



ICMA

MANAGING YOURSELF IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT eBOOK SERIES PART 1:

Communication and Listening

Collaboration and Influencing

Time Management and Planning

Strategies for Local Government Leaders

MANAGING YOURSELF IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, ICMA Executive Director Bob O'Neill wrote a special report on *Leadership and the Profession*. He, along with authors James Keene, John Nalbandian, Shannon Portillo, and James Svava, state that a local government professional can achieve a successful community through developing and sustaining organizational excellence. How does a community achieve such excellence? Through exceptional leadership and management from within.

The purpose of the *ICMA Leadership in Local Government* eBook Series is to provide professionals of all career stages with leadership best practices and tips to help their communities achieve organizational excellence.

Each eBook includes a collection of articles compiled

from ICMA's *PM Magazine* and are written by thought leaders in and out of local government. The focus is on three main areas of leadership and management: (1) managing yourself, (2) leading and managing others, and (3) leading teams and change.

In the next four sections, we will take you through different levels of managing yourself and personal effectiveness – communication and listening, collaboration and influencing, time management and planning, and effective strategies for local government leaders. These four sections are foundational to any successful leader. They will help you elevate your skills and get you one step closer to developing organizational excellence to achieve a successful community.



COMMUNICATION **AND LISTENING**



BECOMING A BETTER DIGITAL-AGE COMMUNICATOR

By Geoffrey Tumlin

You fiddle with your smartphone under the table during an important meeting.

You type an (error-ridden) e-mail to a client while talking (distractedly) on the phone.

You interrupt a sensitive discussion with your spouse to respond to a trivial text message.

You use a social media platform to reconnect with an old friend, only to offend the person with an ill-advised attempt at humor.

And, really, you're not some clueless boor: Everyone you know operates this way. In our device-dominated world, it's what passes for communication. Yes, at some point or another, we've all allowed quick and easy to replace meaningful and productive. But while shoddy communication is ubiquitous, it doesn't have to be inevitable.

The very tools that enable us to maintain contact with people all over the world also distort our priorities, fragment our concentration, degrade our ability to listen,

and scatter our attention. But like any other tool, our phones, computers, and tablets are inanimate objects.

They aren't the problem. We are.

Although it's true that it can be incredibly difficult to break free of the gravitational pull of distraction, expediency, self-expression, and excess that characterize so much digital-age communication, it's also the best time in history to be a competent communicator. If you are willing to consciously strengthen your communication skills, you can leverage unprecedented opportunities to connect productively and meaningfully with other people.

Here are 10 tips to help shake off counterproductive communication behaviors and get better results personally and professionally.

- **Back up to go forward: Remember how we communicated before we got our new devices.** The digital revolution facilitated hypercommunication and instant self-expression, but, ironically, made it harder for anyone to listen. There's just too much

If you are willing to consciously strengthen your communication skills, you can leverage unprecedented opportunities to connect productively and meaningfully with other people.

“chatter clutter” getting in the way. To make the most of our conversations, we need to remember how we connected effectively with others before we had smartphones and computer screens to help us.

Specifically, implementing three guiding habits—listen like every sentence matters, talk like every word counts, and act like every interaction is important—will help you be more present in conversations and will improve your digital-age communication. These three “old school” guiding behaviors will help you become a better communicator and will immediately improve your quality of life.

- **Invert your expectations: Lower your hopes for your “smart” devices.** Because technology does a lot for us, it’s no surprise that we’ve collectively fallen in love with it. But in our enthusiasm for what our tools can do, we’ve lost sight of the people behind the tools. It’s time to turn that around. Our devices don’t possess the communication abilities we think they do.

A tech-centered view of communication encourages us to expect too much from our devices and too little from each other. We assume that hitting “send” means we’ve communicated, when really, the other person may not have understood the message at all.

Until we restore a more people-centered approach, we will continue to feel unsatisfied and unfulfilled by our interactions—despite having the most powerful connection and transmission devices in human history in the palm of our hands.

- **Lose your “friends.”** These days, it’s not unusual to be superficially connected to large numbers of people. And it’s way too easy to send hundreds of marginally important messages, chat with distant acquaintances, and spend hours surfing the Web,

leaving no time to talk to the people who matter most. In other words, meaningful relationships are being trumped by people you barely know.

Prioritize the people in your life—actual and digital—in a four-tier pyramid. The top of the pyramid—Tier A—should be composed of a small number of the most important people in your life; those you want to have open access to you at all times.

Residents of Tier B also have good access to you, but you monitor the time you give them more closely. Tiers C and D don’t have open access to you. You might return a voice mail from a C within 24 hours, and Ds will just have to wait until you can get around to them.

After you’ve made these distinctions, stick to them. No, you aren’t being rude or insensitive. You’re safeguarding time and energy for the most important people in your life.

- **Stop talking and think for a minute.** While words can build relationships only slowly, they can cause damage with lightning speed. A blurted retort, a thoughtless Tweet, or a hasty remark can—and does—land people in hot water all the time.

People require some space to absorb information, formulate their responses, and deliver them effectively. You don’t need to take a vow of silence, but, as CEO of your tongue you should issue an executive order to stop talking long enough to think about what it is that you’re going to express.

This will help you to clear out a lot of distracting conversational clutter, get in front of ill-advised words, and provide the space you need to self-correct when you’re angry or upset.

- **Don’t always “be yourself”:** Careless self-expression is usually an excuse for bad behavior. Not so long ago, there were more structural impediments

to our communication. We couldn't afford to talk frequently to people outside our local area code, and it was hard to talk to several people at once unless the conversation was face-to-face. If we made a communication gaffe, it wasn't such a big deal. But now that we can talk to anyone, anywhere, at virtually no cost, the ability to express ourselves instantly can be much more dangerous.

"I was just being myself" sounds harmless, but it's often an excuse to indulge in destructive behavior. Smart communicators realize that one single action—not allowing your feelings to dictate your words—will impact your quality of life profoundly: You will get what you want more often. By focusing on what you want to accomplish instead of what you want to say, you'll keep your conversational goal in its rightful place—above your feelings in terms of priority.

- **Question your questions.** Questions are not always neutral. They make some of your conversations better, but as you've probably noticed, many questions make a surprisingly large number of your conversations worse.

Even simple inquiries can go awry. "Is your mother coming over for dinner again?" or "Did you call Jim in accounting about this?" can cause trouble if the other person thinks there's a criticism behind the query.

Some of your relationship problems probably reflect your underdeveloped questioning skills. Faulty questions contribute to many conversational failures and can add anxiety, defensiveness, and ill will to interactions.

In general, the more you query simply to indulge your personal cravings to get an answer, to hammer home a point, or to satisfy a narrow personal interest, the more your questions are likely to stifle dialogue. Better to focus on what you can learn from or about another person and ask questions that reflect a broad curiosity about the person or topic you're discussing.

- **Don't try to solve every problem right now.** Our quick, cheap, and easy digital devices allow us to have far too many unnecessary conversations, engage in way too much unnecessary collaboration, and get our hands (and thumbs) on too many irrelevant issues. That's why smart communicators, like smart doctors, have a good triage system—its categories are Now, Delay, and Avoid—to focus on the most pressing issues, while delaying or ignoring less important matters.

Problems in the Now category require an immediate, solution-based conversation. Don't automatically assign too many issues to this category—this is

the fundamental miscalculation your triage system is trying to correct.

Delay is your default category. Many issues may disappear completely or resolve themselves without your intervention. Finally, avoid issues that reflect highly emotional, incredibly complicated, and other volatile feelings that reside deep inside another person unless they are impairing the accomplishment of critical work.

- **Let difficult people win.** Jane talks too much. Jim is incredibly stubborn. Uncle Billy loves to argue. Your client is moody. Whether they're controlling, critical, or cranky, the behaviors that make someone a difficult person tend to spark frequent confrontations—even though we're unlikely to influence these people.

We wrestle with Jane, for example, to get a word in edgewise. We struggle to change Jim's mind. We fire a barrage of points and counterpoints into Uncle Billy's arguments. We try to offset our client's mood swings. It's time to quit trying.

At the end of a conversation, the difficult person remains the same, but you are often in a weaker position. Only a commitment to let go of your desire to win by imposing your will on the other person can realistically and consistently improve your communication with difficult people. When you find yourself with no choice but to interact with a difficult person, have modest expectations, avoid tangents, and stay focused on your end goal. It's really all you can do.

- **Respond with weakness.** We all too often use more force than we need to accomplish our objectives. We yell when a measured response would work better, send a blistering e-mail when a more restrained reply would suffice, or issue an ultimatum when a firm but gentle statement of convictions would do. Conflicts that start or escalate with excessive force frequently cause a destructive cycle—attack, retaliation, escalated attack, and escalated retaliation. No matter how justified you may feel, the bottom line is that using excessive force isn't usually a winning strategy.

It's not always easy, but try to apply the least amount of interpersonal force and intensity necessary to accomplish your objective. In other words, bring a stick to a knife fight in order to neutralize a harsh conversation. Try to stay serious and focused, and keep the conversation as brief as possible. Keep your words calm, controlled, and stabilizing—don't add any new emotional material.

- **Be boring.** Modern culture promotes the false notion that communication should be as flashy, stimulating,

and entertaining as the sleek devices that facilitate it. We assume that the best conversations are also the most exciting ones: the ones that are intense or high stakes, that bring big news, that are filled with emotion, or that contain something unexpected or novel. But exciting conversations are relatively rare and often don't go our way. In reality, good, meaningful communication usually looks plain, unremarkable, and boring. And guess what: That's okay.

Think about it: It's not really excitement and intensity that you want from your conversations. You want bosses, coworkers, family, and friends you can count on. And they want the same from you.

The fact is, boring is dependable. Bland is steady. Over time, what seems unremarkable turns out to be

quite remarkable after all, because great relationships are built through thousands of routine interactions.

As we move further into the digital age, let's embrace new ways to connect while retaining the ability to communicate meaningfully and effectively with each other. Whether you are talking face-to-face with one individual or broadcasting to hundreds by e-mail or social media, thoughtful and deliberative communication skills will help make your interactions count.

*Geoffrey Tumlin is author of *Stop Talking, Start Communicating: Counterintuitive Secrets to Success in Business and in Life* (McGraw-Hill, August 2013, ISBN: 978-0-0718130-4-4, \$20.00). He is the CEO of Mouthpeace Consulting LLC, Austin, Texas (geoff@tumlin.com; www.tumlin.com).*



TALK YOUR WAY TO THE TOP

By Geoffrey Tumlin

If you were a college graduate this past spring or summer, you are (justifiably) proud of your accomplishment. But as you head into the workforce, don't expect your new credentials or your great GPA to do all the heavy lifting for you. They don't matter nearly as much as your ability to articulate, influence, persuade, and connect.

Great communication skills stand out to hiring managers. Can you pitch an idea to a team leader? Can you create a working consensus among group members? Can you build rapport with a customer or resident?

Individuals will need much more than an education to get the attention of hiring managers and bosses. Any new grad who struggles with communication will need to boost those skills in order to get ahead. Here are eight communication lessons that will give you the competitive edge you need, now and throughout your career:

- **Take a daily dose of higher-order communication.** Most new graduates are highly skilled users of social media, text messages, and e-mail. But these modes of communication are characterized by expedience and convenience—it's easier to send messages this way than to call or to communicate face-to-face.

But not all of our communication can happen effectively along lower-order channels. Sometimes we need to do difficult things with our communication, like resolve a conflict, persuade someone who's reluctant, or convey a complicated idea. When we reach for our more difficult and time-intensive higher-order communication skills, we can't afford for them to be rusty. That's why everyone should practice higher-order communication every day.

Even though it takes longer and is more difficult, walk over and talk to a coworker instead of sending an instant message. Call a friend and congratulate her or him on getting a new job instead of posting it on Facebook. In these situations, you'll be using higher-order communication, but the stakes will still be relatively low.

You won't be under the pressure and stress that will come when you have to deal with more difficult issues face-to-face. These daily doses of higher-order conversations will keep your face-to-face and your real-time communication skills sharp, so that you'll be able to tackle higher-stakes situations successfully.

Smart communicators don't blurt out dumb things and then try to cover their tracks by claiming authenticity. That's not what will endear you to your colleagues.

- **Talk (and type) like your grandmother's watching.** While words can build our work relationships only slowly, they can cause damage with lightning speed. A blurted retort, a thoughtless e-mail, or a hasty remark can—and does—land people in hot water all the time.

A quick and effective way to improve your communication is to pretend like your grandmother—or someone else who brings out the best in you—is standing by your side when you are talking or typing. Acting like someone you respect is looking over your shoulder will give you the pause you need to get in front of ill-advised words and provide the space you need to self-correct when you're frustrated, agitated, or confused.

- **Expect less from technology (and more from people).** Because technology does a lot for us, it's easy to overestimate its role in our success. But our enthusiasm for what our digital communication tools can do shouldn't cause us to lose sight of the people behind the tools. Our devices don't possess the communication abilities we think they do.

A tech-centered view of communication encourages us to expect too much from our devices and too little from each other. We assume that hitting "send" means we've communicated, when really, the other person may not have understood the message at all. Even with the most powerful connection and transmission devices in human history in the palm of our hands, communication doesn't happen until the other person understands.

- **Listen like you're getting paid for it.** The digital revolution facilitated hyper-communication and instant self-expression but made it harder for anyone to listen. Between e-mails, social media, and texts, there's just too much communication junk

getting in the way. Our thoughts are scattered, our minds wander, and ever-present distractions make it difficult for us to focus on the person right in front of us. We need to make a concerted effort to reinvigorate our listening skills.

Listening decisively improves communication, and that fundamental lesson is one that's easy to forget in our frenetic multitasking environment. The funny thing is that people tell us all the time about what they value, what they want, and what they're worried about, but we're often too busy thinking about what's in our inbox or who just texted us to absorb much of what they're saying. The old-school behavior of listening will help you become a much better communicator and become far more knowledgeable about the people you work with.

- **Assume you're a terrible questioner (and set out to fix it).** Most of us have poor questioning skills because we don't think twice before blurting out a query. But questions aren't neutral; they are powerful communication tools because they change the trajectory of a conversation. As you might have noticed, questions can make conversations worse. Even simple inquiries can go awry: "Is this your final report?" or "Did you call John in accounting about this?" can cause trouble if the other person thinks there's a criticism behind the query.

Faulty questions contribute to many conversational failures and can add anxiety, defensiveness, and ill will to interactions. In general, the more you query to hammer home a point or to satisfy a narrow interest, the more your questions are likely to stifle dialogue. Use your questions to open up a conversation and learn about the topic you're discussing. If you take your questions as seriously as you take your new job, you'll dramatically reduce

the friction caused by faulty questions.

- **Act like every interaction might be important.**

Nothing kills a conversation faster than someone who doesn't care. And it doesn't take much more than folded arms, a disapproving scowl, a sigh of boredom, or a well-placed eye roll to make someone feel like what she's saying just doesn't matter. And the company newbie, who needs to establish connections all over the office, can't afford to prematurely shut the door on any relationships.

Conversations are often unpredictable, sometimes volatile, and occasionally exhilarating. We simply don't know which of our interactions might be vital to us—or to someone else. Words we painstakingly arrange may fall completely flat, while a chance encounter might lead to a vital breakthrough or to a crucial relationship we never anticipated. Because we never know what might happen, the wise course is to act as if every interaction is important.

- **Don't "be yourself."** I was just "being myself" sounds harmless, but it's often an excuse to indulge in bad interpersonal behavior. Authenticity is good in spirit, but in practice it often torpedoes our goals and harms our underlying relationships.

I'm not suggesting that you become a fake, just that you don't cloak impulsive—and counterproductive—communication in the fabric of being yourself. The overwhelming feeling that you should say something is usually a warning sign that you shouldn't. Smart communicators don't blurt out dumb things and then try to cover their tracks by claiming authenticity. That's not what will endear you to your colleagues.

- **Let difficult people win.** Your coworker Jane loves to argue. Your colleague Jim is incredibly stubborn. Your friend in Albuquerque is always moody. Whether they're controlling, critical, or cranky, the behaviors that make someone a difficult person spark frequent confrontations. Even if you fire a

barrage of points and counterpoints into Jane's arguments, you won't match her debating skills. You won't change Jim's mind on anything. And you'll be unsuccessful in your efforts to offset your client's mood swings. Don't lock horns with difficult people.

At the end of a conversation, a difficult person remains the same, but often you are in a weaker position. Only a commitment to let go of your desire to "win" by imposing your will on the other person can realistically and consistently improve your communication with difficult people. Let difficult people win. And when you find yourself with no choice but to interact with a difficult person, have modest expectations, avoid tangents, and stay focused on your end goal. It's really all you can do.

Your communication—productive or unproductive, healthy or dysfunctional—is a major factor in how successful you will be in any job. For the kinds of productive and meaningful interactions you want—and need—at work, pack a few communication ideas you didn't learn at college in your jacket pocket to show you have the communication skills to succeed in business environments where innovation and collaboration are king.

- **Callout if you want to add some visual interest to the article layout:**

A tech-centered view of communication encourages us to expect too much from our devices and too little from each other. We assume that hitting "send" means we've communicated, when really, the other person may not have understood the message at all.

Geoffrey Tumlin is author of Stop Talking, Start Communicating: Counterintuitive Secrets to Success in Business and in Life (McGraw-Hill, August 2013, ISBN: 978-0-0718130-4-4, \$20.00). He is the CEO of Mouthpeace Consulting LLC, Austin, Texas (geoff@tumlin.com; www.tumlin.com).



10 PERFORMANCE KILLING WORKPLACE CONVERSATIONS

It's True, Words Can Sabotage an Organization's Performance

By Dan Prosser

Did you know that the world where we all work, in general, is a vast network of interrelated conversations? And your organization is a microcosm of that network. What this means is that the conversations that take place between team members are incredibly important.

Words are far more powerful than most people realize. Unbelievable outcomes happen when a person says how something is going to be and then takes the actions to make it happen. Changing his or her language and perspective changes what's possible in the future.

But suppose you, as a leader of an organization, are declaring bold possibilities full of fire and optimism, but employees are engaging in other kinds of conversations? Perhaps bitter complaints, criticisms, or cynical rants full of anger. All of these conversations create a sense of unconscious disconnection in the workplace and create disempowerment among the workforce.

In my research with leaders of organizations across the country during the past five years, I've learned that the conversations in nearly 90 percent of organizations are limiting, and they undermine and sabotage an organization's performance. Leaders are unaware of most of these conversations. Yet they go viral throughout an organization, kill morale, prevent engagement, and impair productivity.

These conversations are symptoms of what I call an "execution virus." These viruses can be deadly, with my conversations with leaders showing that only 13 percent of organizations succeed in overcoming them. Here are 10 performance-killing conversations employees may be having in the workplace without a leader's knowledge.

This is why employees don't—or, more likely, can't—execute your strategy. All your organization needs is one of these execution viruses to ensure that it's among the

87 percent of organizations that fail to execute strategy.

1. **It's not our strategy.** If this persistent conversation is being repeated—albeit in the background—throughout your organization, employees feel that they have no say in the direction of the organization, and therefore, they disconnect themselves from its future. You do all the planning and demand a certain result; they do all the work, and you get all the reward. Be honest: Would you be motivated if you were in their shoes?

The key to eradicating this execution virus is to invite employees to the strategy table. Ask them for their insights and opinions regarding the path your work group is on and how they see themselves fulfilling their roles. Don't just talk about engagement and empowerment. Allow people to contribute, ask questions, and even disagree with you. This gives them a way to invest in what they're working toward and gives real meaning to their work.

2. **They don't appreciate us.** So many leaders believe that if they acknowledge someone, it will come back to haunt them. Perhaps the employee will take advantage of the comment when the time comes to review his or her performance and salary. So leaders think: They get a paycheck, and that ought to be enough acknowledgment and appreciation.

Nevertheless, employees may still feel exploited. And from there, it's a short step to becoming actively resentful of management for not recognizing their contribution to the success of the organization.

No matter what level of skills a leader has achieved, I've rarely found an organizational leader who is totally, authentically (meaning from the heart) comfortable acknowledging or expressing appreciation for an employee in front of others. So here's some tough love: Get over yourself. It can cost you big time not to have that conversation. It costs you nothing to appreciate and acknowledge the contribution of others.

3. **They're always making excuses.** Employees learn from their leaders. When leaders use ready-made excuses, point the finger of blame at peers or other team members, or cite circumstances beyond their control as reasons for failing to deliver, employees will find their own excuses for not doing what they said they would do. This produces a culture in which strategies, plans, and intentions disappear soon after they are agreed to, and teams quickly fall back into business-as-usual behavior.

No one holds management accountable. Honestly—how comfortable would you be calling your own supervisor on the carpet? You'll have to

attack this execution virus starting with you. No more excuses. It's time to become publicly accountable for your own results—the good and the bad. You'll find that employees are much more willing to follow a fallible leader with integrity than a "perfect" leader who constantly passes the buck.

4. **Did you hear what (Team Member A) said about (Team Member B)?** Gossip and stories that degrade others in the organization create a toxic workplace environment. If your employees are experiencing the scorn of another employee, or if management knowingly tolerates gossip about others, then you have employees who will give just enough effort to get by.

How do you know if a conversation is gossip? If what is being said about another person can't be said to that person's face, it's absolutely gossip. Wherever there are secrets or anything that cannot be discussed at any level of an organization, you will find a dysfunctional organization that's unable to focus on what matters. There is no alignment with what is important, because people feel bullied.

5. **What mission statement . . . and why should I care?** Have an unannounced conversation with members of your teams and ask them to tell you the mission or vision statement of the organization. If you're lucky, maybe 5 percent will be able to give you a credible answer. As for the rest, you might have difficulty getting them to understand the relevance of the mission, much less motivating them to implement it with any sense of urgency.

How can people implement actions or execute a strategy when they can't understand the relevance of the vision or mission as it relates to their jobs? Most teams don't spend a great deal of time focusing on an organizational mission and its relevance to them.

As a result, the significance of their role as an employee contributor isn't well understood. For employees to be effective, they must understand where they fit and how their jobs impact overall contribution to the desired outcome.

6. **They treat us like crap.** If there's mistreatment, rudeness, and nastiness toward employees, leaders will surely take action to stop it, because they know that no company can execute its strategy with that going on, right? Apparently not.

In a 2011 study that spanned 14 years, Christine Porath and Christine Pearson found that 98 percent of employees surveyed reported experiencing rude or uncivil behavior either toward them or toward another in their presence. Their findings were

reported in a Harvard Business Review article, “The Price of Incivility” (see <https://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility>).

Uncivil behavior hits squarely at the bottom line, because those who are on the receiving end nearly always report responding in a negative way. Employees who feel that they’re being treated badly will put forth the bare minimum of effort.

Their negative attitude will be all too evident to customers. And they’ll probably jump ship at the earliest opportunity. The solution is clear: Treat your employees at every level with civility and respect. Make sure all supervisors do the same. No excuses.

7. **It’s the same old story.** Grandiose pronouncements for new initiatives that are intended to provoke a new battle cry are falling on deaf ears. That’s because employees have heard it all before. Bringing your employees together to build new initiatives for a goal or challenge is usually received with rolling eyes and sighs of annoyance and anguish.

Employees are smarter today. They can tell when leaders are inauthentic in their pronouncements. They will usually give you one chance to get it right. No one wants to feel manipulated into thinking that what you’re putting forth is brand new. It rarely is. There are too many options available (even in a sluggish economy) for good people to stick with leaders who aren’t serious about being authentic.

8. **Because he’s (or she’s) the boss.** That’s why. A patriarchal and paternalistic culture exists in far too many organizations. In this type of culture, there are the haves, and they have all the answers; and there are the have-nots, who have no power.

Employees buy into a patriarchal and paternalistic business culture because it lets them off the hook. They can avoid having to make promises and take action, and they feel that they have “permission” to wait until someone tells them what to do. That creates a dependency on receiving orders from leadership, and those employees can’t execute your strategy because they won’t take responsibility for causing things to happen.

9. **We’ve always done it this way.** Old paradigms, nonexistent visions, and limiting business models that are fixed on past performance keep your employees from moving your government forward.

A rigid belief system that creates inflexible boundaries around what is possible for the future makes employees feel stifled. When employees can’t see how or where they can improve their position in life and can’t perceive a future for themselves that doesn’t look and feel a lot like the past, they become apathetic.

Employees who haven’t been shown that they can grow, develop, and expand their opportunities within the organization—so that they have a sense of control over their own possible future—will lose interest in what you want. Once again, that’s why it’s so important to make sure that employees have a voice in determining where your organization is going, how best to get there, and what their individual roles look like.

10. **The boss is watching, so just don’t screw up.**

Leaders who focus on not losing, rather than on working to build something they can share with their employees, end up sabotaging their own organizations. For an employee, there’s no benefit to coming to work each day for a leader whose fears dominate the working environment, because a supervisor operating out of fear takes it out on employees. Those employees just put in their time, but not their best efforts, as they focus on placating the supervisor.

Leaders who are in constant fear of the unknown and uncontrollable events need to get a grip. There’s no faster way to turn good employees into cynical and nonproductive ones than to stress them out for no purpose other than to feel like you’re controlling the possibility of failure.

If any of the conversations in this list sound familiar, take them seriously. They are likely the reason employees are disconnected from you as a leader, from your organization’s vision, from its mission, from organizational strategy, and from the needs of a local government’s residents.

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COLLABORATION **AND INFUENCING**





ALL ROADS LEAD TO RIGHT NOW

By Mona Miyasato

"I think we're all here, at this time, for a reason," the district attorney told a conference room of executives from various public agencies. "We're here to provide leadership, together."

It was three days after the May 23, 2014, tragedy in Isla Vista, a community of 23,000 people adjacent to the University of California at Santa Barbara. A young man with a history of mental health issues killed six students in a short period of time, and then himself, leaving a disturbing and chilling written and video record of his reasons.

Our entire nation experienced the tragedy. That night, the killer ended the lives of six young people and created a deep wound felt by an entire community.

That community was part of unincorporated Santa Barbara County, where I had been the county executive officer for five months and two weeks. I was still learning names of key staff, meeting community members, juggling weekly agenda issues, and preparing for budget hearings, which were only two weeks away, when the tragedy occurred.

In the days and weeks to come, I knew the staff

would be inundated. The county sheriff would be at the center, but the rest of the organization would be enmeshed too. We would be managing the onslaught of national media, coordinating responses, working with partner agencies to make progress, and providing healing and recovery to our employees and residents.

Upon hearing news of the event, my former boss, the county administrator of another jurisdiction, e-mailed me to offer support: "Let me know if you need anything." I had worked with him in an assistant position prior to taking my current post, and for a moment, I thought: "Yes, can I have my old job back? I'm not sure I want to handle all this."

But thinking of the wise words of the district attorney, I stopped. She was right: All past experiences have led me to where I am, right here and now.

CLIMBING THE LADDER AND MAKING CHOICES

My career looks like an intentional, straight climb up the proverbial career ladder, starting with an education in political science, economics, and public policy, followed by early jobs in the private sector, then as a

Encouraging others to step up, giving them the tools and confidence to thrive and also make mistakes, really does create more energy, creativity, and ability.

government analyst, project manager, and assistant to the city manager. My past three jobs were in executive positions as deputy city manager, chief assistant county administrator, and now, county executive officer.

My career looks like something from an ICMA textbook. Yet, back when ICMA started, this was not the common path for local government managers. And even some 80 years ago, local managers were mostly men, only 13 percent had advanced degrees, and close to 77 percent had college degrees in engineering.¹

Today, a master's degree in public administration appears to be more common, and there is more gender and ethnic diversity among top public administrators than when ICMA was founded.

While my path may be more the norm now, my choices have not been based on traditional notions. I'm a Generation Xer born after the baby boom but before the skinny jeans ilk. Like other Gen Xers I've known, my decisions are made more by the types of activities or outcomes I want to pursue or accomplish, not position titles I yearn to hold.

How can I best serve to resolve problems, build strong communities, and empower and develop resilient staff was the question I would ask myself. Basically, how can I make things better and work with really cool people in the process? Along the way, I've learned lessons that have helped me grow professionally and personally.

I began as an analyst and project manager in local government. I was the technical expert, the "go-to gal" with the detailed financial and legal information and knowledge.

As I advanced in my organization, my daily tasks changed from master of Excel spreadsheets and analysis to more ambiguous roles like meeting facilitator, conflict resolver, and influencer. This transition was difficult. My primary source of confidence and value to

the organization had changed without a clear and conscious acknowledgement.

I had to adapt and realize that the skills responsible for my promotion, while important and foundational, weren't necessarily the ones that would propel me forward.

MIGHTY MENTORS TEACH KEY LESSONS

Early on, it was also hard to see myself in the city or county manager executive suite when few others there looked like me. But others saw it in me, before I saw it in myself. I am fortunate to have had men and women mentors of various ethnicities and ages.

The city manager who pulled me into the manager's office was the first female city manager in that locality. She and the assistant city manager introduced me to ICMA and insisted I attend the annual conferences to get a better understanding of the field and relevant issues.

Another mentor was a city manager and former fire chief, whose advice I didn't always want to hear but in the end, taught me my most valuable lessons. My last supervisor would call me out when I became too intense and myopic. These individuals created a mirror so I could see my weaknesses as well as my strengths.

GOING BEYOND MY COMFORT ZONE

In every position I've held, I had opportunities for projects that were somewhat out of my comfort zone. Earlier in my career, my supervisor asked that I coordinate a municipal bond issuance. I knew nothing about debt finance.

He handed me a weathered, red book titled *Fundamentals of Municipal Bonds* and said, "Here, read this." I read it cover to cover and led the project.

In a different city, the manager asked that I head the division responsible for services to the homeless, which had drawn greater attention that year. I had to quickly

jump in, look at the data, determine whose expertise I could trust, and assess what could and could not be realistically accomplished.

Mostly, though, I had to develop emotional resilience to work on an intractable social problem with no easy solution. That experience is something that I still draw upon today.

For these experiences, I had to be ready, not just willing. This meant being out of my comfort zone and acknowledging my learning curve. It also meant addressing staff's anxiety about change and developing a sense of rhythm and timing concerning how much I could achieve given my time in the department.

In short, it prepared me—gave me cellular memory—for taking on new challenges.

CREATING MORE

I also learned that encouraging others to step up, giving them the tools and confidence to thrive and also make mistakes, really does create more energy, creativity, and ability. That's not just something your human resources director wants you to believe—it's true.

We know this approach requires time and discipline, including our own personal commitment, to ensure the energy is harnessed and directed toward the right things in the right way. It also requires systems that are flexible enough to accommodate changes in positions and jobs and believers who are willing enough to try new ways of working. All this takes work.

DRAWING STRENGTH FROM ICMA

Creating more has also meant giving back. When I began attending ICMA conferences more than 10 years ago, I saw few people who looked like me—under 40 (at the time), Asian American, and female.

At one of my first ICMA conferences, I met a group of several Asian American local managers from across the country. I must have looked like the young, lost pup. Later, I gave a demonstration in the tech forum and was disappointed by the small attendance (maybe four people).

At one point, I looked up to see my newfound colleagues huddling in the back, cheering me on. I'll always remember that moment.

Each year at ICMA conferences we would gather and some five years ago, almost all were gone. They had retired. After lamenting this situation, the few remaining realized we were now "it." The "Next Gen," whose growth ICMA nurtured over the past decade is the "Now Gen."

And a variety of people are now in the mix. I've met people who spent healthy careers in the private sector before launching into local government. I've met more women city and county managers, as well as men, who've juggled children and career.

I've seen younger people intent on working in the field with innovative ideas and high spirits. I've witnessed a change in demographics at ICMA conferences. There appears to be more age, ethnicity, gender, and geographic diversity than I remember 10 years ago. There is always more that can be done, but all of this progress is creating more.

In the end, this is the most significant lesson I've learned, and our profession has allowed all of us to do this—create more for our communities and organizations. My former boss e-mailed me the other day to ask: "How are you doing?" This time I thought: "Doing great."

Why? I'm fortunate to be working where I am, surrounded by inspiring people doing great work to make life better. There's no other place I would rather be, or should be, than right here, right now.

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ENDNOTE

- 1 "A Changing Profession" (Source: ICMA's 2000, 2002, 2006, and 2009 State of the Profession Surveys and The Rise of the City Manager, by Richard J. Stillman II, 1974); revised 3/29/10.



NETWORKING LEADS TO BETTER RESULTS

Local governments show how it's done.

By Karen Thoreson and Greg Stopka

Merriam-Webster's definition of networking is: "The exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business."¹ An important part of the mission of the Alliance for Innovation is to further develop networking among local governments and their staff members for the purpose of accelerating innovative practices.

Most organizations, public and private, recognize the benefits of well-networked members. Longstanding civic organizations, for example, were formed to do good work in their communities and to provide a platform for networking community leaders with one another.

While networking can take place in informal settings, increasingly local governments intentionally create opportunities for employees to learn from others in their

field or their region. This article highlights two exchange programs that intensified the networking experience.

Benefits realized through these activities include:

- Learning how others accomplish similar work or tasks.
- Sharing ideas on how to do tasks and projects better.
- Building stronger bonds with other staff and organizations.
- Providing staff development for participants.
- Providing an attractive workplace in order to recruit and retain talent.

CITIES UNLIMITED

The Cities Unlimited program between Coon Rapids and Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, allows them to share internal expertise and resources purposely but with-

While networking can take place in informal settings, increasingly local governments intentionally create opportunities for employees to learn from others in their field or their region.

out contracts. With increasing demand for service and limited capacity, the goal of the program was for the cities to focus on developing and strengthening their natural talent to maximize the effectiveness of internal resources deployment.

A program developed by Brooklyn Park Assistant City Manager Michael Sable and Coon Rapids Assistant City Manager Matt Stemwedel, which is under the guidance of Matt Fulton, city manager of West Saint Paul, and Jamie Verbrugge, city manager of Brooklyn Park, allows a city to identify its natural talent and develop it into strengths for each organization.

When a problem arises where one organization needs the expertise it lacks, instead of outsourcing to a consultant, the city can share (i.e., trade) its own internal experts with each other, saving financial resources to be reinvested in internal talent.

When Coon Rapids wanted to create an innovation team, for example, and recognized it needed facilitation services, the city contacted Brooklyn Park where trained internal facilitators were able to help with the initiative Coon Rapids was undertaking. Brooklyn Park offered to facilitate the Coon Rapids meetings and in return, Coon Rapids offered performance measurement expertise to help Brooklyn Park coach its staff on improving that performance measurement program.

The two organizations have gone on to collaborate on a number of other training programs, saving both time and money. While not all problems can be solved by borrowing talent, it creates a powerful tool for managers to cost-effectively address challenges.

Some cities have collaborated this way informally for years but usually only where established relationships already existed. By formalizing this process, Coon Rapids and Brooklyn Park have created new opportunities to share costs, train more staff, and build connections that didn't exist previously.

Both organizations have been able to network more,

promoting greater collaborative opportunities and idea generation. Building on the initial success, Coon Rapids and Brooklyn Park envision a document or website that could identify experts in the communities so that participants know what is available to them.

Recently, Coon Rapids created the Wizard Program to catalog staff expertise that will better enable it to use and deploy resources internally and externally in the future. The city is currently encouraging as many “wizards” to come forward as possible. The next phase will include recruiting people who can be identified as having such specific skills as Word, Excel, or PowerPoint.

MANAGEMENT TALENT EXCHANGE

In 2003, two Silicon Valley city managers at the time (Frank Benest, Palo Alto, and Ed Everett, Redwood City) were discussing the upcoming retirement of baby-boomer managers and the lack of interest in public service from younger generations.

As they developed the litany of shortcomings their organizations faced in offering high-quality training and opportunities for advancement in small organizations, they also outlined a potential solution that came to be known as the Management Talent Exchange Program (MTEP), which is now entering its 10th year.

MTEP provides high-potential employees a three-month opportunity to work in a nearby Silicon Valley community to develop new skills, relationships, and context for their future careers. It currently consists of 20 local governments (cities, counties, special districts) that nominate an employee and generally receive an employee from another agency in return.

The “hosting” agency agrees to provide a supervisor who also acts as a coach and mentor. Learning forums also allow all exchange employees to hear speakers on such topics as leadership and career development.

In order to supercharge the development of the high-potential employees, they are not only placed

in a different organizational culture but in a different discipline and work on projects with which they are not familiar. Thus, the participants develop new competencies, experiences, and relationships.

The program is sponsored by the City/County Management Associations of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. It is administered by the Human Resources Department of San Mateo County. Participating jurisdictions pay \$1,000 to cover administration costs.

Participants and local government leaders are unanimous in their praise of the program. They say that MTEP exposes high-potential employees to professional development beyond what any single organization could provide, as well as experience in different work cultures that will assist them in future career choices.

LESSONS LEARNED

These two programs highlight the vast potential of networking exchange programs:

- There is tremendous underused talent within most organizations. Identify it and leverage it!
- Organizations can seek out expertise within the organization and use it to train their own staffs. This is inexpensive and helps connect your own employees to one another and highlights skill areas that aren't included in traditional trainings.
- Talent can be traded with other organizations. Which communities nearby do you admire? What could you trade them for access to their expertise?
- A broader exchange program can leverage mid-

level staff who would benefit from more challenging work opportunities, which aren't offered in their home organization. This creates a chance for an up-and-comer to get exposure to a new organizational culture and new ways of operating.

- "Fire bullets, then cannonballs" (Collins and Hansen, 2011, p. 69)² allows ideas to be shared from experts in other communities before an organization develops something new. Narrow some of your options by getting ideas from others who have addressed the problem you are trying to address.
- Grow the organizational talent capacity by teaching each other. The opportunities are unlimited.

Networking takes time and intentionality. For low costs, organizations can support their own employees, increase their skill set, help position mid-level employees to prepare for leadership roles, and build regional relationships that will bear fruit through new collaborations and enhanced expertise.

ENDNOTE

- 1 Networking [Def. 1]. (n.d.). Merriam-Webster.com. In Merriam-Webster. Retrieved February 6, 2014, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/networking>.
- 2 Collins, J. and Hansen, M.T. (2011). *Great by Choice: Uncertainty, Chaos, and Luck--Why Some Thrive Despite Them All*. HarperCollins. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com>.



NETWORK LIKE IT'S YOUR JOB

By Maribeth Kuzmeski

For many job seekers, finding a job in today's job market can be like conquering a new frontier. With the unemployment rate still more than 9 percent, the job market has been flooded with job seekers—many of whom are experiencing a culture shock when they send out their resumes. After all, the days of mailing in your resume and receiving a phone call to set up an interview are over.

Today, everything is done online, from sending in your resume to setting up your first interview—and nine times out of 10, you're lucky to receive any kind of response, even an automatic one thanking you for your submission.

It doesn't take long to discover that in a virtual world it can be extremely difficult to get noticed by the decision makers whom you need to impress in order to land the job. I've found there are three easy steps to getting noticed in today's digitally dominated job market: networking, networking, networking.

Today you need more than a resume and a cover letter to get that dream job. Think of yourself as CEO of Me, Myself, and I, Inc. You need to be doing everything

you can to get the word out about your brand. That means networking.

Great networkers are capable of leaving something behind after every personal encounter—a thought, a memory, or a connection. This is exactly what you need to do if you are in the job market. You need to make strong connections, become a relationship builder. You want to be the first person who comes to mind when someone in your network hears about a great job opening.

Here is what you can do to network your way to a great new job.

Rejuvenate your resume. Resumes rarely showcase how great you are. That's why it's probably time to breathe a little life into yours. Think of it this way: If you are the CEO of Me, Myself, and I, Inc., you will need some marketing materials to promote your brand. Your resume and cover letter will serve as those marketing materials. Grab the attention of employers by upping the impact of your resume. This might mean bucking the traditional format to include eye-catching—but informative—headlines or a list of social media links and sites.

Busting through job search barriers can be a huge challenge in today's faceless, virtual world. The best way to overcome the challenge is to bypass the whole resume e-mailing, no-response hoopla by making great connections with the people who can put you and your resume right in front of the hiring decision makers at your dream job.

Also make sure you are emphasizing the tangible benefits you've brought to past employers, including in management jobs, whether it's cutting costs or improving efficiency. Turn your resume into something an employer would want to read.

Build your online resume using LinkedIn. According to Jobvite.com's 2010 Social Recruiting survey, 83 percent of employers plan to use social networks to recruit this year. If you aren't already on business-focused social media sites like LinkedIn, take the time to set up a profile.

LinkedIn is especially important because it is the most commonly viewed source for job seekers and employers. Setting up a profile is fairly simple: go to www.linkedin.com, add your picture and a summary of your past job responsibilities, and state what you're looking for. As a LinkedIn member, you can also join groups, review books, and proactively connect with potential employers. Think of it as creating your own living resume and a great way for people to connect with you!

Get face-to-face with potential employers! Find a way to get in front of your potential employers. These days it is much harder to show potential employers what you are all about and to forge a connection with them because so much of the pre-hiring process is done online and through e-mail. That is why it is essential that you find a way to communicate with them face-to-face.

Once you are face-to-face, in an interview or otherwise, focus on maintaining eye contact throughout. Lean in, show you are interested, and think before you answer any question. Thoughtful deliberation can be difficult if you're nervous, but it is critical in answering your potential employer's questions to the best of your ability. Establishing this face time is sure to set you apart from your job market competition.

Another great face-to-face opportunity comes after the interview. To show you paid close attention to

everything your interviewer or interviewers said, stop at the local government's main office or human resources office with an article that you think would be of interest to that community's managers or staff.

Make an impact by using video. If you really want to capture the attention of a potential employer, record a quick video. Use it to get an interview or as a follow-up after an interview. Here's how it works: Instead of just e-mailing a resume or a post-interview thank-you note, include a link to a video of you. Carefully script your response and record the quick message using a Flip video camera or even a webcam. Post it on YouTube or some other service and send a link to the video to your potential employer.

Here are some helpful scripting tips for getting the interview:

- The video should be no longer than one or two minutes.
- Introduce yourself.
- Identify the job you would like to be interviewed for.
- Tell the intended viewer three things about your background that may create an interest in interviewing you.
- Thank the individual for watching the video and request an interview!

Become a contrarian networker. The focus of networking should not be on gaining an immediate job offer from your networking contacts. In fact, that tactic almost never works. The goal should, instead, be to build a mutually beneficial relationship with someone who may never even be able to give you a job but might know someone who can.

It's what I call contrarian networking. Before you go to your next networking opportunity, create a game plan. First, think about which contacts are the most important to you. Remember, these will not necessarily be the people you think might be able to give you a

job on the spot. Brainstorm before the event to decide who the best connectors are. Who knows the people you want to know? By connecting with other great connectors, you are able to widen your reach. You expand your opportunities.

Let them do the talking. (You ask the questions!)

There's nothing worse than coming away from a great networking opportunity realizing that you didn't capitalize on the situation. Come up with a list of questions to get the conversation going. Here are a few great ice breakers:

- What did you do for your vacation this year?
- Where did you grow up? Do you still have family there?
- How are your kids? What are they up to?
- What do you think about . . . ? (Complete this question with something from current events, your community's local news, or a recent event in your profession. Remember, it is always a good idea to avoid topics such as religion and politics that can lead to contentious conversations.)

When the conversation is flowing freely, you can move on to more in-depth professional questions:

- What's the best thing that has happened to your community this year?
- What's one thing you've done that has really changed your career?
- What will you never do again in your profession?
- What's your biggest challenge?
- What do you find is the most effective way to keep elected officials happy?

It's always a good idea to follow up with a secondary question that encourages the individual to tell you more. The more the person talks and you listen, the more that person will like you because you are showing genuine interest.

Be prepared to pitch yourself in 15 seconds. You undoubtedly have a lot of qualifications and experience. So much that you could probably go on for hours about yourself. But the hard reality is that no one (except your mom!) wants to hear that much about your accomplishments.

So prepare a short, 15-second elevator pitch that hits on your career high points and top skills. Think about what's unique about what you have done and what will help you stand out from a crowd of other job seekers.

The key to an effective pitch is keeping it short while still including your biggest wins. Be creative and think about how you can frame your accomplishments in a way that gets people's attention.

Network with the people you know. Sometimes the most obvious connections are the ones most easily

ignored. When you are building your network or considering who might be able to lend you a helping hand during your job search, don't forget about people close to you who might have huge networks of their own.

Maybe, for example, your mom is or used to be a teacher. She's had contact with tons of parents over the years who just might be working in a local government. Or maybe your best friend is in a completely different field but has a huge network of friends on Facebook. You never know how a great opportunity will present itself. Don't count anyone out of your networking efforts, especially those who are the closest to you and likely to be the most willing to help.

Get involved in organizations that are connected to your profession. Job fairs can be great ways to get in front of potential employers, but you might not want to focus only on organizations you know are hiring. To meet people within your profession who might have the potential to hire you, attend seminars and join organizations or associations connected to your profession.

These events and organizations provide great opportunities to help you get your name recognized in your profession. Again, you might not find someone who is going to hire you on the spot, but you will have the chance to meet people who have the potential to hire you in the future. Take hard copies of your resume and your business cards to any of these events. The more people who know you the better.

Volunteer. Volunteering is a great way to give back, but it is also a great way to sneak in some networking. There are usually many staff and volunteers who keep a nonprofit running, and volunteering provides you the opportunity to meet them. And remember, you don't necessarily have to be doing anything that is connected to your profession. Simply volunteering at a place with a cause you are passionate about will provide you the chance to meet a lot of great connectors whom you might not have met otherwise.

Be a mover and a shaker. The next time you attend a networking event or a party, force yourself to get outside your comfort zone. Don't just hang out with the people you already know. Introduce yourself to new people and find out as much as you can about them. The more you move around from group to group, the more connections you will be able to make. It's all about expanding your opportunities.

Always be networking. You don't have to be at an event or party or working your social networks to build your connections. We all run into people everywhere in our day-to-day lives, but few of us capitalize on all those great connections. Next time you're on an airplane, for example, instead of working on your laptop

or reading the newspaper the whole time, get to know the person next to you. Network at your kid's soccer game or the next school PTA meeting. Strike up a conversation with the person behind you in line at the grocery store.

Remember, always be prepared to sell yourself. Provide what I call a simple, repeatable statement of value—something, in other words, that you can say that you know will trigger the person's interest and that will be easy to repeat to others. Companies do this, too. Think about how you first learned about Google. It wasn't through some elaborate advertisement. It was most likely from someone in your network saying, "Search for anything and everything on the Internet for free at google.com." By creating a statement like this,

those you connect with can easily pass along information about you.

Trying to find a job in such an overcrowded job market can be a daunting task. But by placing a renewed focus on networking, you open yourself up to many more opportunities than just the ones on the job boards. Every time you make a new connection you get that much closer to a great new opportunity.

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TIME MANAGEMENT **AND PLANNING**



GETTING MORE DONE

Ways to Leverage Resources More Efficiently

By Jeff Davidson

As another calendar year approaches, in the face of shrinking government budgets, better use of the resources you already have available represents a tremendous productivity initiative and time management technique.

When, for example, is the last time you reviewed the resumes of staff members? Going further, when is the last time you reviewed their original employment applications, which provide information on their background, education, training, and expertise? It pays to tap into staff background information to leverage their strengths.

RESOURCE ROSTER

A variety of resource areas that you might not have recently considered, which might be at your immediate disposal, are listed here and grouped by categories.

Tap the skills of current and prospective staff:

- Find experts among your staff.
- Research staff backgrounds, including software skills and other key capabilities.

- Empower administrative staff.
- Hire interns, especially tech-savvy recent grads.
- Consult other departments and committees.
- Recruit members of other departments.
- Retrain managers and staff.
- Hire retirees.
- Recall former employees (not just retirees).
- Retain temporary workers.

Consult with specialists:

- Involve people who know your agency.
- Network with colleagues inside and outside of your organization.

Work with volunteers:

- Find volunteers in your community with skills new to your office.
- Bring in peers and networking groups.
- Seek mentors.
- Involve friends and family.

- Tap online networks.

Capitalize on relations with vendors and customers:

- Pose questions to vendors.
- Review the skills of business customers.
- Establish partnerships.

Draw upon the services of professional and other governmental agencies:

- Scout programs offered by state and federal agencies.
- Research all other government agencies with applicable programs.
- Become more involved in professional networks and organizations.
- Explore the services of professional and industry associations.
- Learn about local university partnership with business.

Harness leadership tools:

- Recognize your own responsibility and accountability.
- Enhance your own leadership skills.
- Develop and consult frequently asked questions.
- Use virtual and informal networks.
- Make better use of data you've already gathered.
- Take better advantage of Internet and library resources.
- Use the most appropriate tools and technologies.

Employ technology wisely:

- Employ a variety of e-mail signatures, letters, and reusable templates.
- Enact flexi-place (virtual office) policies.
- Communicate by teleconferencing and Skype-type meetings.
- Acquire better and faster technology.
- Use the full version of key software.
- Maintain a simple and short list of goals.
- Undertake more comprehensive online searches.
- Automate with available equipment.

Draw upon your own wisdom:

- Prepare for contingencies.
- Assemble the right team.
- Know whom to consult.
- Befriend such information purveyors as librarians.
- Be able to say no. Make more effective choices.

GET MORE ORGANIZED

Becoming more organized, in general, represents a second front on the path to effective time management by better use of resources. Take this quick quiz to see where you stand:

- Is your desk at work or at home piled horizontally with reports, papers, and files? Nobody can manage a horizontal pile.
- Do you have trouble finding a particular item in your desk that you use often? Maybe it needs to be left on your desk.
- Do you feel that you could be organized if you only had more space? More space is seldom the answer; filing or getting rid of what isn't important is.
- Do you have piles of newspapers and magazines at home that you don't have time to read? If you're attempting to read these publications cover to cover, good luck. Clip out what looks important or interesting, and recycle the rest.
- Do papers clutter your desk for at least a week? A desk is not a filing cabinet.
- Do you ever find something at the bottom of a pile that you didn't know was there? Beware: You're liable to lose anything! Break down your piles now.
- Do you sometimes spend five to 10 minutes or more looking for a letter or document that you need? The search should take no more than 45 to 75 seconds. More than that and, well...you're wasting everyone's time.

Recognizing that getting better organized in and of itself is a "resource" worth cultivating, here are some ideas to help you benefit from your own organizational skills:

- Organize documents for optimal use.
- Train others to respect your time.
- Work away from the office to avoid distraction.
- Find a quiet room or place within your facilities.
- Limit distractions as often as practical.

Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC, is principal, Breathing Space® Institute, Raleigh, North Carolina. An author and presenter on work-life balance, he holds the world's only registered trademark from the United States Patent and Trademark Office as a "Work-Life Balance Expert."®



TOO LITTLE TIME TO WEAR ALL THOSE HATS?

Let strategy help you find the right fit.

By Douglas Schulze and Thomas Terry

Who knew that fueling an airplane was a skill a local government manager should have? One author of this article (that would be me, Doug!) discovered this during the first few weeks as a brand new city administrator in a small rural city, population 2,200.

One evening early in my tenure the telephone rang while I was having dinner with family members. My wife answered the phone and, after a brief moment, informed the caller he must have dialed a wrong number. The man insisted he had the correct number, so I talked with him.

Much to my surprise, the caller said he was at the municipal airport and needed fuel for his airplane. I found out that my name and telephone number were posted at the office as the contact for fuel!

This example shows that serving as a manager of a small community can often mean working with limited

time, resources, staff, and in-house expertise. The job requires unique perspective, skills, flexibility, and willingness by both manager and staff to wear many hats.

The ability to meet the needs and expectations of residents may be enhanced by employing such commonsense and effective strategies as establishing priorities, providing policy perspectives for elected officials, providing professional development for the manager and staff members, collaborating, contracting and outsourcing, and using volunteers and interns.

Here's a closer look at the strategies that smaller community managers can use to handle everything that needs to be done:

Prioritization and Flexibility. These may seem to be commonsense strategies but acknowledging them as strategies is much easier than actually using them. In small organizations, the manager also can be respon-

Developing a circle of fellow managers allows the small-community manager to stay current and bounce ideas off of others who understand local government management.

sible for one or more departments. Spending the day putting out proverbial fires can't always be avoided, but unless you have a strategy for prioritizing issues, each day will turn into firefighting.

Using well-known time management strategies, for example, to prioritize your workday is important. Finishing a priority project first thing in the morning before opening e-mail or listening to voice messages sounds simple, but it works. Think about how many times the productivity of your day has been completely lost because of one telephone call or one e-mail message.

Policy Perspective for Elected Officials. Elected officials need a perspective on the everyday workings of the local government. Every function an organization serves and every service it provides is important. The reality is, however, that in an environment of finite resources and unlimited demands it is necessary to establish policy priorities.

Policy can be a difficult topic of discussion with elected officials, especially for managers in small communities who are expected to do it all. It may be a frightening prospect to openly discuss limitations of your organization and you as manager. In spite of this, working with your elected officials to understand the limitations and to focus finite resources is the foundation for improving organizational effectiveness.

The capacity for a comprehensive discussion may not currently exist in your organization because such a discussion hasn't taken place before or the current political environment may not be conducive to one. If so, keep a discussion simple.

An annual SWOT analysis and goal-identification process is a good place to begin. It may be necessary to use an outside facilitator for this task. Retired managers are often willing participants and the cost of hiring one might be within your budget.

The city of Elko New Market, Minnesota (population 4,100), engages annually in visioning and goal setting.

The overall process involves four steps: (1) developing a common vision for the community, (2) identifying community issues, (3) establishing goals, and (4) implementing them.

Although rather quick and dirty, this process has been successful in developing consensus on community vision, issues, goals, and priorities. We use the vision as a mental image of a desirable and feasible Elko New Market 20 to 30 years in the future.

The vision is not so much an end product as it is a direction in which the council feels the community should be moving. This vision serves as the foundation for the rest of the process, with councilmembers then identifying the most important issues facing the community within the next 10 years.

The vision and issues serve as the context or backdrop as councilmembers develop goals and an action plan. The council establishes a number of priority goals, which are projects or activities that merit special attention and focused resources. The goals are intended to be easily defined and measurable for progress and completion.

The goals also are expected to be reasonably achievable within a five-year time frame. They provide a framework for shaping policy, setting priorities, and budgeting.

Finally, an implementation or action plan with a 12- to 18-month time frame is developed to move each of the goals forward. Because action items necessary to achieve the identified goals may require funding, this exercise serves as an excellent lead-in to the city's annual budget process.

The visioning and goal process has proven to be as valuable as the outcomes in developing council consensus and focus. The exercise has allowed Elko New Market to move from being reactive to being a more proactive organization.

Professional Development. For managers and staff members, professional development can be done for

minimal cost without leaving the office by using webinars, electronic newsletters, and professional blogs. The difficulty can be finding the time to listen to a webinar or read a newsletter without interruption.

Using the ICMA Credentialed Manager program is a great way to plan your professional development. Set aside two to three hours every two weeks, perhaps during lunch, to read newsletters, blogs, websites, or books.

If your community or personal budget allows, attending annual state association and municipal league training events and ICMA's annual conference not only is a great way to learn how other managers are doing the job, but it can also be a feasible way to develop a management network.

Developing a circle of fellow managers allows the small-community manager to stay current and bounce ideas off of others who understand local government management. Having monthly or quarterly lunch meetings with managers from nearby communities is also an easy and inexpensive way to stay current. Encourage and provide similar opportunities for staff members.

Collaboration. Working with other people and other communities is an excellent way to pool resources and achieve efficiencies and levels of service that would not be possible individually. Collaboration doesn't just happen on its own. It requires an investment in time and resources, which can be a difficult proposition when both are in short supply.

As with any investment, the returns can outweigh the initial cost. By necessity, successful collaboration depends on developing relationships. Certain levels of comfort and trust are required to build a good foundation for any relationship. Again, setting up monthly or quarterly meetings with managers from nearby communities is an easy way to begin developing those relationships.

As a manager, you will likely have to cultivate a culture of collaboration within and outside your organization. The tendency of people and organizations is to identify reasons why collaboration will not work. As a result, most collaborative concepts are passed over before truly being vetted. Work to foster a culture that looks to collaborative opportunities first and that encourages flexibility and consideration of nontraditional areas of collaboration.

Finally, you and your organization will have to be willing to "pay it forward," to take the first step and make an investment for future return. This has been especially successful in Scott County, Minnesota, and has been formalized in the establishment of the Scott County Association for Leadership and Efficiency (SCALE). More information on SCALE can be found at the website www.scaleinfo.org.

SCALE was formed in 2003 to encourage greater efficiencies and leadership in public service through enhanced communication, collaboration of services, and sharing of resources. Members include elected and appointed officials from the cities, schools, and townships within Scott County, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, and Scott County.

SCALE members meet monthly to discuss ways in which local governments can continue to maximize the value of taxpayers' money through cooperating in such mutual service areas as public safety, parks and recreation, transportation, community development, and general government. These are some successful SCALE initiatives:

- The Unified Economic Development, Land Use and Transportation Charter has led countywide coordinated economic development efforts.
- The SCALE Regional Public Safety Training Facility, established in 2008, provides training opportunities for law enforcement, firefighting, emergency management, emergency preparedness, military, public health, and public works groups serving Scott and Carver counties, along with the Minnesota River Valley Region.
- The countywide equipment sharing agreement provides for the sharing of equipment resources among the local government jurisdictions in Scott County.

Another example of successful collaboration is the Scott County Joint Prosecution Association, a joint-powers organization whose membership consists of all of the cities in Scott County. The organization provides prosecution services for the cities for nonfelony cases.

Elko New Market also has an agreement with the neighboring city of Savage (population 27,000) for receiving management information services on an as-needed basis. This has resulted in a higher level of expertise, with experience in local technology needs and applications at a reduced cost compared with the options available through private contractors or in-house staff.

Administrators in Scott County have been meeting monthly for several years. All of the collaborative efforts mentioned have been the result of relationships, concepts, and collaboration developed through those meetings. This practice can serve as a good example for other local governments.

Contracting and Outsourcing. Contracting and outsourcing are often necessities in small communities. When you have limited internal resources and expertise, contracting and outsourcing can provide a level of expertise that cannot be maintained internally as well as the flexibility to respond to a changing workload.

A common concern can be the premium that is paid for the external expertise. In smaller communities with limited resources, there might be a philosophical resistance to paying for external expertise—perhaps a certain degree of sticker shock exists. This can result in a strong desire to “make do” with internal staff resources. The alternative, however, can be reduced efficiency due to the lack of internal capacity and the increased burden on internal resources that are more efficiently focused on core competencies.

Staff members are often required to be more generalists, without the luxury of time or resources to develop high degrees of expertise and efficiencies. The organization, in some instances, may find it better to use external resources and allow the manager and staff members to focus on what they do well.

Aside from the obvious cost-benefit analysis, keep certain points in mind when exploring options for contracting and outsourcing: be creative and flexible, use external resources that can function as an extension of city staff, and seek external resources that have depth.

Elko New Market has effectively used contracting and outsourcing in a number of areas:

- Snow and ice removal on all of its streets. This allows the city to provide a more cost-effective level of service than can currently be provided with in-house resources.
- Management services for the public works department by contracting with an engineering consulting firm. This allows the city to maintain flexibility while it benefits from much greater experience and technical expertise than could be obtained if the position was internal.
- Planning services that allow the city to maintain flexibility as it benefits from much greater experience and technical expertise than could be obtained if the position were internal. The city also has a joint-powers agreement with the neighboring city of Lonsdale to provide part-time zoning administrator services, resulting in flexibility and service at a lower cost than the use of a private firm.
- Administration and management of recreational programming. Establishing an agreement with one of the two school districts serving Elko New Market has allowed the service to be provided at a much lower cost than if the city had to provide it in-house.

Volunteers and Interns. Here is an inexpensive and effective way to supplement staff. Small communities are frequently full of talented, retired people who welcome opportunities to share their talents. Engaging community members to work with local government staff also can build trust and support.

When you have limited internal resources and expertise, contracting and outsourcing can provide a level of expertise that cannot be maintained internally as well as the flexibility to respond to a changing workload.

Volunteers can be used for a broad range of tasks depending on needs of the organization and skills of the volunteers. In 1993–1994, volunteers in Sandstone, Minnesota (population 2,200), converted a derelict municipal golf course into a beautiful nine-hole course with a new clubhouse, including a full bar and banquet capacity for 100 people, for less than \$250,000.

In Normandy Park, Washington (population 6,800), volunteer programs have been developed to help with maintenance and special projects in parks and public rights-of-way. An adopt-a-spot program is available to individuals or groups, and volunteers are recognized by a plaque installed at the site of their “spot.”

Volunteers recently constructed a footbridge that provides access to a nature preserve. The bridge would have cost the city some \$150,000 if the work had been contracted out; however, the city paid only for materials because volunteers provided the labor and a local licensed engineer volunteered to design the structure. Total cost of the project, including a dedication plaque to recognize the volunteers, was less than \$15,000.

If a volunteer program is established or volunteers are used for a small project, do not waste their time. Be clear about the objectives, budget and resources available, and safety and supervision. Volunteers will not return if the experience is unproductive or unrewarding.

Typical internships through graduate programs encourage employers to provide some compensation for interns to demonstrate a commitment to providing the interns with a beneficial experience. Even if

your budget doesn't give you an opportunity to offer compensation to an intern, it is possible to find good interns who are willing to work without compensation just to gain experience.

Normandy Park has two successful internship programs. The police department offers a six-month internship program, which gives interns an opportunity to work closely with the police chief and assistant chief on administrative functions.

An internship in the community development department that is available for students working on GIS certification was recently established through a partnership with Green River Community College. This program has helped fill a staffing need the city could not otherwise afford.

MAKE THE INVESTMENTS

A common attribute of successful managers of small organizations is that they take time out of an already busy

schedule to make investments that result in a return of personal development and organizational development.

Although the impact of taking time to make these investments may result in a short-term personal or organizational burden, these investments will help you and your organization to become more efficient and more capable of wearing many hats. If these investments are not made, it is extremely difficult to accomplish anything more than frantically putting out those proverbial fires.

Finally, it is also important to take time for your family and your own health. Don't let work consume you! If your personal life is not in order, you cannot perform at your best professionally.

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STRATEGIES FOR LOCAL **GOVERNMENT LEADERS**



GIVING YOURSELF PERMISSION TO MANAGE

By Julia Novak and Steven Burkett

Employee empowerment. Collaborative decision making. Servant leadership. These are the leadership buzzwords of contemporary management. With each of these phrases, a manager is provided a mental picture of how a good leader leads an organization.

These phrases describe styles that are effective and important for managers to adapt to their own settings. We cannot, however, use them or anything else as an excuse not to manage. Our profession is, after all, local government management.

The goal of management and the role of the manager are to achieve a balance between ensuring day-to-day services are provided by employees, and creating the optimal environment. The common denominator of all the approaches to leadership and management is to create an organization that attracts talented employees and leads to high performance and quality services.

As local government managers and advisers, we have seen managers being apologetic about doing just that—managing the organization. They are concerned

about being labeled micromanagers because they ask questions about operations. They have been told to focus their attention on building relationships, and they interpret that mandate as requiring them to be soft and hands-off.

In fact, one of the most important keys to effective leadership and management is to ask the right questions. Although the manager may not need or want to be obsessively detail oriented, it is important that others in the organization are.

In our interaction with managers and as managers ourselves, we help managers implement contemporary leadership principles, but, at the same time, we urge managers not to abdicate their responsibility to manage the organization. Consider this to be your permission slip to be the manager again.

THE CHALLENGE OF BEGINNING

It is a daunting task to decide to change how the organization has (or has not) been managed. New and ten-

One of the most important keys to effective leadership and management is to ask the right questions.

ured managers face similar hurdles when they decide to implement a management system. The challenge is the same, but the nuances can be different.

Some new managers come in from the outside, and no one in the organization really knows them or how they work. Some have been inside the organization for a while, and they move into the top seat and must take over the leadership role.

Regardless of where they came from, new managers can be reluctant to implement management systems because they do not want to be labeled as having a command-and-control style or appear to be top-down managers.

As a result, they focus their attention on current issues and whatever is brought to them. Period. Unfortunately, in such a situation the manager is abdicating responsibility for leadership by letting someone else set the agenda and define the strategic direction of the organization.

Managers who have been in the organization for a long time have to clear a special hurdle when they try to implement new management systems. People who have worked with a manager for a while often put up all kinds of roadblocks to adapting to a new system.

They are likely to know what issues to bring, as well as what not to bring, to the manager. They will play to this because it is human nature to turn other people's attention to what they want that person—in this case, the boss—to focus on. Then the boss will stay away from the details! In these situations, the manager continues to be sidetracked by issues and has a hard time getting down to the business of managing the organization.

Let's face it. Every manager has a bigger job than can be done in a reasonable workweek and can spend time bouncing from one hot issue to another, whether it is a controversial rezoning, a difficult personnel issue, or a new council that must be trained, oriented, and understood.

If it isn't the managers in your organization lining up

outside your door with issues that must be dealt with, it is members of the governing body, citizens, customers, members of the chamber of commerce, or an assistant who knows about an otherwise quiet issue in which the manager should intervene. These are the important things your days are made of, and in many ways they are what makes the job of managing local governments fun—or at least not boring!

But what percentage of your fleet is out of service during a given week? What is the time lost due to injury or sick leave in your sanitation operation? Where on the critical path is the newest stormwater detention facility capital project? In what direction is the crime rate headed?

And while we're on the topic, how is staff turnover? What is the average condition of your streets? How long does it take to issue a check to a vendor? What is the accuracy rate of payroll checks? How much does it cost to issue a payroll check? How many of your building inspectors are certified by the International Building Code (IBC)?

How can the manager possibly be expected to know answers to detailed questions like this? That is why we pay our department heads (or assistants) six figures, right?

Wrong.

The job of the manager is to manage the business of the organization. While any one of these measures may not be important at any given moment, the reality is that you must have a corporate system for ensuring that important measures of effectiveness and efficiency get to the top. Such a system allows the manager to monitor the results of the organization and ensure that the day-to-day work of the organization is focused on the local government's strategic objectives and long-term goals.

Managers must know the status of key projects. If they do not, they will be trapped managing issues when things go wrong instead of addressing performance trends before they become a crisis.

You cannot allow yourself to be consumed by issues and forget that you must actively manage the big-picture organization. The business of government is focused on two key things: operational (program) performance and project management. Addressing urgent issues is important, but no more important than ensuring every department is operating as efficiently and effectively as it should.

In his book, *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins describes Level 5 leadership as being critical for helping companies break through from good to great. What is unique about Collins's leadership model is that he has specifically defined Level 5 leadership as one of five specific skill sets the leader must accomplish. And in order to be a Level 5 leader, you must also be skilled at levels 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Level 3 in Collins's hierarchy is being a competent manager. What Collins reinforces is that great leaders are also great managers! Management is about structure and discipline. It is not about fads and trends. It is management that gives an organization the stability and consistency it needs to thrive. Management is not delegated by great leaders; it is encouraged, supported, and, above all, practiced by them.

So how do you do it? How do you stay on top of the operations without being labeled a top-down, directing micromanager? It isn't easy, but it can be done by imposing rigor and discipline in your schedule and the schedules of those who work with you.

You need three systems in place to do this effectively.

1. A system for managing organizational performance through individual work plans.
2. A system for managing key projects.
3. A discipline of structured, regular one-on-one meetings between you and your direct reports.

MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The everyday business of what our organizations do happens at a program level. We pick up trash, we fill vacancies, we conduct inspections, we immunize people, we provide after-school child care, and we provide introductory ballet courses. Each of these activities is part of the programs that feed into our organizational hierarchy. These programs provide the building blocks for a system of managing performance.

Our program managers track "things"—how many people sign up for ballet, get flu shots, and apply for jobs. The workload data exist. The job of a manager is to translate the workload data into measures of efficiency and effectiveness that are shared up the organizational hierarchy.

Sounds simple, but it is not so easy to do! At each

level of the organization, knowledge of the detailed data required to manage decreases. But there is a need-to-know key indicator of organizational performance. Usually, the information the manager needs to know relates directly to the organization's strategic plan or the governing body's goals and objectives.

Organizations should have a system for reporting information up through the organization and a system for discussing that information. If management doesn't pay attention to the details, who will? Nothing will be communicated until there is a problem.

There should be a clear hierarchy of operational data that is tracked by all levels in the organization. While the city or county manager reviews performance measures and reports from all departments at a strategic level, program managers monitor operational performance at a much more detailed level.

PROJECT TRACKING

The same type of information is important to know about projects. Many governing bodies care only about high-profile projects, and maybe you have figured out a way to keep informed of those.

How about the rest of the projects? How did the roll-out of the new financial management system go? Are employees happy with it? Did they get the training they needed? Is it performing as advertised? What about the new skate park? Is it on schedule, on budget?

Management must pay attention to project performance, big as well as small projects. You need to know who is accountable for executing a project plan. The manager needs to know what projects are progressing according to plan, what projects are starting to go off course, and what projects require immediate redirection.

The bottom line is that the agreed work and metrics need to be written down and discussed at routine management meetings. After you reach agreement, you can collaborate about the execution of the agreement.

MEETINGS WITH DIRECT REPORTS

The most effective way to ensure that people within the organization communicate thoroughly and usefully about both projects and programs is to have routine, structured meetings where you review operational performance issues, project management information, and hot issues happening in the department. The one-on-one meeting between manager and department head, department head and division head, and division head and program manager is where management happens in an organization.

What about weekly staff meetings? These meetings are wonderful for sharing information and for collab-

oratively strategizing about issues of organization wide importance. They are not, however, how the business of the organization is managed. City and county managers must lead and manage their organizations and ensure that their subordinates are managing their departments.

Best-practice organizations have a consistent methodology for managing in every department. Sure, styles differ, and some departments require more or fewer one-on-one meetings, but the fact of the matter is that they all do require them. It is a matter of setting the proper procedures in place to ensure a productive and meaningful dialogue. Such regular meetings provide the opportunity to review work plans and project schedules, to review data on operational trends, and to track progress toward strategic objectives.

PERMISSION TO MANAGE

So yes, collaborate, be a servant leader, and don't micromanage the good people in your organization.

But you do have a duty to actively manage the organization. It is your responsibility to ensure that the intended results are produced for the organization and that core services are provided in a cost-effective and efficient manner. This is similar to a private sector manager's responsibility to track the financial bottom line.

The best organizations execute well. They invest in their people, they know where they want to go, and they have clear plans for getting there. Don't allow pejoratives to give you an excuse to abdicate your responsibility.

Lead and manage. You have permission.

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LINCOLN'S LAWS: 10 LESSONS FOR TODAY'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVES

By Jim Schutz

Despite the fact that the license plates on my parents' cars always proclaimed "Land of Lincoln," merely growing up in Illinois did not give me any inherent insights into its favorite son. It wasn't until one of our longtime, retiring city councilmembers presented the mayor with Doris Kearns Goodwin's book, *Team of Rivals*, that my interest in President Abraham Lincoln bloomed.

As an assistant city manager, I was curious about why this book on Lincoln would be a valued gift from one veteran elected official to his closest colleague. After I read it, I was surprised and delighted to find a distinct set of traits, practices, and beliefs that guided Lincoln's day-to-day decision making and leadership. What emerged for me was a sort of handbook of best practices for local government managers and other top local government executives.

Lincoln, of course, was an elected official and not a

manager. How he led his life has much to offer elected officials, including how to win an election, but his life may have even more to offer city and county administrators. Here I have assembled 10 "Lincoln laws" that are as relevant today as they were in 1860 when Lincoln was elected president, eggs were 18 cents a dozen, and the top iTunes download would have been "I've Been Working on the Railroad."

1. Create Your Own Team of Rivals. After Lincoln first won the presidency, he made the surprising decision to fill his cabinet with his fiercest rivals, whom he had just outmaneuvered to win the top position. Goodwin notes, "Every member of his administration was better known, better educated, and more experienced in public life than Lincoln. Their presence in the cabinet might have threatened to eclipse the obscure prairie lawyer from Springfield."

Managers must also constantly gauge public perception to know when to hold back and lay the foundation and when to take action.

But Lincoln's self-confidence allowed him to choose the best and brightest for this crucial time in American history instead of surrounding himself with sycophants or yes-men. He often felt his policy or intended direction was not truly ready until it was dashed against the rocks a few times by his challenging cabinet.

He would then be quite confident in his final version because it had already been scrutinized from every perspective. No matter whom a manager thinks of as a local government cabinet—such as department directors or key community leaders—it is important to seek out and listen to advisers with dissimilar backgrounds, insights, and opinions.

2. **Don't Sweat the Detractors.** Lincoln is not unlike today's managers in that he was revered and adored by some but was constantly under fire and ridiculed as incompetent by others. Even the man who would become his secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, said of Lincoln after their first meeting, "Why did you bring that gawky, long armed ape here? . . . He does not know anything and can do you no good."

Stanton later became one of Lincoln's truest friends and admirers. Managers make decisions every day that are popular with some and reviled by others. Lincoln tried not to get caught up in negative sentiments. He remained focused, resolute, and calm, and he once said, "If I do get up a little temper I have no sufficient time to keep it up."

3. **Allegiance Pays Dividends.** As Lincoln managed his political career leading up to the presidency, his successes provided him with followers, but how he handled his defeats created his most loyal supporters. In 1855, the Illinois state legislature was charged with choosing, by majority vote, one of its members for the U.S. Senate.

The legislature was deadlocked with Lincoln in the lead, only four votes shy of victory. After nine bal-

lots, he still had the most votes but could not reach the majority mark. Although he wanted the Senate seat for himself, he had even more allegiance to the antislavery cause, and therefore he swung all the votes for himself to his like-minded colleague, Lyman Trumbull. This gave Trumbull enough votes to secure the majority.

Trumbull and his key supporters never forgot Lincoln's magnanimity, and they developed a devoted allegiance to him. They went on to support Lincoln in his U.S. Senate bid in 1858 and played a critical role in his selection as the presidential candidate in 1860.

Local government managers also experience victories and defeats, and it is important to remain true to the cause and to elected officials, senior staff, community leaders or groups, and so on. As they did for Lincoln, integrity and sense of duty come back to help when they are needed the most.

4. **Proceed Only When You Can Succeed.** Lincoln was keenly aware of public opinion. Goodwin writes that Lincoln long believed that "with public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed." For this reason, he strategically unveiled his concepts to the public only when the time was right.

Lincoln waited for the right time to release his Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves within all states fighting the Union. Lincoln feared that if this proclamation had been issued even six months too early, he would have lost the support of the border states and therefore he would have lost the war.

If he had waited six months too long, he would have lost the morale boost that the proclamation provided. Managers must also constantly gauge public perception to know when to hold back and lay the foundation and when to take action.

5. **Drop the Bureaucratic Language.** Lincoln's orations were the opposite of a dry political monologue. A

colleague of Lincoln once said that his audiences were always riveted, “his anecdotes were always exceedingly apt and pointed, and socially he always kept his company in a roar of laughter.”

When Lincoln wanted to illustrate the difference between accepting slavery where it was but not allowing it to spread further, he used a masterful story about finding a snake (slavery) in a bed with children. He wanted to be careful to strike at the snake but not hurt the children.

He also certainly did not want to let the snake get into any more beds (new territories). He strove, as should we all, to use common language to reveal the plain truth behind complicated issues.

6. **Be Honest.** This one is only slightly less obvious than “bring extra bodyguards to the theater.” But Honest Abe’s personal integrity was built on a lifelong sense of fairness, truth, and decency. Innumerable endearing stories are told of Lincoln walking a long distance to return a few pennies he accidentally overcharged when working as a retail clerk or returning legal fees when his clients needed the money more than he did.
7. **Remember to Laugh.** Lincoln would advise today’s managers to seek out humor and joy in the executive role as a way to combat the difficulties. He sometimes irritated his colleagues, and enlivened others, when he took out a joke book and started reading it during stressful times.

Once, when Lincoln was taking a navy flagship to meet with his generals near the front, he refused the admiral’s quarters and chose, instead, an extremely small room. After one night, the admiral got carpenters to knock down a wall and also increase the size of the bed. Goodwin writes, “When Lincoln awoke the next morning, he announced with delight that ‘a greater miracle than ever happened last night; I shrank six inches in length and about a foot sideways.’”

8. **Don’t Cloud the Right Decision with the Personal.** Salmon P. Chase was a longtime member of the Lincoln cabinet. He was a champion of many of the ideals Lincoln held dear, and he did a superb job running the U.S. Treasury. He also thought himself better equipped for the presidency and was constantly scheming to advance his personal interests. This caused Lincoln irritation and embarrassment.

When a vacancy arose on the Supreme Court for the position of chief justice of the United States, which Chase coveted, Lincoln appointed him to the position. Goodwin writes that Lincoln later commented that he “would rather have swallowed his buckhorn chair than to have nominated Chase.”

But, he remarked, “to have done otherwise I should have been recreant to my convictions of duty to the Republican party and to the country.” Local government administrators also serve their community better when personal feelings are set aside.

9. **Spend Time with the Troops.** In local government, employees on the “front lines” are street maintenance crews, building inspectors, public safety officers, and the like. Lincoln visited the front lines of the Civil War as often as he could. The soldiers most often greeted him with heartfelt cheers.

Lincoln justified his presence by saying he “was not afraid to show himself among them, and willing to share their dangers here, as often, far away, he had shared the joys of their triumphs.” The triumphs of local government are many, and it is usually the troops who bring them about.

10. **Leave a Legacy.** Early in Lincoln’s career, in the winter of 1841, Lincoln experienced a devastating depression after a series of grave personal and political losses. Goodwin writes that his good friend, Joshua Speed, warned him “that if he did not rally, he would most certainly die.” Goodwin writes that Lincoln replied “that he was more than willing to die, but that he had done nothing to make any human being remember that he had lived” and he yearned to distinguish himself in a memorable way.

Although few of us will be able to claim a Gettysburg Address, an Emancipation Proclamation, or a 13th Amendment, we are uniquely positioned to leave a lasting impression in many ways. Our individual legacies might be working with elected officials on a new community center or library, a child care program or affordable housing, safer streets, or an exciting entertainment district. The potential legacies are as varied as the administrators creating them.

One person can’t do these things alone. Even someone with Lincoln’s talents knew he needed to surround himself with winners. When the top-ranked Union general, Ulysses S. Grant, first met Lincoln in person, the crowds showered all their affections on Grant. Goodwin writes that a young colonel present at the occasion noted that Lincoln was pleased and fully aware that the path to victory was wide enough for both men to “walk it abreast.”

And so it is in local government. The path to success is less strenuous and more rewarding when walking shoulder to shoulder with others.

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TOP 10 LEADERSHIP LESSONS OF EFFECTIVE WOMEN LEADERS

Describing what matters most in leadership

By Katy Simon

As I prepared recently to present “Leadership Secrets of Effective Women Leaders” to a group of elected women leaders from throughout the United States, I pondered these fundamental questions: What do followers need leaders to be? Is leadership different for men and women? Has the current economy and its repercussions affected what women leaders are called upon to do and to be in their organizations? What is the role of ethics in leadership? Is leadership different for us in the public sector?

To answer these questions, I want to give credit to a group of women I admire greatly, whom I e-mailed in preparation for the presentation—women leaders ranging from the former president of Gannett Publishing Worldwide, to a highly successful chief executive officer of a public relations firm, to a city councilwoman, to a state legislator, to a college president, to the chief

executive officer of an international airport.

I asked them to tell me the first thing that came to mind in answer to the question, What do aspiring women leaders need to know? What follows is a culmination of what they told me, and their responses were, coincidentally, especially consistent with what research tells us matters most in leadership.

WHAT ARE THE SECRETS?

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once said, “If you want to change the world, who do you begin with, yourself or others?” My answer? Yourself. The first secret, then, is to **be self-aware**. The admonition to “know thyself” goes back to the oracles at Delphi and has been attributed to no fewer than six Greek philosophers, including Socrates.

We need to understand what we know and what we

Nobody ever gets too much encouragement.
Be unselfish in your praise, in your listening, in
your thoughtfulness.

don't know. We need to know our strengths and be honest about our weaknesses and not be unnecessarily critical of ourselves, but we should get busy fixing the weaknesses. Remember that you can really only change yourself. It's easier to overcome other people's judgments of you than to overcome your own self-judgment.

So learn how to use your strengths to build on them and to address what you need to change in yourself. Knowing yourself and your values gives you confidence, and that confidence is contagious.

The second secret flows from the first: **be competent**. Always try to be the best-prepared person in the room. Don't take things on if you don't have the capacity to do them well. My mother used to say that you can do anything and everything—you just can't do it all at the same time.

And remember that communication skills—especially listening—are the most important competencies you need to master. Seek out and accept feedback that will help you to become ever more competent at the things that matter.

The third secret is: **be curious**. You cannot grow if you don't make room for what isn't already part of you. Curiosity about people, about issues, about things you don't know leads to better understanding, which makes you more powerful. And your genuine interest in and curiosity about other people make them feel special and make you more likable, more memorable to them.

The fourth secret, then, is **be kind**. Plato once said, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." How you treat everyone matters to everyone else. They learn a lot about who you are by how you treat people at all levels. They decide how much they can trust you based on how they see you treating others.

Do you know your employees and constituents? Their stories? Their heartbreaks? Their dreams? They will follow you to the extent that they feel they matter to you. And remember that nobody ever gets too much

encouragement. Be unselfish in your praise, in your listening, in your thoughtfulness.

Send handwritten notes. (Some of Washoe County's 3,000 employees have tacked up on their walls notes that I sent them five, eight, 10 years ago. It matters.) Seek first to understand, then to be understood, as author Stephen Covey says. Empower others, and they will follow you. And be kind to yourself, too. Remember to put the oxygen mask on yourself first, then help others!

The fifth secret is to **be purposeful**. Be intentional. Demonstrate your integrity, honesty, ethics, and consistency every day. The ends never justify the means. You are only as strong as your commitment to your personal mission and purpose in life, and that's the same for your organization.

Don't be afraid to speak your mind, but do so with respect, honoring the differing views of others. They will respect you more if you are committed to their right to disagree with you. Being purposeful also means being decisive. Indecision is worse than making a bad decision, which you can usually go back and fix.

Be accountable for all that you do, and be transparent. As we all know, that old warning, "Would you want to see this reported on the front page of the newspaper?" is really true for leaders like us!

FIVE MORE SECRETS

The sixth secret, then, is **be resilient**. Grow a thick skin. We all have to keep relearning not to take things personally. People are going to misunderstand us, reject our ideas, and attack us, and we have to hold up our heads and keep going.

We always have to ask ourselves whether the criticism we're getting is justified—if it is, acknowledge it and do something about it. If it isn't, shake it off and recognize that you aren't going to make everyone happy. A year or two or 10 from now, whatever this thing is will have

paled in importance.

Whether you like her or not, Hillary Clinton has often been named one of the most resilient leaders of our time. She has been knocked down personally and publicly but has managed to get back up, get on her feet, and keep going time and again. Because of this, she has been able to contribute in ways that could never be possible otherwise.

The seventh secret is to **be optimistic**. It is said that optimistic people live considerably longer, make more money in their lifetimes, have a better health status, reportedly have more successful marriages and family lives, and have higher educational attainment—all other things being equal.

In other words, no matter where you come from, an optimistic nature pays off for you. This doesn't mean to be foolishly and naively cheerful in the face of crisis. It means that, whether things are going well or poorly, understand the negatives but try to refocus on the positives.

As the saying goes, "What I think about, I bring about." Our thoughts and expectations—of ourselves and others—are extremely powerful and are contagious. Enthusiasm gives people energy to face the difficult tasks we all share.

The eighth secret is **be connected**. Surround yourself with smart, talented people who will be honest with you—good or bad. Nurture and pay attention to relationships. They are the machinery of how everything good gets done.

Find a mentor whom you respect, and learn from your mentor. Get to know people in diverse networks—being open, inclusive, and tolerant of differing views gives you insight, knowledge, new perspectives, and solutions.

Know and practice the value of teamwork—the demands on us to know more and more make it virtually impossible to come up, by ourselves, individually, with solutions that are even half as good as the ones we can come up with by involving a team, not to mention that the sheer number of ideas a team can come up with increases exponentially over ideas of a single individual.

Reach out and meet people you think you should know. Don't wait for them to call you because they may not, but nine times out of 10, they'd love to hear from you and are extremely flattered and willing to give you some of their time.

And, speaking of time, the ninth secret is **be present** wherever you are. As my daughter's preschool teacher used to say, "Today is the day we have." I loved that phrase so much that when my daughter turned 16 I wrote a book of all the lessons I wanted her to know that maybe I hadn't fully shared with her, and that was

Surround yourself with smart, talented people who will be honest with you—good or bad. They are the machinery of how everything good gets done.

the title I gave it. Today is the day we have. Let go of worrying about the future. If you can do something about it, do it; but stop the worrying. It robs you of productive energy.

And, likewise, let go of regrets about the past. There is nothing you can redo now. If there is a correction you can make, make it and free yourself of regrets. Focus on what you can do today, right now, in this minute, to carry out the change that you want to see in the world, as Gandhi said.

And being fully present wherever you are means putting down the PDA when you are in meetings and being fully engaged in what is in front of you. When you aren't, people lose respect for you.

Finally, the tenth secret is to **be passionate**. Have an inspired vision of what can be, and share it with others. One of the most highly correlated attributes that successful people share is that they are passionate. Whether they are corporate CEOs, or teachers, or world-class kayakers, or software developers, or the first person citizens meet when they come to your offices, it is people with enthusiasm, energy, passion, and a sense of joy who do more for the world and are more successful than their peers who lack those qualities.

In our organization, a fellow who works on the facilities management team stopped what he was doing to help an elderly lady who was obviously struggling to walk to her car. When I sent him a note to thank him

and praise him for it, he said simply that he appreciated the chance to help and that it was actually our contract female security guard who noticed that the woman needed help and asked him to do it.

Both those people are passionate about what they do, and they remind us all and set an example of what a passion for service is all about. Public service is difficult, noble work, and despite all the attacks and criticism we sometimes take, we have to be passionate to keep going. Public service demands all that we have to give it.

PERTAINS TO EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING

In truth, these leadership secrets are no different for men than for women, for public sector or private sector leaders, for leaders in 2010 or leaders in 1950. To the extent that we all honor one another, we honor the work that we do and the people we serve. Make today another opportunity for greatness.

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ABOUT ICMA

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government worldwide. The organization's mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional management to build sustainable communities that improve people's lives. ICMA provides member support; publications; data and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to 9,500 appointed city, town, and county leaders and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect millions of individuals living in thousands of communities throughout the world, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas.



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities