

“Women’s Success Stories”
From the City Managers’ Dept Annual Meeting, February 2007
By Jan Perkins, ICMA Senior Advisor

*“People grow through experience if they meet life honestly and courageously.
This is how character is built.”*

Eleanor Roosevelt

Women constitute about 13% of the city managers in California. Linda Barton, Beth Pollard, and Jan Perkins spoke at the City Managers’ Department annual meeting in February 2007 about their **careers and tips for success.**

Linda Barton:

Linda was appointed to the position of City Manager for the City of Livermore in February 2001. With a population of over 80,000, Livermore is the largest city in the Tri-Valley and is very involved in regional development issues with its neighboring communities. Linda has had an extensive career in public management. Prior to coming to Livermore, She served as Deputy City Manager of Bellevue, Washington for four years, where she directed the work activities of eight departments. She also served as Bellevue’s Interim City Manager for over a year. Additionally, Linda has also served as City Manager in Bedford, Texas and Burnsville, Minnesota. In her public management career beginning 30 years ago, she served as the Commissioner of Employee Relations in the State of Minnesota and Deputy City Manager of Corvallis, Oregon. Linda holds a Masters in Public Administration with an emphasis on Urban Management. She has been an active member in several organizations including the International City Managers Association, Alameda County City Managers Association and Rotary International. She is a Credentialed City Manager and a Fellow for the National Academy of Public Administration.

Linda Barton’s tips for success:

1. **Have a strong personal support system.** Doing this job without a great support system would be difficult. I define that broadly but for me most important has been family support. My husband has moved three times with me for my job. He is also a wise and thoughtful advisor because he knows me and at the same time he is can step away from the emotion and the drama of the issues. When times are either tough or great he is always there to prop me up or celebrate with me. When all is said and done family and close friends are the ones who will still be there.

Friends and colleagues developed over my years of participating in ICMA and state associations are also an invaluable resource. I have been very active in ICMA and state associations for almost 30 years and the network

that has resulted is broad and spans the whole country. I have found it to be stimulating, fun and highly supportive.

2. **Build a team in your organization that you have confidence in professionally and that you trust.** When you have leaders in your organization who support the organizational goals and follow through with their part of the process, you will have the opportunity to do your job as a leader. You will be able to pay attention to the big picture goals of the organization and the time to stay in touch with the Council and other community leaders. You cannot do it all—trusting and delegating to outstanding professionals is what makes it work. You will never have every idea yourself, but hopefully you are able to recognize a good idea when others bring it up. In addition the richness of perspective of differing points of view will assure that ideas are evaluated from a variety of angles and viewpoints and have much greater chance for success.
3. **Always act with integrity and be known for your trustworthiness and ethical behavior.** Many people have the skills, the personality and the stamina to do the job. What is most critical is our integrity – it is the main thing we have to sell. What differentiates us in the public sector is our strong commitment to ethics. I have always gone beyond following the rules and try to think how the community or worse—the press—would view a decision or a behavior of mine.

I believe we work in the best profession in the world. We can make a difference, we can improve the lives of the people living in our communities, we can work with some of the most outstanding professionals and we can be in the center of everything that is going on in a community! For me the keys have been to stay focused on what I can do, look at the big picture, have a strong support system, build a team of people who I can count on and act with integrity. It is really quite easy!

Beth Pollard Tips for Success:

Beth Pollard is the City Administrator for the City of Albany, in Alameda County. Beth's interest in local government began while covering City issues for her high school newspaper. She continued this connection with municipalities when, during college, she was a daily reporter covering city issues for the Hartford Courant newspaper. Shortly after graduating, she moved inside city government, taking a job as a secretary for the Town of Fairfax, in Marin County. Soon thereafter, she took her secretarial skills to the Town of San Anselmo. Eight years and a Masters degree in Public Administration later, she was appointed San Anselmo Town Administrator. Looking for new challenges, she moved across the San Francisco Bay in 2001 to become the Albany City Administrator. In 2003, she received a certificate in Strategic Management of

Public Organizations from UC Berkeley. Beth is active in various community organizations, including the YMCA and the Rotary Club.

Beth Pollard's tips for success:

1. **Be curious.** We do not need to know everything to be a city manager. We work best when we are comfortable with not knowing the answers, because it motivates us to include others in gathering information and opinions. The best thing about being a rookie is that you are not expected to know everything; take advantage of this window, and continue this mindset of continuous exploration and discovery even when you have been there, done that. "I'm just making this up as I go along", I sometimes say. None of us knows it all, and who wants to be around someone who does?
2. **Avoid the "ouda's." Be in the present moment, not the past.** If only I "coulda, woulda, shoulda" said this, done that, realized the other, etc. etc. Or if only he/she "coulda, woulda, shoulda" etc, Well, I didn't, and he/she didn't, so get over it, learn from it, and move on. There is greater strength in focusing on the cards we now have in our hand rather than those we had before our last turn. Our moving on motivates others to do likewise. I get a lot more done, with a greater chance of success when I focus my own attention, and the attention of others, on the present and the future, the issues and the ideas, rather than the past, the people, and the blame.
3. **Keep and (with some caution) exercise your sense of humor.** Among the delightful aspects of being a city manager is the variety and quirkiness of life that we cannot avoid, even if we wanted to. And who would want to? Whether it is Council open time for public comments, staff briefings, or the person who stops you on the street, you just never know what the next thing is going to be. Having a broad perspective that appreciates and celebrates ironies, inconsistencies, and odd interpretations makes the job a lot more enjoyable not just for you, but the staff with whom you work and who rely upon you for inspiration.

Jan Perkins' Tips for Success:

Jan Perkins serves as an ICMA Senior Advisor, working to foster strong partnerships between ICMA and other local government professional associations. Jan serves on the ICMA Ethics Team and conducts ethics training for ICMA. She is a management consultant with Management Partners, serving local government leaders. As a consultant, Jan leads strategic planning efforts, conducts goal setting and teambuilding with management teams and city councils, conducts organization reviews, provides executive coaching, and

assists executives with their performance evaluations.

In her nearly 30 years in local government, she served as City Manager of Fremont and Morgan Hill, and as Assistant City Manager of Santa Ana, California, Deputy City Manager of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Assistant City Administrator and Community Development Director of Adrian, Michigan. She served as President of the California City Management Foundation, on the Executive Committee of the League of California Cities City Managers' Department, and chaired numerous committees for the International City/County Management Association. She has a Masters Degree in Public Administration from the University of Kansas and a Certificate from Harvard University's Program for Executives in State and Local Government.

She is an ICMA Credentialed Manager and a Fellow with the National Academy of Public Administration. Jan has authored a number of articles, including "Successful Leadership," which appeared in the March 2005 issue of *PM*, "The Value of Getting Back to Basics," co-authored with former Fremont Mayor Gus Morrison which appeared in the June 2005 issue of *Western City Magazine*, and "The Annual Performance Evaluation – An Essential Business Practice," published in *PM* July 2005. Jan co-authored two articles on ethics published in the January/February issue of *PM*. "Ethics: Alive and Well," was co-authored by Elizabeth Kellar, and "Assessing the Ethical Culture of Your Agency" was co-authored by Arne Croce and JoAnne Speers.

Jan Perkins' tips for success:

1. **Care:** Believe deeply in the value of public service, in making the world a better place, and improving the lives of others. I grew up in a family that talked about politics, conditions and events that were swirling around us. Civil rights, women's rights and the Vietnam War were pivotal in shaping my view of the world – as was the expectation fostered from my parents that I would "do good" and help create a better place. John F. Kennedy's imperative to "ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" was something I took seriously while in college. I knew early that I wanted to be a city manager and help create better places for people in organizations and communities. To make a difference – you have to care about improving things, about the people within the community. Leadership begins with wanting to do things that matter. That requires caring.
2. **Engage:** Be authentic in your relationships with other and look for ways to encourage others. Friendships and relationships with others have always been important to me. This is important on a personal level, in having support to get through the tough times and people who will be happy with good things happen. It is also important on a professional level – positive change only happens when we partner with others. People in the

community need to know we care about their interests, are willing to spend the time getting to know people, and are real in our relationships with them. Our colleagues and employees in our organizations want us to engage with them and care about them. I've always believed in fully engaging with people authentically, fostering relationships, and participating in networks such as ICMA, Women Leading Government, MMASC, MMANC, the California City Management Foundation, and other professional associations.

3. **Aim high:** Believe in your ability to provide leadership – and aim for the top job. I've always encouraged women to do the best they can do. Too often, I hear with women say they aren't sure they want to be a City Manager. I respect the many choices that we as professionals have in city management. But our organizations and communities need, and deserve, the great leadership that women can provide. My message to women is to keep your options open and say, "Maybe I will be a City Manager!" We have the ability to create a great future for ourselves and others. So don't limit yourself. Develop your skills – and your confidence in being the boss.

In all that you do, do it with ***enthusiasm!*** People like to be around energetic and confident people. It is contagious – and can inspire others to do their best.