Keeping Your Elected Officials Out of the Ethical Weeds

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Topics of Discussion

• Sharing Information with the Press
• Blogging & Tweeting
• Ethics Violations: Does Intent Play a Part?
• Personal Notes and Impressions
• Appearance and reality: Perception
• Help for Newbies
Sharing Information with the Press

• Ask first: are your comments accurate, appropriate?

• Deep Background: not exactly off-the-record, but you have to ask to be considered this status

• Quoted: take time to write your comments out before giving them (you can always ask to call a reporter back in 10 minutes – use the time!)

• Off-the-record: very rarely granted; be careful!
Blogging and Tweeting

• It is a public record if it deals with any city/county business before your gov’t now and in the foreseeable future – are you the custodian or share it with custodian

• Again the question: are you accurate, appropriate?
Intent and Ethics Violations

- The courts, AG and Commission on Ethics have sided with intent as enough proof to investigate/prosecute.
- You don’t actually have to violate the laws to be charged – example: Chapter 112 *(just the appearance of impropriety is cause)*.
Personal Notes and Impressions

• F.S. Chapter 286 spells out drafts, personal notes (are you keeping them?) rules – go over them with your officials thoroughly! Applies to staff as well

• What the public sees: notes passed on the dais, notebooks kept after meetings – it does not appear transparent
Perception

• Perception is Reality: go through examples
Help for Newbies

• Newly elected or appointed officials need time with the attorney, with the records officer and YOU to understand the reality of Chapters 112, 119 and 286
• Reporting forms: go over every year
• Explain what legal counsel means (they think the gov’t attorney can be their own attorney)
• Your role in *Leach-Wells v. Bradenton*: violated too often and must be followed!