ICMA

CAREER COMPASS **ANTHOLOGY**

Articles from ICMA focused on career issues for local government professional staff

Volume II

By Dr. Frank Benest

About The Author

Career Compass is a monthly column from ICMA focused on career issues for local government professional staff, and appears in ICMA's JOB newsletter and online.

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ICMA

ICMA is the premier local government leadership and management organization. Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advocating professional management of local government worldwide. ICMA provides member support; publications, data, and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 9,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals throughout the world.

CONTENTS

26

The Art of the Interview

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest offers his sage advice on being your best in the job interview.

I am looking to advance in my local government career and have been applying for mid-manager positions in other local governments in my state. I have seven years of solid experience, I am qualified for the jobs, and I have gotten several interviews based on my resume. However, I have not done well in the initial interviews and therefore have not been called back for any final interviews with the hiring manager. Do you have some suggestions on how I can improve my interview skills?

Many professionals do not perform well in an interview. Some common mistakes include:

- A lack of apparent knowledge about the requirements or demands of the position
- Talking on and on
- Not providing concrete examples
- Nervousness
- Telling jokes
- Appearing "cold."

The good news is that you seem to have the appropriate experience, your resume adequately reflects your background, and you have been selected for the initial interviews. Resume writing is an art (see Career Compass No. 11: Frank's Rules for Resume Writing) and so is interviewing.

Originally published on Governing.com July 9, 2012.

13 TIPS

Here are some tips to enhance your interview skills:

1. Practice, practice, practice

Interviewing is like any other skill—you get better with practice. While you do not want to apply for positions that don't interest you (wasting your time and the time of the agency), you do want to get some real-world practice. The more interviews and therefore the more practice, the better you will become.

2. The purpose of conducting research prior to the interview is four-fold:

- To identify if there is a "fit" between your skills, capabilities, and interests and the specific demands of the position, as well as the culture of the organization.

It is a good idea to develop and keep updated a list of accomplishments. You can then weave the achievements into your responses to the interview questions.

- To craft your responses so they correspond to the requirements and challenges of the position and therefore resonate with the interview panel or the hiring manage.
- To formulate questions to ask of the hiring authority that will determine if you want the position.
- To demonstrate to the interviewers that you have in fact researched the position and the agency, thus indicating that you truly care about the opportunity.

To adequately prepare for the interview, you should research the following: the position, its duties and demands; the local government organization; the person to whom you will report; and the key challenges facing the department, the organization, and the community. The initial source of information is the job announcement, which typically includes the "ideal candidate" profile.

3. Identify your competitive advantages

To help you prepare, it is a good idea to develop and keep updated a list of accomplishments. You can then weave the achievements into your responses to the interview questions. However, it is not sufficient to simply promote your achievements. You need to also highlight your competitive advantages.

After you do your research, you should be able to identify what you have to offer the agency, the department, and the larger organization. In other words, what are your competitive advantages? Given the needs of the agency, you want to select no more than three advantages. For example, do you offer:

- A wide array of technical or administrative skills or project experience
- A diverse background in public, private and/or nonprofit sectors
- Experience in managing different kinds of people
- Budget skills
- Ability to build an effective team
- Learning agility
- Leadership capabilities, even if you do not have formal authority.

During the interview, you want to respond to the interview questions in such a way to assert these competitive advantages. At the very end of the interview, you may want to summarize by briefly listing what you uniquely offer.

4. Prepare responses for the classic questions

During my numerous interviews to become a first-time city manager, I became adept at anticipating some of the classic questions. In advance of the interview, you, too, should identify any number of traditional questions and prepare bullet point responses. Then practice your responses.

Some classic interview questions can be found at:

- http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers
- http://www.jobinterviewquestions.org.

Here is my list of traditional questions:

- Could you tell us about yourself?
- Could you give us a quick overview of your professional experience?
- Could you describe a particularly difficult personnel or discipline situation that you had to address as a supervisor?
- Have you led a diverse team? What were the circumstances and results?
- What is your budgeting experience?
- What is your experience in engaging the community in a difficult or controversial issue? How did you go about it? What were the outcomes?
- How would a subordinate or peer describe your leadership or management style?
- Could you tell us about a situation in which you engaged members of another department in solving a difficult problem?
- Could you give us a specific example of a failure and how you dealt with it? What were the lessons that you learned?
- Can you give us a specific example of how you have tried to improve your communication and interaction with a difficult supervisor or peer?

After an interview or two, you can revise your own list of key interview questions and fine-tune your responses.

5. Give concise responses yet fully respond

In responding to a question, you should not ramble on and on (a common mistake especially if you are nervous). Give a general response to the question but also provide one specific example from your experience that supports your general response. The specific

example or experience should showcase how you produced or helped produce a positive result.

6. Convey a professional yet friendly demeanor

You want to portray a professional demeanor yet come off in a friendly and personable way. A little humor is acceptable but stay away from any jokes.

Your goal is not only to demonstrate your professional knowledge and skills, but to also create a connection with the interviewers. Try to connect with people by firmly shaking hands (don't break any fingers), looking from one person to another as you answer questions, and smiling as appropriate. Connecting on a personal level is even more important when you get a second interview with the hiring manager.

7. Be truthful and authentic

Do not try to be someone you are not. For example, if you do not have direct supervisory experience, you need to acknowledge it when asked. However, you can also provide an example of leading a group over whom you did not have formal authority or provide a situation in which you exerted a volunteer leadership role in your non-work life.

While the focus is on your professional qualifications, you want to convey who you are as a person. Let the interview panel get a glimpse of your human side. If the questions allow, you can briefly mention to the panel something about your family or key interests. Sharing some personal information may be more appropriate in a second or final interview.

8. Practice with a coach or colleague

To practice your responses and get feedback in order to enhance your performance, you may wish to schedule a mock interview with a coach, colleague or friend who acts as an interviewer. Or you can videotape your responses and a coach or colleague can critique your answers as well as general demeanor.

9. Debrief immediately after the interview

Immediately following an interview, you should jot down the questions asked and outline how you responded. Then critique your responses and note perhaps a better way to respond or a different example. A coach or colleague may help you craft a better answer to a troublesome or difficult question.

Oftentimes, the same basic questions asked in a different way will be posed to you in a follow-up interview. You want to be ready to respond in the best way possible.

10. Get feedback from the interviewer or the executive recruiter

To enhance your performance in future interviews, it is very helpful to get feedback from someone on the interview panel or from either an HR representative or the executive recruiter who sat in but did not participate in the interview. Phrase your request for feedback in the following manner—"So that I can do better in future interviews, could you give me any specific feedback on how I could improve my interview skills or better respond to the questions posed by the interview panel?" Or, "I felt that I rambled on too much. What did you perceive?"

11. Always thank the hiring manager

If you get to meet the hiring manager, always send a personal note thanking the person for the opportunity to interview for the position. In this electronic age, a personal hand-written note will help you make an impression and perhaps be a way to connect in the future even if you did not get the position.

12. Ask a few questions yourself

Based on your research, you may wish to ask—if time permits—one or two selected questions at the end of the interview. Sometimes, the interview panel will ask you if you have any questions. If there is not an opportunity to do so in the first interview, your questions are certainly appropriate in the second or final interview. Therefore, take some care in selecting one or two questions in order to demonstrate that you have done your homework. For example, you may ask:

- "The county has a structural deficit of $35 million. How will budget reductions affect your department and how do you plan to redesign your services?"
- "Some members of the development community seem to have complaints about the development review process. How will this position be involved in resolving any valid concerns?"
- There apparently has been discussion about consolidating Finance and Human Resources into a single Administrative Services Department. How likely is a merger and what are some opportunities posed by such a restructuring?"

Some of these questions may be more appropriate for a second interview.

13. Create a closing statement

Always end with a brief closing statement. In the closing statement, you can underscore your interest in

the position and why, succinctly identify your competitive advantages, and thank the panel.

NEGOTIATING ANY KEY DEAL POINTS

- If you have any critical issues or deal points, you should pose them in the final interview (not before). Some typical issues may include a minimal starting salary; some flexibility in your schedule so you can complete your master's program or attend to an important family responsibility; or a commitment from the manager that you can finish a committee or officer assignment with your professional association.

Let's say that you want a minimal starting salary. In asking the hiring manager to help resolve your concern, you can try the following sequence. First, you should reiterate that you are excited about the position and energized about the challenges. Second, you should state that you need to identify a key issue (in this case, starting salary) that must be resolved if you are to accept any offer. Third, you should indicate that you want to work with the hiring manager (typically the division head or department director) in order to resolve the issue. Finally, if the hiring manager cannot seem to say "yes" or solve the problem, you may wish to suggest a "Plan B" that provides another way to address your issue. For instance, in this case, you may suggest an added week of vacation upon starting the position or the opportunity to receive a 5% increase after you pass your probationary period in six months.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

To get selected for my first city manager job, I went through 75 different recruitments. By that time, I could anticipate approximately three-quarters of the questions that any interview panel would ask. And I had honed my responses. Practice does make perfect.

27

Creating a Safe Environment for a Courageous Conversation

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest helps us "get to yes!"

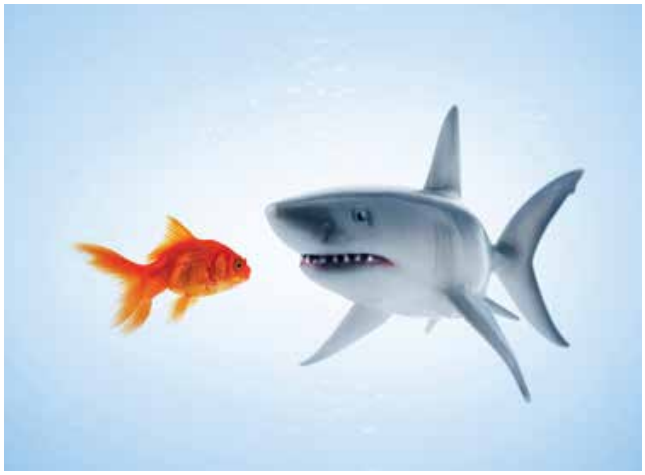
I am a hard-working and newly promoted project manager in the Public Works Department of a mid-sized city. Things are pretty dreary in the organization—we've experienced budget cuts even lay-offs and everybody feels overwhelmed. Like others, I am dealing with quite a number of projects.

I would like to enroll in a well-regarded certificate program for project management but of course our Director has gutted the training budget in the department. I'm afraid that my manager would not be sympathetic to my request that she find the training dollars and the time off. However, I think the certificate program would strengthen my project management skills and energize me.

I do not have much of a relationship yet with my manager and she seems a bit gruff. How do I create a safe environment so I can propose the certificate program without being thrown out of her office?

To be successful over time, we often must conduct difficult and even courageous conversations with supervisors or peers. Such a difficult conversation may be about a colleague not carrying one's weight, or a conflict with a peer, or the desire to be given more room to operate by your supervisor. In any case, you need to create some "safety" so you can confront the situation. To have a productive exchange, it needs to be safe for you and for the other person.

Originally published on the ICMA website September 29, 2012.



To create a safe environment for a difficult conversation, I would suggest a number of related approaches:

1. DEMONSTRATE VALUE

First and foremost, you must demonstrate that you are a reliable and productive team member. As staffing has been reduced, those who perform well and can be counted on to become very valuable commodities. Since you are newly promoted, you need to spend the next 4-6 months showing everyone, especially your manager, that you are a key and valuable staff member who produces tangible results. Of course, as you perform in your assignments and volunteer for new projects, you must ensure that your manager is aware of your efforts and the results produced. (See Career Compass No. 17: The Subtle Art of Promoting Your Value.)

Over time, you should go out of your way to help the manager with her priorities and projects and take prob-

lems off her plate. She will be more open to assisting you as you become helpful to her and more indispensable.

2. CREATE RAPPORT

As you interact with your new manager, you can work to slowly create rapport. To do that, take some time to get to know who she is and what is important to her. Ask questions and listen intently.

To find out something about your manager's family and non-work- related interests, you can disclose a little bit about your family and/or leisure pursuits and see if that encourages your manager to disclose any of her interests. Don't give the third degree. Take cues from her about what she is comfortable in discussing.

Over time, you can have conversations not just about work but about some non-work topics which help build rapport and connections.

3. UNDERSTAND THE CONCERNS OF YOUR MANAGER

As you develop "positive regard" for your manager, you will identify her concerns. Even if you do not agree with her concerns and issues, you must acknowledge them because they are "real" to your manager. For instance, your manager may feel that a certificate program may cost too much given that training monies have been stripped from the budget; the training program will take you away from work and there is not coverage; and/or there is simply too much work.

Before you can develop responses to the concerns, you must identify and acknowledge them. As Steven Covey said, "seek to understand before being understood."

4. CONFRONT YOUR FEARS ABOUT THE CONVERSATION

Many of us do not like confrontations and certainly do not like the feeling of being turned down. So we avoid the conversation.

To minimize the fear, acknowledge it. Your manager may say "no." The manager may say that you must be aware of the reduced training budget. She may say that you would be further burdening others. She may outright reject your request. Are these the worst consequences that can happen? How likely are the feared consequences? Can you live with any and all of these possibilities? If so, you can proceed.

Everyone is fearful of something. Courageous people confront their fears but still take action.

5. PREPARE FOR THE CONVERSATION

Preparing for the conversation makes it easier. In your mind, or on paper, you may wish to:

- Identify your goals, which are hopefully aligned with those of your manager (for example, becoming a more productive and effective project manager);
- Acknowledge possible concerns of the manager;
- State the "facts" (see below);
- Propose specifically what you want;
- Be prepared to respond to the concerns raised;
- Develop a back-up or Plan B proposal.

You may wish to practice the conversation with a trusted colleague or coach or friend, especially in respect to keeping the conversation even-toned and responding to any objections.

6. SELECT A GOOD TIME AND A SAFE OR NEUTRAL LOCATION

Depending on your manager, it may be helpful to hold a difficult conversation at the beginning of the day (if your manager arrives early) or end of the day (if she stays late). To avoid distractions and create some privacy, it may also be a good idea to invite your manager for a cup of coffee at a nearby café.

7. USE "I" LANGUAGE

To minimize defensiveness from the other party, you should use "I" language:

"I believe. . ."
"I feel. . ."
"I hope. . ."
"I am concerned that. . ."

8. FOCUS ON THE "FACTS"

To help create a safe environment for any difficult conversation, you should start the conversation by identifying some facts or making statements that the other party will not generally dispute. For instance, using "I" language, you could state the following:

- "I am a new project manager trying to become a better project manager."
- "I know that we have less staffing and demands have not diminished."
- "I am committed to the team and to helping produce tangible team results even with reduced resources."
- "I would like to improve my project management skills in order to enhance my value to the department."

To start the process, you need to informally meet with your colleague. As part of the conversation, you can try to understand his motivation and interests as they relate to the neighborhood revitalization effort.

- "I believe that the training program would be of value to me and the organization."
- "I know that it is difficult for you to manage our constrained resources."
- "I believe that you can count on me to maintain my performance even if I were engaged in the training program."
- "I have developed an approach so that we can maintain coverage while I am away at the training classes."

These "fact" statements help set the stage for the rest of the conversation.

9. STATE DIRECTLY WHAT YOU WANT

You need to put your proposal on the table and directly and non-defensively ask for approval and support. In this case, you may state that you want to free up some monies so that the city pays for the certificate program and that you want work time off so you can participate.

10. SELL THE BENEFITS

After stating your proposal, you should quickly identify the benefits from the manager's point of view. For example, participation in the training program would:

- Make your more productive and valuable to the department;
- Keep you energized and excited about your project management role;
- Allow you to share what you learn with other project managers and team members so everyone can benefit.

11. INQUIRE ABOUT ANY ISSUES AND RESPOND

At this point, you may indicate that you know that the manager may have some concerns and inquire what some of the issues may be. Be open and acknowledge whatever issues are stated. By asking questions, you can demonstrate openness to any perceived issues, again even if you do not agree that the concern is legitimate.

As you propose what you want, you can explain how you may deal with some of the possible concerns, responding to such questions as: From which accounts do you propose to transfer the monies to pay for the training program? Who has agreed to provide more office coverage while you participate in the program? How will you follow up to ensure that you get any information from the meetings missed in your absence?

If you feel that any of these issues cannot be overcome in the mind of the manager, you may wish to provide a Plan B. For example, as an alternative proposal, you may agree to pay half the tuition, or you propose to take the courses on your own time but the city pays the tuition.

12. SHOW A LITTLE VULNERABILITY

In the hope of promoting some openness, you may wish to demonstrate some vulnerability. For example, even though your request may get rejected, you could say: "I am a new project manager and would like to enhance my skills. I need your support."

13. DON'T FORCE A DECISION OR RESOLUTION

If you sense that the manager is not ready to say "yes," ask her to think about your proposal and suggest that you two can discuss it at a follow-up meeting next week.

Regardless of the difficult topic and the outcome, you should express appreciation that the other person considered what you have said and your interests and concerns. In this case, whatever the manager decides about the certificate program, you should thank her for the consideration and commit in your mind and heart to maintain your sense of excellence. You will have other difficult conversations in the future and you want your manager to remain open and positive whatever you bring to her and about you as a professional and a person.

To be effective, you must confront situations and engage in difficult if not courageous conversations. The question is, how do we create safety for ourselves and others so we can have the conversation?

RESOURCES

A good resource is the book by Kerry Patterson et al, *Crucial Conversations—Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*.

28

My Team Member Is a Slacker!

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest shows us how we can power-up a colleague's potential.

As a mid-manager, I serve on an important cross-departmental team focused on neighborhood revitalization (one of the City Council's strategic priorities). Even though I do not formally lead the group, I am responsible for several significant project results. The problem is that I cannot meet my timelines without the active contributions of a team member from another department. He does not produce on a timely basis. He either drops the ball or calls me at the last minute and asks me to do some of the work.

This team is a high-status assignment launched by the City Manager who also serves as our team's "sponsor." My team member talks a good game in our meetings but does not deliver. His poor performance is hurting our team and making me look bad.

I am committed to this important work. What do I do about this slacker?

Your experience is becoming an increasing problem as more and more of our work in local government is occurring in cross-functional teams. We need cross-cutting teams because no one significant problem (like neighborhood revitalization) can be solved by any one department or any one agency. For example, the Police Department by itself cannot solve the gang problem. The County Public Health Agency by itself cannot

address the childhood obesity challenge. To solve any problem, we need to cross boundaries and convene partners inside and outside our department and government. Cross-cutting teams can bring together diverse expertise and perspectives so we can develop creative responses.

"Messiness"

The big challenge is that such "matrix" teams are messy. Your team may have a formal leader but team success requires commitments from different departments and different players from those departments and/or outside groups. Typically, formal authority in a

Originally published on the ICMA website October 26, 2012.

To start the process, you need to informally meet with your colleague. As part of the conversation, you can try to understand his motivation and interests as they relate to the neighborhood revitalization effort.

cross-department team situation is insufficient to force compliance and performance.

Given this "messiness," here are some thoughts on how you can address your dilemma.

The General Approach—Take action yourself

To address your concern about your team colleague, you must first figure out why he is not delivering on his commitments. Once you inquire and identify the reason or reasons, then you can take some steps to address the problem.

While your first inclination may be to complain to the formal team leader and explain why you have not met all your commitments on a timely basis, a preferred approach is to take positive action yourself in order to minimize the problem. To start the process, you need to informally meet with your colleague. As part of the conversation, you can try to understand his motivation and interests as they relate to the neighborhood revitalization effort.

Even though you want to take action yourself and avoid complaining to the team leader, it is a good idea to still meet with her since you may need her assistance at some point later in the process to address the problem. At the meeting with the team leader, you can emphasize your commitment to the neighborhood revitalization initiative and review your assignments and deadlines and the assistance from others that is required for you to be successful in producing results. This kind of discussion will help prepare your team leader if you need her assistance in taking some of the steps identified below.

Possible Steps

1. FOCUS ON THE "WHY"

In investigating why your colleague has not delivered as desired, you may conclude that he does not understand the importance of the neighborhood revitalization initiative. He may regard his team assignments as secondary work or just other "to do's" among his many duties. If this is the case, you may ask your team leader to schedule a discussion about the "why" or the meaning of the initiative. You or your team leader could request the City Manager who serves as the team sponsor to revisit the group at an upcoming meeting and stress the high-impact significance of the effort and why the City Council made it one of its strategic priorities.

To focus on the meaning behind neighborhood revitalization, you can suggest that the team meet with some neighborhood residents or business people and ask them to speak about the need for revitalization and how project efforts could improve their lives.

People need to know the "why" before focusing on the "what" or the "how."

2. SPECIFY TEAM ASSIGNMENTS SO THEY ARE NOT VAGUE

You may conclude that a part of the problem is that team goals and assignments are not clear or specific enough for team members. For instance, team activities may not be broken into specific "chunks" assigned to specific individuals. If so, you can ask that clarifying team assignments be discussed at an upcoming team meeting and then put into writing and then reviewed on a regular basis.

3. CREATE TEAM ACCOUNTABILITY

Another possibility is that your colleague may not understand that his lack of performance may be impacting the performance of the team and how one completed assignment fits with another. Therefore, you may wish to ask your team leader to schedule a discussion at the next meeting at which everyone reviews key assignments and the need for timely accomplishment. The discussion can also make explicit the connection of one piece of work to another. A written summary report can be distributed to all team members as well as the City Manager sponsor.

Going forward, you could develop a team assignment status report form and suggest that it be updated and reviewed at each meeting in order to promote team accountability. You can share the form with the team leader and recommend that it would help you and others stay on track.

To promote accountability, you can go around the room at each team meeting and directly ask if each team member can commit to the next phase of work and deliver as required.

4. RE-ENFORCE THE HIGH VISIBILITY OF THE INITIATIVE

If the other team member volunteered for the team because it is a high-status opportunity, then it would be helpful if your team leader invites (or ask if you could invite) the City Manager to have a check-in with the team at which time he could review the work of the team and the status of key assignments. The City Manager could also be asked to meet on a quarterly basis to review everyone's progress.

To promote the importance and visibility of the initiative, you could work with the team leader to schedule a quarterly or six-month update presentation to the Planning Commission and/or City Council and include a periodic news item in the City newsletter to the community.

5. CONSIDER THE "FIT"

Perhaps your colleague is not a good "fit" for his assignment. Either he does not have the necessary skills for his team responsibilities or he is not energized by the particular assignments.

If your colleague does not have the right skills, perhaps a mid-course assessment could be scheduled and the team could discuss swapping some responsibilities so there is a better alignment for all team members.

If your colleague is not energized by the specific assignment, perhaps it is time to reshuffle respon sibilities. You could suggest that the team leader not assign work but rather ask for volunteers to commit to different tasks going forward in order that people work on issues or activities that energize them.

6. STOP ENABLING POOR BEHAVIOR

If the team member continues to dump his work on you, you must stop accepting the work even though you are committed to making the team successful. It may be difficult to say "no." However, if you continue to respond to last minute calls for help, you are simply enabling this kind of behavior and it will persist.

7. GET THE PERSON OFF THE BUS

If all else fails, the team may need to get this person "off the bus" (using a Jim Collin's term). To do so, you may encourage a mid-term assessment of the team effort and discuss a re-enrollment process. Given their commitment and interest in neighborhood revitalization, some team members may wish to re-enroll and recommit. As part of the re-enrollment process, team members may suggest some additional members to help build on the work and momentum of the team. Given a lack of interest or commitment, others (like your colleague) may be encouraged by the team leader and other team members to no longer continue.

Of course, a last-ditch response is to encourage the team leader to have in private a courageous conversation with the colleague in order to relieve the person of the team assignment.

A Team Leadership Role

If you are committed to the work of the team, you must assume a leadership role even without formal authority and exert positive influence—for your benefit and the benefit of the team and the organizational enterprise.

This kind of leadership role is especially important as more organizational work happens in cross-cutting teams. In such environments, dealing with messy problems and challenges is not just the responsibility of the formal leader—it is your responsibility as well. Everyone needs to lead.

29

Forget Work-Life Balance... Re-Energize at Work and at Home!

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest says, "If you feel you don't have time to read this article, you need to read this article. "

I am a Division Manager in a County Environmental Services Department. I love my work but I'm working too hard. I'm often fatigued (as are many on my team). I feel overwhelmed with urgent demands. I am distracted and have little time to think, plan or "connect the dots." I have tried to better prioritize and then delegate some of the less important work but I still feel that work is all-consuming.

Worst of all, I do not have much time for my wife and young children. I often stay late at work and when I do get home I'm responding to emails. I am exhausted at work and at home. How do I achieve work-life balance? Help!

Those of us devoted to public service and local government work often struggle with this challenge of work-life balance. Being consumed by work is an epidemic in our culture. Notice that in most cultures people would talk about life-work balance but not in America. We focus on balancing life with work.

We cannot run on empty. In a knowledge economy, we need positive emotion and energy to do our best thinking and work. As Tony Schwartz recently pointed out in an *hbr.org* blog piece, if we are already depleted, putting in one more hour of incremental work produces less value and further depletes us.

Originally published on the ICMA website January 4, 2013.

"Got Purpose"

The good news is that we are very lucky—we find great meaning in our public service. Many people do not have purposeful work. In contrast, our local government work is imbued with meaning and purpose. We want to make a difference; build community; and save the planet. As Daniel Pink has said in his book *Drive*, meaning is the great motivator. In fact, most local government managers often say that the psychic benefits of our work outweigh the psychic costs.

Negative Impacts of Work on Our Personal Lives

While recognizing the positive results generated by our service, our work can negatively impact our personal lives. When I recently led a workshop on this topic of "Work-Life Balance," participants identified the following negative impacts on their personal lives:

- Anxiety and distress
- An unhealthy life
- Less time for family; missed family events
- "I just have a little time for family and friends, nothing else."
- "No time for me"
- "What personal life?"

Premises

To work on this issue of re-energizing and renewing ourselves, we should start with certain premises.

First, we often get "lopsided," especially at mid-life, with too much emphasis on work and career. It is too easy to ignore other important aspects of our lives. As writer and physician Orison Swett Marden has said, "Work, love and play are the great balance wheels of man's being."

Second, re-engaging in family, creative or leisure pursuits can enhance energy and productivity at work. In other words, there is a strong business case for having a robust non-work life.

Third, there is no magic bullet. Everyone needs to mix and match strategies that work for them.

Fourth, we can learn from each other as we all try to recalibrate.

Finally, reflection is a first step in the journey to renew ourselves.

"Forget Balance"

As Jon Gordon stated in his April 2012 PM article "Appreciate the Moment," work-life balance is difficult if not impossible to achieve. There will be days when work demands all your energies and other times when family requires more of your attention. Therefore, it is better to focus on energy and being in the moment at home as well as work. Betsy Jacobson, former Vice-President of J.P. Morgan Investment Management, once emphasized: "Balance is not better time management, but better boundary management. Balance means making choices and enjoying those choices."

Frank's Top Ten Strategies

Again, there is no one ideal strategy. People need to combine different approaches to see what works for them. Here are my top ten strategies to consider and try out:

1. REFLECT ON WHAT IS MISSING (OR NOT WORKING) AND SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH OTHERS

Before doing anything, you need to reflect on what is missing in your life or what is not working to your satisfaction. Then you can do something about the problem. Reflection must precede and inform action.

After spending some time reflecting, share your thoughts with others. There are two reasons to connect with others and share your hopes and concerns. First, saying out loud what is troubling you makes it more real and urgent to act upon. Second, sharing your thoughts with others encourages their support.

When we are experiencing distress, it is easy to isolate ourselves. Therefore, we need to schedule time to reconnect with friends and colleagues. When I felt overwhelmed as a City Manager, I made sure to schedule coffee get-togethers with trusted colleagues to express what I was feeling and get feedback. Social support is critical to resilience and personal change (see Career Compass No. 9: Bouncing Back From Defeat).

2. RECONNECT WITH CREATIVE, LEISURE OR SPIRITUAL PURSUIT

Since it is easy to become lop-sided at mid-life, you should reconnect with a meaningful creative, leisure or spiritual pursuit that once was engaging or brought pleasure. It can be gardening, photography, tennis, painting, dancing or guitar or attending church or synagogue.

Since they refresh, these non-work experiences also make you more productive at work.

3. SHAKE THINGS UP!

To get out of a rut, it is a good idea to engage in a completely different experience which will not only reinvigorate yourself but provide fresh perspectives. For instance, try. . .

- Learning a new language
- Taking a cooking class
- Volunteering with Habitat for Humanity to build homes in Guatemala
- Going to a family camp in the mountains
- Read a magazine you'd normally not consider (say, *Irish Weddings*)

To carve out time to have a non-work life and appreciate the moment with family or friends or in creative or leisure pursuits, we need to create a digital-free zone or times of the day.

4. PROMOTE PLAYFULNESS AT WORK

Within the past few years, many of our work places have become quite dreary. People cannot be creative in an environment of deadly seriousness. Therefore, for yourself and your team, I suggest organizing a crazy hat or crazy tie day or a scavenger hunt at lunch time. This kind of "serious fun" not only relaxes people but promotes a lightness and openness to creative ideas and more resilience.

5. USE RITUALS AND SANCTUARIES

Rituals and sanctuaries can help renew people. A ritual is a prescribed order of activities or a habitual practice. My ritual is a daily walk downtown to go get a newspaper and do errands. My walk clears my head and I use the time to think and plan.

A sanctuary is a sacred place or a refuge. I often go to a specific cafe to retreat from all my urgent matters and to simply contemplate. My colleague goes into her backyard every Sunday afternoon, sits in the patio, and plans for the week ahead.

6. CREATE A DIGITAL-FREE ZONE

We are now electronically connected to work 24/7, there is no normal work schedule, and we can work all the time everywhere. To carve out time to have a non-work life and appreciate the moment with family or friends or in creative or leisure pursuits, we need to create a digital-free zone or times of the day. Some people leave work and turn off all digital gadgets before entering their homes. This allows them to enjoy family life at dinner time and after dinner even if they do some work after the kids go to bed. Others ensure that their family room is a digital-free zone where they will not check for messages or respond to emails or texts.

7. FIND A "PASSION PROJECT"

Oftentimes we get consumed with mundane operational, program or administrative matters which suck the energy out of us. Therefore, you may wish to identify and commit to a "passion project." Everyone is different and so are their passion projects. For me, I got passionately engaged in affordable housing projects and leadership development initiatives. These kinds of passion projects pose new challenges, learning and the opportunity to further contribute and create meaning. Of course, to free up and protect time and energy for a passion project amidst other duties requires that you hand off some other duties or trade assignments or stop doing stuff.

8. TAKE CARE OF ONESELF

To minimize fatigue and enhance our energy and renew ourselves, we must of course take care of ourselves, ensuring adequate sleep, physical exercise, and proper diet, as well as limiting alcohol and other self-medication.

9. MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

It is critical that we "train" others so they do not unreasonably impose on our non-work selves. For example, if your manager calls you at home about a non-emergency item, you can say that you'd be happy to respond first thing in the morning. This is a subtle message to your manager not to contact you at home unless it is an emergency. If you often work after regular work hours, it is reasonable to inform people that you will be leaving two hours early every Thursday to see your daughter play soccer.

As a manager or as a team member, remember that you serve as a role model. If you are often responding to emails at midnight, you are sending a powerful message that you think this should be the norm. If you record family birthdays or trips or outside activities on your calendar for your work-mates to see, you demonstrate that your personal life is as important as your work life.

10. HELP OTHER EMPLOYEES GROW AND DEVELOP

There is much research to suggest that helping other employees grow and develop is a meaningful and renewing activity. Erik Erikson, the developmental psychologist, has indicated that a key developmental task at mid-life is "generativity"- in other words, preparing and supporting the next generation. According to Erikson, if those of us at mid-life do not sufficiently address this developmental task of generativity, we cannot successfully move on to our next life phase. Other research indicates that those who do support the next generation are three times as satisfied as those who do not. Thus, coaching, mentoring and teaching are very fulfilling and energizing.

Help Create an Organizational Culture of Renewal

Regardless of our formal position or authority, everybody can help build a culture of renewal. Here are some ideas:

- Help everyone focus on learning by scheduling a debriefing after every Governing Board or community meeting or upon project completion in order to identify lessons learned for future practice;
- Make the case for flexible work scheduling based on the nature of the work facing your team and the demands of work and family;
- Suggest or help institute a pilot telework program for your team;
- Conduct a "walking meeting" with a colleague (instead of meeting in a conference room);
- Model healthy behaviors;
- Promote resources offered by your organization's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to help everyone deal with stressful situations (e.g., child care issues, teen parenting concerns, the difficulty of caring for older relatives);
- Explore with team members how people can volunteer with outside groups whose missions may replenish them (and you take the lead and model the power of volunteering);
- Schedule periodic check-ins with your team to discuss how everyone can support each other in managing work and non-work demands and what support you as a manager can provide;
- Bring to a staff meeting some treats (such as bagels and coffee) to celebrate a team accomplishment!

A Personal Challenge—"One Thing To Try"

If you find yourself depleted, you need to do something about it. So here is a challenge. Starting tomorrow, what is one thing you can try out to enhance the fullness of your life?

30

Building a Powerful Network

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest shows us that a solid network can change not only your career but your life.

I am a senior planner in a city community development department. I have good work experience and have expanded my portfolio of skills and experiences over time. I believe that I will be ready to advance in one or two years of continued good work and learning in my current position. In some of my development conversations with my supportive boss, she stated that I am on my way to advancing but suggested that I attend professional meetings and better develop a network.

Recently, I attended a one-day state planners meeting. In my conversations with others, I introduced myself, indicated my agency and title, and shared some of the projects that I'm working on. However, the conversations felt stilted and self-serving. I am also concerned that going to all these meetings and building a network takes a lot of time.

Is all of this networking really important and worth the effort? If it is crucial, how do I do it so it feels more natural?

It sounds like you are doing a good job preparing yourself for advancement. Connecting with others and building a powerful professional network is important and provides many benefits, such as:

- Learning from others
- Resources for current or future projects
- "Intelligence" about job openings and other opportunities
- Opportunities to contribute and further enhance your skills
- Visibility in the profession
- Social support as we struggle in a difficult public environment
- Friendships.

My professional network has not only enhanced my career development over the years but enriched my life. So, how can you get started?

Start Inside

You should start at home inside your organization. Assuming that you have developed good relationships inside your department, seek out opportunities with

Originally published on the ICMA website February 5, 2013.

As you look to opportunities to network outside your organization, do not overlook regional information-sharing and work meetings involving planners from other local and state agencies.

the support of your manager to serve on cross-departmental committees and teams. These cross-cutting special projects and experiences will help you further achieve key results, build skills, and learn. These relationships will also assist you in solving future problems as they arise. (Remember—relationship and rapport-building needs to precede problem-solving.)

Colleagues on these special teams can also serve as informal peer coaches and suggest opportunities to network outside the organization.

Look Close to Home

As you look to opportunities to network outside your organization, do not overlook regional information-sharing and work meetings involving planners from other local and state agencies. You can represent your city government at these meetings dealing with the regional jobs/housing imbalance, or traffic congestion, or the lack of affordable housing.

You might want to volunteer to serve on a work committee as part of a regional planning effort. Meeting people and developing relationships are easier if real work is involved.

Another close-to-home opportunity is to get involved in business and service groups in your community. Typically, these organizations are working on community betterment so you will be making a contribution to your city through your service. Plus, it is easy to volunteer for a leadership position and thus add to your skills portfolio and enhance your visibility.

Seek Professional Involvements

As you get engage close to home, you can begin to search for wider professional opportunities. Some involvements might include the state association for local government planners, or industry groups like the Urban Land Institute. You can evaluate these opportunities with the assistance of your boss and/or one or several informal coaches or supportive peers who can help determine where to start based on a number of factors:

- Time required
- Cost (agency cost or your own cost)
- Ease of joining the group or attending meetings
- Potential value based on your goals (e.g., learning, building relations, gaining skills).

It is usually easier to attend a county or regional meeting or a state gathering associated with your profession than a national conference.

Prepare for the Networking Opportunity

Like any important opportunity, it is wise to prepare so you can maximize the value. Besides bringing a stack of business cards, you can prepare in the following ways.

GO WITH A COLLEAGUE

It may be easier and less intimidating if you go to a professional meeting with a coworker or a colleague friend from another agency. However, if you do go with a colleague, make sure you go your separate ways during the gathering, meet new people, and then compare notes on the way home.

IDENTIFY PEOPLE YOU'D LIKE TO MEET

There may be people you'd like to meet because they might be a resource for one of your projects, or they have authored an interesting article, or you have met them briefly before and you'd like to become better acquainted. Start by making a preliminary list and then query your colleagues or your boss to increase or enhance the list. You might want to prioritize the list of potential contacts for the upcoming conference. You may have a good idea at which function you will likely encounter a potential contact or send an introductory email before the meeting and indicate that you are looking forward to meeting them at the conference.

FOCUS ON YOUR MOST IMPORTANT INTERESTS

Of course, you want to be open to serendipitous encounters at professional meetings. However, as you look to identify people to meet in advance of the meeting, be aware of your key interests. For example:

- Is there something you want to learn?
- Are you hunting for resources regarding a current or upcoming project?
- Would you like contacts in other agencies to be on the look-out for job advancement opportunities?
- Do you want to join a particular professional committee?

FORM SOME INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

To help meet and interact with new people, you can formulate some open-ended questions. For instance:

- "How did you get started in the field?"
- "What has been your career journey?"
- "What is the next chapter in your career story?"
- "What are some new challenges you are addressing?"
- "I'm working on a general plan update. I'd like to promote transit-oriented development. Have your or someone in your agency had any experience with transit-oriented development? Do you have any advice?"
- "What are you looking forward to learning at this conference?"
- "You have an interesting name. Where does your family come from? My family originates from Lebanon."

People love to share and talk about themselves. Encourage them.

OVERCOME AWKWARDNESS

In addition to formulating some introductory questions, here are some other ways to minimize awkwardness suggested by Devora Zack in a "Careers in Government" blog posting:

- Consider going early to the function so there are fewer people to meet and connect with. It is easier to talk and engage when the room is not packed and people are more accessible.
- Stand in line for food or drink and connect with the person in front of you and in back of you. It is easier to interact with just two people instead of a whole roomful.
- Volunteer to help organize a meeting, a reception or other professional event. For instance, volunteer to welcome people at the table in front of the event room or to serve wine. This gives you a function at the gathering and makes it easier to interact with other attendees.
- End graciously with a comment, such as: "May I have your card? It was great meeting you." Or, "Have you met [colleague passing by]?" Or, "I've enjoyed our conversation. Thank you."

Eight Tips for Building a Powerful Network

Now that you've done some basic preparation, here are some tips for becoming a networking pro.

1. GO WITH A "CURIOUS MIND"

While you might have some targeted interests in attending a professional conference or meeting, it is wise to go with an open and curious mind. You will tend to discover people, resources, and opportunities if you inquire about what interests others, what is challenging them, and what they are learning.

As part of participating with a curious mind, you should ask questions and probe with follow-up questions such as "why is that important?" Maintain eye contact, smile, and most importantly listen intently. Don't be looking over the person's shoulder to meet the next person in your possible network. Being in the moment with someone is the best way to make an authentic connection.

2. GIVE A LOT

You must look to contribute in all relationships. Be generous. Think about how you can help others:

- Can you share a helpful idea?
- Can you offer a resource such as an article?
- Can you connect the person with another colleague who may have expertise in an area of interest?
- Do you have some intelligence that you can offer about an agency that interests the other person?
- Can you suggest a professional committee involvement that the other person might seek out?

With every encounter, look for opportunities to give and share. Giving a lot is energizing. Leveraging your knowledge, expertise, and existing network is gratifying.

Do not evaluate contacts as to how much they can help you. I concur with Jodi Glickman who wrote in a recent *hbr.org* blog piece that "life is a virtuous cycle." If you give a lot, you will get a lot.

3. FOLLOW UP

As you discover an interest or a need for a professional contact, you should specifically write down what the person needs or what you can offer (e.g., an article or report) on either their business card or their name and e-mail address on your business card. (Earlier in my career, I collected a lot of business cards at meetings but occasionally forgot how I was to respond.) Then, of course, immediately respond after the meeting. Otherwise, the immediacy of work demands will interfere with the follow up. Immediate response also helps your new professional contact to remember you.

People will offer opportunities to those who are most recently in their memory. It is amazing how many

times I get a speaking, training or consulting opportunity immediately after I follow up with a chance encounter at a professional meeting.

4. LOOK FOR COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

By visiting the website of the professional association and asking questions of your contacts, you can identify committee or other leadership opportunities. These assignments can help build skills, relationships, and of course your network. Again, professional or industry groups are always looking for volunteers.

5. LET PEOPLE KNOW WHAT YOU NEED

While you want to be generous in responding to what others might need, do not be afraid to let everyone know what is on your mind or some intelligence or contact that you might desire. The more you announce to different people what interests you, the more likely you will find the contact or resource you seek.

6. SEND THANK-YOU NOTE

Once someone helps you by providing a resource, an idea or another contact, send a handwritten note. Expressing gratitude enhances a relationship and also feels good to the person expressing the appreciation. In this high-tech world, a handwritten note (instead of an e-mail) sticks out and makes someone remember you. I always have thank-you cards or my stationery available so I can write notes during boring meetings or when I'm watching TV or on the plane flying home. Again, send the thank-you as soon as possible after the meeting.

7. STAY IN CONTACT

To strengthen the connection of someone whom you find interesting or perhaps helpful, stay in contact. Check in periodically via e-mail or a phone call, send an article or a blog posting, connect through social media, arrange a coffee when you are in the area, and certainly reconnect at the next conference or seminar.

8. HAVE FUN!

Meeting new people, learning new things, sharing ideas and experiences—it's all fun. Don't look at networking as another burden but rather as an opportunity to enjoy and refresh yourself.

"Lucky Networks"

In an hbr.org posting entitled "The Secrets of Building a Lucky Network" Anthony Tjan noted that "lucky networks" leading to great outcomes are based on serendipitous connections. A lucky networker does not start by targeting a list of must-have relationships, but rather by demonstrating vulnerability, authenticity, generosity, and openness. By sharing your true self, being open to new ideas and relationships, demonstrating generosity with your knowledge and ideas, offering friendship, and caring about others, you will end up encompassing people in your network who will be pivotal in many different ways.

The Wonder of Networking

If you are open to growing a network, you will never know where a professional encounter will lead. In addition to professional growth and advancement, my professional networking has led to life-long friendships and relationships with people whom I love. For example, I first met at a conference my best friend who is also now the Godfather of my daughter. The woman who helped my wife and me connect with the birthmother of our daughter is a colleague in my network.

So grow your network, learn a lot, give a lot, advance your career, make friends, and have fun!

31

Political Savviness

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest shares some ideas on how we can become more astute and effective in the messy political world of elected officials.

I am a planning manager with a mid-sized city. When our staff team presents land-use, economic development or affordable housing recommendations to council, they might accept them but sometimes they do not. Typically, we do a good job of providing data and well-reasoned recommendations but once they get to the public hearing, it's as if the data and objective analysis do not matter and politics take over. At times, one small yet connected group can shape the council's decision or completely derail the decision. It is baffling to me and my colleagues.

The political arena seems like an alien world. I don't get politics. How can our team become more politically savvy?

You are correct. The world of elected policy-makers is different from the world of professional administrators. To be more effective in recommending policy or specific development proposals, you must first understand the differences in the two world views.

The Two Worlds of Policy and Administration

John Nalbandian, professor of public administration at Kansas University and former mayor of Lawrence,

KS, has done a lot of work differentiating between the mindsets and the drivers of action for policy-makers vs. administrators. Along a variety of dimensions, policy-makers and professional administrators see the world differently. Consider these different ways of thinking and acting: (see table on page 22)

The objective data, your analysis (including options), expert judgments, and recommendations all are necessary but completely insufficient in carrying the day once you enter the political arena of the elected policy-maker. Elected officials will certainly require and care about the data but they will be highly motivated by their own values and ideology and the positions of key constituencies (e.g., neighborhood groups, business associations, environmental advocates, youth sports groups).

Originally published on the ICMA website March 28, 2013.

DIMENSION	POLICY-MAKERS	ADMINISTRATORS
SELECTION	Based on political, policy, ideological views or connection to certain constituent groups	Based on abilities
ROLE	Representative of constituent groups	Professional expert
ISSUES	Concerns of interest to constituent groups	More organization or community-wide perspectives
INFORMATION	Narrative, stories, deeply-felt emotions	Data, plans, reports
ORIENTATION	Making change	Ensuring predictability, continuity amidst any change
ATTENTION TO	Pushing a policy agenda	Operational details (Will it work? How will it work?)
	Pleasing voters	Demonstrating competency, achieving results, improving external professional prospects
TIME FRAME (MOST OF THE TIME)	Short to mid-term	Mid to long-term
FOCUS OF DECISION-MAKING	What I believe	What I know
	Resolving or minimizing conflict among stakeholders	Making the right decision
	Choice that plays well to constituencies ("good politics")	The right choice
	Questions: "Whom am I trying to serve?"	Questions: "What is the goal?"
	"What will achieve positive impacts?"	"What is effective and efficient way to achieve goal?"
	"Have I heard from all significant groups?"	"Do I have the information?"
	"Is it fair to significant groups?"	"What is our analysis?"
ACCOUNTABILITY	To voters on how they represent their interests and fulfill "promises"	To organization, public at large, peers and professional groups on how they achieve goals
REWARDS	Winning next election, moving up political ladder, self-satisfaction	Getting next promotion, positive recognition among peers, self-satisfaction

Democracy Is Messy

Even though "politics" has a bad name, you can't have democracy without it. Politics is how democracy happens. Different groups compete for attention, influence, and resources. In a democratic arena, value choices made by policy-makers often compete with technical solutions.

Consequently, you need to understand that "technically correct" decisions may not match community values as determined by elected officials. The "best" technical solution may not be the "right" overall answer for the community.

A seasoned professional gains an appreciation over time that democracy is messy. In a democracy, process may sometimes trump the result.

"Think Politically, Act Non-Politically"

So, how do we become more effective in this messy political world?

Kevin Duggan, former city manager of Mountain View, CA, and current ICMA West Coast region director, wrote in a *PM* article "Leadership Without Appearing Political" that local government managers need to follow the axiom to "think politically but act non-politically."

We local government professionals generally know how to act non-politically:

- Provide objective analysis and options for the policy makers
- Treat all elected officials and stakeholder groups equally in terms of providing access to information and responding to their questions and concerns
- Respect the political views of governing board members and acknowledge their interests
- Avoid the picking of sides in political disputes
- Accept policy decisions once they are made even if we do not agree

The other part of Duggan's axiom that we must think politically or strategically is more difficult.

Before I provide some tips on how we can think more strategically, let me emphasize that I am in no way suggesting that you abandon your professional role and become more of a political actor. It is your job to provide professional expertise. You must provide objective data and analysis and sound recommendations. However, you also need to help policy-makers make good decisions that are not only administratively and organizationally do-able, but also politically acceptable.

Eleven Tips To Become More Politically Savvy

Here are some tips for helping yourself and your team develop some political astuteness:

1. GET INTO THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE POLICY-MAKERS

Ask yourself and your team the following questions:

- What are the values, motivations, and goals of the different elected officials making the decisions?
- To which constituent groups do the elected officials relate?
- What are the ideologies of the various groups?
- Who are the key supporters or players in the community or within the local government with whom the elected officials connect?

If you and your team do not know the answers to these questions, how are you going to find out?

2. DEBRIEF ALL CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

After a city council or planning commission meeting, ask your department director to debrief the session with you and your team. While staff people can let off a little steam in such debriefings, the purpose of the discussion is to promote understanding, not griping. Successful department heads usually have good political sensibilities and can help your team better understand the policy view points, political ambitions, alliances, and other relationships which may result in decisions that are not perfectly aligned with your expert judgments.

Periodically, you can also request that the city manager or assistant city manager visit one of your staff meetings, provide a city-wide update, debrief recent council decisions, and help you better sense the political landscape, especially key alliances and the differing policy perspectives on the council.

At these debriefings, you can also evaluate how your staff reports and presentations framed the land use or housing proposal that you presented to the council so that it resonated with the decision-makers (more on this later).

3. DEVELOP RAPPORT WITH POLITICAL ACTORS

To the extent possible, get to know policy-makers as real people. Elected officials are more apt to listen with openness to your professional views if they know you in a social context. Now I'm not suggesting that you invite the council member to coffee or lunch to create a social relationship. However, you can introduce yourself at a community event or before or after a meeting; engage them in some informal conversation; ask about their work, family and interests; and then share a little bit about yourself.

If you are asked to brief a council member, a planning commissioner or a key stakeholder representative about a specific issue, you can start an informal conversation before or after the briefing to get to know the person.

As a young manager, I started an informal conversation before a meeting with a council member who was quickly becoming a nemesis. In the conversation, I discovered that he too was a Lebanese-American and

As Simon Sinek says in his TED.com video "How Great Leaders Inspire Action," people are motivated by the purpose and meaning of any proposed action or pursuit as opposed to the "what" and the "how."

loved the same foods as we both grew up with immigrant grandparents. The relationship became much easier thereafter (even though he did not always support our policy recommendations).

4. ASK THE POLICY-MAKER WHY SHE VOTED THE WAY SHE DID

John Nalbandian, in a recent Cal-ICMA Coaching Program webinar on the topic of "Navigating Staff-Board Relations," suggested that when the opportunity presents itself, staff people occasionally ask an elected official why she voted the way she did. Of course, you need to approach this situation with a "curious mind." You are not asking the elected official to justify why she voted the way she did. Rather, you want to better understand so you can do a better job. If you ask in a nondefensive way that suggests that you want to better understand her viewpoint, you may get better educated on her values and policy perspectives.

5. START WITH THE "WHY"

Once you get a better understanding of the mindsets of the different elected officials, you can begin to make policy recommendations that are both supported by the data and are shaped so they are more politically acceptable. In developing a recommendation, always start with the "why" of the proposal. As Simon Sinek says in his TED.com video "How Great Leaders Inspire Action," people are motivated by the purpose and meaning of any proposed action or pursuit as opposed to the "what" and the "how," which usually dominate our professional reports and presentations.

For example, before getting into the technical aspects of a proposed mixed-use development, talk about the "why." Is the mixed-use development aimed at promoting economic vitality, creating new jobs, animating downtown streets, or addressing the city's jobs/housing imbalance?

6. FRAME THE ISSUE

You need to frame the staff recommendations differently for different decision-makers and/or their constituencies. Again, you must do good staff work in providing solid data and analysis and good options. In addition, you can emphasize a "why" that resonates with the majority of policy-makers.

7. ENGAGE REFERENCE GROUPS AND CONSTITUENCIES

It is essential to authentically engage important constituent groups (especially those connected to policy-makers) in developing a proposal before bringing it forward. Even if you believe that a group's fears are totally baseless, you must reach out and engage them. If you interact with constituent groups, listen to their concerns, and integrate their interests in a recommendation, you are likely to gain the political support of key decision-makers who relate to these groups. Of course, if constituent groups of different policy-makers all get their "fingerprints" on a land use proposal, you are in the best situation in terms of carrying the day.

Let's say the university hospital is a key health care provider and employer in your community and desires to expand. How does your team work with the hospital administrators who are concerned about growing their enterprise and becoming more competitive; business community leaders who are interested in economic development; and adjacent neighborhood groups who are distressed about potential traffic and parking issues? All of these groups will be reaching out to some or all of the planning commissioners and city council members. The more you interact with these politically-relevant groups, the more you get to know their perspectives and concerns, the more you get the opportunity to solve perceived and thus real problems and shape proposals in a politically palatable way.

8. CONSIDER THE "BEST" PRESENTERS

Certainly you or one of the planning staff should present the staff report on a proposed project and provide the staff analysis. However, if you've worked with some stakeholder groups that are connected with the various policy-makers, you could on occasion include one or several representatives at the end of the presentation. Whether they support the entire proposal or certain aspects of the proposal, the group representatives can discuss how they have worked with staff to resolve or minimize any concerns.

Remember that a public hearing is the worst mechanism ever devised to engage people. A public

hearing must be the culmination of a process of engaging different groups, at which time you show your work even if you have not resolved each and every problem to everyone's total satisfaction.

9. TELL THE STORY

Elected officials think in terms of a narrative. Providing data, analysis, and expert recommendations is certainly necessary but may be insufficient. What's the story that makes the analysis and recommendations come alive? With respect to the university hospital expansion, what story will you tell to bring life to the recommended state-of-the-art health care center and its impact on real people, or the new jobs, or the spin-off benefits for the local economy?

10. KNOW WHEN TO PUSH FORWARD AND WHEN TO PULL BACK

Developing this political skill is difficult and takes a lot of seasoning. As a city manager, I often tended to push forward on a decision even when it would result in a major conflict on a split council. I failed to adequately learn when to pull back and present a proposal at a later date when there was more support or a greater readiness to consider the recommendation.
In considering when to push ahead or pull back, here are some questions to ask:

- How important is a recommendation to the community at large, the organization, or the council as a whole?
- Is there a state of readiness on the council to consider the contentious issue?
- Have the staff and partner groups done a good job in addressing some of the concerns and problems identified by stakeholder groups, especially the opposition, to the proposal?
- How mature is the political body? Can they split on a vote and not hold grudges with respect to other council members or the city management?
- Are you too emotionally involved in the issue as a leader?

11. GET POLITICAL ADVICE

As I stated in Career Compass No. 7 "Creating a Dream Team of Advisors," you need different coaches for different purposes. While you certainly benefit from a coach providing career advice, you may also need a special advisor for political guidance. Who has ample interaction with policy-makers and can help translate the political world for you? Who can suggest different groups to engage or different ways to present an issue that will resonate with policy-makers or their political allies even as you provide professional analysis?

Political Savviness Is an Added Value

Guided by senior managers and coaches, your growing political astuteness can make you and your team more effective. However, as John Nalbandian emphasized in the Cal-ICMA webinar, developing political sensibilities is just an added value. Don't forget that your core assets are professional analysis, judgment, and execution.

Your world is one of professional expertise, not politics. So the trick is "thinking politically but acting non-politically." In other words, how do you become more politically astute without becoming "political"?

32

The Power of Vulnerability

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest shows us how opening up can move us forward.

I've served as a division manager for two years in a county organization. I have worked hard to establish my presence as the division manager even though I'm a former peer. I'm trying to be a good leader, working to get our division team to the next level. They say they agree with our "stretch" goals but apparently they do not embrace them. I have been discussing with the division team the need to reprioritize our projects, cut our costs, engage outside partners, and rethink how we do our work. I want discussion but they do not engage when I lay out a proposed plan of action.

The last few years have been a tough time for our department and the county. Our county organization operates in an uncertain environment—changes in the political direction of the governing board, budget cuts and layoffs, uncertain state funding, new federal and state regulations, more scrutiny from the media and the public than ever before, and increased demands from everyone.

People are not responding as well as I would like to me in my role, and I want to see where I can improve to help our team become engaged again.

You have three good things going for you. One, you appear committed to helping move the team to the next level of performance. Second, you seem self-

reflective. Great leaders are those who are self-reflective and self-critical. They reflect on who they are and how they act. Third, you recognize that leadership is about learning and becoming over time more effective in your leadership endeavors. As John F. Kennedy once stated, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

Leaders Can't Force People To Follow

To start addressing the lack of team responsiveness, you must first acknowledge that leaders can't force people to follow. Jim Collins suggests that you know it is a leadership situation when followers can decide not to follow. Given your formal authority as a manager, you can only force a minimal level of performance on the part of your direct reports. You cannot force team members to follow. They need to choose to follow and go beyond a minimal level of compliance.

Originally published on the ICMA website May 22, 2013.

The Paradox of Control

I am pleased that you recognize that your division team operates in an uncertain environment and you are trying to provide a sense of certainty for the team. You can't. If you try to control or act like you are in control, you lose control or influence. The most you can do is to acknowledge the uncertainty and disruption and demonstrate that you support the team and will struggle to help shape the change with them as the change happens. Control is not possible and trying to exert it erodes your influence.

Acknowledging Your Role in the Dysfunction

I sense that you have fostered a formal "I'm the manager, you are the follower" relationship with team members. To the extent that team members feel that the "stretch" goals for them are your goals, they will at some level resist those goals. To the degree that you present plans of action that are well-developed, people will feel little ownership and therefore little commitment. The proposed plans are your plans, not theirs.

Establishing a Human Connection

Followers may choose to follow you if they feel a human connection and at some level identify with you. They will not follow you if you are not open and you do not reveal your authentic self. Revealing yourself requires some vulnerability. So here's another paradox--the more vulnerability you demonstrate, the greater the measure of influence. Vulnerability creates connection. (See Brene Brown's TED.com video "The Power of Vulnerability.")

Becoming More Vulnerable

How do you as a leader become more vulnerable and help people better connect with you and decide to follow? Here are some suggestions.

1. REVEAL YOURSELF

- To be authentic and create a human connection, you need to reveal and share some of yourself. For example, I . . .
- Am a single dad who loves my two kids yet struggles to be a good parent
- Have trouble not being in charge and am trying to become more of a facilitative leader
- Over-identify with my work
- Try to be strong for others.

As city manager of Palo Alto, California, I discovered the power of vulnerability after my wife Pam died and I then discovered that I had a life-threatening cancer and underwent very difficult treatment. After my absence, I wanted to reach out to employees, demonstrate that I had returned to work as their leader, and update everyone on our goals. I wanted to show I was okay and back in control. However, when I started the meetings by thanking everyone for their support for me and my kids during our time of adversity, I invariably started to cry. Looking back, I discovered that expressing my vulnerability allowed employees to better connect with me and strengthened my ability to lead and exert influence from that point forward.

A "safe" and fun way to reveal yourself and help others to reveal themselves is to use at a meeting the ice-breaker exercise called "Two Lies and One Truth." Everyone tells two audacious lies about themselves and one true statement and then everyone on the team must guess which of the statements is a true statement. Another way is to start a retreat or planning session by asking everyone to share "one thing you may not know about me." You should start and model the way.

Of course, the easiest and perhaps best way is to simply be open and reveal things about yourself in casual conversations so that people will begin to feel a connection.

2. "I DON'T KNOW"

You will also promote vulnerability when you state "I don't know." These are three powerful words. You can pose a challenge to the team, indicate that you do not know how to proceed, and encourage the team to figure it out with your encouragement and support. In so doing, you are enhancing the opportunity for team members to step up, suggest solutions, and take ownership and responsibility.

3. STOP TALKING SO MUCH

Like many managers, you may be talking too much. Good leaders listen intently twice as much as they talk. To help you stop talking and directing, ask some provocative questions (see Career Compass No. 24: Asking Powerful Questions), such as:

- Why does what we do matter?
- For what ideas are we fighting?
- Are we as an organization or department who we say we are?
- Why would anyone follow our team?

Part of being vulnerable is to demonstrate trust. By saying to your team members in words and showing them in actions that "I trust you" to figure out a problem and solve it, you are increasing their trust in you.

- Are we focused on the right challenge or problem?
- What is our organizational culture all about?
- How do we sustain our culture?
- What if we take a completely different approach?
- How do we accelerate our learning?

4. ASK FOR HELP

When you ask for help without providing the answer or the solution, you are increasing your leadership quotient. By asking for ideas, listening intently, encouraging people to influence you, acknowledging their concerns (and taking them seriously!), and integrating their ideas and interests into a plan of action, the plan becomes their plan (not just yours). Because they will have their "fingerprints" on the plan, they will be more committed to the course of action. Of course, you then acknowledge the contributions of others and give credit to them.

Therefore, to be a great leader, ask for help and allow others to lead.

5. TAKE THE BLAME

When people play a part in some group failure, we tend to blame others. In blaming others, we try to preserve our self-esteem and value. Of course, blaming others only weakens self-esteem. And it destroys relationships. In an *hbr.org* blog piece entitled "Why You Should Take the Blame," Peter Bregman says that blaming also prevents learning. Therefore, Bregman suggests that leaders always take the blame for everything.

Taking the blame (even when it is not your entire fault) shows strength and courage and promotes your trust-worthiness. It allows everyone else to more quickly acknowledge the failure, even their role in it, examine the mistakes, and explore lessons learned for future practice.

Try it. Taking the blame liberates everyone else to recognize their responsibility and to more openly examine how to improve the situation.

6. TO BUILD TRUST, SHOW TRUST

Here's another paradox—to build trust, you must show trust. Part of being vulnerable is to demonstrate trust. By saying to your team members in words and showing them in actions that "I trust you" to figure out a problem and solve it, you are increasing their trust in you. If you articulate all the challenges and provide the direction in addressing them, you are showing little trust in the abilities of your group. Demonstrating real trust requires vulnerability. Showing trust in others acknowledges the possibility that they may betray your trust.

A "Squishy" Concept

Yes, I know that vulnerability seems like a soft and squishy concept. Yet this kind of soft skill helps create the hard results that you seek.

The Strong and Vulnerable Leader

Engaging others in an open and vulnerable way is one path to create influence as a leader. To do so, vulnerability requires courage and confidence.

Courage is all about confronting your fears that people may think less of you or they may not positively respond. . .and then moving forward anyway.

It requires courage to say these difficult words. . .

"I don't know"

"I blew it"

"I need help"

"I trust you"

A vulnerable leader is a strong and confident leader. Ultimately, vulnerability is based on confidence in your ability to exert positive influence when the results are always uncertain. Most of all, vulnerability requires a sense of self-value regardless of the outcome.

33

Making the Move Up and Out—What's the Fit?

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest offers his sage advice on being your best in the job interview.

I'm a middle manager in a county organization who leads a program unit in a large public works department. I've been with the county for seven years and have developed a very positive relationship with my division manager, my staff, and my peers. I am well-regarded, generally like the work and the people, and know how to get things done within my department and the organization. I feel comfortable and valuable.

Recently, I have heard of a public works division manager position soon to come open in a city within the region. It may be a good move up and I think I would be competitive. However, I wonder if it would be the right move. I am particularly concerned if it be a right "fit" given the good experience that I've had with my current county organization.

Can you offer some advice as I consider this new opportunity?

The good news is that you are doing well, feel comfortable, and are well-regarded in your current position and organization. Moreover, since the new position has not been formally advertised, you have some time to gather intelligence and "size up" the opportunity. Recognizing we spend the majority of our waking hours on the job, considering the "fit" is a good idea.

Originally published on the ICMA website June 24, 2013.

Gathering Intel

There are a variety of ways to get information on the city government organization and the position. They include:

- Talking to public works colleagues outside your organization in the region (see Career Compass No. 30: *Building a Powerful Network*)
- Discussing the opportunity with several informal coaches inside or outside your organization
- Contacting a colleague in the city government that will be offering the position (or asking another colleague or coach to help you make the connection)

People join an organization because of the opportunity and the reputation of the organization. They leave the organization because of a poor relationship with their immediate supervisor.

- Going online and reviewing news articles (and blog postings) about the city organization in general and the Public Works Department in particular
- Talking to residents and business people in the city (again, colleagues or friends can help you connect)
- Calling the public works director in the city, indicating that colleagues have encouraged you to consider the upcoming division manager position, and asking the director about the scope and expectations of the position.

Frank's Top Ten Issues to Consider

In gathering intelligence, what are the "fit" considerations and other issues that you should assess? I have identified my "ten top" issues and related questions to ask:

1. THE NEW BOSS

People join an organization because of the opportunity and the reputation of the organization. They leave the organization because of a poor relationship with their immediate supervisor. Therefore, here are some questions to address regarding the public works director to whom you would report:

- Is the director well-regarded in the field?
- Is the director considered a strong leader?
- What might be the director's expectations of the division manager position?
- What's the director's style of leadership?
- Does the director foster a sense of team collaboration within the department and with other departments?
- Does the director support the division managers and the other staff?

2. THE BIG CHALLENGES

- What are the big challenges facing the city organization or the city as a whole? From the city council's perspective? From the staff's perspective?
- Do the big issues energize you?
- What have been the biggest media issues in the last six months?

3. COMPENSATION PACKAGE

- What is the current division manager's compensation?
- Does the compensation and benefit package minimally meet your needs?
- If the compensation package is not a solid increase (15% +), does the new position put you in a much better mid- to long-range position for compensation and other kinds of growth?
- Are there some key additional benefits of importance to you or your family?

4. THE DEPARTMENT TEAM

- Is there a history of the senior management of the Public Works Department working together as a team?
- Does the department staff typically collaborate across division "silos" to address problems?
- Does the department have a tradition of effectively engaging outside partners to solve its problems?

5. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

- What are the tradition, culture and reputation of the city-wide organization?
- Is there a history of openness to experiment and innovate?
- How risk-averse is the organization?
- Is there a history of ethical behavior at all levels of the organization?
- Does the organization support continued professional education for all staff?

6. "THE POLITICS"

- What is the relationship between the city council and the city manager and city management in general?
- Does the city council respect the professional judgments of the staff?
- How well do the council members generally work together? Are they business-like in trying to identify solutions to difficult problems? Are they civil when they disagree?
- Who are the big political players in the city?
- How do they exhibit influence?

- Is political influence somewhat dispersed or is there a small political elite?
- Have there been any recent political "battles" in the city?

7. LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

- How many labor organizations are there in the city organization?
- What is the history of labor-management relations?
- Has there been a good working relationship between management and labor groups?
- Do union groups have undue influence with the council members?
- How much of city management is formally represented?

8. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INVOLVEMENT

- Does the city in general and the public works director in particular have a history of supporting professional development of department managers and involvement in appropriate professional associations?

9. PERSONAL AND FAMILY LIFE

- What are the potential impacts (both positive and negative) of the division manager position on your personal and family life?
- Are there employment opportunities for your spouse or partner (if applicable)?
- Would you have to move to take the position? If yes, is the housing market in the area affordable? If not, how is the commute?

10. CHALLENGE AND LEARNING

- Even if there are some "fit" concerns, will the new position help you grow, stretch and contribute in significantly new ways?
- Will the position help you develop new competencies and provide new experiences and relationships that will enrich your professional life and career?

No Position Is Perfect

After collecting this data, you must assess the relative advantages and disadvantages of pursuing and hopefully securing the new position. In fact, how does your current position stack up to these "fit" issues? What are ultimately the most important issues for you at this point in your career and life?

How Important Is Fit, Really?

As you can tell, I think that the notion of "fit" is important. But how important is it? Let me tell you a personal experience.

After 11 years of a great run as city manager of Brea, California, I became too "comfortable" and felt the need to make a change. When I did some intelligence about the city manager opening in Palo Alto, California, it became clear that it might not be a great fit. I have always been a "ready, fire, aim" kind of guy who enjoyed taking risks and bold action. Palo Alto is a university town, with nine council members who conduct many meetings to discuss and re-discuss any potential change. It is a very process- and rules-oriented organization. It is a "Are we ready? Are we sure we're ready? Are we really sure we're ready?" kind of environment. If it were all about fit, I should have not pursued or accepted the position.

However, during my eight-year tenure in Palo Alto, I had to learn a more patient and facilitative style, became much better at dealing with a lot of organizational adversity during the dot.com bust and recession, and began for the first time to focus on the issues of succession development.

I grew a lot and matured as a leader and a person. It was not a good fit but I contributed a lot and was enriched.

What Is the Worst That Can Happen?

As a boy, whenever I confronted a big opportunity but feared taking a risk, my mother Rosy used to say to me: "Frank, what is the worst that can happen? Can you survive the worst-case scenario? If so, go for it!"

34

Making Presentations Like a Pro

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest gives us a blueprint to talk like TED.

I'm a newly promoted recreation manager in a city Community Services Department. As part of my new role, I am being called upon to make verbal reports and other kinds of presentations to the Recreation and Parks Commission, community associations, and user groups such as the Little League Board.

In my first two presentations, I thought that I prepared well and wrote out my remarks to make sure I covered everything. However, I did not feel comfortable and it was evident that I was not effective in making my case. In fact, in one situation, the commission heard my report, took testimony from a few people with some minor concerns, and then postponed its decision even though there was enough information to take action.

For me to be a success as a manager, I recognize that I must improve my presentation skills. Do you have any advice?

You are correct. As you move up in local government management, you will be required to make more and more public presentations, including those to the city council or other governing boards. Your effectiveness as a manager will be determined in part by your presentation skills.

To enhance your skills, I suggest the following preparation, delivery and post-delivery approaches.

Originally published on the ICMA website August 15, 2013.

1. Preparing the Presentation

Before you even begin to write the presentation, you need to determine:

YOUR PURPOSE IN MAKING THE PRESENTATION

First, you need to decide on the purpose of the talk. Is it to:

- Provide information and inform?
- Make a recommendation?
- Teach or train?
- Move people to action?

Understanding the purpose will help you shape the remarks. A presentation aimed at informing the audience is much different than a talk that is crafted to move the audience to action.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Second, you must identify the primary and any secondary audiences. Sometimes, this is easy if you are speaking to the Recreation and Parks Commission and there is little citizen participation in the meeting. However, in the more likely case that there are representatives from different groups attending the meeting (e.g., field users, neighborhood associations, environmental groups), all with their own views and interests, you must decide who is the primary audience and who are secondary audiences.

THE "WHY"

Before you draft an outline, you must consider the "why" of the issue that you are addressing. Why are people interested in the issue? Why is it important to the audience, the community, and/or the organization? Oftentimes, we focus on the "what" and "how" and ignore the "why." The "why" motivates support and positive action.

NEEDS OF THE AUDIENCE(S)

If the commission is the primary audience, along with field user groups, and everyone wants to increase field usage, then you obviously want to build a case and provide options and recommendations to enhance usage. However, if members of the neighborhood where the park is located are concerned about parking and traffic congestion, you need to address those issues in your report and presentation.

2. Crafting the Presentation

Once you decide on the purpose, the target audience, the "why" and the needs of the audience, you are ready to craft your presentation.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Depending on the primary audiences and their needs, you want to "frame" the issue in terms of their interests.

For example, a recommendation to install artificial turf on a youth soccer field can be framed in different ways:

- Increasing field usage by user groups
- Reducing maintenance costs for the city
- Freeing up department monies for other recreational purposes or programs
- Reducing injuries to users.

Just like a red frame brings out the red in a painting, the proper framing of an issue helps shape the issue in such a way that it resonates with the audience and thus generates support.

FOCUSING ON A FEW KEY MESSAGES

While you may have a lot of information and knowledge about the issue, you want to highlight just a few key messages crafted for the primary audience(s). Certainly you must provide the data that people expect but also focus the presentation on a few key messages related to the positive frame and the concerns of stakeholders.

In terms of messages, less is more.

AVOIDING JARGON

In all our disciplines (finance, HR, planning, police, recreation), we use technical jargon. If you want an effective presentation that accomplishes its purpose, you want to avoid jargon and abbreviations. Even if you are addressing a professional group in your own field, but especially in community settings or with governing or advisory groups, jargon and acronyms dull the senses of the audience.

WINNING HEARTS AS WELL AS MINDS

As a professional, you are required to provide essential data and present an analytical case in recommending a public decision or educating a professional audience. However, you must understand that data is necessary but insufficient to carry the day. Appropriate stories are the most powerful way to communicate because they resonate emotionally.

Therefore, you may wish to use a personal experience, a vignette from a user or customer, or a story about your daughter in order to help support the analytical case for your recommendation. Stories do not replace data but they make the data come to life and help you connect with the audience.

SIZING THE PRESENTATION

Before developing your presentation, you need to know how long it should be. The worst blunder is to go over the expected time. If the commission expects no more than 10 minutes, make sure you do not exceed the time assigned.

I time all my presentations, section by section, so I do not break the cardinal rule of sticking to the time allotted. Therefore, if I use up too much time in one section of my presentation, I can adjust during the talk and cut back on another section.

You may have a wealth of information and examples. Save some for the follow-up questions.

ADHERING TO THE TED RULE

World-class speakers are invited to present at TED conferences. (View these presentations at www.TED.com.) Since adults begin to lose attention after 18 minutes, TED speakers are not allowed to go beyond 18 minutes of talking. If you are presenting to the city's department head team, the city council or a professional association, you cannot lecture beyond 18-20 minutes maximum without engaging the audience in some interactive way (see next item).

ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

You certainly want to present information or other content to the audience. However, effective presenters engage their audience in an interactive way.

- Stories engage the audience. Here some other ways to create interaction with the audience:
- Ask a provocative question and record the responses
- Engage the audience in critiquing a mini-caste study and identifying lessons learned
- Pair up audience members and ask them to share a personal experience in the pair related to the issue and then several participants can share their responses in the larger group
- Request the audience members to write ideas on sticky cards and then post them on an "Idea Wall."

OUTLINING THE TALK

Once you have figured out all the issues above, you can outline your remarks or verbal report. Do not write out your verbal presentation! An outline will help you keep the presentation more conversational or informal. Inexperienced speakers tend to develop full outlines. With more experience, you can move towards more basic outlines which just include the key data, messages, conclusions, and/or recommendations.

In terms of constructing your outline, remember the classic rule of structuring a talk: Tell the audience what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then remind them what you told them.

CRITIQUING THE PRESENTATION

If it is an especially important presentation, ask a manager, colleague, or informal coach who is a seasoned presenter to critique the outline.

For important presentations to the city council or commission, I always suggest that the staff team conduct a practice run-through in the council chambers or meeting location. The presenter gives the report and then the rest of the team makes suggestions on how to refine the powerpoint or other presentation. The team members can also pose some tough questions that may be asked by council, commission or community members attending the meeting.

3. Delivering the Presentation

After you have prepared your presentation, including any critique to refine it, you now must focus on delivery. These are some tips:

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Just like any activity, you will enhance your presentation skills if you rehearse and practice in advance of the actual delivery. I used to speak in front of a wall or full-length mirror. Others record their talks and then critique them; new technology makes this easierthan ever.

In any case, by using an outline and rehearsing your remarks, you can rely less on what you wrote out, occasionally glance at the outline to make key points and keep on track, and thus provide a less formal and more effective presentation.

STAND UP

I never like to make a presentation sitting at a staff table or presenters table (for instance, if I'm on a panel at a professional meeting). I personally get more energy, deliver the report with more enthusiasm, better project my voice, and create more presence and connection if I stand up and get closer to the audience.

DITCH THE PODIUM

Unless it is a very formal environment (such as a city council meeting), it is always best to get out in front of the audience. The podium just creates a physical barrier between you and the audience.

USE A WIRELESS, CLIP-ON MIKE

If you need a microphone for the presentation, I always request a clip-on wireless mike (as opposed to a hand-held mike). A clip-on mike allows you to walk around, hold your notes in one hand and gesture with the other, and generally better address the audience.

AVOID NON-WORDS

Even as a seasoned presenter, I sometimes fill in momentary gaps with non-words or unnecessary transitions such as "um," "uh," "ok," "you know," or "I mean."

Listening to a recording of a practice speech or the actual presentation will help you identify and work to avoid distracting non-words or annoying transitions. Slowing your speech down also helps you avoid this pitfall.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY

Dress at least as formally as your audience. Even if your audience is dressed very casually, you need to project a professional image so always wear nice slacks, a shirt with a collar, and a blazer.

MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT

Effective speakers use eye contact to create a connection with their audience. Hold eye contact with a specific member of the board or audience for three to six seconds before moving to a new person. Using eye contact, move around and throughout the audience. You may wish to pick a few people in the audience to make eye contact and speak to.

PAUSE FOR EMPHASIS

After you make a key point, pause for a moment to emphasize its importance. Also consider pausing after you complete a section of your presentation so the audience can catch up.

PREPARE FOR TOUGH QUESTIONS

In your preparation, you certainly want to anticipate any concerns of different stakeholder groups. You can incorporate into your report any ways of minimizing or addressing significant concerns. In advance of the presentation, you (and other staff team members) should identify what tough questions may be asked at the end of your report and prepare some bullet-point responses so you are not caught off guard.

In preparing for different questions or even angry responses, you must do your best to acknowledge the concern and concisely present any data or response even if it does not fully mitigate the concern.

USE (NOT MISUSE) POWERPOINT

If you use decide to use PowerPoint or KeyNote, here are a few simple rules:

- Use photos or other visuals wherever possible depicting the point you are trying to make
- Minimize the verbiage per slide
- Use no more than 3 bullets per slide
- Minimize the number of slides to only those that best capture key messages and data
- Do not read off the slides.

For a more informal presentation, you may wish to simply write down up to three key messages or recommendations on an easel pad of paper or white board or provide a few talking points in a handout.

Again, less is more.

4. Debriefing the Presentation

With your manager, colleagues or an informal coach, debrief the presentation a day after your experience. Ask yourself and others:

- What went well?
- What did not go so well?
- How do I improve my presentation the next time?

To the extent you debrief with your staff team, they learn along with you.

5. Improving Your Skills Over Time

We can all enhance our presentation skills. Consider. . .

- Joining a Toastmasters group in your community (or form one at work involving other emerging leaders). This is my No. 1 recommendation.
- Trying out simple presentations in "safe" environments, such as a staff meeting.
- Experimenting with some interactive elements in your presentations.
- Getting an informal coach to assist you in developing and delivering presentations.
- Critiquing and borrowing techniques from pro's. For instance, go to professional conferences and assess the approaches used by seasoned speakers or watch TED.com videos for tips.
- Reading a book or participating in a webinar focused on storytelling.

6. Presentation Skills are Leadership Skills

Remember that leaders cannot force people (other staff, professional colleagues, community members, governing board members) to follow. Followers can decide not to follow.

Therefore, your ability to present your ideas and thus influence others is a critical leadership skill, especially as you advance.

7. Becoming World-class

The more you give presentations in all kinds of settings, the better you will become. As Malcolm Gladwell suggests in Outliers, someone develops world-class expertise or skills as they approach 10,000 hours of experimenting, learning and practicing. As a long-time city manager and now in encore career as a consultant and trainer, I am well on my way. How about you?

35

Leadership Lessons from My Teenage Daughter

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest shares some leadership lessons learned from parenting a teen.

I am writing a different kind of Career Compass column today. I have a 15-year-old daughter, Leila, who is the love of my life but she and I are struggling as we navigate her teen years. Leila tends to ignore my advice and regularly informs me that "I don't get it." I'm trying to learn from some of our more contentious interactions and reflect on how I can better exert positive influence. After one of our recent disagreements, it occurred to me that there are some basic leadership lessons that Leila is teaching me and that might be worth sharing.

A Situation Last Week

My daughter is co-president of a high school club. The other co-president is not discussing issues with Leila and is making decisions unilaterally. Leila comes home after school and is quite upset. I'm a bit distracted prepping for a workshop while watching the first Monday Night Football game of the season. I'm sort of listening and then offer some advice on how Leila can address the problem. This only causes more negative reaction and histrionics and gets me uptight since Leila won't let me help her.

SOME QUICK LEADERSHIP LESSONS

Having reflected on my inadequate behavior trying to support Leila, I have concluded that our difficulties in

interacting suggest a few leadership lessons:

Lesson No. 1: Don't get caught up in the drama.

Lesson No. 2: Stay calm (this is difficult).

Lesson No. 3: Pay attention and listen (this is very difficult; I'm watching the football game).

Lesson No. 4: Show a little empathy (also very difficult).

Lesson No. 5: Ask questions (I know how to do this).

Lesson No. 6: Don't micro-manage; let her solve the problem herself.

APPLYING THE LESSONS

Oftentimes staff come to us as managers about someone who is obstructing them or acting stupidly (accord-

Originally published on the ICMA website November 4, 2013.

ing to them). It's easy for us to get caught up in the drama but it is not helpful.

The most difficult thing for me is to just pay attention, put away other stuff or thoughts, and focus on the other person. Just connect. People won't follow you unless they feel a connection. (See Career Compass No. 32: The Power of Vulnerability.) Since I see myself as the ultimate problem-solver, I often pull out a piece of blank paper and take a few notes. Leila hates that and now forbids me to take notes during any conversation.

When I offered Leila a suggestion, she totally ignored it and went on to further blast away and pretty soon we were debating the best approach. She ends the back-and-forth by telling me that I'm clueless as a single dad (she is basically correct) and then stomps off. Later, when I express that I just wanted to help and that Leila doesn't seem to appreciate my efforts as her father, she tells me that if I want unconditional love, I should get a dog.

We can show a little empathy by saying "that must be difficult" or "you must be frustrated (or disappointed)." We can ask questions that might help the other person clarify the situation for himself/herself. Once you let the person vent (actually this is sometimes all the other person wants from you), you can ask. . .

- What are you going to do?
- What is one appro ach or another approach for dealing with the situation?

You may then ask "how can I help?" Usually the colleague (and certainly my daughter) will say "you can't—I will handle the problem."

A SITUATION THREE WEEKS AGO

Leila goes to her long-time nanny and surrogate mother Patty and suggests that Patty approach me about allowing Leila to go to an amusement park at night with friends and then sleep over at one of her friend's home. (Leila's smart. She knows that Patty has influence with me and can "front" her request.)

When I hear about Leila's plan, I ask some questions and Leila gets defensive. "Don't you trust me?" I assure Leila that I do trust her but it's my responsibility to make sure that she is safe and I will follow up the other girl's parent about the amusement park trip and the sleep-over. I say to Leila—"If you were the father, what would you require in order to say 'yes'?" I end by sharing some possible concerns, encourage her to follow-up, and tell her that we need to discuss the plan some more.

I do follow up with the other parent who assures me that she will pick up the girls at an appropriate time and there will be supervision for the sleep-over.

As leaders, we are stewards of the enterprise. To perform this role, we must ask questions, get responses to any concerns, offer support, set appropriate limits, yet whenever possible say "yes".

While Leila acts like she is being put upon, she does schedule a time to talk to me and respond to the issues that I originally raised. I agree to take the girls to the park since the other parent will be picking them up. Since Leila senses that I'm still a bit hesitant, she suggests that I get some advice from Patty. She ends by saying, "Dad, you need some coaching."

SOME ADDITIONAL LESSONS

Lesson 7: Don't agree too quickly; let things play out.

Lesson 8: Don't give in to emotional blackmail.

Lesson 9: Trust but verify.

Lesson 10: Ask for more information in response to your questions.

Lesson 11: Let the other person figure out how to resolve your concerns.

Lesson 12: Do your part and provide support.

Lesson 13: Model optimism and steadiness.

Lesson 14: Get some advice.

APPLYING THE LESSONS

As leaders, we are stewards of the enterprise. To perform this role, we must ask questions, get responses to any concerns, offer support, set appropriate limits, yet whenever possible say "yes". When others are facing a difficult situation, we can make a big difference by demonstrating optimism and steadiness.

Being a parent or an organizational leader is a challenging responsibility. Leila is right. I do need coaching as a parent (and leader). We all do.

A FINAL LESSON

When I found a moment that Leila and I were not struggling with some issue, I went to her and told her how much I loved her, how grateful I am for her, and that I will always be there for her. Leila responded by saying, "I know, Dad. I love you, too."

Even though I take pride in solving problems, being action-oriented, and giving sound advice, I often fail to

recognize that "connection" and authentic relating all help us better interact, overcome our challenges, and become more whole.

MANAGING A CITY IS EASY

I know how to manage a city. Give me a city any time. I just can't manage my daughter. Yet Leila is a good teacher.

WHAT HAS LEILA TAUGHT ME? PLENTY.

For instance, a parent or leader needs a strong ego and sense of self-worth because you will be tested on a daily basis.

She has taught me that parenting is difficult but the rewards are immense.

THE BEST PARENTS (AND LEADERS)

I know that there are some obvious differences between being a parent and serving as an organizational leader. Yet, there are many leadership lessons a child can teach you. Probably the most important lesson involves a paradox. With Leila's guidance, I've discovered that great parents (and leaders) must be demanding and tough-minded, yet also tender-hearted.

Thanks, Leila.

36

Creating a Leadership Presence

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest offers his sage advice on being your best in the job interview.

I am a human resources senior management analyst in a fairly large city government. At one of our HR department management meetings, I made what I thought was a good suggestion about how to proceed on a new HR initiative. However, my idea was not considered. This has happened to me before. I'm now reluctant to speak up. How can I get others to listen to me and take me seriously as a leader?

Your real concern is how to better project "leadership presence" so you and your ideas are taken seriously. Leadership presence is a "skishy" attribute—it's hard to define. Yet when you have it, people pay attention, listen to your ideas, tend to follow, and want to collaborate.

Leadership presence is something you can learn. There is no one best way to exert positive presence. You want to start small and practice some behaviors so that you can exert confidence and leadership presence in larger settings.

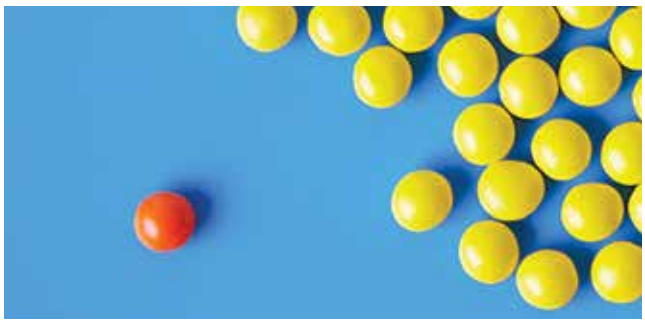
Here are some strategies.

PREPARATION

Before a key meeting at which you want to put forward an idea or proposal or raise an important issue, try out some of these techniques:

- Connect with a few key players, share your idea in an informal conversation, and get feedback.

Originally published on the ICMA website January 6, 2014.



- Incorporate into your proposal some thoughts from these conversations with colleagues.
- Frame your idea in a way that resonates with the "influentials" with whom you discussed the idea.
- Figure out a compelling "why" for your proposal so that the group might be more open to considering it and taking action.
- Craft your message in terms of organizational values, larger goals, and the need to act now.

If someone supports the idea, and that someone is influential, ask him or her if you can mention the conversation in the staff meeting, noting that you both are enthusiastic about the idea.

You might also "tag-team" the idea. Join with someone with "presence" and influence who shares your idea and would like to co-present the proposal. The proposal will be better perceived at the meeting (and you will be, too, especially if you handle yourself well in co-presenting).

Before the meeting, you can prepare a few points about your proposal. Remember less is more. After talking to a few colleagues, get their feedback on your key points.

In preparing your comments, don't provide a lot of technical detail. Don't strive to show people how smart you are.

You can identify a powerful and provocative question to engage others in the issue. For example:

- What do we really know about this challenge?
- Is this the underlying problem or is there something more fundamental challenging us?
- What are some barriers to improving this situation and how can we overcome them?
- Why is it better that we act sooner rather than later?
- Are we passionate enough about this new initiative that other organizational members will follow us?
- What if we take a completely different approach?
- How do we accelerate our learning about this key challenge?

(See Career Compass No. 24: Asking Powerful Questions).

If appropriate, you can put the item on the management team agenda with you as the designated staff person to introduce the item and frame it for the team.

In preparation, practice your key points by saying them out loud. Don't write everything out. A few bullet points will help you remember what you want to stress, while allowing you to make eye contact with others at the upcoming meeting. You should also identify a few tough questions and how you would respond. Close your eyes and visualize your participation in the meeting and your responses to questions.

AT THE MEETING

Be present in the moment, listen intently, and be open to how you can connect your idea to other thoughts that are presented. Don't let your mind wander; don't become distracted by your smart phone. Be attentive to what people are saying and feeling.

When you present your idea, pay attention to your tone, posture, and eye contact, as well as your message and follow-up commitment.

Posture. If everyone is sitting at a conference table, lean in a bit. If it is appropriate, stand up straight, with good posture, shoulders back and weight distributed on both feet.

Eye Contact. Eye contact helps you connect with people. Make eye contact with a few individuals, especially influentials, around the table. Hold eye contact for 3-6 seconds and then connect with someone else.

Tone. You want to sound knowledgeable and be assertive yet not forceful, vociferous or "pushy." You want to project your voice yet not be loud. Show enthusiasm for your proposal. If you are not enthusiastic, why should others be enthusiastic?

Your Message. Before speaking, slow down and take a deep breath. Then make a concise statement and perhaps ask a provocative question to engage others. Make reference to what others have said, connecting your ideas to those of others. You are looking for a "yes, and" rather than "yes, but." Use "we" as appropriate. Acknowledge and be open to any concerns or fears that are raised but focus on the "why" and the upsides.

Visuals. If it adds value, write out a few key words or draw a simple diagram on the white board or a flip chart.

Dealing with Nay-Sayers. If it is an emotional topic or issue and someone attacks your proposal (or you), it is essential to say calm and positive. Again, acknowledge the concern, without judging others, and then concisely reassert the compelling need or "why."

Follow-Up Action. Let the group know that you commit yourself to taking some action, such as talking to some colleagues in other departments, collecting some more data, or developing an action plan for further discussion. Ask who else would like to join you. Even if no one else joins you, take another step and demonstrate your commitment.

AFTER THE MEETING

As a follow-up to the meeting, debrief with a trusted colleague, your manager, or a coach. Get some feedback to learn how you were received and if you came of f in an appropriately authoritative and assertive manner.

GROWING YOUR LEADERSHIP PRESENCE

Once you practice at your HR department management meetings and get more comfortable and confident in that environment, you can try a more challenging setting such as a multidepartment task force or at a council subcommittee meeting or a professional association discussion.

Finally, I suggest that you pay attention to those who seem to exude leadership presence. Critique how they connect with others, what and how they communicate, how they project confidence. Then figure out how you can use some of what you learn from their leadership performances.

Anyone can grow their leadership presence and become more influential. It is just a matter of learning, practicing, and taking a few risks.

ONE FINAL COMMENT

Leadership has many voices. There is no one best way to exert leadership. Over time, you will discover the voice and style that works best for you.

37

Engaging Employees for Success

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest offers his sage advice on being your best in the job interview.

I'm a relatively new supervisor for an accounting group in a large local government. I want to enhance my contribution, make my mark as a good supervisor, and advance in my organization and career. However, I find that my group is fairly lackadaisical. While there are one or two exceptions, many of my direct reports do the work with almost no enthusiasm and take little initiative. I'm committed but I don't sense the same level of commitment with other team members. I try to motivate the group members but with minimal success. For the most part, they exhibit a "Thank God, it's Friday" mentality.

To make matters worse, I've noticed that work attendance is sketchy for some and the unit has experienced troublesome turnover. Do you have a few suggestions?

What you report is unfortunately quite normal for organizations across sectors and in fact across nations. Most employees are simply not actively engaged at work.

Three Groups

The Gallup Organization has surveyed millions of employees in thousands of organizations. Through its research, Gallup has identified three groups of employees.

Originally published on the ICMA website January 31, 2014.

1. ACTIVELY ENGAGED

These highly motivated individuals are outcome-focused, committed to productivity and quality, drive innovation, move the unit and organization forward, and are accountable. They exhibit a passion for the work and a profound connection to the enterprise.

2. THE UNENGAGED

The non-engaged are just average performers, task-focused, see the work as merely a job, show little initiative, and are not committed to the success of the organization. They have "tell me what to do" and "it's only a job" mindsets. They can hardly wait for lunch.

3. THE ACTIVELY DISENGAGED

The actively disengaged are "checked out." Still worse, they are negative, often display anger and mistrust, and undermine their group and organization. These employees are destructive. They are often called

"ROAD" ("Retired On Active Duty") Warriors or "CAVE" ("Consistently Against Virtually Everything") Dwellers.

Research by the Gallup Organization shows that fully 70% of all American employees across private, public, and nonprofit sectors are unengaged or actively disengaged. Across all organizations, the percentages for the three groups (as a percent of all employees) are as follows:

- Actively Engaged—21-30% of all employees
- Not Engaged—45-52%
- Actively Disengaged—17-38%

The Impacts of Engagement

While many might feel that employee engagement is a "squishy" concern, there is much hard data underscoring the importance of engaging employees.

When employees are engaged, the Gallup research shows that these measurable results are achieved:

- Performance and productivity go way up
- Customer satisfaction increases
- Discretionary effort jumps
- Problem-solving, innovation, and adaptability improve
- Political support by the public increases as residents, business people, and others interact with energized and committed employees.

In the private sector, revenue, profitability, and stock prices significantly improve.

When employees are unengaged or actively disengaged, the research also indicates that all these costs sky-rocket:

- Absenteeism, including sick time
- Workers compensation claims
- Liability claims
- Mistakes and errors
- Turnover

The Approach

To address the lack of engagement, you need to understand three precepts.

First, a leader cannot "motivate" anyone. Only the employee can motivate oneself. The leader can only support one's motivation. As a supervisor, you want to provide resources, remove obstacles, support the efforts of staff, and recognize good work and achievement.

Second, everyone in the organization can contribute to creating robust employee engagement, including the chief executive, department directors, managers, supervisors, and employees themselves. However, the direct supervisor has the most influence in actively supporting highly engaged employees. As pointed out in First, Break All the Rules (based on the Gallup research), an employee joins an organization because of opportunity, compensation, and the reputation of the enterprise. Once the employee joins the organization, he or she most often leaves because of a poor relationship with the supervisor. The supervisor is the key leverage point in terms of employee engagement.

Third, a supervisor does not have to move all the actively disengaged employees to the actively engaged group. Rather, significantly better performance, productivity, and attitudes result from moving employees one level. In other words, you as a supervisor will have great success if you can help move several actively disengaged into the non-engaged category and some non-engaged employees into the actively engaged group. Of course, for those actively disengaged employees who do not respond to your support, you need to do everything in your power to help them find a new enterprise where they can contribute. You can't tolerate actively disengaged employees who undermine everyone and everything.

TEN TIPS

As indicated by the review of motivation studies conducted by Dan Pink (see his book *Drive*), people are not motivated by compensation once basic needs are addressed by employers. Employees desire meaning and purpose, some measure of autonomy, and the opportunity to master their work and craft.

To be more intentional and focused on employee engagement, consider these ten simple tips for direct supervisors and front-line managers.

1. **Serve as a meaning "translator"**

   People thirst for meaning. Yet, oftentimes, they do not perceive the connection between their work and the organization's mission and goals. As a supervisor, you must specifically discuss how the work of the accounting group is tied to achieving the big goals of the organization.

   Recognizing that stories and personal experiences are the most powerful way to communicate, you might ask "customers," including internal and external service recipients, to share in an e-mail, or better yet attend one of your staff meetings, in order to highlight how the work of the accounting team helps them achieve success.

2. **Specify what is expected, engage employees in goal-setting, and provide feedback**

   Clarify expectations, roles, and responsibilities for the group and individuals. Employees need to know what is expected of them. Encourage employees to participate in goal-setting and performance metrics. Most employees want to be partners in the enterprise. Through ongoing discussions, review and modify expectations and hold people accountable. Immediately correct performance and behaviors that are inconsistent with organizational values or goals.

3. **Discuss what employees need in order to do a good job**

   Start some conversations individually or as a group or institute a quick survey identifying any equipment, technology, or other resources that staff need in order to do a better job. Ask what non-value rules or procedures are getting in the way or have become outdated. Then do something about it. Often it is inexpensive. For instance, an HR Department group identified that projectors and easels for training workshops were broken, which hindered the training workshops conducted by the department. Once a few new projectors and easels were purchased, engagement scores significantly improved.

4. **Be modest, ask questions, listen, request help**

   Don't try to have all the answers just because you are formally in charge. Don't give detailed instructions. Ask questions. Identify problems and ask for help in identifying the solutions. Promote "FIO" ("Figure It Out") skills. Listen intently, write down notes, and summarize what you heard. Then tie your decisions and actions to what you heard. People want to see that their opinions count.

   Share mistakes as well as successes. Vulnerability is powerful (see Career Compass No. 32: *The Power of Vulnerability*).

   To solve problems, especially those that matter to employees, create time-limited work teams and ask them to report their recommendations at a specific upcoming meeting and then help implement the changes. As suggested by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, you can provide your team members with "opportunities for positive impact."

5. **Focus on strengths**

   One of the secrets to success for a supervisor is matching individual employees to the right job or task. Don't focus on weakness but rather on strengths. It is your responsibility to uncover and strengthen employee talents and align them with the right assignments.

6. **Conduct "stay" interviews**

   By conducting a "stay" interview over coffee with an employee, you can acknowledge the value provided by the individual and ask:

   - What's working for you?
   - What's not working?
   - What makes a great day at work for you?
   - What are your aspirations?
   - How can I support your personal and professional goals?
   - What distresses you and how can I help?
   - What is something new that you'd like to learn in the coming year?
   - What kind of recognition do you appreciate?

   These one-on-one chats give you valuable information on how you can support the motivation of your employee and allow you to show that you care. Of course, you must follow up on these discussions in meaningful ways demonstrating that these conversations count.

7. **Provide learning and growth opportunities**

   People do not want to stagnate in their jobs and positions. Employees of all ages are motivated by learning and challenge. Especially in tough times, learning, training and growth opportunities are "cheap" and demonstrate your interest. In terms of engagement, you can also get a "two-fer" by using talented employees to train others and share their knowledge.

8. **Talk about progress**

   As suggested by Teresa Ambile in The Progress Principle, people need to see progress to maintain their motivation. Therefore, your job as an effective supervisor is to provide feedback and especially highlight steady progress in meeting milestones in pursuit of larger goals.

9. **Recognize good work**

   Use multiple methods to recognize individual and team achievement. Bring coffee and bagels to a staff meeting in order to celebrate a team milestone. Put on each staff meeting agenda an item called "Team Accomplishments" and encourage everyone to acknowledge the assistance or achievement of someone else. Let managers and the department head and chief executive know of the good work by

your group. Share stories and other feedback from internal and external "customers."

10. **Promote employee wellness and balance**

    Where possible, provide telecommuting, flex-time, and other alternative work schedules. Encourage the use of leave balances, especially vacation time. Have individual "walking" meetings and encourage some off-site meetings and social time.

Resources

To learn more about this critical leadership skill of effectively engaging employees, here are some resources:

- Marcus Buckingham et al, *First, Break All The Rules*
- Dan Pink, *Drive* (also see TED.com video of Dan Pink on *The Puzzle of Motivation*)
- Teresa Ambile, *The Progress Principle*
- To view Gallup's twelve questions (called the Q12) used in assessing employee engagement, visit the *Gallup Employee Engagement Overview*
- The Human Resources Department of San Mateo County, CA, has developed an excellent guidebook entitled *How To Engage Employees* focused on the roles of department heads, managers, supervisors, and employees.

A Culture of Engagement

The supervisor-employee relationship is the most important relationship in the organization. A supervisor striving for better performance, organizational commitment, and just a more enjoyable work environment needs to slowly and consistently build a culture of engagement. Over time, many of your employees may adopt a "Thank God, it's Monday" mindset.

38

Your Staff Meetings Don't Have To Be Dreary

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest rolls out a plan for making sure your meetings are a success.

I supervise an operations group in a community services special district. Our district has a lot of responsibilities and is always trying to address the demands of our service recipients. Because we try to move fast, I hold a weekly staff meeting to keep the 15 operations staff people informed and, hopefully, engaged. The meeting lasts an hour or sometimes 90 minutes.

The problem is that most staff think these regular meetings are boring, don't show much enthusiasm in the meetings, and tend to leave decisions to me even though I'm trying to involve them in the decision-making. In the meetings, many don't fully participate in the discussions, others wander off target, and a few try to dominate. I even have a few employees who often find an excuse to arrive late or leave early. As the one who leads the meetings, I'm frustrated. I believe that face-to-face meetings are important but my meetings aren't working and have little positive impact.

Do you have any suggestions?

Throughout my career as a manager, I, too, have struggled with leading effective and meaningful meetings.

Since meetings are ubiquitous in almost every contemporary organization (including local government agencies) and they consume a significant amount of staff time, it is important to maximize their effectiveness. The first thing to do is to figure out the desired outcome(s) of any particular meeting. For instance, is a meeting intended to. . .

- Provide information
- Brainstorm ideas
- Solve specific problems
- Generate feedback or input on a recommendation
- Create consensus
- Engage participants in making a decision
- Build social cohesion in the group.

Oftentimes, meetings in our organizations are in fact dreary affairs. They primarily serve as an opportunity for the manager to inform others. People don't sense the importance of the meeting and feel that they don't own it. They generally think it is a waste of their time (and they are mostly correct). Therefore, some people tend to come late or leave early or don't participate in any authentic way.

Originally published on the ICMA website March 31, 2014.

Key Questions and Issues

If you'd like to run more meaningful and effective meetings, you can start by responding to certain questions:

- Why are we having this meeting?
- What should be the focus?
- Who should attend?
- How often do we really need to meet?
- What do we need to accomplish during the meeting?
- How do we present the issues?
- Who presents at the meeting or kick-starts the discussion?
- How long should the meeting last?

Based on my trial and error experience over the years, let me address some of these questions.

PURPOSE AND FOCUS

You don't want to overuse your weekly staff meeting as the only way to inform, engage, and connect with others. So as not to overburden the utility of the meeting, make sure that you e-mail information to staff on a regular basis, walk around, go out into the field with operations staff, and basically drop in and ask about projects, progress, problems, and how you can support people.

My bias is that meetings should not primarily be about information-sharing. If the primary purpose is providing basic information, then you will have fairly boring and non-engaging sessions with your staff.

Unfortunately, information items take up too much time at meetings and important decision-making discussions often get squeezed for time. To minimize info-sharing as a focus, consider sending out a series of info items once a week in a regular message to your operations staff. Another option is to relegate info items to the last five minutes of the meeting.

SCHEDULING AND ATTENDANCE

If your meetings involve a lot of people, it is difficult to engage everyone in the discussion. If you continue to invite all the ops staff, you might consider a meeting every other week. As another option, you might involve supervisory and lead staff every week and an all-hands operations meeting once every month. If you focus on supervisory and lead personnel, make sure that they commit to sharing the discussion with line staff and you distribute action items following the meeting to everyone.

CONSIDER THE "TWO-PIZZA RULE"

Amazon and Intuit have instituted the "2-Pizza Rule." Team meetings cannot consist of more people than can easily be fed with two pizzas. According to Bob Sutton, co-author of Scaling Up Excellence, the "2-Pizza Rule" is based on research that big teams are fairly nonproductive, people don't easily connect or care about each other, and coordination problems multiply.

In a LinkedIn.com post, Sutton notes that the average dinner reservation in the United States is a party of four. If the dinner group is larger than four, it is difficult to have a meaningful and emotionally satisfying conversation with each member of the group. With more than four, the group breaks into smaller conversations or some people do all the talking and others say little.

DURATION

Most regular staff meetings lose steam if they last longer than an hour. In fact, it is a good idea to schedule the session for 50 minutes, allowing participants at least 10 minutes to transition instead of rushing from the meeting to another meeting or activity. For meetings focused on strategic directions, budget priorities, or the annul work plan, consider a separate meeting that is longer, in a different place, and targeted for the one key discussion.

FORMATTING AND KEY ELEMENTS OF THE AGENDA

Over time, I have developed a preference regarding the format for staff meetings. I like to start the meeting with a regular agenda item titled "Team Accomplishments." Anyone can acknowledge progress made on key projects (see Teresa Ambile's *The Progress Principle* for the importance of acknowledging small steps forward and thus helping people stay motivated). During "Team Accomplishments," staff can also thank others for their support since no one can accomplish anything by themselves.

I then like to have an agenda item called "Learning Reports" which allows one of us to summarize the learning from an article, book, recent seminar, conference, or what one's teen daughter said at the breakfast table. Sometimes we rotate the responsibility for presenting the "Learning Report" or we leave it open for anyone to briefly present. Learning reports underscore our emphasis on continuous learning as well as engage participates in the meeting.

After these two brief introductory items, I recommend that you schedule a key discussion item that becomes the focus for the meeting. Be careful not

You don't want to be solely responsible for leading effective meetings and engaging employees. Therefore, you can ask a specific staff person to present a learning report or plan on kick-starting the discussion on a particular item.

to agendize more than one item for critical thinking or creative brainstorming. You should send out the agenda in advance so that participants can ponder the issue prior to the discussion.

STATING THE DISCUSSION ITEM AS A QUESTION

It is a particularly good idea to state the discussion issue as a question. For instance, instead of labeling the agenda item as a discussion of budget priorities, the item should be stated as follows: "Given upcoming budget cuts, what are the one or two key priorities for which we need to maintain funding?" Or, "What is one key investment for the upcoming two-year budget?"

For a key discussion item, you might also identify the desired outcome (for example, group consensus on one or two investments for the upcoming two-year budget or selection of two high-potential employees for the next leadership academy).

To allow ample time for the one key discussion question, allocate a specific number of minutes for each item and note the number of minutes on the agenda. After 7-10 minutes of team accomplishments and a brief learning report, you can allocate 30-35 minutes for the key discussion question and end with 3-5 minutes of announcements.

At the end of the meeting, you can encourage people to identify questions that should be discussed at future meetings and tentatively schedule them. Another option is requesting discussion questions as part of your weekly info e-mail to staff.

THE SOCIAL PURPOSE OF MEETINGS

Face-to-face meetings are important because they provide the opportunity for people to connect with each other. You might consider scheduling coffee and bagels for each meeting (or at least once per month) with a different supervisor (including you) taking the responsibility. The coffee and bagels in the morning or cookies in the afternoon is aimed to promote socializing and camaraderie or to celebrate progress toward a goal or other team successes, such as getting the operational or capital budget approved. I call this "purposeful partying." We party for the purpose of supporting team efforts and promoting team cohesion. In local government, we unfortunately often ignore the importance of serious fun.

PHYSICAL SPACE

Some rooms are not suited for face-to-face discussions. Make sure you are not all cramped and that there is a round table around which everyone can sit. If there isn't a round table in your department offices, find a location that has one. Having a rectangular table at which the manager sits at the head of the table only reinforces that leading the meeting is the manager's responsibility (instead of a collective responsibility).

DISCUSSION LEADERS

You don't want to be solely responsible for leading effective meetings and engaging employees. Therefore, you can ask a specific staff person to present a learning report or plan on kick-starting the discussion on a particular item. Of course, in presenting a challenge to be discussed, the staff person needs to prepare a concise summary of the issue and one or two provocative questions for the group to consider.

Preparing for the Meeting

Even though you and your agency might be overwhelmed and trying to move as fast as you can, you must take the time to think through and prepare for your weekly meeting with staff.

In advance of the meeting, I suggest that you. . .

- Think through what you want to achieve with respect to the one key discussion item
- Send out the agenda in advance and ask people to think about how to address the key question to be discussed
- Identify some people to kick-start the conversation (and note them on the agenda)
- Ask one or two specific individuals to offer contrarian views on the key question in order to generate healthy discussion (yes, plant some divergent opinions).

Conducting the Meeting

In conducting the staff meeting, you might want to rotate the responsibility of facilitating the session and recording key points or decisions.

To engage everyone, be modest, ask questions, and request help in addressing the challenge under discussion (see Career Compass No. 32: The Power of Vulnerability). At the beginning of the discussion, you might also want to first ask questions or the opinions of lower-status or typically reticent people.

To deal with people who wander off target, you might need to refocus the person. For instance, "Jerry, I see your point. Can we talk about your concern after the meeting?" If someone is in the habit of making speeches, you might need to talk to the person before the meeting and encourage the person to allow others to also express their views.

Following Up

After the meeting, you or a designee should draft a no-more-than one-page e-mail summarizing specific assignments, action steps, and timelines for reporting back.

Other Suggestions

Here are some other ideas that colleagues have suggested to me:

Hold a "standing" meeting. To stay within your allotted 50 minutes for the staff meeting, occasionally ask everyone to hold the meeting standing up. Standing meetings tend to eliminate a lot of speeches and helps focus people.

Take a walk. To generate a more comfortable discussion of a tough issue, request that everyone pair up, take a 20-minute walk, exchange views in their pairs, return to the meeting and then share their perspectives in the larger group as a launch into a fuller discussion. Of course, the walk is also healthy and refreshes people.

To add a meeting, kill a meeting. If you want to add a special meeting to focus on a critical issue or a new direction, don't just add a meeting. Eliminate one.

Declare your decision-making approach for each question. It is easy for people to get confused about their role in deciding a question, especially if the leader switches decision-making approaches for different types of issues. So before discussing a key question or challenge, declare yourself as the leader. Are you asking for people to the make the decision? Have you made a tentative decision and are asking for feedback? Are you requesting input and then you will decide? Have you already made the decision and are simply announcing it? Be clear about what you are asking for. Otherwise people will get mixed messages about how the decision will be made and will over time just shut down.

Figuring Out What Works

Effectively facilitating meetings is a critical competency for leaders. This competency is only developed over time after evaluating your meeting management efforts, testing out new approaches and seeing what works and what does not work, and then practicing some more. Self-criticism, feedback from others, including coaches, and being on the look-out for best practices will help you along this journey.

Here are two resources in respect to best practices:

Amy Gallo, "The Seven Imperatives to Keeping Meetings on Track," *hbr.org* blog, Dec 20, 2013.

Roger Schwarz, Smart Leaders, Smarter Teams: How You and Your Team Get Unstuck To Get Results, Jossey-Bass, March 2013.

Enhancing Your Leadership Quotient

Meetings don't have to be boring or dreaded affairs. Successful leaders know that meetings serve a number of important purposes and therefore think through what they are trying to achieve as the result of the meeting. They prepare for the session, take steps to engage participants in meaningful ways, and ensure that everyone's time adds value.

In the process, leaders increase their ability to connect with others, create rapport, solve problems, and increase the likelihood that others will follow.

39

The Courage to Do the Right Thing

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest helps us find our backbone.

I am a Finance Department manager in a city that is facing a deteriorating fiscal situation and the organization is depending on our budget team to come up with reasonable solutions. Here's my problem. The finance director is recommending a city budget that contains, in my opinion, (and I believe in the opinion of a few other team members) some faulty assumptions.

We've had several budget team meetings but no one has directly questioned the finance director, who is a strong-willed individual who demands loyalty. I feel the need to speak up but I might suffer negative consequences or retaliation. To be honest, I'm afraid that I won't be seen as a team player and my future prospects may be jeopardized. I've asked another Finance team member for advice but she suggests that I just go along—it's not worth taking on the finance director.

Having said all that, I believe that it is my professional responsibility and ethical obligation to call out some of these questionable assumptions.

I am energized by my role and responsibility in the city organization but I do not know what to do. Can you help?

In our professional (as well as personal) lives, there is often a need to speak up or take other action but we fear the negative consequences. Typical situations may occur when you feel the need to

- Say something that a person of authority and power doesn't want to hear
- Inform a higher authority of a serious ethical breach on the part of a co-worker
- Lead a needed organizational or community project that will face significant opposition
- Oppose a development project proposed by a powerful developer who has influence with the council
- Promote the best candidate for the organization even though the selection is unpopular with employees or some council members.

All of these situations, including your dilemma of "speaking truth to power," invoke personal fears. We must act, yet we fear to act because of the possible consequences.

Originally published on the ICMA website April 26, 2014.

Courageous people tend to do two things. First, they acknowledge their fears and often share their fears with trusted colleagues, friends or family members. . . . Second, after acknowledging their fears, courageous people act anyway.

During my career as a local government manager, I often feared what would happen if I spoke up or took unpopular action. I especially feared that

- I would be ignored
- I would lose city council or organizational support.
- My colleagues would not like me.
- My efforts would fail and others would perceive me as an ineffectual leader.
- If I failed, I would be less likely to be followed in the future.

Yet—in spite of these fears—our values, professional ethics, or responsibilities to others require us to act anyway.

In encouraging you to take action, let me emphasize one caveat: When we feel compelled to act, it is important to consider the "how" of taking action. The WAY we do something can determine how others react to our action.

Taking Action in Spite of Our Fears

So, how do we deal with personal fears so we can act on our values or convictions? Here are some ideas.

1. BE CLEAR ABOUT THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF TAKING NO ACTION

If you act, there may be consequences. If you don't act, there will also be consequences. For example, in your case, keeping quiet may likely result in an adopted budget that is unrealistic. Because the city would not have confronted its fiscal problems earlier on, the consequences may include much greater budget cuts or even lay-offs at mid-year or next year affecting service recipients and employees (and their families). More severe cutbacks later on will be much more difficult to manage. In addition, the reputations of the Finance Department and its managers may be damaged by recommending an out-of-whack budget.

2. ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR FEARS

All of us have personal fears. Fears are stories that we all tell ourselves. Anyone who says that they have no fears is lying.

Courageous people tend to do two things. First, they acknowledge their fears and often share their fears with trusted colleagues, friends or family members. Saying what you fear allows you to address your fear in one way or another. Undefined or unacknowledged fear inhibits action and incapacitates us.

Second, after acknowledging their fears, courageous people act anyway.

3. ASK YOURSELF: "WHAT'S THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN?"

My mother Rosy always asked me as a young man two important questions: "Frank, what's the worst that can happen?" And then, "How likely is the worst thing that can happen?" For instance, if I took action

- Would I really get fired?
- Would people stop following me?
- Would my reputation be seriously damaged?

Once I acknowledged that most of these negative results were not likely, my mom urged me to "go for it."

4. CALCULATE YOUR BANK ACCOUNT OF CREDIBILITY

As good performers and leaders who exert positive influence, we continuously make deposits into a bank account of credibility and support. However, we tend to undervalue how much we've accumulated into our account. If we fail to bring a controversial project across the finish line or if top management disapproves of us questioning some action, we are merely making a "withdrawal" from our bank account. If we've deposited over time $100,000 into the account, we can survive a $10,000 withdrawal.

5. ENSURE THAT COURAGEOUS ACTION IS ALIGNED WITH VALUES AND PASSION

You are more likely to take action if your courageous act is aligned with your values, ethics, and passion. In my case, I have always been committed to affordable housing. Given this passion, I am more likely to take action to promote a housing project for low-income families even in the face of criticism or opposition.

6. SEEK ALLIES

Before taking action, seek out colleagues (not just the one other Finance team manager) to verify that they have the same concerns. Assuming that a colleague or

two shares your worries, suggest that they join you at the upcoming budget team meeting in expressing your collective misgivings. Or, if they hesitate to join you, ask if you can mention that they too share your concerns when you bring up the issue at the meeting.

Even if they are too afraid and won't publicly support you, you will at least know that you are on the right track.

7. DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN A CALCULATED RISK WORTH TAKING AND A RECKLESS ACTION

During my long career, I've taken a number of courageous actions in leading efforts to promote homeless or day-worker projects or to restructure labor contracts, all in the face of significant opposition. Unfortunately, I have also been reckless on several occasions even though I thought at the time that I was being courageous.

One such experience was opposing citizen oversight of the Police Department. Some community activists urged the council to directly supervise the department or appoint a Citizen's Police Commission to oversee the police and ensure that police officers did not racially profile citizens. As city manager, I did not think there was much evidence to support such radical proposals. At several heated public hearings, I took what I thought was courageous action opposing the proposals as interference with professional policing and undercutting the council-manager form of government. During one hearing, a respected council member suggested an independent police auditor on contract who would evaluate any citizen complaints and police procedures. Even though the police chief (who was a trusted colleague and confidante) thought that this was a good compromise, I held my ground and recommended against the contract and lost some credibility with the council.

As it turned out, the police auditor has served a useful purpose in validating most police actions while making sound recommendations to improve policies and procedures. My opposition did not serve me or the organization well. It was reckless.

There is smart courage and then there is reckless, stupid courage.

8. GET SOME ADVICE

It is extremely helpful to have an informal coach inside or outside the organization who can ensure that your reasoning is sound, validate your concerns, and provide perspective. A coach can also help you confront your personal fears, assess the probable consequences of any action, suggest how to seek support for your action, and help you rehearse what to say and how to say it.

We all have a lot of nay-sayers in our lives. Coaches can be yay-sayers.

9. SEEK SOCIAL SUPPORT

Even if family members, friends or colleagues don't have any practical advice, they can listen to your concerns and fears. Most importantly, they will validate (without saying much) that they care for you, support you, and are proud of you regardless of what happens.

Social support is critical when you are trying to do the right thing.

10. PREPARE YOUR BOSS

In private, query the finance director about the numbers and his rationale for being aggressive in his financial projections. As Steven Covey advises, "seek to understand before being understood." If you then still have misgivings, let your boss know that you have concerns so he will not be surprised at the team meeting. If a group shares your misgivings, also let him know.

11. PRACTICE, SMILE, AND BE OPEN

Make a few notes of the key points or questions that you want to raise. Practice making your remarks. And smile while you deliver them. Avoid grimacing, frowning, and making "closed off" gestures like crossing your arms. Smiling makes it easier for you to deliver the message and makes it easier for your boss to accept it.

12. MINIMIZE THE POTENTIAL FALL-OUT

Taking courageous action is a calculated risk. The way in which you speak truth to power or take other courageous action may help minimize any fall-out.
For example, you might want to state your concerns as questions to be addressed by the budget team:

- "Can you tell me more so I can better understand the validity of our assumptions?"
- "If we are questioned by the city manager or city council, do we have solid data to support our projections?"
- "What are the upsides and downsides of being more conservative in our projections?"
- "If we are wrong about our revenue or expenditure projections, what are the consequences for the organization and the community?"

It is also important not to accuse anyone. You should use "I" or "we," not "you." For instance, "I have a concern that these projections need more work."

You can also tie your ethical concern to a priority of the city manager or the council. For example, you

might suggest that "The council has an established priority of creating a sustainable budget. Do we think that this proposed budget is sustainable over time?"

13. REFERENCE YOUR PROFESSIONAL CODE OF ETHICS

Your professional code of ethics can give you some cover for speaking up. As one example, the ICMA Code of Ethics requires that we as local government managers maintain the public trust (Tenet No. 2), be dedicated to the highest ideals of honor and integrity (Tenet No. 3), and serve the best interests of the public (Tenet No. 4).

The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) also has a code of professional ethics that stresses professional integrity, especially in presenting financial information to public officials and the public (Tenet No. 4).

You can say: "Our code of ethics compels us to provide the most valid and reliable data to our elected officials. Based on our code, may I put another perspective on the table?"

Contingency Plan

If all efforts fail and the finance director insists on using the dubious projections, you should at the very least write a memo to file identifying your misgivings and the steps that you've taken to question the projections.

In addition, you should find a way to informally let the city manager know of the concerns raised by you and others. The city manager represents the organization and the staff and has an ethical obligation to present a reliable budget to the council. While loyalty is important, I believe that your code of professional ethics should trump loyalty and the chain of command.

Whether you decide to reach out to the city manager might depend on any number of factors:

- In your judgment, how critical are the budget projections to the organization and the community?
- Does the culture of the organization encourage the consideration of different perspectives and opinions?
- Do organizational members talk about ethics and how they affect decisions and actions?
- Is the organization small enough that you know the city manager and you can find the opportunity to "run into" him or her?
- Is the city manager open to contact from those lower in the organization?
- How vindictive is the finance director?
- If you do contact the city manager and the finance director is vindictive, are you willing to look for a new job?

Courage Is a Skill

Courage is like any skill: you develop it over time by doing something and then improving what and how you do it. By practicing small acts of courage, you will learn what works and what does not. Over time, you will become more courageous.

Support Courage in Others

If you act courageously, others will tend to gradually take smart risks and act with more courage. As a formal or informal leader, you can model the way.

To encourage a more courageous and risk-taking culture, you must support others who commit small acts of courage. You can:

- Talk about the implications of ethics in work group meetings
- Act as a sounding board for others who might fear taking courageous action
- Provide social support
- Join colleagues seeking allies in doing the right thing
- Recognize co-workers in public when they have acted courageously.

To create great organizations, we need a lot of small heroes, not a few big ones.

A Fuller Life

As Rosabeth Moss Kanter says in an *hbr.org* blog piece "Courage in the C-Suite," passion, commitment to shared goals, colleagueship, and practice all support courage. "When others are counting on you and backing you, and when you're acting in the service of others rather than for personal glory, courageous acts become easier."

It's a terrible thing to live our lives in fear. Therefore, I'll conclude with a quote from the poet Anais Nin: "Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage."

40

"Why Can't We Just Get Along?"

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest addresses workplace conflict.

I manage a city planning team in a mid-sized community and report to the community development director. The team includes current planning, which focuses on development projects. There's a lot of pressure to approve the projects and get them "out the door" since our community needs the economic boost and the jobs. The team also involves advanced planning, which deals with large area plans; transportation, bike and pedestrian issues; and sustainability goals. Two key players on the team, the supervising planners for current planning and advanced planning, are high-performing in their own realms yet don't get along. In fact, they don't seem to like each other and the conflict has begun to hurt our group productivity and performance. I fear that the rift has begun to affect their staff who have taken sides, jeopardizing the communication and collaboration that we need across the two units and within the team.

In our team meetings, the two supervising planners often bicker about projects and approaches. When things get a bit heated, other team members withdraw. To make matters worse, they send dueling emails criticizing projects or plans being conducted by the other group. I don't like the in-fighting and assumed that these two professionals could work together even though they have different perspectives. However, I now need to do something.

Originally published on the ICMA website July 15, 2014.

Do you have any advice on helping to minimize the conflict so it doesn't continue to undercut our performance as a team?

It sounds bad and it seems to be getting worse. I can understand your feeling that professional staff should just get along and avoid personal conflicts. However, ignoring this workplace conflict is not working.

There have always been conflicts in organizations. In recent years, conflicts have become more widespread and intense for a number of reasons:

- Local governments like other organizations have less hierarchy, have become flatter, and require collaboration across boundaries of units, divisions, and departments.
- The work often entails cross-functional project teams coordinated by project leaders who may not have formal authority over team members.

To effectively intervene, you must differentiate between bad conflict and good conflict. . . . A healthy conflict involves disagreement and debate over ideas, ways of addressing difficult challenges, and pivotal decisions about priorities and resources.

- Our diverse workforces include employees of different generations, values, cultural perspectives, and life experiences.

Local governments are experiencing increased expectations to perform in spite of reduced resources.

Our increasing reliance on electronic communications does not help us deal with issues of great complexity and divergent interests.

Bad and Good Conflict

To effectively intervene, you must differentiate between bad conflict and good conflict. Unhealthy conflict is related to people fighting over position, power, or pay; seeking personal visibility; or currying favor with higher-ups and political interests. This kind of in-fighting is toxic and causes staff to take sides, saps energy, and undercuts team performance. Being nice and not calling out this disruptive behavior are very costly.

However, there is also healthy conflict. This involves disagreement and debate over ideas, ways of addressing difficult challenges, and pivotal decisions about priorities and resources. Healthy conflicts help teams to

- Come to terms with challenges that do not have right or wrong solutions,
- Ensure that key decisions are well-reasoned.
- Identify and mitigate risks.
- Promote creative problem-solving and innovation.

As Michael Feiner suggests (in *hbr.org* blog "Make Conflict Drive Results"), managers should view conflict as cholesterol: there is bad cholesterol and good cholesterol. You want to minimize and lower bad cholesterol and cultivate good cholesterol.

Once you differentiate between these two kinds of conflict, you must take action. It is your role as team leader to address conflict. Conflict management and conflict resolution are critical soft skills required of leaders. The question then is how do you start to address the in-fighting.

Steps to Consider

Here are some suggestions:

Get Some Assistance

Given that conflict management is not your strong suit, you need to get some help. Do some reading (quickly) about addressing workplace conflict. Ask a coach or a well-seasoned senior manager inside or outside the organization to give you some advice on how to proceed.

Talk to the Director

Since you are accountable for the performance of the planning team, I suggest that you share the problem with the community development director so she knows that you are aware of the conflict and that you have some ideas on how to address the challenge (see below). Ask for some advice and hopefully engage the director as a partner. The director may have some good ideas on steps to take. At the very least, she will appreciate that you are confronting the problem.

Seek to Understand

Even though we often think that rifts are personality conflicts, you must seek to understand any underlying issues, perspectives, and interests. I suggest that you individually approach each supervising planner, have coffee offsite, and ask each of them to clarify their concerns and issues about the big issues that the planning team is confronting, such as development pressures, economic vitality, walkable and bike-friendly communities, or sustainability. (If they get into personalities, steer them back to the issues and their perspectives and interests.)

To assist in this inquiry, ask open-ended questions, including:

- From your perspective, what are the big challenges we face?
- What are your ideas for addressing the big dilemmas?
- How can I as the planning manager support your group?
- How can the other planning unit assist your group?
- How can you and your staff support the other group?

If the disruptive behavior is a recent phenomenon, or has gotten much worse in the last few months, you

must try to figure out what is going on and show some empathy for the other person. For instance, you can ask:

- What is worrying you about our work together? What do you fear is happening?
- Are there stressors outside of work that are bothering you?
- How can I help?

Emphasize Importance of Healthy Debate

As planning manager, you should discuss with the whole team the difference between bad conflict and good conflict and strongly voice your support for healthy conflict and debate about differing ideas, perspectives and approaches.

Insist on Accountability

In your individual meetings with the supervising planners, you can identify some specific situations where the conflict has been unhealthy and the in-fighting has negatively impacted the larger team. You can also suggest that the adversarial behavior is hurting their credibility and reputation in the department and the organization.

To promote accountability, consider the following:

- Let each supervisor know that his or her individual performance will not only be judged by the productivity of their planning group but also by their performance as members of the larger team. Include team behavior as an element in their individual performance evaluations.
- Identify several very specific behaviors (e.g., disparaging another team member during a meeting, sending hostile emails) that you will not tolerate. In other words, identify some minimal standards of conduct.
- If there are relapses into old behavior patterns, again meet with the supervisor and insist on professional behavior.
- If the negative behaviors continue, take progressive discipline (inform the director and ask the HR Department for guidance).

Use Incentives

As planning manager, you can provide incentives to promote team collaboration. These incentives may include additional budget for cross-functional endeavors, recognition inside the department and throughout the organization, opportunities to get visibility with the city council or professional groups, and merit or performance rewards.

Develop a Team Charter

I recommend that all teams develop a simple written charter in order to guide team members, minimize negative behaviors, and hold people accountable. At a retreat, focus on the team (not your normal urgent business items) and develop through dialogue a team charter that might include:

- Team purpose
- Guiding values
- Norms or expectations about behavior
- Operating procedures for the team (who develops and distributes agenda, how is the agenda structured, how often does team meet, how long are meetings, who leads discussions of agenda items, etc. (see Career Compass #38--"Your Staff Meetings Don't Have To Be Dreary")
- Rules for engagement (for example, how do we deal with disagreements).

Once the charter has been developed, you and other team members can refer back to it when unhealthy conflict or negative behaviors occur. Some teams attach their charter to each meeting agenda.

Model the Way

To promote positive behaviors, you as team leader need to model those behaviors. For instance, don't start with your ideas; ask others to voice their opinions. In addition, encourage team members to challenge each other's ideas. Tell the team members that "I want your ideas. I want to hear different ways of addressing the challenge. I want you to challenge our thinking."

You can ask some clarifying or probing questions, such as "What would be the impact on the development community if we imposed these requirements?" Or, "What are the likely results of this proposed development on our community 10 years from now?" Or, "How might we make the proposed project or long-range plan even better?"

Suggest Some Behaviors

You might suggest some behaviors to the planning supervisors as the team debates ideas, issues, and approaches. For instance, they can ask questions instead of taking positions. You can also suggest that they hold back their opinions until other team members voice their ideas. You can encourage them to remain calm in the face of fighting language or, if they are feeling angry, they may ask that the item be brought back at the next meeting.

Of course, the higher the emotional intelligence of the supervisors, the more likely that they will consider new approaches and adjust their behaviors.

Whenever there is some improvement in behavior, let them know that you noticed their efforts and congratulate them.

Explore Converging Interests

You and the team might be able to identify some overlapping interests. For example, walkable and bike-friendly communities are not antithetical to economic growth. In fact, healthy and sustainable communities might support economic vitality. Therefore, you can help the team members listen to each other, identify different interests (not positions), and integrate interests.

One technique you may try is called "convergence/divergence." Where there is a difficult challenge, ask each team member to use post-it notes to identify value statements, ideas, and perspectives. By posting the notes and then sorting them, the team can identify themes of convergence and divergence and then discuss how to integrate the interests. You may facilitate the discussion by asking: "How might we achieve significant economic growth and promote long-term sustainable improvement in the community?"

Compromise or Accommodate

Again, depending on the emotional intelligence of the pair, you may be able to counsel the individuals about ignoring some opinions of the other colleague if they are unimportant. There may be room to compromise, such as the LEED certification of a new community building ("gold" instead of "platinum"), or accommodate some idea from the other supervisor that would not jeopardize the overall goal.

Provide Ongoing Feedback

Things are not going to get better overnight. As the manager, you must relentlessly provide feedback. If one of the supervisors interrupts the other one or rolls his eyes at an idea advocated by the other supervisor, you need to follow up and have a closed-door meeting with the offender. Wait a period of time so emotions diminish (but not too long). In the meeting, use "I" not "you" language. Instead of saying "You belittled the ideas of the other supervisor," you can say "In yesterday's team meeting, I noticed that when Joe was presenting his project your body language changed and you reacted quite strongly to Joe's ideas. I'd like to explore with you how you might express your concerns in a more productive way."

Where there is a difficult challenge, ask each team member to use post-it notes to identify value statements, ideas, and perspectives. By posting the notes and then sorting them, the team can identify themes of convergence and divergence and then discuss how to integrate the interests.

Other questions could include:

- When you interrupted your colleague, how do you think he felt?
- When you rolled your eyes, how do you think the other team members perceived the interaction?
- If the city council, city manager, community development director, other department heads, or department stakeholders were viewing us interact, what would they conclude?
- What do our stakeholders need from us to address the situation we were discussing?
- The next time that you feel irritated or put upon or attacked, what specific behaviors could you employ?
- How can I help?

(See Liane Davey, *hbr.org* blog "Managing Two People Who Hate Each Other.")

If Things Don't Begin To Improve

If the negative behavior continues, you must call it out during the team meeting. Again, you must remain calm and respond with statements such as:

"Marlene, I sense that Joe has more to say and you seem to be interrupting. Our team charter states that we encourage people's ideas, so let's hear Joe out."

"Joe, I sense that you are threatening Marlene's unit by saying that you won't have anything to do with the planning project. Why don't we all suggest some steps we could consider to minimize the concerns that you raised?"

Heal the Rift

Assuming that the two combatants understand the importance of minimizing unhealthy conflict, are concerned with how others perceive them, or at least

understand your minimal expectations, you may be able to provide some opportunities for them to demonstrate that they can work together. Meet with the pair and suggest a simple assignment that they can address together. They can then report as a pair back to the team and begin to demonstrate their commitment to new behaviors and to the team itself.

If they respond well to the opportunity, give them a bigger challenge.

If All Else Fails

As you proceed, you need to keep the community director apprised of your progress and any improvements. Assuming there is little progress, you must document continuing poor team behavior and notify one or both of the supervisors that they are not meeting your minimal standards. Offer your support or any resources (e.g., coaching through the city's Employee Assistance Program). If negative behaviors persist, you must initiate disciplinary action. Continued bickering and fighting have too high a cost and cannot be tolerated.

Conflict Management is a Leadership Skill

Conflict management is a key competency that will help you effectively lead your team. It is also a skill that will differentiate you from colleagues who are not adept at dealing with organizational conflicts.

Like any skill, conflict management requires practice. Over time, you will discover what works for you and what doesn't.

Finally, I want to emphasize that conflict resolution is a skill that will boost creative problem-solving. A lot of our challenges in local government have no right or wrong answers. We need healthy disagreements to help us discover innovative approaches.

41

The Post-Heroic Leader

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest kickstarts our leadership journey in 14 steps.

I lead the Parks and Facilities Division in a large city government. We are faced with major challenges in addressing the drought. My division needs to help the city reduce city water consumption by a council mandate of 20 percent. Since our parks and public facilities use a lot of water, we have a big challenge. We have old irrigation and plumbing systems that leak; we need to invest in cost-effective technologies to help reduce water usage; and we must enlist the users of our parks and facilities in helping reduce consumption. At the same time, we have precious assets that must be preserved for the future—unique parks, an arboretum, and well-used and valued golf courses and sports complexes.

I recently went to a conference and the keynoter exhorted us local government managers to be great leaders and inspire others. My parks and recreation director wants me to "take charge" and come up with some big ideas to solve our drought-related challenge.

I want to respond but I'm not a take-charge kind of guy. In fact, I am an introvert. I don't have the charisma gene. Now, I think I do some things fairly well. I'm committed to public service and preserving our community's great park and public space resources. I support our team and the team members appreciate it.

I'd like to help solve the drought challenge. But I don't have enough authority or power to solve the problem. Moreover, I'm told I have to be a much better "out-there" leader if I want to move up in the organization

I don't know how to do this big leadership thing. Do I have what it takes?

American culture unfortunately mythologizes leaders as bigger-than-life heroes who through the force of their personalities and ideas lead their teams to greatness. Not so. Heroic leaders do not create greatness which is sustainable over time.

In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins found that those corporations that are successful and sustain greatness are not led by charismatic leaders but rather by humble and committed executives. These humble leaders are committed to the enterprise, its

Originally published on the ICMA website October 13, 2014.

mission, and certain enduring values, yet at the same time they help their organizations adapt to changing times and circumstances.

LEADERSHIP HAS MANY "VOICES"

You're a quiet guy. Do not despair! There is no one model of effective leadership. As Kevin Sharer, former Amgen CEO noted, "leadership has many voices." Thankfully, different kinds of leaders have different "gifts" to give away and make a positive difference. You are an introvert and can contribute a great deal given your strengths and attributes. The key is to be the best you can be. It is clear that you are committed to the mission of the parks and public facilities division. You are supportive of your team. You want to make a positive contribution. Therefore, the issue is how to become an even better leader.

LEADERS CAN'T FORCE PEOPLE TO FOLLOW

Management is based on one's positional or formal authority. By using their positional authority, managers can force a minimal level of performance by the employees who report to them.

In contrast, leadership is based on one's interpersonal attributes. Leadership is about winning the hearts and minds of people. It is about mobilizing people to do difficult work and take action when there is often no perfect solution.

As American author and poet Charles Lauer has said, "Leaders don't force people to follow. They invite them on a journey." I love the "journey" metaphor. The nature of a journey is that you know the general direction but not the precise destination.

So, with respect to addressing the drought, how do you invite employees in your division and department, other departments, as well as external stakeholders, on this journey of reducing water consumption and at the same time preserving your city assets? Is it a worthy and energizing journey for others? Are you passionate enough about the journey? If not, why should anyone follow?

INTROVERTS CAN BE GREAT LEADERS TOO

Introverts like yourself can be very effective leaders, if they leverage their strengths. Introverts often exhibit some very positive behaviors:

- They ask questions. (See Career Compass No. 24: Asking Powerful Questions)
- They encourage others to speak first.
- They listen before speaking.

Because introverted leaders ask questions, listen, and generate ideas from others, their own ideas are better informed. Most importantly, others are contributing to the ultimate plan and get their fingerprints on the plan. They "own" the plan because they helped create it.

You are likely to come up with a good drought response plan if you ask the right questions and listen to members of your team, other division and department groups, and external stakeholders, such as park and facility user groups.

HUMBLE SERVANT-LEADERS

Great leaders are "servant-leaders." In his classic essay "The Servant as Leader," Robert Greenleaf emphasized that servant leaders are committed to the organization, their co-workers, and the people they serve. They are stewards of the people, resources, assets, and the organizations they serve. Servant-leaders are "other-centered," as opposed to "me-centered." They seek to influence (rather than increase their own power and status) so that they can better make a difference and serve others. It is not about their great ideas, but the best ideas that will come from everybody in an effort to address the problem, such as the drought challenge.

While great leaders are humble, they are still passionate. They just demonstrate their passion in a quiet manner. They are not boisterous about their commitments but they demonstrate their commitments every day in small ways. They exhibit their passion through their commitment to certain values and goals and through their persistence, tenacity, hard work, and ethical behavior. They don't ask of others what they are unwilling to do. They model the way.

AN ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE

The drought response is not a "technical" challenge that can be addressed through technical solutions, but rather an "adaptive" challenge. As suggested by Ron Heifetz and his colleagues at Harvard, adaptive challenges usually involve many stakeholders, often with differing values, perspectives, and preferred solutions to the challenge.

Technical problems are "tame" problems that can be addressed by managers using their formal authority. Adaptive challenges are "wicked" problems that require leaders to bring together different groups, start conversations, and "figure it out" together, recognizing that there are no perfect solutions. The water crisis for your city is certainly an adaptive challenge.

Humble leaders start conversations because they understand that they don't have the one perfect solution. Conversations help us understand people's hopes and dreams, their concerns and fears, and where they are in their current thinking.

CROSS BOUNDARIES, START CONVERSATIONS AND AIM FOR SHARED LEADERSHIP

Yes, you do not have sufficient authority or power to successfully address the drought challenge. Rarely do leaders have sufficient authority or power to solve any significant problem.

Because responding to the drought is an adaptive challenge requiring leadership, you need to cross boundaries. Certainly you need to engage your division employees since they will have a lot of ideas about how to reduce water use in your facilities and minimize the impact to the park assets and the public users. However, you cannot solve the problem solely in your division silo. You need to engage other groups and start conversations about everybody being part of the solution. These groups include:

- Other divisions in the department (for example, recreation and cultural arts divisions)
- Other departments (for example, utilities)
- External stakeholders (for example, park user groups)
- The general public.

Given the drought challenge, with whom do you and other team members need to start conversations? What is the nature and content of the conversations? As poet David Whyte has pointed out, "leadership is the art of conversation."

Once they cross boundaries and start conversations, humble leaders aim for shared leadership. They encourage leadership from wherever it may come. For instance, they encourage employees to contribute to the thinking and problem-solving and help create a better enterprise. Given the drought challenge, they ask:

- How do we address the leakage problems in our old irrigation and plumbing systems? Where can we best invest limited financial resources?
- How do we cut water usage in ways that have a minimum impact on the public (for example, stop washing the park maintenance vehicles)?
- How do we explore technology responses to better use limited water (for example, using soil moisture meters to measure the moisture in our golf course turf and avoid over-watering)?
- How do we communicate with the user groups and the general public about our department's response to the drought crisis and encourage the public to modify its behavior and become part of the solution (for example, let's conserve at home and at work so we can save our parks for the future)?
- Which other groups (for example, neighborhood associations that are adjacent to parks) do we need to engage?

AVOID SEEKING "BUY-IN"

We in local government often say that we need to get "buy-in." The term and the mindset suggest that we have a solution and therefore we need to convince/manipulate others to "buy it."

Humble leaders start conversations because they understand that they don't have the one perfect solution. Conversations help us understand people's hopes and dreams, their concerns and fears, and where they are in their current thinking.

Conversations are not about teaching but learning about different perspectives and generating additional ideas.

FOCUS ON THE "WHY"

In order for people to join you in addressing the water crisis in creative ways, they need to understand the "why." Typically, we start by discussing the "what" and the "how." Rather, we need to begin with the "why" which involves the meaning and purpose behind our endeavor.

What is the why of the drought response? Water is life. Water is required for functioning of the community. Water is needed to preserve certain park assets and amenities for the present and the future.

Once the meaning of the journey is explored, you and others can explore the what and how of your response.

DIRECTING VS. ENGAGING

When you gather staff and/or stakeholder groups to brainstorm ideas, people will not join you in the leadership journey if you have a command-and-control mindset and typically "suck all the air out of the room."

Humble leaders not only recognize the contributions of others, they demonstrate gratitude. They say "thank you" and "I'm grateful." Followers connect with grateful leaders, and they too begin to feel grateful for the opportunity to serve and do great things together.

Employees and other stakeholders won't share their best thinking and won't commit their discretionary effort. They need to be engaged in authentic ways.

"Taking charge" is not telling people how the department will respond to the drought. It is engaging people, talking about the "why" behind the drought response, and supporting the team or teams involved. It is engaging people, yet letting go so they respond and own the problem with you.

ASK FOR HELP

For employees and residents and other users to step up and contribute to a multi-prong solution, you must demonstrate not only humility ("I don't have all the answers"), but also some vulnerability. By asking for ideas and assistance, you exhibit vulnerability. People connect with leaders who are human and show that they are not all-knowing and all-powerful. When people connect with such leaders, they will contribute and decide to follow. (See Career Compass No. 32: The Power of Vulnerability.)

ARE YOU A MULTIPLIER OR DIMINISHER?

Heroic leaders diminish the ideas and contributions of others. Because they do not share the problem and engage others in developing new approaches, they "own" the problem and no one struggles with them to solve it. Humble leaders open up the dimensions of the problem to others, ask for their ideas and help, and support the team in solving the problem with others.

As suggested by Liz Wiseman in her book *Multipliers-How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*, heroic leaders with big ideas and their own visions for the future diminish the talent and intellect of people around them, at precisely the point that we need to increase everybody's productivity and creativity to address adaptive challenges.

In contrast, "Multiplers"

- See the genius in others and amplify the smarts and capabilities of the team
- Shift from answers to questions
- Extend the challenge to others
- Stimulate debate about ideas before making decisions
- Install ownership and accountability throughout the team.

SHOW GRATITUDE

Humble leaders not only recognize the contributions of others, they demonstrate gratitude. They say "thank you" and "I'm grateful." Followers connect with grateful leaders, and they too begin to feel grateful for the opportunity to serve and do great things together.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT BEING NOTICED

You don't have to be an "out-there" leader to move up the organization. As you begin to effectively address adaptive challenges by enlisting others, you will be seen as a highly valued leader, be given bigger opportunities to serve, and be promoted into more responsible positions in the organization. You may have been promoted into management because of your technical skills, but you will advance into senior management because of your leadership or "soft" people skills.

FIND THE LEADER WITHIN

In summary, as you confront the drought and other adaptive challenges, be your authentic self and use the "gifts" that make you special. Engage your team, convene others, start conversations, listen, and begin better defining the problem and possible responses. Then of course take action with others even when there is no perfect solution. Fix things up as you go along.

Through this kind of quiet leadership, you can help your organization decrease water consumption, and at the same time, preserve unique park assets for future generations.

42

Trust Me!

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest helps us win our team's confidence with a recipe for trust.

For the past nine months, I have served as the unit head of the city's Transportation and Parking Division. We have a big and often controversial agenda and are expected to deal with a number of traffic-calming, downtown parking, and pedestrian and bike safety projects during the next two years. I'm energized by the agenda and want to exert leadership for our unit in taking on these projects. The problem is that the employees in the unit do not seem quite as enthusiastic, are tentative about any creative ideas, and in some cases resist my leadership. In staff meetings I've tried to push forward with my goals for the unit but with poor results.

Prior to my appointment as unit manager, the employees did not have a good relationship with their previous manager. Employees found him aloof, didn't see him as their advocate, and perceived him as more concerned with the wants of top management than with any needs they have. The previous manager did not defend the good work of the unit when it was scrutinized by top management, the council, and the many different stakeholder groups. To make matters worse, the unit (like the rest of the organization) suffered through program cutbacks, loss of some benefits, and a few layoffs of colleagues.

I've tried being more assertive and demanding; however, after some reflection, I believe that there is not much

trust. I need my team members to trust me. Do you have any guidance? I hope it is not too late.

You have focused on the right issue. Followers won't decide to follow unless they trust you as the leader. Trust is the currency of leadership.

It is not too late to change the current dynamic. Therefore, the question is how do you build trust between you and the team. Trust is not created overnight. It is a slow process.

Here is how I suggest that you start.

Building Trust

CONNECT ON A PERSONAL LEVEL

Trust is based on people connecting with you on a personal level. Consequently, start by holding a series of ongoing one-to-one conversations with staff. At these one-to-one get-togethers, try to be authentic and

Originally published on the ICMA website January 14, 2015.

reveal something of yourself--your family and career, your hopes and dreams, your non-work interests and leisure pursuits. Inquire about the family, career, and personal interests of the employee. Share your goals and expectations for the division. Most importantly, ask how you can support the goals and efforts of your direct reports. Inquire about the obstacles that they face. Ask if they have the equipment, resources, and support they need to be successful.

Perhaps you can hold some of these conversations over coffee away from the office. Don't just meet once. Make these individual discussions an ongoing practice. Trust is not built in structured large-group staff meetings.

LOOK FOR SMALL WINS

To begin addressing people's skepticism, you should look for several small wins. Perhaps your unit needs more time to complete a traffic study. Or your team requires some more money for a specific consultant to help it finish up a bicycle corridor project. You can advocate with top management to get the time or to move budget monies around to support your unit. Make sure that you communicate in staff meetings how you responded to what you have heard from team members.

TO BUILD TRUST, SHOW TRUST

Think about how you can demonstrate trust in your team. For instance, perhaps a few of your unit members commute a long distance and have requested to telecommute and do their work from home once every two weeks. Work with the team to develop criteria for a pilot telecommute program and then implement it.

Trust must be reciprocal.

DEMONSTRATE PATIENCE

Since building trust takes time, it is necessary to show patience. While you have an ambitious agenda of key projects, you as the leader can show patience if

- The team is making ongoing progress
- People want to improve their performance and are open to learning from missteps
- Team members are assuming new positions or responsibilities or are taking on "stretch" assignments.

As Dan Rockwell states in the *Leadership Freak* blog, impatience by leaders creates fear, fractures relationships, and is perceived as arrogance. A team cannot be creative in an atmosphere of fear. And there cannot be trust without positive relationships.

Patience is not weakness. Just because you are patient doesn't mean that you aren't tenacious in the pursuit of team goals. It doesn't mean that you accept mediocrity.

Patience requires that you focus on solutions, progress, improvement, and employee learning and development. To do so, you must learn how to deal with frustration and demonstrate self-control.

DEMONSTRATE VALUES IN ACTION

As you share your values in one-to-one conversations and in staff meetings, look for ways to make your values visible and come to life. You will gain trust if people see your values in action.

Let's say that you have stressed learning as a value. If that's the case, explicitly tie stretch assignments, training, and debriefing experiences to your value of continuous learning.

If you have expressed your value of taking smart risks in support of building community and making a positive difference, ask the team to identify several creative solutions to a traffic-calming challenge. After the discussion, help the group select a proposed solution and then pursue it with the team taking some smart risks associated with the solution (see Career Compass No. 18: Taking Smart Risks).

ENHANCE CONNECTIONS AND SHOW YOU CARE

Trust is enhanced when there are positive social relationships on the team. Here are some ways to promote social connections and show that you care:

- Take a staff person for a morning coffee or an afternoon ice cream conversation.
- Conduct a walking meeting with individual staff.
- Provide bagels or cookies to celebrate team accomplishments.
- Schedule at the beginning of staff meetings a "take 5" segment so people can briefly share what is happening in their professional and personal lives.
- Shadow parking enforcement staff as they carry out their responsibilities in the downtown.
- Write personal notes (no e-mails!) to employees to recognize accomplishments and express gratitude for their effort, and support them when a family member has a health problem or when someone is suffering a loss.

OVER-COMMUNICATE

When there is not a lot of trust, a leader must communicate on a regular basis and with predictability.

Employees need to see continual progress toward team goals in order to stay self-motivated. In one-to-one conversations and unit meetings, ask team members to discuss progress and milestones met.

Certainly use e-mails but recognize that e-mails only provide information; they do not build trust. Make sure that you are communicating face-to-face in one-to-one informal conversations in addition to formal meetings. When you think that people are tired of hearing about values, vision, goals, and expectations, communicate some more and in different ways.

ACCEPT BLAME

Look for opportunities to acknowledge your mistakes and accept blame. Even if you are not completely at fault, take responsibility. And then ask: "What can we all learn from this experience as we move forward as a team?" As the leader, "model the way" so others take responsibility and commit to learn from mistakes.

Demonstrating this kind of vulnerability allows people to enhance their connection with you. You will gain a measure of trust.

ASK QUESTIONS, ENCOURAGE PEOPLE, AND HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE

The best way to engage employees, promote discretionary effort by everyone, and slowly engender trust is to ask questions, such as:

- What projects are the most important and should take priority? Why?
- What are the obstacles? How do we overcome or minimize them?
- How can I assist you as your manager?
- What are we learning for future practice?
- How might we creatively address this challenge?
- If we were to proceed, what would success look like?
- If you were in my role as unit manager tomorrow, what are the three things that you would do and why?

As the leader, you don't need to have all the answers. Everybody needs to contribute their ideas and perspectives so that they get their "fingerprints" on any plan.

As the team explores paths forward, encourage them as opposed to telling them what and how to do it. Then "monitor and mentor." You can hold people accountable if you have done a good job of expressing your expectations and identifying the metrics of success.

SHOW PROGRESS, SHARE CREDIT

As emphasized by Teresa Ambile in *The Progress Principle*, employees need to see continual progress toward team goals in order to stay self-motivated. In one-to-one conversations and unit meetings, ask team members to discuss progress and milestones met. As the leader, acknowledge and recognize individual and team efforts.

TELL THE UGLY TRUTH, SPREAD OPTIMISM

It is important that the unit can depend on you to provide the unvarnished truth about the environment in which it works. You therefore need to share information about city finances, the department budget, perspectives from top management and council members, and the "politics" of controversial projects. For example, unit members need to understand how transportation and parking projects are perceived by different stakeholder groups. Even as you spread the "ugly" or difficult news, you also have a role in encouraging the team, spreading optimism that good team efforts will ultimately prevail.

EXPLAIN YOUR DECISIONS

Trust is slowly built in an environment of transparency. Consequently, you must go out of your way to explain what is behind your decisions, such as reallocating staff and budget resources from a traffic-calming study to a parking demonstration project. People may not agree with your decisions but they will more easily understand and accept those decisions if they know the "why" behind them. As a boss, you must be open, even if you are personally inclined not to share what you are thinking.

SERVE THE TEAM

Team members will tend over time to trust you if you are perceived as a "servant leader." You serve the team by

- Asking questions
- Providing forthright information
- Letting people know what is expected of them

- Securing resources for the team
- Encouraging and guiding group members
- Advocating for the needs of the team
- Helping unit members cross boundaries and connect with stakeholders inside and outside the organization.

BUILD YOUR COMPETENCE

As you articulate and demonstrate your values and discuss what matters to you, you are focusing on character. You must also demonstrate competence. While you may have been appointed because of your analytic and management skills, you also must show that you are growing your technical and political astuteness.

You can grow your technical knowledge about transportation and parking issues by reading, going to workshops, and getting tutorials from various staff people in specific technical areas.

You can show and improve your political skills as you help your unit secure additional resources or get resources reallocated. You can help the unit "frame" projects differently for different groups. You can provide guidance so the team better engages stakeholder groups in controversial transportation and parking projects.

ENGAGE WITH STORIES

To make values and goals come alive, leaders must share their personal stories. For instance, you can discuss what people, events, and experiences have shaped you as a person and leader. You can explore what is important to you and why. And then you can encourage others to do the same.

Facts, figures, and data are important but they don't "stick" and they don't inspire others to act. Stories are "data with a soul."

One way to use stories as a way to engage staff and create commitment is to invite neighborhood representatives, business people, and other residents to staff meetings. You can ask these customers and stakeholders to share their stories and how the team's efforts have made a positive difference in their lives and neighborhoods.

GET COACHING

It is always a good idea to rely on a trusted advisor inside or outside the organization in order to get feedback on your efforts to promote a more trusting environment. Everyone needs a sounding board to share goals, efforts, frustrations, and disappointments. It is impossible to come up with all the right moves by yourself. You don't have to accept all of the advice but informal coaches can provide good food for thought and consideration.

Toughness Is Over-Rated

You sound like a leader who wants to do well. Going forward, you certainly want to express your expectations, establish goals and measures of success with staff, and hold people accountable. But you cannot solely rely on being assertive and "tough." You need to foster trust as a basis for leadership.

Trust is a by-product of creating human connections with others and serving the team. You can't just say "Trust me!" You must build trust in small incremental ways over time.

43

My Team Is Overwhelmed (and so Am I)!

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest reminds us we can't all have a Time-Turner.

As a manager in a city Community Services Department, I lead a youth services team. The team addresses serious matters such as youth violence, substance abuse, and family dysfunction. There is much to do and it is obviously important work.

During the Great Recession, my team lost several positions but the work just kept on coming. With a small rebound in the economy, we have hired one replacement person. Yet with so much work, everyone on the team feels stressed out and distracted. Productivity has plummeted. People in the unit complain that nothing ever comes off our team's plate. Plus, every day there seems to be some new demand from senior management. When we are thrown a new challenge, I notice that the group seems to shut down. It has gotten to such a point that if I suggest a new idea or a new way of doing things, people scream.

Not only is my team overwhelmed, I feel overwhelmed as well. I don't know how to help my team in these continuing hard times. Can you offer some advice?

It's true. Local government employees feel overwhelmed and put upon. Resources, especially staffing, are down, yet demands from the governing board, stakeholder groups, and senior management keep on escalating. . .with no end in sight. In some cases, the attitude of senior management seems to be "just suck it up."

Originally published on the ICMA website March 24, 2015.

Supporting an overwhelmed team is one of the most difficult jobs for a leader. The emotional experience of feeling overwhelmed often incapacitates everyone. Even though you too feel overwhelmed and distressed, your job as the team leader is to get your team focused amid all the demands and "noise."

Given the complexity of the challenge, no one strategy or approach will suffice. It will take a number of efforts to focus and reenergize the team.

Once the team agrees on a specific purpose, it becomes a guiding principle on how group members should spend their time and energy. It becomes the litmus test to decide what work to take on and what work to shed.

Team Leadership Strategies

Here are a number of ideas to consider.

SHOW SOME EMPATHY

First and foremost, show that you understand how team members are feeling. Encourage some constructive venting. Acknowledge that you too feel overwhelmed.

HEAL THYSELF

Before leading the team to find ways of getting more focused and energized, begin to take action so you become less distressed and distracted. The same approaches listed below can help you first heal yourself. (Also see Career Compass No. 29: Forget Work-Life Balance...Re-Energize at Work and at Home!)

IDENTIFY THE STRESSORS

Once you demonstrate that you understand the team's distress, begin to identify with the team the forces that are resulting in the team's feeling overwhelmed. Ask some questions:

- Is it the sheer amount of work?
- It is difficult to get any priority work done given all the distractions?
- Do the projects feel "too big"?
- Are there too many new demands coming from on-high?
- Is there a feeling that nothing ever gets done or decided?

FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS

This is difficult since a lot of programs and project "priorities" and demands are thrown at your team. Therefore, as suggested by Liane Davey (see the *hbr.org* blog piece *Help Your Overwhelmed Team*), you need to gather your group and ask the team members to respond to this fundamental question: "What does the organization or community need from our team that no other group can accomplish?"

Once the team agrees on a specific purpose, it becomes a guiding principle on how group members should spend their time and energy. It becomes the litmus test to decide what work to take on and what work to shed.

Deciding on a few priority projects might take a number of conversations, but don't give up. You need to tenaciously force the group to decide on its purpose and therefore identify what really matters.

HELP IDENTIFY THE TEAM'S "SWEET SPOT"

Davey suggests that the team edits (with your help) its workload by identifying its "sweet spot." Does a current or new project fit with your team's unique purpose, what the team's good at, or what's really important to the community, governing board, or senior management? If a project is not aligned with the strategic agenda of the governing board or senior management, you need to get rid of it.

INSULATE THE TEAM FROM LOW-PRIORITY WORK

To protect the group's time and energy from being dissipated, you need to articulate the team's purpose and "sweet spot" to the department director and to the executive team of the city. In so doing, you provide a rationale for not accepting new, nonpriority assignments.

This is an extremely challenging leadership task that requires access to higher levels, relationships built over time, and courage. While you participate in the department's management group, you do not participate on an ongoing basis with the department head group of the city. Consequently, you need the community services director to share your priorities with the executive group. You can perhaps find ways to sandwich in your team's priorities when you update the city manager and department heads on a particular project. Or, find ways to interact with the directors of other departments as you participate on cross-cutting, interdepartmental teams, and, in the process, build relationships and communicate your priorities.

SHED NON-VALUE ADDED ACTIVITIES

Many activities (monthly activity reports, redundant written approvals from managers at several levels, laborious purchasing or contracting processes, or overly long staff reports to the city council) are non-value added, ritualistic practices that distract people from important work.

How does a leader reduce such bureaucratic, time- and energy-sapping activities? Here are several suggestions. Once a year, ask staff in a two- or three-week period to identify forms, reports, and practices that get in the way of priority work. Evaluate "bureaucracy-busting" proposals from staff and eliminate some of non-value-added procedures or activity. Another idea is to encourage staff members to complete a form entitled "This Seems Stupid To Me. . .!" Of course, a manager often needs to sell this idea to higher-ups, which requires framing it in the interests of senior management. (See Career Compass No. 14: Selling Your Ideas.)

Let me give one concrete example from my experience. In one city where I worked, the Police Department had traditionally required officers to complete a log documenting each and every transaction or encounter in the field. These field logs were then reviewed by the field sergeant. Everyone agreed that completing the logs added no value to public safety. By eliminating the logs, we freed up thousands of hours of police time and energy to focus on practices that did make a real difference in enhancing community safety.

FIX UP YOUR MEETINGS

A lot of time and energy is sucked up by unproductive even unneeded meetings. Cut the number of meetings and make those that remain more focused and productive. Don't use meetings to communicate information that can be shared by e-mail or in other ways.

To focus the meeting on a meaningful topic, frame the key issue for the meeting as a question. For instance, you can challenge the group with the question: "Given what we've heard from youth and their parents, what is one key intervention or program investment that will keep young teens safe after they get out of school?"

Forty-five (not 60 or 90) minutes is sufficient if a meeting is focused on an important question. See Career Compass No. 38: Your Staff Meetings Don't Have To Be Dreary).

BUILD IN "QUIET TIME"

No one has time for "deep thinking" (thinking or reflection that results in true understanding, insight or learning or helps develop effective solutions for a challenge). We are so distracted with e-mails and "busy-ness" that we cannot reflect and strategize. Therefore, create one hour a day (I prefer first thing in the morning, when people are fresh) when no meetings are allowed and no one is permitted to take telephone calls or respond to e-mails. Quiet time is for thoughtful proactive work on priority projects.

In other ways, you can help people carve out uninterrupted time. I used to schedule every Friday morning at a cafe. I'd get a cup of coffee, put my phone away, and focus on an important project requiring focused thinking. You can also find ways for you and staff members to telecommute once or twice a week, as long as they use part of the day for strategic work.

SET LIMITS ON E-MAIL

It is bad enough that we are overwhelmed at work with constant communication, especially e-mails. Set some limits for yourself and your team regarding e-mails and phone calls after work. For instance, unless it is a true emergency, don't send e-mails or respond to e-mails or make phone calls after 6 pm. People need to decompress, refresh, and reenergize after work hours and they cannot do that if they are bombarded with communication 24/7/365.

BREAK UP THE BIG PRIORITIES

In one-to-one meetings or in team sessions, help your team members break the big priorities into do-able "chunks" that once completed can move the project forward. Assist the team in focusing on these smaller tasks during quiet time or other uninterrupted time.

HELP YOUR TEAM SEE PROGRESS AND THEN CELEBRATE

With a lot of demands and distractions, people have difficulty in discerning any progress in achieving their team agenda. During one-on-one meetings and especially in team sessions, ask group members to talk about the project chunks they are addressing and the milestones achieved. As Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer state in *The Progress Principle*, people can maintain their engagement and energy if they perceive progress. Small wins help create momentum.

In our hectic and disruptive worlds, we in local government rarely take a time out and celebrate our successes. Thus, once a project milestone is met, take a time-out, bring in ice cream, savor the achievement, and express gratitude for those involved.

FOCUS ON "ROUGHLY RIGHT"

In the risk-averse environment of local government, people tend not to submit reports or proposals or finish up projects until everything is perfect. Other-

wise, somebody (a stakeholder group, governing board member, top management) will criticize the work and the staff person. This "no-mistakes" ethos bogs down progress and projects pile up, adding to our experience of feeling overwhelmed. Moreover, no one learns from making missteps because we avoid them at all costs.

The best way to learn, grow, and adapt is to try to get things "roughly right." In other words, do some research, come up with a proposal that you think may work, try it out as an experiment, and fix it up as you go along. The best approach in this disruptive world is "ready, fire, aim."

As the team leader, you can help the team develop a "growth mindset" (see *Mindset* by Carol Dweck). People with a growth mindset enjoy new challenges and see mistakes as a part of learning and growth. Those with "fixed mindsets" avoid new challenges and want to do repeat work that they already know how to do so their sense of competency is reinforced.

Of course, in a risk-averse environment, the leader needs to protect the team from attack. Therefore, call any new effort a "pilot" or "experiment" from which to learn. Also, tie the project to the larger agendas of the city council or the city manager or school board; engage other groups or players as partners, and thus acquire allies and political supporters for any project.

EMPHASIZE SOCIAL SUPPORT

To the extent that people feel interpersonal support in their team, they can better deal with adversity, challenge, and frustration and can generally become more resilient. To promote positive relations, consider:

- "Taking 5" at the beginning of group meetings when people can share what is happening in their personal and professional lives.
- Asking group members on a rotational basis to bring coffee and bagels for the team meetings.
- Acknowledging people's work anniversaries and thanking them for their service.
- Organizing a picnic meeting outdoors.

PROMOTE WELLNESS

To help staff members stay energized and focused, promote wellness activities. When you meet with a direct report or gather the team, take a walk and address the agenda. Help provide a city- or YMCA-sponsored yoga class on site or near work. Make available a meditation or nap room. Provide healthy foods at team meetings or workshops.

To help staff members stay energized and focused, promote wellness activities. When you meet with a direct report or gather the team, take a walk and address the agenda.

MODEL THE WAY

Modeling is the most powerful way that people learn and change attitudes and behaviors. As team leader, you must model the attitudes and behaviors that you wish to see. So, do you as the leader. . .

- Focus on strategic activities during quiet time?
- Say "no" to new demands that don't fit in the "sweet spot"?
- Take walks to clear your head or eat healthy foods?
- Shed non-value-added activities and let people know why these activities will no longer be undertaken?
- Try to get things "roughly right"?
- Show gratitude for the opportunity to make a positive difference?

Have the Courage to Say No

Your job is to help the team stay focused on what really matters and produce important results for the organization and the community. You can only do that if you insulate the team from all kinds of new demands. If you stand up for your team and if you are perceived as a leader that "has the team's back," team members will follow you.

As a team leader, you serve as a key communication link. You help your team know what is happening at the city council level or with other departments or other community services divisions. In this communication role, you must also articulate and advocate the needs of the team to other groups with whom you interact. You must have the courage to say "no" to new demands, or at least negotiate new resources or eliminate some other team priority. It is not easy. It takes courage.

For instance, you may fear that "top management will see me as an obstacle" or "I won't be viewed as a team player." Courage is the ability to face your fears and then act anyway on the legitimate interests of your team.

44

Rookie Mistakes of a First-Time Department Head

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest Helps Us Appreciate the Rookie Mindset

I have just been appointed the new director of the Public Works Department in an adjacent city. For the past seven years, I have served as a division manager in a very good Public Works Department. This experience got me ready for my new department head position.

I've done some research on the department and the public works-related issues facing my new city. The department seems to be a good group with no glaring big problems.

Since this is my first executive position, how do I get started on the right foot and promote the likelihood of my success?

Congratulations. I remember when I got my first department head position. I too was very excited yet anxious about the opportunity and the challenge of proving my worth. Looking back, I made a number of mistakes. So, I'd like to share some of the classic mistakes of first-time or "rookie" department heads.

Nine Rookie Mistakes

MISTAKE NO. 1: HOLDING COURT IN YOUR OFFICE

Typically, new department directors ask for briefings in their office from different division heads and program managers. This is a missed opportunity to schedule

briefings and meetings in different offices of public works and in the field, seeing people in their environment, and casually meeting staff. I suggest that you go to tailgate safety meetings, do a little job shadowing of field crews, and let the department employees know that you will be in the cafeteria or lunch room on a certain morning to hang out, have coffee with anyone, answer questions, and meet people.

MISTAKE NO. 2: GETTING UP TO SPEED TOO QUICKLY

New department heads often like to show that they are knowledgeable and have done their homework. Instead of asking questions, listening and assessing the knowledge and competencies of staff, the department director does too much talking and tries to impress others with his or her knowledge.

Originally published on the ICMA website June 4, 2015.

After consulting with management staff and other department employees, you probably do want to make some key or pivotal decisions to demonstrate that you are in charge and aren't afraid to act.

MISTAKE NO. 3: COMPARING YOUR NEW ORGANIZATION WITH YOUR PREVIOUS AGENCY

You apparently came from a very good Public Works Department, which provided you with ample experience and even exposure to some best practices. As you see how your new department operates, it is tempting to share how things were done better in your previous organization or department. This is deadly. Your new colleagues don't want to hear your constant references to better practices in your previous agency.

It is important to first get to know the culture of your new department. What worked in your previous organization may not be the best solution for where you are now. Again, you need to listen and learn a lot as well as build relationships as you come onboard.

If you see a dysfunctional or out-of-date practice, you may want to ask a staff person to check with similar departments in nearby cities on their practices or protocols and then have that person share the findings with your department management group.

MISTAKE NO. 4: TAKING CORRECTIVE ACTION TOO QUICKLY OR NOT AT ALL

By conducting various kinds of listening sessions with different public works units, you will certainly discover a few troublesome problems that department management has failed to address (i.e., a personnel issue, a burdensome process or practice, a stalled initiative). On one hand, you don't want to rush to judgment and act hastily. You want to demonstrate that you've listened to and heard employees, assessed the situation, and then took action. On the other hand, once you've evaluated the problematic situation, you need to confront it and act.

Keeping a commitment to address a problematic situation builds trust with staff and increases the likelihood that department employees will share their concerns and issues with you in the future.

As you become aware of problems, think through which ones you want to initially confront and correct. Your first effort to "fix things up" and improve the department and the work place is symbolic to all—so choose wisely.

MISTAKE NO. 5: ACTING LIKE "I KNOW BEST"

If you make most of the decisions as the new boss, your staff will be at your door every hour on the hour; they won't take ownership of the problems or the solutions; and they will become overly-dependent on you. After consulting with management staff and other department employees, you probably do want to make some key or pivotal decisions to demonstrate that you are in charge and aren't afraid to act. But this should not be your general approach to decision-making.

In approaching different kinds of decisions, you do want to declare to your management group how the particular decision will be made. You can declare to the management group:

- "The decision is up to you" (defer/delegate decision to management group).
- "Let's decide together" (seek consensus before deciding as a group).
- "Please provide input and I will decide" (ask for input before you decide).
- "I will or have decided" (announce your decision without any discussion).

Your decision about how to decide an issue will of course be tied to how important or urgent it is to you. If you don't openly declare how the decision will be made, your management staff will be confused if in some situations you leave the decision up to them and in others you make it with little or no input.

In general, engaging employees in decision-making over time will help develop the capacity of your managers and others. As Dan Rockwell states in his blog "Leadership Freak" (March 18, 2015), great leaders avoid providing the "right" answer. Instead, they add "s" to words and ask "what options or solutions might we try?"

Remember that the primary role of leaders is to grow more leaders.

MISTAKE NO. 6: EMPHASIZING YOUR VISION

Typically, a new department head goes out to work groups or holds an all-hands meeting and communicates his or her goals for the department, updates everyone on key issues or projects, talks about the budget, and the like. The problem is that this is one-way monologue even if you ask for questions and respond to them.

What you want to do is engage people in a conversation. As the poet David Whyte has suggested, leadership is the art of conversation. The best way to engage in a conversation is to ask questions. For instance, . . .

- "Given our public works role, how can we make the community an even better place to live and work?"
- "What are the issues or challenges that interest or concern you?"
- "As your director, how can I support you?"
- "Do you have the resources you need to do your best work?"
- "What do you want to learn?"
- "What do you like best about your job or the department?
- "What don't you like about your job or the department?"
- "If I could make one improvement, what would that be?"

Prematurely proclaiming your vision for the department is a mistake, since you know less about the department than anyone else. Instead of announcing your vision at the beginning, you can certainly talk about your values and overall approach to managing the department, commitment to customer service, and the like.

There is nothing wrong with vision. In fact, developing a vision and identifying goals may be very energizing for everyone, as long as it is a shared vision and involves shared goals.

MISTAKE NO. 7: ACTING LIKE THE LONE RANGER

A lot of executives or senior managers believe it's lonely at the top. If you get too close to your direct reports or others, it will become too difficult to make tough decisions or impartially evaluate the performance of your staff. I disagree. It's lonely at the top only if you isolate yourself.

You spend most of your working hours at work or thinking about work. While you want to avoid the perception of favoritism, it would be a dreary existence if you didn't have social and friendly ties to co-workers even if you are the boss and occasionally make a tough decision.

In addition to doing your part in creating friendly work relations with others, you as an executive must also actively reach out and form bonds and relationships with those who can provide advice, coaching, and social support. Certain colleagues from inside the department can become an informal "brain trust." Those from other departments or from outside the agency can also serve as trusted advisors or coaches.

As a leader, you need the capacity to bounce back after making a mistake or failing (see Career Compass No. 9: Bouncing Back From Defeat). Your resiliency as a leader is determined in part by your professional and personal support network.

MISTAKE NO. 8: SPENDING ALL YOUR TIME ON DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS

As a new department director, you do need to learn all you can about department operations. A primary role is, of course, managing your department so the city manager and others don't have to worry about poor service delivery or that the department is not achieving its work plan. However, another primary role for department directors is serving as a "little cm" with the other department heads. The city manager is the "big CM" and serves as the chief executive. However, the city manager needs "little cms" who not just manage their departments but also help the city manager identify city-wide problems, assess challenges, and generate solutions for the big challenges facing the city organization and community.

Therefore, to become a key part of the city's leadership team, you must create positive relationships with the other department directors. Schedule a series of get-to-know-you coffee or lunch meetings with individual department heads. Maintain this effort over time. Relationship-building comes before joint problem-solving. These relationships can also help you build your support network (see Mistake No. 6 above).

MISTAKE NO. 9: BECOMING CONSUMED WITH ALL THE RESPONSIBILITIES

You certainly need to invest a lot of time and energy in getting established in your new position. In doing so, it's easy to become consumed with getting to know all the department employees and the other senior managers, attending city council and community meetings, getting briefed on key capital projects, becoming familiar with the department and city budgets, meeting key stakeholder groups and other agency representatives, and just trying to stay on top of e-mails and other communications. However, you must guard against getting burned out and consciously seek opportunities to refresh and re-energize yourself.

When I was appointed as a first-time department director in my mid-twenties, I quickly became stressed out with demonstrating that I was competent as the

new boss and that I was on top of everything. As I became overwhelmed with all the responsibilities, I tried to "numb" my work emotions. Unfortunately, once you start numbing some emotions, you numb all emotions. I became withdrawn at home and eventually separated from my wife. Over time, I matured and grew from this first major leadership responsibility but it was a distressful time in my life.

To avoid becoming consumed, try to carve out some time, energy and space for your non-work life. Consider:

- Taking a walk at lunch
- Going to the gym on a regular basis
- Maintaining outside (non-work) relationships
- Not checking e-mails when you get home (or waiting until the kids go to bed)
- Designating a tech-free zone in the family room or in your work shop
- Meeting your spouse/partner or friend for lunch
- Maintaining your participation in your soccer or running club
- Going out of town with your family for a long weekend, or better yet, a vacation.

As a department head, remember that you also serve as a role model for other managers in your department and help set the culture. If you don't want work to be all-consuming for you and others, don't e-mail your team after hours or otherwise become over-focused on work all the time.

The Upside to a Rookie Mindset

While you may make a lot of mistakes as a first-time department head, there is an upside to being a rookie.

A lot of department directors get complacent after they have established themselves. A great thing about being a "rookie" is that you are always asking questions and are open to learning, making new relationships, and trying out different approaches. A great department head maintains these efforts over the long term with a focus on renewing and refreshing oneself and adding more value to the department, city organization, and community.

A great thing about being a "rookie" is that you are always asking questions and are open to learning, making new relationships, and trying out different approaches.

Therefore, I suggest that you do your best to maintain a "rookie mindset." For instance, over time you can. . .

- Get actively involved in the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), not just professional associations related to public works.
- Enroll yourself in the ICMA Credentialing Program or some other credentialing effort that stimulates continuous learning.
- Seek out conferences, workshops, and reading outside the field and share with your team what you learn.
- Find ways to meet new people inside and outside local government.
- Engage a variety of peer coaches or supporters inside and outside your organization.
- Take on with the support of the city manager an acting role as a director of another department while the recruitment is being conducted.
- Reflect on your ever-unfolding leadership journey and share your musings in a department blog or a personal journal.

I wish you well on your new journey of discovery, learning, and contribution.

45

City Managers Need Coaches Too

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest reminds us that everyone can benefit from a coach.

I'm a mid-career City Manager for a suburban community who has served in my current position for five years. I am a strong leader who is comfortable dealing with most aspects of my job, such as department oversight, budget, operational management, personnel and service delivery issues. However, I find it is becoming increasingly difficult to effectively respond to political conflict between certain City Council members; a few Council members who don't respect my role or want to micro-manage the organization; and new demands as our community becomes ethnically more diverse.

Over time, the Chief Executive role in local government seems to have become a much more difficult job. I don't just want to survive; I want to feel more effective in these turbulent times.

I still enjoy my job (most days) yet I could probably use some advice and guidance about new challenges. I must admit that I don't feel comfortable sharing some of my dissatisfaction with other senior managers in my organization or asking them for advice.

I know that our State Association has a coaching program for emerging leaders (and some of the up-and-comers in our organization participate). However, I don't know of any City and County Managers in our region who have engaged a coach of any kind.

Originally published on the ICMA website October 10, 2015.

What do you think? Would a savvy coach help me? If so, how do I get a coach and use one?

(NOTE: While my response below is written for City Managers and other Senior Executives, many of the suggestions are relevant for all local government leaders needing advice, feedback, and support. —FB)

Yes. Serving as a City Manager has become a much more difficult job. In fact, in California, Cal-ICMA recently surveyed City and County Managers and held follow-up focus groups to identify conflicts and stressors. These disconcerting challenges include:

- Governing Board members who don't understand or value the Council-Manager form of government
- Attempts by Governing Board members to interfere into administrative matters or micro-manage
- Political conflicts among Governing Board members or "outlier" members, causing serious negative impacts on the staff and organization
- Lack of Governing Board priorities and overwhelming demands on the organization

- Dramatic loss of revenue, including state actions taking away local government authority and funding
- Growing controversies such as land use or development conflicts
- Changing demographics in the community, leading to a change in values at the political level and new demands on the organization
- Increasing misinformation and inflammatory attacks from social media posts

WHY DON'T CITY MANAGERS SEEK COACHES?

Chief Executives in local government often don't have the necessary support and guidance they need to serve effectively in these turbulent and disruptive times. There are a lot of reasons that City and County Managers do not get coaching:

Either most State Associations don't have formal coaching programs for members or they are oriented to emerging leaders, not senior executives.

City and County Managers in their mid and late careers may feel that they have "arrived" at the top of their profession and may be complacent about their continued learning and development.

Some Chief Executives do not want to acknowledge that they may feel less than adequate given the increasing challenges and thus feel reluctant to seek advice and support.

The role of the City, County or Special District Manager may be fairly lonely. Inside our organizations, we may feel that others really don't understand the demands or pressures facing the Chief Executive, or it is showing weakness if we ask for help and advice.

In the local government sector (as opposed to the corporate or non-profit sectors), we don't have a tradition of coaching for Chief Executives.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Assuming that you would benefit from a formal or informal coach, let's first define coaching. In this context, coaching provides feedback or advice or simply a listening ear from a trusted colleague or group of colleagues. Coaches listen, ask questions, provide different perspectives, suggest additional options or choices for action, challenge our thinking or attitudes, and prompt action. They encourage and support us. Effective coaches don't dole out answers. Instead, they help you find the answers that are right for you.

To effectively serve, a coach helps make it "safe" and comfortable to explore dilemmas and maintains confidences. Most importantly, a coach demonstrates that he or she cares about you as a leader and a person.

As a City Manager, How Do I Get Coaching?

City, County and Special District Managers can secure informal or formal coaching in a variety of ways. The following seven suggestions are listed in order of less formal to more formal approaches.

1. DEBRIEF WITH OTHER SENIOR EXECUTIVES INSIDE YOUR ORGANIZATION

After any significant activity or experience, I suggest that you hold an informal debriefing session at your department head meeting. For example, in Palo Alto, California, where I served as City Manager, we debriefed every City Council meeting (we called it the "Good, the Bad and the Ugly") as well as any recent project or organizational or community initiative.

Typically, you would ask the following questions about the Council meeting or a just concluded community workshop conducted by staff:

- What went well?
- What did not go so well?
- What did we learn for future practice or behavior?

Of course, it is critical that you as the leader are not defensive and demonstrate your openness to feedback (even if you don't agree with some of the comments). Otherwise, you won't get forthright feedback and suggestions for future action.

If you don't feel comfortable seeking this kind of peer advice from all the department heads, call together on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule a few trusted department directors or other senior colleagues in the organization and debrief significant events in a smaller circle.

2. INVITE A CITY/COUNTY MANAGER TO COFFEE OR LUNCH

The easiest approach to get some informal coaching is to invite on a regular basis a trusted City or County Manager to coffee, a drink or lunch. When I served as City Manager, I met informally with other Managers away from the office at least two or three times a month. Not only did I explore challenges and dilemmas in order to get feedback, but I got social support which was essential to my survival as a Chief Executive.

Please note that I didn't ask these colleagues to serve as my coach. I just asked them out for coffee or a drink. These "let's have coffee or a beer" get-togethers easily turned into sounding board sessions for me.

During these sessions, we swapped stories and personal experiences. I often learned more from the

If you want a more formal arrangement, you should secure an Executive Coach. This can be an encore manager who is recently retired and now consults or is otherwise still engaged in some aspect of local government.

stories than any specific advice. (Stories are the most powerful way to teach and learn.) Not only did I get advice but I enjoyed the interaction.

3. GET PEER ADVICE AT YOUR AREA MANAGER GROUP MEETING

Most Managers participate in Area Manager Group meetings. Area Manager Groups tend to be overly social (at one extreme) or very business-item oriented (at the other extreme). In any case, it is fairly easy to incorporate peer advice as a formal part of the monthly program for your Area Manager Group.

In the Bay Area of California, the Santa Clara County City/County Managers Association has incorporated a regular peer coaching element into our meetings. At the beginning of the monthly meeting, we hold a 45-minute "Mangers-Only" session called "Joys and Challenges." After we express gratitude and joy for recent organizational or personal successes and experiences, any member of our group can raise a challenge in a safe environment and get feedback and advice from other Managers. After the Managers-Only session, we invite Assistants or presenters to join us for the business meeting of the Association.

Why don't you suggest that this kind of confidential peer advice be included as part of the regular meetings of your Area Manager Group?

4. USE A COACH FROM THE STATE ASSOCIATION COACHING PROGRAM

Currently, there are 15 State Associations that have joined the ICMA Coaching Program. All these State Associations participate in the Coaching Program webinars and distribute these Career Compass advice columns. Some have started (or are about to initiate) a one-to-one coaching service which offers at no-cost a respected senior leader as a coach for any emerging leader in the state. Typically, all the emerging leader has to do is go the State Association website, select a coach, send an email to the coach, and then start the coaching relationship. It can be a one-time or periodic conversation, or an ongoing relationship. Coaching conversations can be face-to-face or over the telephone.

In California, we have 90 plus coaches profiled on the "Coaches Gallery" on the Cal-ICMA website. Some who reach out to the Cal-ICMA coaches are in fact City Managers who wish feedback and advice.

If your State Association has a one-to-one coaching program, why don't you reach out to one of the coaches? Or contact one of the Cal-ICMA coaches listed on the "Coaches Gallery" at www.cal-icma.org/coaching.

5. ASK AN ICMA SENIOR ADVISOR OR STATE LIAISON TO SUGGEST A COACH

If you don't feel comfortable asking a City Manager colleague from a neighboring jurisdiction to serve as an informal sounding board, ask an ICMA Senior Advisor or State Liaison to serve as a coach. Or, they can also serve as a "match-maker," recommending a respected City or County Manager (active or retired) whom you can contact in your State. They can even make the introduction for you.

Again, you don't have to ask for "coaching." Just mention that the Manager was recommended as a savvy professional with lots of experience and you'd like to get their feedback on a challenge or two. Then invite the Manager to coffee or schedule a phone call. This "coach" can be an active manager or an encore manager. As an encore manager, I personally do a lot of pro bono coaching for both emerging leaders and Chief Executives.

6. SECURE A FORMAL EXECUTIVE COACH

If you want a more formal arrangement, you should secure an Executive Coach. This can be an encore manager who is recently retired and now consults or is otherwise still engaged in some aspect of local government. For instance, there are several of us encore managers in California who do paid coaching for City Managers or other Senior Executives.

Another option is to seek a former CEO from the corporate world who has training as an Executive Coach. Your organization or you personally would pay an hourly rate or package fee for the formal coaching.

Typically, executive coaching consists of a scheduled series of structured discussions, with specific goals and expectations, with some preparation required of the Manager in advance of the session. The Manager and the coach may often identify specific actions

Another formal option is to join a Chief Executive Peer Group. … Participants may also receive individual coaching. The emphasis is on personal development as well as support to address professional challenges.

or different behaviors for the Manager to try out or practice before the next coaching session.

The big advantage to using an Executive Coach is that you secure the committed time, attention and counsel of an experienced and often formally trained coach. Formal executive coaching also forces you to take the coaching process seriously, prepare for sessions and take some follow-up action.

The downside is the cost. Hourly rates for formal executive coaching range in the public sector from $150-$350 (costs are higher in the corporate sector). A package fee ranges from $500 to $2000 per month depending upon the frequency, depth, and extent of support you seek. While cost is a concern, consider the substantial value for the organization and the community as well as the Manager if the Chief Executive receives sage advice and support in his or her role. Also consider the organizational or personal costs if the Manager fails in his or her role.

To secure a formal executive coach, you can ask trusted colleagues or human resource professionals for recommendations or contact an organization like the International Coaching Federation, www.coachfederation.org, where you can make a confidential request for coaching.

7. JOIN A CHIEF EXECUTIVE PEER GROUP

Another formal option is to join a Chief Executive Peer Group. Most common in the corporate and non-profit sectors, these confidential monthly meetings for a selected cohort of chief executives are led by a professional consultant/coach. The consultant facilitates structured learning and discussions, engages participants in leadership style assessments and self-reflection, and promotes peer coaching and mutual support among the participants. Participants may also receive individual coaching. The emphasis is on personal development as well as support to address professional challenges.

The peer group meetings occur over a period of a year or longer with an annual cost in the corporate sector varying from $10,000 to $20,000 (the annual fee in the public sector is substantially less). For one example of an organization that conducts Executive Peer Groups in the private and non-profit sectors, go to www.vistage.com.)

For the federal government, the Partnership for Public Service has developed the Strategic Advisors to Government Executives (SAGE) Program. For senior executives in the federal service across a variety of disciplines, SAGE provides one-to-one coaching and periodic peer group meetings during which participants can discuss leadership dilemmas with former government executives who have held similar positions. (For more information please visit the SAGE Program online.)

In local government, I am aware of one example of this kind of formal peer support group for local government executives. Craig Rapp, a former City Manager, and Dr. James Lynn, a psychologist and organizational consultant, conduct "Compass Peer Groups" for City Managers in the Minneapolis and Chicago regions. To check out these Executive Peer Groups, go to www.compasspeergroup.com or www.craigrapp.com.

How Do I Get the Most Out of Coaching?

In order to get maximum value from informal peer advice or more formal executive coaching, we need to shift our mindset.

Focus on a "growth mindset." Instead of looking at our challenges as problems to minimize, we need to have a "growth mindset." Carol Dweck in her book Mindsets suggest that those with "fixed mindsets" try to avoid challenges and mistakes. They prefer to do the same kind of work that they have already mastered since it reinforces their sense of competency. With a "growth mindset," we look at challenges and experimenting and even mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow, and thereby expand our portfolio of behaviors, skills, and relationships and ultimately become more effective in a disruptive environment.

As part of a growth mindset, we want to try out and practice new behaviors to see if they work for us or improve problematic situations. As Herminia Ibarra suggests in the Harvard Business Review article (January-February 2015) entitled "The Paradox of Authenticity," you are not being a fake if you experiment with new behaviors; rather, you are just trying them out to see if they enhance who you are as a leader and thus over time become part of your authentic self.

Ask for help and feedback. As a strong leader, it may be difficult for you to ask for help and feedback. We often perceive asking for help as a sign of vulnerability and weakness (see Career Compass No. 32 : The Power of Vulnerability). We tend to think of strong leaders as very confident, all-knowing managers who have it all figured it out. The paradox is that it is only strong leaders who can ask for help and advice and coaching.

Be open to the conversation. It is important to not only share your challenges and dilemmas with a coach, but be open to the feedback and any suggestions on how to handle similar problems in the future.

Prepare for the conversation. Even if it's only a cup of coffee with a colleague, prepare for the opportunity. In advance of the get-together, identify the challenge you are facing; what actions you have taken; what have been the results to date; why you are frustrated; and how you'd like things to change.

Use the coach to promote self-reflection. Great leaders are self-reflective. Coaches can ask probing questions which promote reflection and self-critique and opportunities to make adjustments. After an informal or formal coaching conversation, reflect on what has been discussed and the implications for self-correction.

No griping. It is therapeutic to express some frustration but you want to quickly move on to request the coach's perspectives and constructive feedback.

Be forward looking. While you want a coach to assist you in debriefing recent experiences, the point is to explore what you have learned so that you can enhance your future practice and behavior.

Learn from the stories. Chief Executives love to tell war stories. Don't just enjoy the swapping of stories—probe for lessons that may be related to your dilemma or challenge.

Don't feel compelled to follow the advice. While you want a coach to offer different perspectives and additional options and prompt action, you don't have to accept or act on anything. It is your responsibility to weigh the advice and feedback and choose whatever you may do to become a more effective leader.

Enjoy the interaction. While you are certainly looking for feedback and advice, informal or even formal coaching offers an opportunity to form new relationships and get social support. The experience of meeting with colleagues and exchanging experiences and views is stimulating and fun.

Provide informal coaching for other chief executives. Since we all need coaching and support, actively seek opportunities to serve others in the same capacity. In your conversations with other Managers, look to create a safe and comfortable environment to explore the challenges faced by the other Manager, ask questions, suggest other perspectives and options, and offer encouragement.

Providing advice and support for others causes us to become more self-reflective of our own leadership. We also get a lot by giving a lot.

Remember, Coaches Love To Coach

Often we think it is an added burden if we ask another City or County Manager to coach us or act as a sounding board. Not so!

Coaches love to coach. It is satisfying and fulfilling and gets us away from the more mundane aspects of our City Manager jobs.

You are doing a colleague a favor if you ask for advice and coaching.

Thrive, Not Just Survive.

You seem like a seasoned Manager and I congratulate you on your desire to enhance your capacity to lead and become more effective in difficult times.

You are right. It is not enough to survive, you want to thrive. Coaching can help.

46

Leading by Letting Go

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest recommends that leaders make the transition from controlling to coaching.

I'm a recently appointed division manager in a large city Human Resources Department. I was promoted because I'm results-oriented and have demonstrated my ability to accomplish whatever assignment is thrown my way.

As division manager, I have a lot of day-to-day administrative responsibilities. Yet, I want to lead change in my division as well as the Human Resources Department. This leadership role requires a lot of analysis, communication, and engagement. To move the changes forward, I feel that I must do a lot of the important work.

I have been told by my director that I need to be less hard-driving and give people the time to adjust and get on board. However, I'm afraid that if I lessen the pressure and become more laissez-faire, the group will lapse into old behaviors and attitudes, and we won't achieve the goals that I'm committed to. I don't want to give up on what I want to achieve in this new leadership position. The goals are important to the organization and to me. I care a lot.

Can you help?

When I was a less seasoned leader, I too felt that I must "drive" change and ride hard on staff to achieve important results. When I felt my unit was not apt to

step up or perform at its highest level, I did the important work myself. It was all about my vision, my goals, my agenda, and my results. I, too, cared a lot.

Upon a lot of reflection, I discovered that the problem was two-fold:

- It was impossible for my brilliant self to do all the important work.
- The team underperformed, given its capacity and potential, and, therefore, the available talent was underutilized.

As I matured as a leader, I learned that I had to "lead by letting go." Letting go is not losing control or giving up. Letting go is about engaging people and creating shared intentions, goals, and leadership. As a former chief executive and now as a consultant, I have learned a lot over my years of practice, yet still struggle with this issue. Here is my advice. (By the way, we teach best what we most need to learn.)

Originally published on the ICMA website December 4, 2015.

Ideas for Letting Go

Over time I had to make the transition from managing/controlling/driving results to supporting/coaching/developing people. So, what are some ideas for making this transition?

1. REFLECT

Before taking any actions to improve the situation, you must reflect and ask yourself some courageous questions.

First, ask yourself: "What are the consequences of me being in control?" As suggested above, the consequences include the minimal compliance of staff; their lack of commitment to the vision and the goals; and little growth and development by all (including you as leader).

Second, ask yourself: "What do I truly fear?" If you are honest with yourself, you may conclude that you fear losing control, failing to bring about the desired changes, and perhaps being perceived as an ineffective leader in this new role.

Third, ask yourself, as Dan Rockwell suggests in his Leadership Freak blog, "Simple Strategies to Tap the Power of Letting Go"

- Who can do what I'm doing, at least 80% as good as I'm doing?
- Where am I slowing, rather than energizing, the process?
- What can I do that no else can do?
- Who has the capacity and desire to learn new roles?

2. REDEFINE YOUR ROLE

To become truly effective as a leader, you must explicitly redefine your role. You must transition from one who directs and/or does the important work to one who leads and achieves results and public value through others. Begin by asking yourself, who can. . .

- Do some of my administrative work?
- Reach out to other departments and engage them in the change process?
- Map out current processes and identify opportunities to streamline?
- Suggest non-value-added rules to eliminate?
- Focus on employee communication across the departments?

This new definition of roles needs to be part of the ongoing conversation with staff (see below).

3. PUT MORE EMPHASIS ON RELATIONSHIPS

In addition to the work and results, begin to spend more time and energy on getting to know the staff and other players inside and outside the division and department. Share yourself, and likewise demonstrate an interest in their families, leisure pursuits, career goals, life stories, and histories. Followers will not follow if they do not feel a human connection to their leader and to other team members.

You can connect with people by walking around, asking questions, and sharing personal experiences and stories. You can do the same thing at the beginning of one-to-one meetings. Chit chat is important if there is a true interest in the other person. You can also start staff meetings with a "take 5" segment, during which one or several people can share a personal anecdote or experience with the group. To get this tradition going, you should take the initiative as the team leader and share a personal vignette from your life.

4. FOCUS ON THE "WHY"

Instead of spending all your time on the "what" and "how" of the work, begin to emphasize the purpose and meaning of the work or the project. Meaning is the great motivator. (See Dan Pink's book *Drive*.) Ask your team members: Why is our HR work so important to the organization and the community that we serve? You might want to invite to a quarterly staff meeting several employees from other departments who can relate how the work of HR helped them (and perhaps their families) and allowed them to better serve the community.

If people agree on the "why," do you really need to firmly control all of the "what" and the "how"?

5. FACILITATE CONVERSATIONS WITH STAFF

In addition to having conversations about the "why" of the work, you can facilitate conversations about the following topics:

- What does "success" look like for our team?
- What might we do to achieve success?
- How might we proceed?
- What could impede us or get in our way?
- How could we address these obstacles?
- What are our first steps?
- What should be my role as the division manager?
- What should be your roles as team members/leaders?
- How are we progressing?
- What are we learning?

A coach can help you reflect on your fears and insecurities as well as approaches for developing a team that creates a shared vision and goals and a real sense of commitment. …

The best coaches don't provide answers but help you explore options and choices that are best for you.

- What adjustments might we make?

As the poet David Whyte once said, "Leadership is the art of the conversation."

6. AVOID TRYING TO SECURE "BUY-IN"

Oftentimes leaders try to get staff (or other stakeholders) to "buy-in" to their great ideas. People instinctively know when you are "selling." Buy-in is really manipulation. Instead of trying to impose your ideas (or selling them), it is best to have a conversation, ask questions, identify the hopes and interests of people, and incorporate their ideas into any proposal. You need to get the "fingerprints" of others on the final plan or it is really not a shared plan.

7. PROVIDE "GUARD RAILS"

Once the team develops a shared vision and shared goals, you can provide "guard rails" or boundaries within which staff can act autonomously and expect your support. For instance, you can specify how much financial or program authority team members have in conducting a project. In other words, within defined parameters, staff can "go for it." Outside the guard rails, staff need to have the conversation with you and/or the entire team.

8. TALK ABOUT PROGRESS

A lot of projects, particularly organizational improvement initiatives, take several years to achieve. It's easy for team members to lose momentum and get discouraged. Therefore, it's important to discuss milestones and celebrate progress along the way. (See Teresa Amabile et al, *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*.) Dan Rockwell encourages leaders to appreciate "imperfect progress."

9. PROMOTE LEARNING AND GROWTH

Growth (for you and others) and added team capacity cannot happen unless you let go.

As the team works on achieving its shared goals, you can promote learning by debriefing with the team. Police and fire professionals call these debriefings "post-action reports."

At every staff meeting, ask the team about key projects:

- What is going well? Where are we making progress?
- What is not going well? How are we going to address some of the problems?
- How can I help as team leader?
- What are we learning for future action?

Regardless of the position, team members learn by doing, reflecting upon their experience, and applying the lessons learned. Your role is to facilitate their learning and development. Great leaders grow more leaders.

10. GET A COACH (OR TWO)

You need encouragement and coaching as you struggle with making this transition from a driver of results to a leader who supports and develops people. The best way is to get a formal or informal coach or two (see Career Compass No. 7 "How Do I Create a Dream Team of Advisors" and Career Compass No. 45 "City Managers Need Coaches Too").

A coach can help you reflect on your fears and insecurities as well as approaches for developing a team that creates a shared vision and goals and a real sense of commitment. A coach can help you confront the feeling that no one can do it as good as you.

The best coaches don't provide answers but help you explore options and choices that are best for you.

Trust the Process

This process of self-development as a leader is a journey with twists and turns, small successes and setbacks. You need to trust the process, the ongoing conversation, the people. Take small steps and build on the effort.

Great leaders are supportive and demanding at the same time. With the team, you are evaluating along the way, checking on milestones, debriefing, confronting mediocrity, making adjustments, celebrating successes, and learning from mistakes. You haven't given up your role as leader.

Over time, the team will take on more and more self-leadership. Great leaders then become great followers.

47

Leadership Myths Debunked

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest highlights seven leadership myths that should be left behind.

I'm a fairly new program manager for a key Family Services Program in the county's Human Services Agency. I'm trying to get employees to buy into a new approach for serving disadvantaged households and to better adapt to the demands on our agency. I have completed some of the initial research. With this new approach, I know that we can achieve better outcomes for children and their families.

Even though the team members have given lip-service to the innovations that I've proposed, I'm getting subtle and not-so-subtle resistance to the agenda and metrics that I've proposed.

If we don't meet the metrics assigned to our program unit, we face serious funding cutbacks from the state. Because of these consequences, I've been trying to drive results with a sense of urgency but team members are not responding to my leadership. To make matters worse, there are no monetary incentives that I can offer my team members if we achieve the program goals and measures.

I'm committed to this new approach so I've decided to do some of the more detailed planning myself so we can get started. However, I'm quite frustrated.

How do I better motivate my team?

Originally published on the ICMA website January 5, 2016.

Let me see if I can help. The biggest obstacle for you is that you may be operating according to several well-accepted leadership myths. These myths are inhibiting you from moving forward.

Debilitating Myths

Here are seven myths that impede effective leadership:

MYTH 1: I NEED TO MOTIVATE OTHERS

Leaders cannot motivate anyone except themselves. The role of leaders is to support the self-motivation of others. As a leader, you must explore how to tap into the individual and collective interests and motivations of your group. The best way to explore and identify the

Leadership is not about asserting your position. It is not about telling and explaining. Rather, it is about listening, learning, and then exerting positive influence. Anyone, at any time, can step up and lead.

hopes and dreams of others is to ask questions (See Career Compass No. 24: Asking Powerful Questions). Therefore, you may wish to begin by asking questions about how the unit can better meet the needs of children and families.

MYTH 2: MONEY OR FEAR CAN EFFECTIVELY MOTIVATE PEOPLE

Given the knowledge work of most local government workers, money limits performance, innovation, and adaptability. As Daniel Pink points out in his book *Drive*, people are driven by purpose (the urge to do something in service to a purpose bigger than ourselves). In fact, once you provide competitive pay and benefits, Pink states that "meaning is the new money." The other two great motivators of knowledge workers, according to Pink, are autonomy (the urge to direct our own lives) and mastery (learning to become better and better at what we do).

Fear is also a de-motivator. Fear overwhelms people and thus limits creativity and adaptability. An atmosphere of fear kills creative ideas and approaches. In contrast, a focus on hopes and dreams engages people, engenders commitment, and inspires people to action.

MYTH 3: I NEED BUY-IN

Never, ever seek "buy-in" from employees or external stakeholders. A mindset of buy-in suggests manipulation; you have an idea and you want others to accept it. Buy-in suggests a used-car salesman trying to get an unsuspecting customer to buy a clunker. If you seek buy-in, people sense manipulation as soon as you start "selling."

Rather than buy-in, formal or informal leaders can convene team members; start conversations; identify the hopes, dreams, and interests of people; integrate those interests into the plan; ensure that everyone's fingerprints are on the proposal; and then the execute the plan together. The poet David Whyte has reframed the leadership proposition: "Leadership is the art of conversation."

Yes, these leadership conversations take a lot of time and effort. But it is the only path to long-term success. One of the paradoxes of leadership is that leaders must "go slow to go fast."

MYTH 4: LEADERS "DRIVE" RESULTS

You may be getting resistance because you are using your positional authority to drive results. Management can try to use formal or positional authority as a lever, but management authority can only ensure a minimal level of performance or compliance. You can tell people to follow you, but then you look back and no one is there.

Authentic leadership is based not on your formal authority but rather your interpersonal (even your moral or spiritual) attributes. People choose to follow (or not to follow). As author Charles Lauer suggests, "Leaders do not force people to follow. They invite them on a journey."

The "journey" is a wonderful metaphor for leaders. With a journey, you know the general direction but not the precise destination. Is it, therefore, an exciting and fulfilling journey? Is the journey aligned with people's hopes and dreams? Are you passionate enough about the journey? If not, why would anyone follow you?

MYTH 5: THERE ARE LEADERS AND THERE ARE FOLLOWERS

Leadership is not about asserting your position. It is not about telling and explaining. Rather, it is about listening, learning, and then exerting positive influence. Anyone, at any time, can step up and lead.

In my career as a local government manager, I have often started a team project as the leader. And then along the journey, someone else (or usually several people) became the leader who pointed the way and energized the effort. Then I changed roles and became the follower and often the cheerleader.

One of the paradoxes of leadership is that great leaders are great followers. And, of course, the best leadership is shared leadership with everyone accepting responsibility, making contributions, and exerting positive influence.

As Margaret Wheatley says, great organizations and teams are "leader-ful."

Whether a team member accepts the leadership opportunity depends on how the project is aligned with his or her hopes and interests, supported by top management and others, imbued with opportunities to learn and grow, and provides a measure of autonomy.

MYTH 6: I'M THE ONLY PERSON WHO CAN DO THIS RIGHT

Oftentimes, we leaders insist on our way of doing things and, therefore, we often end up doing it ourselves. We simply believe that we are the only ones who can ensure the job gets done the right way. We assume that there is only one way. In fact, there are often many ways to achieve the desired end.

For shared leadership to evolve, people need autonomy to find their right path within certain boundaries (See Career Compass No. 46: Leading By Letting Go). While you may think that you are the only one who can do it right, that's not your role as a leader. In addition, in a disruptive world, you want to promote a "ready, fire, aim" approach to problem-solving and innovation. Given escalating demands for which there are no perfect answers, our teams need to get it "roughly right" and fix it up as we go along.

MYTH 7: I LEAD A TEAM

Just because you call your work unit a "team," doesn't mean it is a team. A true team is built over time. It struggles to develop and achieve common vision, goals, work plans, and results. Team members must choose to play as a team. Each member has his or her say, but not necessarily his or her way. Everyone helps and supports each other. Each one contributes in his or her own way. People connect with each other and hold each other accountable.

An authentic team is built by all team members. There may be a manager who is the formal leader but ultimately a true team has shared leadership.

To succeed as a team, team leaders must build the team issue by issue, step by step (See Career Compass No. 37: Engaging Employees Successfully).

A team is only a team if it acts like a team.

Changing Your Leadership Mindset

By becoming aware of these myths, you can enhance your leadership mindset. With a different mindset (see Career Compass No. 41: The Post-Heroic Leader), you can then take action to become more of a humble servant leader who serves your team, your clients, and the larger organization and community.

To change how you lead, you can start any place. Where do you want to begin?

48

How Do I Benefit From a Coach?

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest explains why you need a coach, how to get one, and what they can do for you.

I'm a mid-manager in a suburban city government. I'd like to advance in my career, but I'm "stuck" in my current program manager role. I went back to school and earned an MPA; I competed unsuccessfully for one position inside my organization and one with another local government agency. I have never used a coach, but I think I may benefit from some coaching.

What do you think? I don't know what to expect from a coach or how to proceed.

If you desire to advance in your career, a coach (or better yet several different kinds of advisors) would help you accelerate your development and better position you for advancement.

In my experience as a coach, oftentimes aspiring leaders have a number of unanswered questions about the coaching process and thus they are overly tentative about seeking a coach. Some common questions include:

- What is coaching?
- What can I expect for a good coach?
- What are my responsibilities in the coaching relationship?
- Where do I find a coach?
- Do I need more than one coach?

Originally published on the ICMA website March 8, 2016.

- How do I approach a potential coach?
- How do I get the most out of coaching?
- What are some keys to accelerating my development?

Let me address these questions.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching is a confidential relationship typically between a senior manager and an aspiring leader that aims to help the emerging leader achieve his or her hopes and dreams. Coaching often helps one focus on accelerating career development and/or addressing problematic work situations.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM A GOOD COACH?

Recognizing your aspirations, a good coach is in your corner and wants the best for you. It is not what the coach wants for you or from you; it is what you want to achieve.

A good coach will:

- Explore your hopes and dreams.
- Ask questions about obstacles and challenges.
- Prompt you to consider a variety of options.
- Share experiences.
- Invite you to consider big leaps.
- Offer resources, connections, and opportunities.
- Provide candid feedback.

Don Maruska points out in his book, T*ake Charge of Your Talent*, that a good coach is a catalyst for action.

WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE COACHING RELATIONSHIP?

You must take the initiative in reaching out to the potential coach and in scheduling times to talk either in person or by phone.

In addition, you need to be open to the conversation and honestly share your goals, challenges, doubts, and fears.

Finally, it is your responsibility to take any action (such as a stretch assignment, professional involvement, or training) which flows from the coaching.

WHERE DO I FIND A COACH?

There are many places to find a coach. A coach may be. . .

- A senior manager or other respected colleague in your department.
- A senior manager or other respected colleague in another department in your organization.
- A professional from another public agency.
- A local government leader whom you find in one of your professional organizations.

Some ICMA state associations or other affiliated organizations (e.g., Cal-ICMA, Texas City Management Association, Oregon City/County Management Association, International Hispanic Network) have now established one-to-one coaching services. The ICMA Coaching Program will launch "CoachConnect" in 2016, which is an online service to match you with a coach based on your needs. "CoachConnect" is available to any local government employee in the United States.

An ICMA Senior Advisor (usually a retired manager affiliated with your state association) is often available to suggest a good coach in order to support your aspirations.

Finally, a number of individual local government agencies have begun, through their HR departments, one-to-one coaching programs to address succession planning needs.

DO I NEED MORE THAN ONE COACH?

Yes. While you may just want to start with one formal or informal coach, eventually you want to create a "dream team" of coaches and advisors.

Different coaches offer different things. One or another member in your dream team might:

- Advise you on how to enhance your skills, gain new experiences, and position yourself for advancement.
- Suggest how you may handle problematic situations at work.
- Alert you to new job opportunities inside and outside your organization.
- Serve as connectors to others who may be able to provide advice or resources.
- Serve as a sponsor in helping you secure an appointment to an interdepartmental team or a professional committee or access some other opportunity such as a training program.
- Provide information, data, knowledge, and expertise.
- Serve as a sounding board for advice.

(See Career Compass No. 7: How Do I Create a Dream Team of Advisors?)

In developing over time a cadre of advisors, you might want to adhere to the "2 + 1" rule. You need a coach inside your department who knows the work of the department and how to get things done, and a coach outside your department who is aware of broader opportunities, as well as organizational politics (the "2"), plus a coach outside your organization who knows about the bigger professional picture, as well as opportunities outside your agency (the "1").

HOW DO I APPROACH A POTENTIAL COACH?

It is easy if a senior manager has already registered as a coach or offered to serve as a coach in a formal coaching program. You simply send an e-mail, introduce yourself, indicate that you found the senior manager in the "Coaches Gallery" or some other registry, and ask them to schedule a face-to-face or telephone call. It's a good idea to provide a list of dates and times to get together in order to give the coach some flexibility in scheduling.

If you are approaching a senior manager who is not involved in a formal coaching program, you can try one of two approaches:

- The direct approach: "I need some career coaching. Would you be willing to give me some advice or feedback?"

While you want a coach to assist you in debriefing recent experiences or efforts to advance, the point is to explore what you have learned so that you can enhance your future behavior and opportunities.

- A softer approach: "May I buy you a cup of coffee and pick your brain about achieving some of my goals (or advancing my career)?"

Another approach is to ask one coach to make a connection with another potential advisor, and then you follow up after the introduction.

HOW DO I GET THE MOST OUT OF COACHING?

In order to maximize the value from informal or more formal coaching, you need to have a proper frame of mind.

Focus on a "growth mindset." Instead of looking at our challenges as problems to minimize, you should foster a "growth mindset." Carol Dweck in her book *Mindset* suggests that those with "fixed mindsets" try to avoid challenges and mistakes. They prefer to do the same kind of work that they have already mastered since it reinforces their sense of competency. With a "growth mindset," we look at challenges and experimenting and even mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow, and thereby expand our portfolio of behaviors, skills, and relationships and ultimately become more effective in the dynamic environment of local government.

As part of a growth mindset, we want to try out and practice new behaviors to see if they work for us or improve problematic situations. As Herminia Ibarra suggests in the *Harvard Business Review* article (January-February 2015) titled "The Paradox of Authenticity," you are not being a fake if you experiment with new behaviors; rather, you are just trying them out to see if they enhance who you are as a leader and thus over time become part of your authentic self.

Ask for help and feedback. A lot of us find it difficult to ask for help. We often perceive asking for help as a sign of vulnerability and weakness (see Career Compass No. 32: The Power of Vulnerability). You can only benefit from coaching if you ask for guidance or feedback.

Be open to the conversation. It is important to not only share your challenges and dilemmas with a coach, but be open to the feedback and any suggestions on how to handle difficult career or work-related problems.

Prepare for the conversation. In advance of the get-together with the coach, identify the challenge you are facing; what actions you have taken; what have been the results to date; why you are frustrated; and how you'd like things to change.

Use the coach to promote self-reflection. Coaches can ask probing questions that promote reflection and self-critique and opportunities to make adjustments. After an informal or formal coaching conversation, reflect on what has been discussed and the implications for self-correction.

No griping. It is therapeutic to express some frustration, but you want to quickly move on to request the coach's perspectives and constructive feedback.

Be forward looking. While you want a coach to assist you in debriefing recent experiences or efforts to advance, the point is to explore what you have learned so that you can enhance your future behavior and opportunities.

Learn from the stories. Coaches love to tell war stories. Don't just enjoy the swapping of stories—probe for lessons that may be related to your dilemma or challenge.

Don't feel compelled to follow the advice. While you want a coach to offer different perspectives and additional options and prompt action, you do not have to accept or act on anything. It is your responsibility to weigh the advice and feedback and choose whatever you might do to enhance your career development or become a more effective leader.

Enjoy the interaction. While you are certainly looking for feedback and advice, informal or even formal coaching offers an opportunity to form new relationships and get social support. The experience of meeting with a senior manager colleague and exchanging experiences and views is stimulating and fun.

WHAT ARE SOME KEYS TO ACCELERATING MY DEVELOPMENT?

Oftentimes, we mistakenly assume that the best development or training is through classroom education such as a seminar, workshop or university class. Classroom training or education is a good way to secure new information and develop a broader conceptual or theoretical framework for new behavior, but it does not create new behavior, skills or capabilities. You only create skills or enhance skills if you apply the information or learning.

Therefore, the best development is "learning through doing." You can supercharge your development by taking on a series of stretching job assignments coupled with helpful and candid coaching and feedback.

In looking for and requesting new job experiences, you should seek the "sweet spot" of learning and development. The sweet spot is when you have a 50-70% chance of success. If you have an 85% chance of success, the assignment is not difficult enough and you won't learn new things or develop new capabilities. It is just more work. If you only have a 40% chance of success, you may easily feel overwhelmed or withdraw. It won't be an energizing learning experience.

REMEMBER, COACHES LOVE TO COACH!

Often we think it is an added burden if we ask a senior manager to coach us or act as a sounding board. Not so!

Coaches love to coach. It is satisfying and fulfilling and gets us away from the more mundane aspects of our work.

You are doing a senior manager a favor if you ask for advice and coaching.

49

Building High-Performance Teams—What's the Magic?

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Frank Benest explains the traits of high-performing teams, how to build them, and what they are capable of accomplishing.

I'm a mid-career manager in a large water district. The division team that I supervise is involved in water conservation and recycling programs. I also lead several project teams involving internal and external groups.

During my career, I've participated on a few high-achieving teams and some terrible teams. My current work team plus several project teams are decent but not especially high-performing. Maybe it is because my water agency does not have a culture of high achievement and excellence.

How do I build high-performing teams? Is it possible to overcome the organization-wide culture? If so, what's the magic?

Since teams are critical to the way we do our work in local government, I wish I knew the "special sauce." However, I do have some ideas that I've picked up over the course of my long work in the trenches of local government.

WHY TEAMS?

There is a strong business case for relying on teams to do our work:

Originally published on the ICMA website April 18, 2016.

- The big challenges of the day (for example, conserving water, promoting economic prosperity for all) cannot be solved by anyone alone and often require engaging stakeholder groups from the different parts of the organization and from outside the agency.
- Teams bring together different ideas, perspectives, expertise, approaches, and resources.
- Teams provide the opportunity to foster commitment and accountability.
- Teams create the opportunity for people to support each other in doing difficult work.

Our team persevered and slowly built support from the faith community, downtown merchants, the police, and immigrant advocates.

FRANK'S PREMISES

Before I share some ideas about building high-performing teams, I need to share several premises and even biases. These premises include the following:

- Oftentimes, teams are "teams" in name only. A team is a team only if it behaves like one.
- Many teams are used primarily for information-sharing, but don't do much real work as a team.
- Serving on an effective team requires everyone to move beyond their individual agendas and interests.
- Even if you are not the department head, a team leader can help create a "pocket of excellence" in his/her sphere of influence.
- It takes time and focused effort to build a team.
- No one action will create a great team; team-building requires sustained effort.
- Elite teams are "leader-full."

FRANK'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE JOB CENTER FOR DAY WORKERS

To give you a sense of what a great team looks like, I'd like to share my team experience addressing a day worker problem when I was city manager in Brea, California.

Downtown merchants and residents were complaining about day workers. The day workers were blocking access to stores, running out into the streets to jump into the trucks of contractors, and littering. The city council wanted me to use the police to push the day workers out of the downtown. I thought this was a waste of police resources and was basically unjust. I asked the council for some time and pulled together an interdepartmental team with additional representatives from congregations serving newly arrived immigrants.

Each department had its own department interests and perspectives. The police did not want to use scarce resources on day workers who were just trying to get work. The redevelopment staff wanted to revitalize the downtown and saw the day workers as an obstacle. The legal staff were concerned about federal immigrant employment laws and the city's potential liability if we got involved. The church people were only concerned with social justice.

There was much disagreement about how to address the day worker challenge and the proper role of the city. However, after some research and community outreach, our team proposed a Job Center using a modular unit on a vacant parcel of city-owned land. The site would allow contractors to match up with day workers on the city streets.

The proposal caused a firestorm of opposition, particularly from residents who thought the city shouldn't be using tax monies to serve "illegals."

Our team persevered and slowly built support from the faith community, downtown merchants, the police, and immigrant advocates. Different team members worked to get the modular unit donated, address parking and traffic circulation issues, and resolve any federal immigration problems. We learned a lot.

The council eventually approved the Job Center pilot on a 3-2 vote, and it turned out to be a great success. After the Job Center opened, we subsequently used the Job Center experience as a "story" to illustrate that the city could solve intractable community problems if we exerted leadership, worked across boundaries, and engaged community groups.

TRAITS OF HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

My experience with the team that created the Job Center for Day Workers illustrates the traits of high-performing teams. Such teams:

- Ensure that purpose and expectations are clear.
- Do something (not just share information).
- Are "owned" by all.
- Feature "shared leadership."
- Encourage different people to make different contributions.
- Focus on learning.
- Share knowledge and resources freely.
- Encourage disagreements in order that the team makes better decisions.
- Hold team members accountable.
- Provide social support.

- Tell their story.
- Celebrate successes and failures.
- Are built over time.

Frank's Ten Ideas to Build Great Teams

Here are my top 10 ideas for building with others a high-performing team.

1. DEVELOP A TEAM CHARTER.

Start with a number of conversations with the group, identifying its purpose, its vision of moving forward, strategic and operational priorities, and the "rules" of engagement or protocols for conducting meetings, working together, and making decisions. Remember, as the poet David Whyte suggests, leadership is the art of conversation.

2. TALK ABOUT THE MEANING OF THE WORK. ASK YOUR TEAMMATES:

- "What is our 'collective ambition'?"
- "Why is it important?"
- "What will result if we are successful? If we fail?"
- Meaning is a great motivator.

3. REFORM TEAM MEETINGS.

Don't use meetings for info-sharing. Focus on generating ideas, debriefing, and developing a shared plan of action.

One idea to reform meetings is to focus each meeting on a question. For instance, instead of labeling the agenda item as a discussion of budget priorities, the item should be stated as follows: "Given upcoming budget cuts, what are the one or two key priorities for which we need to maintain funding?" Or, "What is one key investment for the upcoming two-year budget?" (See Career Compass No. 38: Your Staff Meetings Don't Have To Be Dreary).

4. ROTATE MEETING CONVENER AND LEADER ROLES.

All great teams exhibit "shared leadership." To promote shared leadership, rotate who calls the meeting, pulls together the agenda, and facilitates the discussion.

5. USE THE TEAM TO SHARE LEARNING.

Great teams are self-reflective and self-critical. A great team is always focused on learning, especially from mistakes. Ask the following in debriefing a recent team experience:

What went well?
What did not go so well?
What do we learn for future practice?

As John F. Kennedy said, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

6. PUT CONFLICT TO WORK.

High-performing teams avoid "group think" and encourage members to express different perspectives and ideas. You want your teams to consist of people from different disciplines, with different expertise, perspectives, and life experiences (see Frans Johansson, *The Medici Effect)*. Diverse teams are the most innovative, if the groups encourage the exploration of different ideas.

To make conflict productive, the leader must model openness to different ideas and help make it "safe" for team members to express themselves. The team charter and group protocols need to encourage discussion and debate. You may also want to designate different people at different meetings to serve as the "contrarian."

7. EMPHASIZE PROGRESS.

Team members will stay engaged and energized if they see progress along the way. It is the leader's role to help the team set milestones and then recognize and celebrate progress (see Teresa Amabile et al., *The Progress Principle*).

8. BUILD CONNECTIONS.

Relationship-building must precede problem-solving and accomplishment. Leadership is all about creating connections with others. People will decide to follow (or not). Therefore, a leader must get to know team members, their hopes and dreams, concerns and fears, unique motivations, and family and outside pursuits.

Often leaders think they must choose between emphasizing results or relationships. Rather, a great leader achieves results through relationships.

9. HELP THE TEAM TELL ITS STORY.

In terms of influencing others, data is necessary but completely insufficient. Storytelling is the most powerful way to communicate and persuade.

Therefore, a team can create a readiness for those inside and outside the organization to collaborate with

the team and support its work if it has a good "story" or narrative to tell. We used the Job Center story to demonstrate to the city organization and the Brea community that we all could address difficult challenges and do great work together.

10. PROMOTE "PURPOSEFUL PARTYING."

To build cohesion and a sense of great purpose, it is always important to celebrate team progress and achievement. We in local government all too often do not take the time to celebrate because we are too busy with the next demand on us.

Team leaders should therefore "party with a purpose." It can be a coffee and bagel break, a pizza party, or an ice cream social. It doesn't cost much, but it underscores our positive work together, builds momentum for the future work, and demonstrates that we care.

A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the laments from team leaders is "how do I force accountability?" You can't.

Formal leaders try to force compliance, make demands, even plead—all to no avail. Formal authority can only force a minimal level of compliance and performance. True accountability is team accountability.

So, here are some questions that suggest how to create a culture of accountability:

- Do team members truly see the meaning and purpose behind the work or task?
- Have we as a team developed through conversations a clear vision, specific goals, and expectations of each other?
- Is there shared leadership?
- Do we have the capabilities, resources (including time) and support to achieve what we intend?
- Are we debriefing along the way and learning from missteps?
- What are the consequences if we fail?
- Do we have peer accountability (or does accountability come from the formal leader)?

ELITE TEAMS

Regardless of the overall organizational culture, any of us can help create a "pocket of excellence" within our own realms. Even in the face of political, funding, and other organizational obstacles, members of high-performing teams learn over time to. . .

- Share ideas, perspectives and resources.
- Make different contributions to further the "collective ambition" of the team.
- Support each other.
- Share leadership.
- Learn together.
- Persevere.
- Make a big difference in organizational or community life.

Such groups become elite teams and do indeed create "magic."

50

Storytelling—A Powerful Way to Lead and Communicate

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Frank Benest explains how to persuasively use stories to influence public policy decisions.

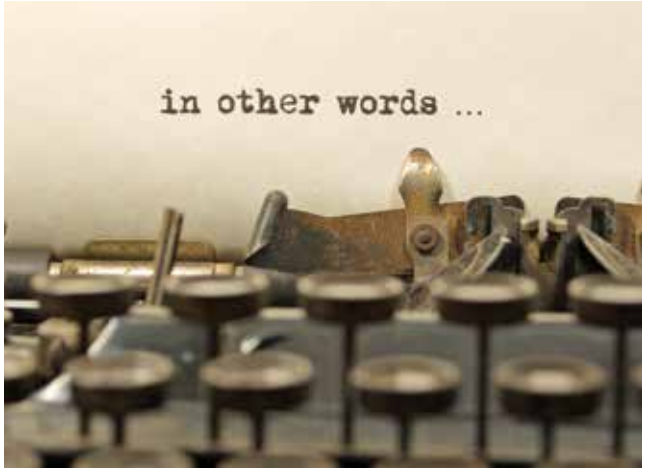
I'm a traffic engineer in a small midwestern city. I just had a difficult experience presenting a mobility safety plan to my city council. I did a lot of research on best practices to better protect pedestrians and bicyclists along a fairly busy street, while still maintaining reasonable traffic flow. As part of my report, I presented traffic count, accident data, and made a set of well-balanced recommendations based on the information.

The council members seemed to show support for my recommendations until the public comment portion of the hearing, when a mother with her son beside her told the council about their experience riding bicycles to his school. She stated that the recommendations did not go far enough and demanded action well beyond what the technical data supported. She blew my presentation out of the water, and the council voted to do what she wanted.

It was very frustrating to see policy-makers ignore our technical recommendations. How do I better communicate our recommendations in the future?

I understand your frustration. As a long-time local government manager, I too have tried to communicate and influence public policy decisions based on sound technical research, best practices, and good staff work.

Originally published on the ICMA website June 1, 2016.



Yet I often failed when a little old lady (or in your case a mother and child) has a personal experience or story that trumps my technical data. Over time, I learned that I had to enhance my leadership and communication skills through story-telling.

WHY STORIES?

We professionals often feel that stories are "fluff." In fact, stories are the most powerful way to communicate.

Data becomes less important when we are overwhelmed with data. Stories are memorable and make the data "stick." In research conducted by Stanford University, people retain only 5-10% of the information and message with statistics alone. With data and anecdotes ("stories"), people retain 65-70%.

In addition to helping people retain the message, stories also help leaders connect with their audience. Leadership is all about connection.

Most importantly, stories help us win hearts as well as minds. As opposed to data alone, stories can inspire us to act.

In short, data is necessary but completely insufficient. In making recommendations to senior management or to your governing board, you certainly need data or you will get thrown out of the room. However, to carry the day, you need a narrative to reinforce the data.

Brené Brown defined stories as "data with a soul." (See Brené Brown's TED.com talk "The Power of Vulnerability.")

WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE STORY?

A good story that adds value to the data must be a "true" story. An appropriate story must be relevant to the issue and aligned with the data and recommendations. Again, a good story makes the data come alive.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A GOOD STORY?

Good stories often have some typical elements:

- The stories are personal with a strong point of view.
- People can relate to the protagonist or situation.
- The narrative involves a big problem, failure, or misfortune.
- The audience develops "rooting interest" in the main character.
- The story builds to a conclusion.
- The experience includes lessons to be learned.
- There's a "call to action."

WHAT SIMPLE STORY COULD YOU USE?

To enhance your safety presentation, you could share a personal experience (which is a "story"). For example, you could start your presentation by briefly relating how you as a resident drive everyday on this well-traveled street from your home to work at city hall. You also often walk this route to the downtown district for lunch. You could relate that due to traffic speeds you feel uncomfortable crossing the street as a pedestrian even though the crosswalks are marked.

You can conclude your personal experience by stating that the street must work and be safe for all users. You could emphasize that staff have tried to develop a set of well-balanced recommendations based on the experiences of other cities, data gathered by the city related to the functioning of the street, and input from several community meetings.

While your presentation may include photos of several traffic-calming measures, you might use a prop to enhance the narrative. For instance, you could hold up one of the bright flags that you recommend pedestrians use as a safety measure in crossing the street.

This is a simple yet effective story. It is aligned with data and underscores the need for the proposed safety plan that works for all. It also attaches a human face (yours) to the proposal and humanizes you.

WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE OF A GOOD STORY?

A classic story has three acts:

- Act one introduces the main character facing a challenge or some obstacles.
- Act two involves some action that is taken by the protagonist or someone else.
- Act three features a "happy" conclusion, a triumph over adversity, or some ending with an important lesson for us all.

In your story to the council, you are introduced in act one. In act two, you encounter problems using the street. In act three, you conclude that the challenges will be addressed by your recommendations.

WHEN SHOULD YOU USE A STORY OR NARRATIVE?

Always or often. As a leader and communicator, you must serve as a "bard," making issues come alive and inspiring action. You can tie stories to efforts

- Improving customer service.
- Promoting an organizational culture of excellence.
- Developing partnerships with business, neighborhood or school groups.
- Supporting the senior citizen population.
- Promoting a new technology.
- Overcoming a major organizational or community challenge.

WHO SHOULD TELL THE STORY?

You as the leader can tell the story. Or, you can invite several users or partners to share their experiences as a way to make the data come alive.

In terms of the public hearing regarding the safety plan, you could have involved in your presentation someone from the local bicycle coalition or the PTA to share their experiences. These narratives could have replaced your story or augmented it.

HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR STORY-TELLING?

Here are ten tips to enhance your story-telling skills:

- Search for stories. Be on the look-out for personal experiences that can become a story. This requires self-reflection and that you know and have tried to understand your own personal history.

- Critique the stories of others. Be aware of the stories told by others and critique them. Was the story relevant? Did the story connect you to the storyteller? Did the narrative include elements of a powerful story? For example, did the story exhibit a strong point of view or allow the audience to develop a "rooting interest"? Did the narrative have the classic three-act structure?
- Outline the story. Never write out the full story and read it. It is better to make some notes outlining the sequence of events. Don't memorize the story as part of the presentation. You want the telling to seem natural, like you are at a cocktail party and sharing an experience with a small circle of friends.
- Remove the "fluff." After you outline the story, examine the story with a very critical eye. Oftentimes, we love our stories so much that we include a lot of context and detail that make the story too long, get in the way of the conclusions or lessons, and/or simply bore the audience. You need to eliminate the fluff so the story is "tight" and leads to the conclusions desired.
- Practice in a safe environment. Try out your material in a comfortable and "safe" environment. Comedian Chris Rock practices his jokes and stories at dive bars. I practice stories in the car as I'm driving the freeways.
- Debrief your stories. After telling a story, always debrief the story so you can refine it. Ask yourself (or better yet a friend or colleague who heard the story) the following questions: What went well with the story? What did not go so well? How could I improve the story with the next telling?
- Start a story file. Once you become more aware of personal experiences that can turn into powerful stories, begin a paper or digital file and throw in any stories that can be used in internal and external presentations. In hunting for a relevant story, you first go to your story file. Your unit can create a file that contains your collective stories.
- Use stories at the beginning of staff meetings. To showcase stories and practice storytelling, make it a practice for someone at the beginning of each staff meeting to tell an informal story (i.e., share a work or personal experience that they or someone else had relevant to your endeavors). You can also invite internal or external customers or partners to join you at the beginning of a staff meeting and share their experiences with your services or joint efforts.
- Use a prop. A prop helps illustrate the story. The suggested bright pedestrian flag to illustrate a safety measure supports your story.
- Show "vulnerability." If you want people in the audience to connect with you and "root" for you, show vulnerability. Share "my worst experience" or a fabulous flop.

Most importantly, you must practice this skill. Like most behaviors, storytelling gets better the more you do it.

HOW DOES ONE START?

To get started in developing this capability, I suggest the following:

- Critique other leaders as they tell stories and try to influence others.
- Incorporate a personal experience or other story in your next presentation. Ensure that this first effort is in a fairly comfortable environment, such as your unit staff meeting.
- Get feedback from a trusted colleague after the meeting so you can tweak the story going forward.
- Try out the story or another story in your next formal presentation.
- Start a story file.

STORY-TELLING AS A KEY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY

The ability to tell relevant and engaging stories will expand your leadership capacity and effectiveness. Stories will

- Help people connect with you.
- Help the audience retain your message and make it "sticky."
- Persuade others.
- Inspire others to act with you.

The mission of ICMA is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide.

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