and time with family. You need to recognize when you are hitting the burnout zone and have a heightened awareness of your sense of style. You need to listen to what others are telling you about your work-life balance.
 - i. Don asks Bob to go in-depth about how he applies this:
 1. In Lancaster we have a 9/80 schedule therefore I stick to it. I set my pattern right from the get go and set my informal boundaries immediately.
 - b. Rita Geldert – I’m married to a fabulous man who works in Sacramento and we have three children and three grandchildren. I have served for 28 years in local government with experience in both the private sector and the state government. With regard to work-life balance, do what you can do but do not be drained. Make sure that the values of the organization and the people of the organization match your values. Learn from bad examples either your own or others. I set the boundaries with council by sending them pictures of my family, when we meet I ask them about their families and tell them about mine. I informed my staff that anyone from my family calling me comes first.

You have people around you to help with workload, use them. I also reach out to employees and set a culture where family is valued. If applicable, I allow new mothers to bring their babies to work.

- i. Don points out how Rita talks about her family when meeting with council members.
- ii. Don presents an email question:
 1. How does moving from city to city take a toll on a relationship?
 - a. Rita - You need to have a sense of humor. For the first twenty years I followed my husband and supported his career. We make it a point to see each other every weekend. We share in each other's careers by going to events. It takes communication, planning and commitment.
 - c. Rod Wood – I am a recovering workaholic. I made all the mistakes possible. I made my wife miserable because I was addicted to what I did and lost focus. What I learned from my mistakes: one has to schedule time and family in their calendar; point out your family's achievements at public events; one has to keep in mind that it is the position everyone wants access to, not you; keep all of this in perspective; and set clear pursuits outside your profession.
 - i. Don asks about Rod's pursuits.
 1. Home improvement projects
 2. Camping and hiking.
 3. Spending time with kids.
 - d. Don opens line and panelists respond to caller's questions, perspectives, and comments.
 - i. As you move up how to do deal with the workload increase?
 1. Bob – community, council, department heads, will take as much as you give them. Communicate accessibility in terms they relate to. Maintain some control of what is reasonable and isn't--such as no evening calls unless it is a genuine emergency.
 2. Rita – Department Heads typically work 50-60 hours per week. High-level positions are going to have those demands by community. Share your story with the community. Refine your planning skills.
 - ii. Don asks Rita: Is that your schedule, what are your hours?
 1. Rita – I would like to work less but on council meeting weeks 60-70 hours and other weeks 45-50. It all depends on the council and the current projects. Certain things can be done at home such as reading email or reports.
 - a. Don - Did you find out that you had to put being a City Manager off until your children were gone?
 - i. Rita - Kids where in high school and it was a family decision.

- ii. Rod – If you were single, you still could not get it all done. You need to delegate. I work about 60-70 hours, but I include everything such as conferences. You have to include your family. Sit down with your council and go over expectations and needs. Agree to it and respect it.
- iii. Don – email question – Is having small kids and being a City Manager realistic?
 - 1. Rod – I was City Manager while I had kids. You have to have moral character to say “no” to some of the requests.
 - 2. Rita –It would be difficult. There is always that wonderful world of guilt hood. I worked with my husband and friends to schedule our kids’ needs.
 - 3. Bob – I did not set boundaries and I paid a price with council members calling me at all times.
- iv. Don identifies theme: there are many opportunities to structure relationships with staff and council.
 - 1. Bob – profession goes through changes. Remember kids got benefits from me being a City Manager. They had access to people, events, and experiences that they otherwise would not have.
 - 2. Rita – the job can make people feel guilty; work so it does not replace your family; ask for kids’ schedules so you know what they are doing and set aside time.
 - 3. Bob – I am currently experiencing relocation and my wife and I are empty nesters. With this new job I was immediately dropped into the mix. Wife currently doesn’t have job. He is very aware that he has a staff and support system but she doesn’t.
- v. Don – Isn’t the job similar to being a CEO therefore you can’t expect to fully contain it?
 - 1. Rita – yes, but you can’t have it all.
- vi. Don – email question– How do you create boundaries, discipline, structure and space?
 - 1. Bob - Set time for relief such as gym and reading. I have a quiet time in the mornings when I address my inbox and scope out the day. I make sure to be home for dinner even if it means taking things home. Tends to notice that after dinner everyone in the family will have there own quiet time so that he can do some work.
 - 2. Rod - set calendar before it is open to public. Block out times for family, as if they were meetings. Be home for dinner.
- vii. Don – How did you help your kids when you had to relocate?

1. Bob – after visiting with my wife I brought back pictures of the schools and neighborhoods. Take the kids out there to have them become familiar and do fun things. As to making the transition, be there together, talk about experiences.
 2. Rod – I always included my family in decision making. Show them the town, the interesting things about it. My career decisions are not mine. They are the family's.
- viii. Caller Question – Has anyone been fired from the job? What is the impact on children?
1. Bob – I was fired twice. I sat down with our daughter before it occurred and explained to her what was in the papers. I asked questions, followed up with discussions, and tried to maintain normality. My wife and I talked enough about it along the way and kept an open line of communication.
- e. Don – reiterates Cal-ICMA conference calls and Coaching Program.
 - f. Rod – Everyone talk to family about career about the reality of the job.
 - g. Rita – use California City Management Foundation (CCMF) resources such as the “Future City Managers Workshop,” November 11-13, 2005.
 - h. Caller Feedback –
 - i. Setting boundaries and work balance life is important.
 - ii. Ideas about looking at calendars at the beginning of each month.

Adjournment 4:00pm

Khashayar Alaei, City of Palo Alto, kindly provided these notes from the session.