

“How to Create a Great Coaching Relationship”
Cal-ICMA Coaching Program
3:00 – 4:00 p.m., Thursday, March 3, 2005

Panelists:

Ken Hampian, City Manager, San Luis Obispo
Eric Figueroa, Assistant to the City Manager, San Leandro
Jennifer Phillips, Director, Animal Care Services, Orange County
Audrey Seymour, Assistant City Manager, Menlo Park

Don Maruska welcomed participants, introduced the panelists and thanked the Preparing the Next Generation Working Group for developing the Cal-ICMA Coaching Program and ICMA, CCMF, MMASC, MMANC, CPS and Comcast for their support and financial contributions to the program.

Don Maruska explained that this topic launches a new element of the Coaching Program to allow aspiring managers to link with senior local agency executives and advance in their career. Today’s topic will focus on creating a great coaching relationship for both the coach and participant.

Don Maruska referred callers to the tools available on the Cal-ICMA Coaching Corner web site www.cal-icma.org, such as the volunteer coaching program and the One-on-One Coaching ABC’s download. The Coaches Gallery has a listing of senior members of the profession who’ve volunteered to be coaches and contacts for the Cal-ICMA Range Riders.

Don Maruska distinguished between coaching and mentoring, Mentoring involves job seekers finding role models who track and assist with your career. Coaching has a broader, more flexible application. Coaches may not have the exact position that the aspiring manager desires, but coaches can help them find the right answers for themselves. Coaching involves developing the aspiring manager’s interests and developing a path appropriate for the aspiring manager rather than directing the aspiring manager along the same career path as the coach.

To illustrate the coaching process, Don Maruska and Jennifer Phillips conducted a sample coaching session role play. The following is an abridged transcript of their coaching session:

- Don: What are your hopes for your career? Why are they important?
- Jennifer: I hope to make a difference, making an impact appeals to me. I’m not sure where to go from here, that’s why I’m seeking guidance.
- Don: What gave you satisfaction in your prior positions? What’s of value from your past work?

- Jennifer: Implementing change; identifying stagnation, status quo – shaking things up and moving forward is rewarding and satisfying. Also, reaching out to the community and gaining respect for the organization. Creating rapport with the community.
- Don: Why is being a change agent important to you?
- Jennifer: Because it's so challenging. It's easy to come into an organization and manage the status quo. It's exciting to see the potential with staff and the organization and make the employees and the public proud of the organization and the impact on the community and the services they provide.
- Don: Regarding reaching out to the community. What aspect of that do you find especially rewarding?
- Jennifer: Being a strong part of the community. The community knows they can reach out to your organization. They feel comfortable and confident in the City they do business in. I like giving residents the confidence that we'll take care of the animals in the organization as well as protect the public.
- Don: Looking to the future and wanting to be a change agent – what are you looking forward to further on in your career? Where will you go next?
- Jennifer: I hope to become a city manager or move up in the county as a director. I want to help convince public that local government can be efficient and effective. I want people to strive to be a part of local government – to make it a proud career path.
- Don: The second step is to uncover real issues. What do you see as things that stand between you and making ever-increasing impact? What are the stepping stones that you're contemplating?
- Jennifer: One of my challenges is that step to city manager. It was a big risk to come to the county and step away from city manager track for the moment.
- Don: How do you plan to get back into the city manager track? (Don explained here that this step in the coaching process reviews the hopes and issues as the aspiring manager sees them.)

- Don: Step 3 of the coaching process examines how to build some bridges from the aspiring manager's current position to other executive management opportunities.
- Jennifer: It was important to stay networked in the City Manager community when I took this job. I want to continue to be involved. Without a network, it would be difficult to transition back into City Management. Getting leadership experience in my current position is important, but I deal with different issues than cities do. I have no exposure to redevelopment or planning at this point.
- Don: How could you demonstrate leadership management skills and keep in touch with city managers to stay on the city manager track? How could you keep abreast of city issues such as redevelopment? How could a recruiter or city view your experience?
- Jennifer: I see some work balance issues here. The challenge is to stay abreast of issues that don't affect me right now. Also I have opportunities within the county to prepare for a city manager position.
- Don: My recollection is that you went to the county for line management experience. You wouldn't get that in the ACM role. You're doing something important here for management skills. That's a strong point and is building a strength. An option for how to pursue keeping in touch with economic development issues is to leverage participation in conferences and talk to people active in those issues. By being in the network of people in the know, you can say that while you're not currently involved with those issues, you know x, y and z who've offered to assist you should you need it.
- Don: Step 4 of the coaching session should include sharing stories and experiences. Underscore being a coach, not a mentor.
- Recommended Jennifer find those who are on the same path she would like to take 1) to get input on how to navigate the path under consideration and 2) point out people who've been successful on this career path when talking with recruiters and interview panels. Invited Jennifer to find people who've gone to county government and then returned to work for a city. Does anyone come to mind?
- Jennifer: Actually, a gentleman who was in my position many years ago is now a city manger.

- Don: You should also look at the information in the Coaches Gallery on the Cal-ICMA web site. There may be people with both city and county experience there.
- Don: It's not so much that you think your path doesn't make sense – but you are concerned how others will see the path.
- Jennifer: And to stay aware of issues - this could be a potential roadblock for me
- Don: Consider talking with executive recruiters. Tell them your plan and get their input. See if they see any issues.

Don Maruska asked for reaction from panelists.

Jennifer Philips, said this process is helping her. It is reaffirming some of the positive thoughts she had about her decision and encouraging her to reach out as well.

Ken Hampian said he likes how this process makes suggestions for next steps rather than telling the aspiring manager what to do. It's more about helping aspiring managers help themselves.

Don Maruska added that this process is about keeping the power with the aspiring manager so they don't become dependent upon the coach.

Audrey Seymour noted that the coach didn't solve the problem; he just asked open-ended questions to help the aspiring manager define her concerns. Don also asked more than one question and tried to find out what motivated Jennifer.

Eric Figueroa thought it would be helpful if the coach would explain how his recommendations connect in the overall scheme. It's been helpful for him to hear from his coach as to why that's valuable.

Don Maruska continued the coaching session with step 5 – hold a big vision for the person you're coaching.

- Don: I sense that if you could do it your way, you'd be doing bigger things right now. Visualize what your big break would be. I want you to be in that place to have the big impact.
- Jennifer: I think that if I really stretched and said 'what would be ultimate place for me' it would be a city manager position in a good -sized community that still has with growth potential issues, following after a city manager who had been there many years. I could bring new energy; make changes – somewhere in the near future.

Don: Moving on to Step 6 – I invite you to share that vision for yourself with a few people who could help you get there. Share with a couple executive recruiters. Let them know where you want to go and ask how best to get there. Try people in your professional networks too. With input from a small cadre of people with whom you share your vision, develop a timeline and key steps to realize your vision. Then think about how to get there in just one-half of the length of time you thought possible.

Don: Step 7 - be sure you're doing what you can to build a dream team. Make a list and come up with who would be on your dream team. If you could pick anyone and their abilities, who would they be?

Don Maruska noted that a true coaching session would take more time on these steps. But this process showed how even with a busy schedule, people can coach in an efficient way.

Audrey Seymour emphasized that this is one approach on how to enter into a coaching relationship. It's good to remember that what works for you and the person you're coaching may be different depending on where they are in their careers and what they need. Their needs may be very specific, such as resume review.

Ken Hampian added that aspiring managers need to take advantage of someone who is accessible, such as a coach and initiate conversations with passion and interest, preparing to engage in an exploration of desires and goals. The technique is important.

Eric Figueroa reminded people that the aspiring manager has the responsibility to pursue the relationship. A coach can help by creating accountability for people to move forward. The worst thing is to get great advice and not do anything with it. That can hinder a relationship.

A caller who is a 10-year state employee with no management experience but about to earn an MPA asked what to look for in a coach. Don Maruska referred to the ABC's of One-on-One Coaching on the Cal-ICMA website. The Cal-ICMA Range Riders and recruiters can also help you find a good match.

Another caller noted that one of the big barriers would seem to be the intimidation factor of reaching out to supervisors. How do aspiring managers overcome that fear factor?

Ken Hampian said he thinks it is important for folks to know that many people in positions like city management really look forward to the opportunity to step away from the day-to-day hassles and reflect on why they're passionate about their career and share that passion and some time with someone beginning the journey.

Don Maruska added that those who've volunteered for the Coaches Gallery have already said they'd like to do this. It's up to the aspiring managers to respond to the invitation.

Audrey Seymour added that with Don Maruska's approach, people don't need to know exactly where they are in their career or where they're going. Don Maruska added that those with a less clear idea of where they are going have an opportunity for more creativity – those are prime candidates for coaching.

Don Maruska announced upcoming Cal-ICMA Coaching Program events and thanked the panelists and those who called-in. He also thanked the following sponsors: Cal-ICMA, CPS, Comcast, MMASC, MMANC and California City Management Foundation.

Lucinda Williams, Deputy City Clerk, City of Brea, kindly provided these notes.