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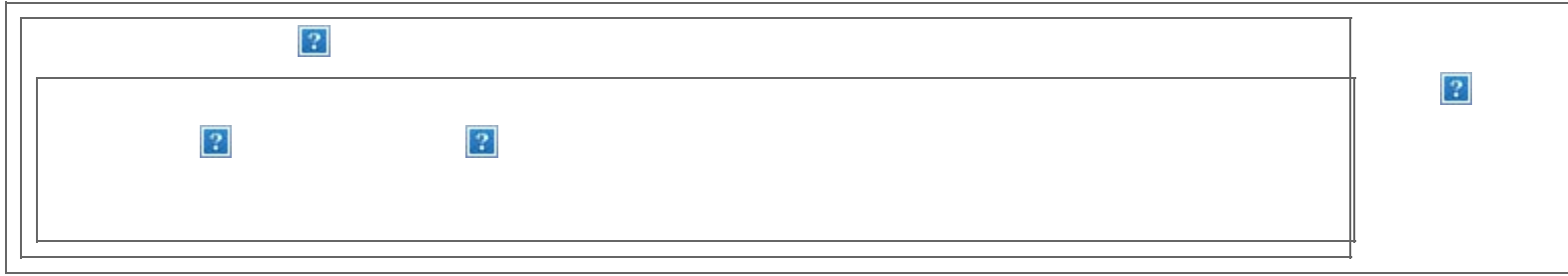


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Your First Year On the Job: Conceptualizing New Directions

George Caravalho

What do I do now? Where do I start? How do I get things done? These are some of the questions I asked myself when I was appointed to my first job in 1980, as city manager of San Clemente, California. Standing at the cusp of my new adventure, I felt a great sense of achievement and excitement, but I was also anxious about being in a foreign place with so many unknowns.

While a new manager is expected to be an instrument of change, change also may be wreaking havoc on the new manager's life, and he or she may not even be aware of it.

But now, as I am acclimatizing to my fourth city as a manager, I am able to look at the opportunity of beginning work at a new local government, not with apprehension but rather with the certainty of its being a promising new venture, a blank slate, a tabula rasa that can be used to be creative and develop a fresh strategy for successful management.

This is not to say that the transition will be easy, even for a seasoned executive like myself. Too often overlooked is the personal side of a manager's move to a new community. While undertaking the move, a new manager will face challenges in meeting new people, encountering a new organization, merging into new cultures and styles, as well as learning different issues, structures, dynamics, neighborhoods, and too many other people and activities to list here.

There are the family considerations, like schooling for the children, temporary housing, buying and selling a home, and the spouse or partner's career. All these important considerations, while still struggling through the sometimes treacherous and tumultuous first few months on the new job.

Conventional wisdom says that a new manager will be an agent of change, a person

coming into the management position with the will and means to steer the locality in a new direction, like the sturdy captain at the helm of a ship, looking singularly forward and in total control.

And while this may very well be true, what must be recognized is the fact that a new manager is also an object of change. The high levels of stress, the demand for the manager's time from all sides, and unfamiliar social relationships all have a pronounced impact on a new manager. Thus, while a new manager is expected to be an instrument of change, change also may be wreaking havoc on the manager's life, and he or she may not even be aware of it.

This is not a prophecy of doom; it is only a statement of reality. This reality can be dealt with effectively if the proper steps are taken. A well-considered plan for the future—a personal and family “vision”—can aid in reducing personal stress and tension because, with the support of people around the manager, at home or in the workplace, great things can be accomplished. So long as the manager keeps his or her head high and focused, the ship will stay on course, even if it has sprung leaks and is taking on water.

The Driving Forces

But how can this be accomplished in a brand-new place? How can the support of others, whom a new manager barely knows, be garnered to bring about the changes the manager was installed to make? This is after all the challenge of the job: to foster communication and understanding and mutual support among various groups. To achieve this goal, a process must be undertaken that is both inclusive and broad-based. The process requires a style of reaching out and listening and taking in the character, aspirations, and values of the organization, the community, and its people, then using this information to devise initiatives that will be supported.

A manager is in search of a “syzygy.” This an astronomic term that means an alignment of three celestial bodies. In local government, these three bodies are the community (voters), the political body (council), and the city or county organization (employees). The goal of a manager is to orchestrate these three entities so they are all moving in the same direction.

To obtain a syzygy in my own communities, I implement these 10 points:

1. The change “process.” Successful leadership requires the awareness and understanding that change itself is a paradox within human nature. [1] Humans are constantly trying to further changes that they feel are important while resisting the changes that others are trying to implement. Thus, to have the greatest success in bringing about change, you must have others buy into it. They must take ownership of your changes.

Timing is a factor in bringing elected officials a plan and strategy that is supported by the majority both of management and of the community. But this result comes with scar tissue and experience. Sorry.

To achieve this, you must involve others in the creation of the changes and make them feel as though they are a part of the driving force behind them. Accepting change becomes easier when a person is included in the process of making suggestions or modifying initiatives. In this way, everyone feels as though they have had a hand in making the future.

Change is also an evolutionary process.^[2] When new groups, boards, or associations initially gather, they go through a developmental process. At each stage of the process, certain characteristics become more pronounced within the dynamic of the group.

First is the “cheery bliss” stage, an introductory period wherein individuals are introduced and welcomed and no controversial issues are brought forth. Everyone is trying to see where their new place will be in the changing organization.

Second is the “insecure vulnerability” stage, at which, following the initial congeniality, individuals begin jockeying for position and struggling for power. This activity can be volatile and unstable, and it is difficult to navigate through, as the viability of the group may be threatened.

Third is the “level-headed settlement” stage, at which, after all the new niches have been found and the organization has begun to function as a team again, significant progress can be made toward implementing the changes that the group has, ideally, won support for.

Understanding the dynamics of change will greatly enhance your ability to bring about constructive improvements.

2. Bringing others along with you. The progression for undertaking a new strategic direction begins, for a new manager, during the interview process, with the mayor and council, for example. The interview process is an opportunity to explore the receptivity of the legislative body to new initiatives by outlining the concepts and steps that would be taken and by gaining a commitment for their support and involvement.

It is important for both the policy-making board and the executive to understand and appreciate that they both have a great deal of control over their joint destiny and that both have the ability to severely impede the progress of the local government, if their efforts are not effectively communicated and coordinated. To make this delicate situation viable, both the executive and the policy board must develop leaders who will make use of and optimize their constituents’ ideas, talents, and creativity.

Leadership is the process of bringing along others who are unwilling or who lack the motivation, understanding, or confidence to achieve great things for the community. Through working together, building on strengths, and establishing a strategic direction, many successes are possible in a relatively short time.

3. Conceptual understanding. A vision for the future is originally generated in the community. This vision is then implemented through policy leadership. Through consulting with the community, both on an individual and on a collective basis, an image of the aspirations and priorities of the people the manager will serve will begin to come into focus.

Attendance at community, service club, and various business meetings will enhance a manager’s understanding of the community’s vision for the future. An excellent first step for a new manager is simply to orient himself or herself with the community by driving and walking around the neighborhoods, business complexes, and parks.

Also, recognize that the elected officials and management staff are knowledgeable sources of information about the community. Their input needs to be included in the process of conceptual understanding in order to further develop a new direction.

4. Citizen involvement. Local government structure has become a far more participatory process than it used to be. There are more external forces and interest groups that feel they must be heard and consulted on various issues. Thus, it is essential that the process include opportunities for suggestions to be made and feedback to be collected from the public.

This vital process may be more important than the actual issues because the buy-in and support of others is what will see policy implementation through. Surveys, focus groups, and strategic planning sessions can all be helpful in soliciting feedback and support from the public. A solid working relationship with these external forces is critical to the success of a new manager's assimilation into a new community and to the credibility of its initiatives.

5. Intra-jurisdictional collaborations. Mobilizing a community to accomplish ambitious programs calls for a collaborative approach. No one department, entity, or unit will be able to solve the complex issues that a city or county faces daily. Community-based organizations (CBOs), schools, business associations, and other government organizations need to work together to develop plans and strategies to accomplish their common goals.

The problem of youth violence, for example, should be tackled by a coalition of groups—schools, police, county social services, parks and recreation, the district attorney, and parents—to have the best impact. The efforts of any one of these organizations and individuals, no matter how good the intentions, will fail unless all work together.

Success in transforming the culture of an organization, while simultaneously meeting the expectations of the governing body, community, and one's own family, can be a daunting undertaking. Stress, which will probably become most acute during the "insecure vulnerability" stage, can make a new manager question his or her chosen station in life.

6. Visioning. The route to developing a new direction is a collective progression. A vision in the mind of one executive is not enough to carry the day. The vision must be a collective image in the minds of all those involved as to where they are headed and what their mission is all about.

A new vision requires the commitment and acceptance of many groups: nonprofits, neighborhood groups, unions, elected officials, mid-management staff, and others. Their involvement will energize and mobilize people in all areas and at all levels to take ownership of the new direction.

Vision is powerful because it acts as a tractor beam, pulling everyone in the same direction, and channels all of their combined will, talent, and creativity toward accomplishing their goals. It also provides something to point to and hang onto when turbulence is encountered and the goals are challenged.

7. Economic considerations. Often, the implementation of a new vision will require new programs, equipment, and personnel, so it is important to be realistic as to the feasibility of new initiatives. Attention must be paid to external trend data that will affect a manager's choices, and internal financial information must be closely examined to gain an overall perspective of the economic strength of the community.

This information should be used to prepare and support budget instructions to department heads for the coming year. In many instances, the budget will have a

significant influence on the implementation and success of a newly adopted vision.

8. Multiple municipal “businesses.” Local governments operate under fund accounting systems whereby funds are all specifically designed for a certain purpose. This means, in short, that a manager runs multiple businesses! So if someone were to ask, “How is the city doing financially?” the answer would be, “It depends on which business you’re talking about.” Water? Redevelopment? Streets? The refuse fund?

Or what about the general fund? There may be 15 or 20 or even more “businesses” that, for the most part, are financially independent of one another. If one of the underachieving businesses is the general fund, however, this could be an especially serious problem because much of the money for personnel and services comes from this fund.

The conceptualizing process needs to be an educational process both for the new executive and for the citizens to learn the workings of the government, so they can best effect their desired results.

9. Strategic thinking. Hockey player Wayne Gretzky, when asked to describe his style of play, said, “I skate where I think the puck is going to be.”

What does this statement mean? What perspective and talent does it take to make a statement like this? Most obviously, it requires the ability to anticipate, to position oneself in the future, to think strategically. To do this successfully, a player (or a manager) must know many things: his team, his opponent, the rules for the environment in which he is operating. And, all the while, he must maintain momentum and constantly adjust to new obstacles and opportunities.

Taking advantage of all this knowledge and maintaining this momentum is the essence of gaining a strategic advantage. All of these points can be applied to management, as it is the leader who can successfully visualize and anticipate the future who is most successful.

10. Bringing it together. Now, if everything has gone incredibly well and the “celestial bodies” in the community’s universe are all moving into place, how does a manager seal the deal? By going through the process, a manager may see a plan that was once abstract and amorphous begin to take shape and gain clarity.

Timing is a factor in bringing elected officials a plan and strategy that is supported by the majority both of management and of the community. But this result comes with scar tissue and experience. Sorry.

Success in transforming the culture of an organization, while simultaneously meeting the expectations of the governing body, community, and one’s own family, can be a daunting undertaking. Stress, which will probably become most acute during the “insecure vulnerability” stage, can make a new manager question his or her chosen station in life.

By noting these 10 points and developing a sense of the big picture, a new manager will be able to understand the wants and needs of a community and be able to present a coherent plan and strategy to achieve a desirable future. Through the alignment of the community, political body, and local organization, the elusive syzygy can be established, unleashing the full potential of a local government.

[1] “This Thing Called Change,” a nine-minute video by Cally Curtis Co.; 1-800/344-6088.

[2] The discussion of stages is based on *Stages of Group Development* by Bruce W. Tuckman, Ohio State University; Web site, http://web.mit.edu/hr/oed/learn/teams/art_stages.html.

George Carvalho is city manager, Riverside, California. This article was written with the assistance of Joseph "Gus" Carvalho, a political science and English major at the University of California at Davis.

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Ethics Inquiries

Check Your Ethics Knowledge

Are you looking for a way to plan a professional development program? ICMA offers assessment instruments that you can use to determine your relative management strengths and the areas where you would do well to focus your professional development time.

To give you an idea of the types of questions that you might encounter related to the area of integrity, check your knowledge with the following questions. You'll find the "best choice" answers at the end of this column.

For more information about the assessment instruments that ICMA offers, go to <http://icma.org>. You can do a search for "management practices assessment," or click on "professional development" to read more.

1. You have been the city manager for a suburban community for 15 years and have begun to accumulate some savings that you would like to invest. The metropolitan area is growing rapidly, and there are a number of good opportunities you can consider. What is the best choice for a real estate investment for you as a city manager?

- A. Land adjacent to your community that the neighboring city manager tells you may be rezoned from single-family to a higher-density use when the master plan is revised.
- B. A rental property in another community.
- C. A historic property in your own city that you could renovate for multiple purposes, including your home, a rental unit, and a small commercial use.
- D. A sizable property in a distant county that you could afford to invest in only if your department directors joined you in a real estate partnership.

2. You are a town manager married to another town manager. You work in a nearby community, and you live in the community where your wife serves as manager. Because you have a background in library science, your neighbor asked you if you would consider running for the library board in her community. You do not need to raise any campaign funds to do this, and you know how hard it can be to find qualified candidates for these sorts of positions. What is the best course of action?

- A. Check with your town council to see if there are any concerns. If not, file the paperwork to become a candidate.
- B. Ask your wife to check with her town council. If the council has no objections, file the paperwork to become a candidate.
- C. Check with your town council, and have your wife check with her town council to see if there are any concerns. If not, file the paperwork to become a candidate.

- D. Decline to run for this office, explaining to your wife that even though you don't have to raise money, you cannot be a candidate for any local office.

For answers, see below.

Elizabeth Kellar, Deputy Executive Director, ICMA

Answers to "Check Your Ethics Knowledge."

1. The answer is B. Many city managers make it a practice to purchase nothing but their own homes in the communities where they work. The ICMA Code of Ethics stresses that members should avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. Prudent managers are careful about financial dealings with their employees and would not enter into a real estate partnership with them because of the potential for a conflict of interest.

They also know it is unwise to make an investment on the basis of a tip from a colleague or any other information that might come to their attention because of their position. Acting on confidential information is unethical (and may be illegal).

2. The answer is D. The ICMA Code of Ethics has a guideline that makes it clear that its members should not run for any elected office. This principle is important in helping a professional local government manager maintain a reputation for fairness and impartiality.

Ethics advice is a popular service provided to ICMA members. The inquiries and advice are reviewed by the Committee on Professional Conduct, the ethics committee of the ICMA Executive Board. Some of the inquiries are revised and published as a regular feature in *PM*, to give guidance to members in the big and little ethical decisions they make daily. If you have a question about your obligations under the ICMA Code of Ethics, call Elizabeth Kellar at 202/962-3611, e-mail, ekellar@icma.org or Martha Perego at 202/962-3668, e-mail, mperego@icma.org.

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Workshop

Six Reasons Why It's Best to Work Through the Manager

I'm a lucky city manager. I work for an excellent city council. Councilmembers take pride in promoting a tradition of community civility. They do their homework, serve for the right reasons, and have a sense of humor. They are supportive of staff, and they trust me. I can talk to them about almost anything. In such a healthy council-staff environment, councilmembers get to know and trust many staffers, and a smart manager wouldn't want to lose the feeling of a friendly, open organization.

So why is it necessary sometimes to remind our active and sincere councilmembers to work through my office or through department heads when seeking information or expressing interests and concerns? And why do I feel so awkward when I do?

Maybe it's because, no matter how diplomatically I express a desire that is consistent with our formal council policies and procedures, it can come across as a trust-and-control issue. And since the councilmembers trust the staff, why shouldn't staff trust councilmembers?

After all, their motivation is typically to avoid bothering me (or department heads) with the small stuff. What's there to hide? I guess this is where I am supposed to exclaim, "But it's not about trust and control!" In truth, however, it is, and here is why.

Trust and Control

The jewel in a healthy local government environment is trust. With trust, we spend our time working together to solve problems and to get good things done for the community. Without trust, problems multiply, and the time spent

solving them prevents work on more constructive items.

Preserving trust in any relationship, personal or professional, requires that we exercise a prudent amount of control in how we communicate. The council-staff relationship is no exception. In fact, given the unique pressures and constraints imposed on this relationship, the two groups probably need even more structured guidance than most.

A Lot of Rules, but Why Do We Need Them?

Fortunately, nearly all local governments have some formal rules in place, and virtually all such rules advise councilmembers to work through city and county managers and department heads on most organizational matters. Even with all the rules, however, something significant is missing.

Based on my research (admittedly not comprehensive, but I did check with ICMA, the League of California Cities, various trainers, and California city managers via an e-mail inquiry), there seems to be no prepared explanation for why such rules are important and how they preserve trust and benefit everyone involved in the relationship. In the absence of such context, the rules come across as, well, cold rules—a list of dos and don'ts designed to keep everyone in line.

This “context void” seems to be widely perceived by managers, and many of them have asked me to send them anything that I might find on the subject. Because I was unable to find anything already written, however, I have been forced to do a little more work. With the aid of some helpful managers, then, here are a half-dozen reasons why everyone's best interests are served when councilmembers work through the manager and/or department heads to gather information or address concerns.

Reason 1. Because city managers cannot be on top of things if they don't know what the things are. Councilmembers correctly expect managers to be on top of things. But if councilmembers bypass the manager to make requests of staff or to express concerns to staff, then the manager cannot possibly be sufficiently aware of their interests or concerns. Even the world's greatest local government manager cannot assure a timely response to a councilmember's inquiry if the manager is not aware of the request in the first place. Sure, staff members can inform the manager of the request, but this roundabout way of communication raises the chances of miscommunication.

Reason 2. Because bypassing the manager can give the impression that there is a problem in the council-manager relationship, and this perception can undermine both the manager's credibility within the organization and the respect that the staff feels for the councilmember. If a councilmember (or members) consistently goes directly to other staff members with issues, these harmful perceptions may evolve: 1) the councilmember does not like to work with the manager; 2) the councilmember does not trust the information provided by the manager; 3) the manager is ducking his or her responsibility and just “passing the buck”; 4) the councilmember does not play by the rules and seeks special treatment; and/or 5) it must be okay for staff to go around the manager because councilmembers do it. Such impressions will weaken a manager's credibility and authority in the organization or reflect poorly on the councilmember, or both.

Reason 3. Because it is not possible for managers to treat all councilmembers equally if the manager is unaware of the treatment that one councilmember is getting. Managers are in the highly unusual position of having many, equal bosses, and the expectation of equal treatment by each of those bosses is not only extremely high but also entirely appropriate.

Equal treatment includes providing councilmembers with the same information, the same levels of support, and the same accessibility to the staff in general. Thus, when an elected councillor goes through the manager in making a request, the manager can judge if the desired information should be shared with all councilmembers.

The manager can also judge whether a request for staff work is consistent with council policy or if the full council should direct such work. If requests are only inconsistently made through the manager, then the likelihood of inequities cropping up over time is high. This leads us to Reason 4.

Reason 4. Because councilmembers are often perceived as having “awesome power” and, therefore, direct requests can lead to surprising and negative unintended consequences. Councilmembers may contact staff people in a department to make what they perceive to be “simple requests for information,” only to find these requests later perceived as orders to do something never intended by the councilmembers.

This is especially possible when direct contacts are made with staff below the department-head level. Councilmembers are typically surprised by such overreactions and by the complications and rumors that can result (because they know they don’t have that much power). But to the staff member who seldom has contact with the higher-ups, the mayor and councilmembers are as “high up” as they come.

Reason 5. Because direct councilmember contact with staff members below the department-head level boosts the likelihood of getting erroneous or incomplete information. The further a councilmember reaches beyond the manager or department head, the more likely he or she will communicate with someone who has significantly less familiarity with the legislative process, the deeper context of various local government issues, the cross-departmental stakeholders who should be consulted, and the local rules for staff-council communication.

Combine these differences with the “awesome power” phenomenon, and the margin for a mistake in responding to the councilmember climbs substantially. On the other hand, a manager can provide one-stop service, saving time while producing better, more complete information.

Reason 6. Because such direct councilmember contact also can inadvertently cause awkward, embarrassing situations—or worse—for the staff members involved. After a Reason 5 scenario has occurred, a staff member who later learns that he provided incorrect or incomplete information feels embarrassed. In fact, a staff member who learns that she violated some staff-council communication rule is not only embarrassed but also worried that she might be perceived as acting politically and undermining her bosses.

A staff member who incorrectly completes excessive work at the direction of an individual councilmember may perceive him- or herself to be “in trouble,” especially if they have failed to notify their bosses or failed to complete other

assigned work as a result.

An Ugly Truth, But Not for Most

There is one unfortunate truth that needs to be recognized: not everyone is sincere or competent in council-manager relationships. There are councilmembers who deliberately try to undermine the system, and there are managers who are not responsive to councilmember inquiries. For such people, this article will not help, and any solution probably needs to be found through a closed-session discussion but not through short-cutting the system.

Fortunately, most elected officials and managers want the system and the relationships to work in the best possible way. To achieve this end, is it necessary for every little thing to go through the manager? No. What is required, however, is an understanding between the council and the manager as to what differentiates a little thing from a bigger thing. This can only be achieved if the elected officials and manager are regularly talking and if there is a true commitment by all to play by the rules.

Such rules are worthy of commitment, and we can help uphold an excellent system while still preserving city hall as an open, friendly, helpful place.

Ken Hampian, City Manager, San Luis Obispo, California (khampian@slocity.org).

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Profile:

Mike and Nancy Van Milligen: Balancing Marriage, Family, and Community



Mike Van Milligen, with his wife Nancy, is city manager of [Dubuque, Iowa](#).

Some people can do it all. They can balance their busy vocational pursuits with an equal dose of good old-fashioned traditional family values. Mike and Nancy Van Milligen are known mostly for their high-profile public lives in which they serve their community, but at the heart of their private lives together is a guiding commitment to each other and to their family.

The Van Milligens came to Dubuque, Iowa, with their five children when Mike accepted the position of city manager in 1993. His 10 years at the helm have marked what is viewed by many as among the most productive and exciting periods in the city's history.

Nancy Van Milligen has compiled an impressive record of community, state, and national leadership

experience in a variety of settings. Her education, work experience, and volunteer activities have afforded her a unique perspective that drives her passion for community building and making a difference in the lives of others.

Among her many leadership experiences are service as vice president for institutional advancement at Clarke College, area administrator for the Iowa Citizens Foster Care Review Board, chair of the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service, and chair of the State of Iowa Empowerment Board. She is the president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque.

Mike and Nancy met when they were graduate students at Southern Illinois University–Carbondale. Mike was a police officer and Nancy was executive director of Shawnee Solar Project (SSP). After SSP's monthly meeting, the board would take Nancy to dinner. Mike was at the restaurant one evening and a long conversation led Nancy and Mike to know they wanted to spend more time together. Within a year they were married. Their family grew quickly, including through adoption. Today, their children are Kenny (age 23), Mary (age 19), Patrick (age 17), Joseph (age 14), and Christen (age 12).

But their commitment to children didn't stop there. Mike and Nancy also were foster parents for 14 children over nine years and usually sibling groups of two—one brother and sister (David and Miracle) for more than three years. They are still close to David and Miracle and their young children to this day. Since Mike and Nancy moved to Dubuque, they have also hosted a foreign exchange student in their home for a school year, Audrey Dubuc, who is a descendant of Julien Dubuque, a pioneer settler of Iowa.

Mike recognizes the basic fundamentals of a successful marriage as love, respect, and communication. "Not only do you need to love one another and your family, but you need to demonstrate that love. One simple way is saying 'I love you.'" He says that one must respect the other person as an individual with personal interests and aspirations, supporting each other and children as interests and aspirations are pursued. "Communication is listening and being affirming as life's opportunities and obstacles are encountered."

Nancy notes the importance of a sense of humor, trust, and a willingness to accept your spouse for who he is. "Don't sweat the little stuff and when the going gets tough, give 150 percent. Don't yell at each other." Some good advice she practices is to speak softly and you will get more attention—it works with kids too! "To have a good marriage requires commitment, time, and often, hard work," says Nancy. "Most often, you get out of a relationship what you put in. Spend time together and enjoy each other's company."

Mike and Nancy like to bike together. They also get up and swim together early in the morning, finding that it's much easier with a partner.

As to romance, Nancy says Mike is wonderful about cards and notes and flowers but that "while we used to go away for weekends, that just doesn't seem to happen anymore. How do you leave four teenagers?" She adds, "I think we try to make sure that we often tell each other and show each other that we care—with thoughtful gestures and by being there for each other and helping each other out. That sounds corny, but I think that is it."

The Van Milligens do not follow traditional roles or stereotypes. Everybody pitches in wherever needed. Mike does the grocery shopping. Mike, Nancy, and the older kids pitch in to get kids to events and school. They all try to help each other deal with daily chores and responsibilities.

Of course Mike and Nancy attend many events together—job responsibilities bring social outings. They probably attend more dinners with a speaker than most! They also attend funerals, parades, receptions, presentations, speeches, and so forth. They both work long hours and are both often out of town.

That means the other has to pick up kids, cook dinner, drive to sports events, feed the pets, and put out the garbage. And they both have to write a lot of articles and reports. They each view the other as their best critic and clip articles and try to inform each other of various topics.

According to Mike, it was easy to make a long-term commitment to Dubuque (11 years and counting). He cites the history and beauty, the river, the arts, excellent medical care, recreational opportunities, and proximity to other communities as key attractions. "But what makes it a perfect fit is the people—hardworking, caring, and looking to move the community forward." He adds that Dubuque is a great place to raise a family with a great educational system and low crime.

Nancy echoes his thoughts, saying "I love the pace, the beauty, and the good people. I love that I have

woods in my backyard, and that I can see stars at night and a horizon is only a walk away. I love that my kids can hop on their bikes and go anywhere in town and that they will be safe. I love Iowa politics. And I love the fact that my kids have had the opportunity to participate in many activities and have had the opportunity to volunteer and give back.”

Like most parents, Mike and Nancy hope that their children will grow up to be happy and healthy contributing adults. They’ve always encouraged them to read, and Nancy read to them all the time during their early years. The kids have become voracious readers.

Certainly wonderful role models themselves, Mike and Nancy try to point out role models in the community and the world who are successful and give back. Mike says, “We encourage the kids to try to live their lives in a way that they make a difference and leave the world a better place.” The kids have been involved in AmeriCorps, scouting, debate, Junior Achievement, choir, orchestra, piano, volunteering at St. Mark’s Church, Irish dance, and sports too numerous to mention.

Mary received the Shining Moments Award and Pat and Mary were Dubuque Area Youth Leadership Council awardees. They all have attended summer camps and love to go up to Northern Wisconsin for summer family vacations. Kenny has graduated from Culinary School and lives in St Paul.

Nancy truly believes that children are our future and that they are going to literally inherit the earth. She treasures the time she has spent with her kids and other children. “I believe that children learn what they live, and we can have such a tremendous impact on their lives and their future and hence the world’s future. Kids need adults who care and who help them shape their lives.” And it goes both ways. The Van Milligens say that their children, their foster children, and even friends of their children have added richness and joy to their lives.

Family is extremely important to them. When they decided to leave Skokie, Illinois, after nine years, they drew a circle on a map with a 350-mile radius in order to be within a day’s drive from their parents. They then identified every town over 50,000 population with a city manager and Dubuque was the first opening. The community is fortunate that they chose it.

David Rusk, publisher and editor-in-chief, *Julien’s Journal*, Dubuque, Iowa

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