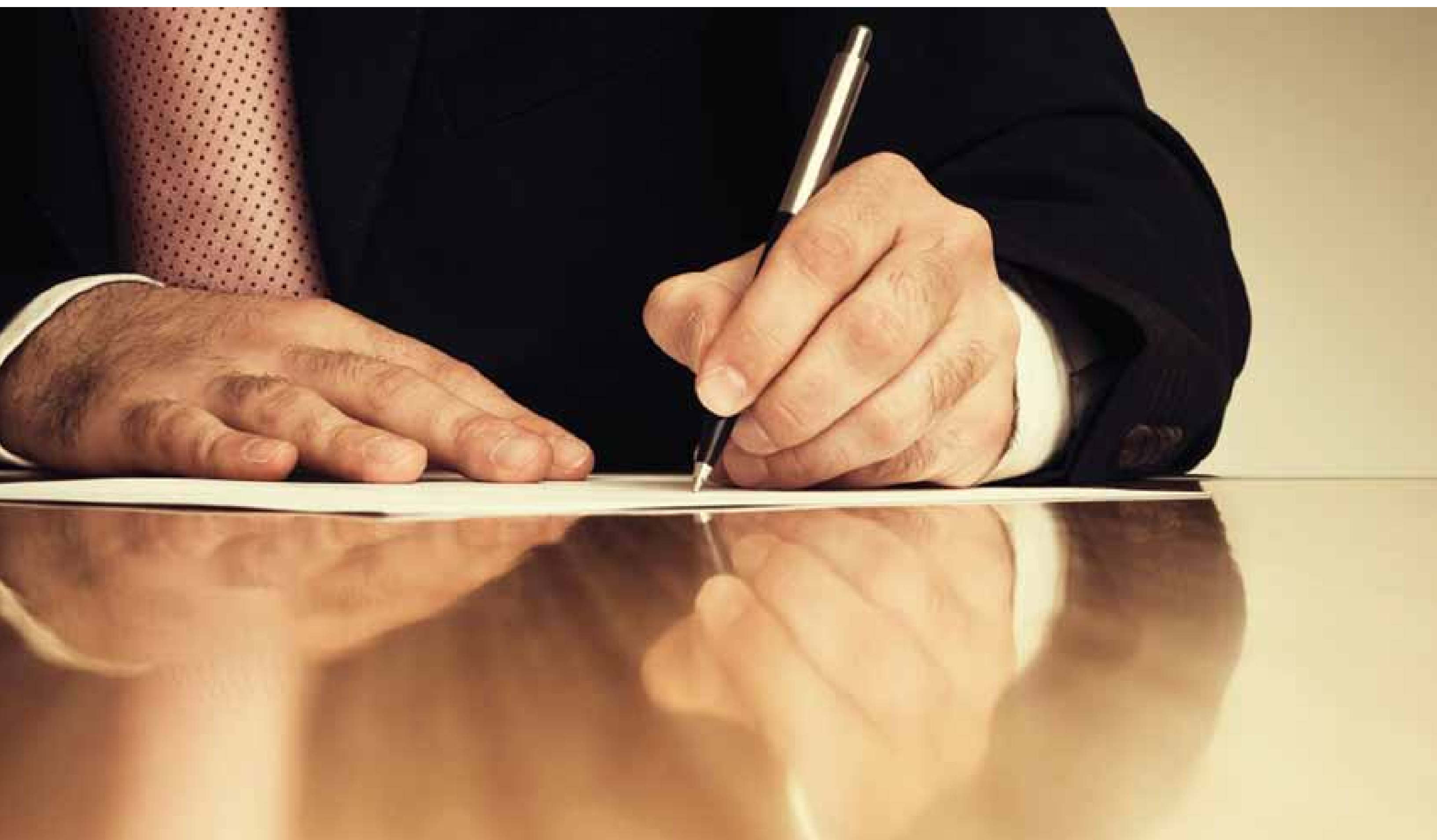
ICMA Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

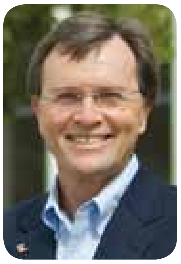
Career Compass Anthology



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

by Dr. Frank Benest

ABOUT CAREER COMPASS



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. Dr. Frank Benest is ICMA's senior advisor for Next Generation Initiatives and resides in Palo Alto, California. If you have a career question you would like addressed in a future Career Compass, e-mail careers@icma.org or contact Frank directly at frank@frankbenest.com.

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.

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What Skills Are Most Important for a Manager (and How do I Develop them?)

Frank Benest, senior adviser for ICMA's Next Generation Initiatives, answers this question in the first of a recurring column on career advice for the profession.

What skills do I need to succeed in senior management and how do I develop them?

The one set of skills essential to serve as a chief executive in local government is leadership, or people skills. Most often people get promoted into supervision or low-level management because of their effective technical skills. However, managers most often fail because of their poor people skills, as opposed to poor analytical or technical competencies. In fact, a Harvard Business School study looked at manager failure and found that as much of 80 percent of senior manager failure resulted from poor people skills.

Five years ago, the Cal-ICMA Coaching Program surveyed up-and-coming talent in local government. When asked "what skills do you need to acquire in order to advance into management?," most aspiring managers responded that they needed technical skills, such as budgeting, HR, project administration, IT, and other hard skills. However, when the coaching program surveyed city and county managers and department directors, they strongly indicated that aspiring managers needed soft skills, including skills in team leadership, team-building, conflict resolution, listening, communication, supervision, and other people leadership skills. For the senior managers, it was the soft skills that created the hard results.

For the top executive, what does leadership really look like in practice? From my perspective, executive leadership is a set of roles to be played at different times depending on the needs of the organization and the community.

These leadership roles include:

Convener and Conversation Starter. Leaders must convene and engage employees and community members so that they take an active role in conversations about the present and future of their organization or community. These venues could include small, intimate opportunities, such as "coffee with the chief executive" on designated mornings in the cafeteria, as well as more formal group meetings or workshops

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with employees and community members. In a very real sense, leadership is about conversations.

Translator. Leaders need to translate the challenges, difficulties, opportunities and the nature of the work so employees perceive meaning. By helping employees sense they are making a difference in the lives of others, building community and saving the planet, leaders become "meaning translators."

Dream Maker. Individuals, organizations, and communities all require dreams and must participate in the hard work to achieve those aspirations if they are to do great things and become fulfilled. Therefore, leaders must engage others in discussing their own dreams and those they hold for the organization or the community. Of course, leaders must then work with all to translate those dreams into plans and actions.

Journey Leader. A great organization is characterized by employees who commit to the general enterprise, key initiatives, and each other. Employees cannot be ordered to commit. Managerial authority is impotent. As Charles Lauer has stated, "leaders cannot force people to follow—they invite them on a journey." Therefore, leaders must articulate the nature of the journey, excite people about the opportunity and challenge, and then invite people to join them.

Follower. Great leaders are great followers. If leaders engage employees and community members in the big issues of the day, they must be open to following the values, ideas, and needs articulated by others. To be a great follower, leaders must demonstrate a certain humility and vulnerability in addition to any traditional toughness and forcefulness.

Cheerleader. Leaders cheer on project teams even when not leading the effort. An effective leader provides encouragement, resources, and other support so that employees and community partners can achieve their hopes, dreams, and plans.

Party Host. We in local government do not know how to have fun in the workplace. In our party host role, we can organize coffee and bagel breaks, tail-gate pizza parties, or ice cream socials in order to recognize people, show our appreciation, and especially celebrate our successes. I call it "purposeful partying." Partying with a purpose helps create a more vital and committed team.

So, as an aspiring manager, how can you develop leadership skills? You can learn leadership skills by engaging in leadership work regardless of your formal position in the organization. You learn leadership by doing.

> *A Harvard Business School study looked at manager failure and found that as much of 80 percent of senior manager failure resulted from poor people skills.*

First, you can exert leadership skills by asking to join or volunteering to participate on project teams in your local organization or community or through your church, a nonprofit or professional association. Leadership is a social activity, so you need to engage yourself with others.

Second, you can ask questions to employee or community partners and engage them in conversations about the following:

- What are our hopes and vision for this effort or project?
- Why is this project important to us and others?
- What do we want to achieve?
- Who else needs to be part of the conversation?

Third, an aspiring manager can help engage others in a worthy journey. You can articulate your dreams and encourage others to communicate their own. As you embark with others on a journey, you can model excitement and passion as well as tenacity in taking on the inevitable problems as you experience the project journey.

Fourth, you can serve a cheerleader and party host in any position.

Finally, you can be a good follower by supporting others as they exert leadership, asking how you can help and bringing up the tough questions that must be addressed by the team while demonstrating your commitment to the endeavor.

Everyone can learn leadership skills by engaging in leadership work. Certainly, you'll make mistakes from which you can learn. As President John F. Kennedy once said, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

I wish you well as you experience the joys and challenges of learning leadership.

2

Defining Your Value In Uncertain Times

Frank Benest explores how to enhance one's professional value in the face of economic uncertainty.

I'm early in my career and am afraid for myself and others. How do I demonstrate my value in this economic climate of cutbacks, layoffs, and hiring freezes?

As our national and global economies have hit some turbulence, most local governments will be making significant budget cuts now or certainly by the beginning of the next fiscal year planning cycle. Most local government revenues are tied to economic transactions, so we will be forced to make service and personnel cuts even as service demand increases in the recession. As these cuts are made, organizational members will experience fear and productivity will decline.

In these turbulent times, you may experience:

- Loss of your job and the jobs of other family members or colleagues
- Family insecurity
- Loss of professional identity
- Concern for community and country.

In times of fear, people tend to hunker down. That's the worst thing to do. You need to demonstrate your value and help the organization survive the budget cuts and re-think how it does business. How do you demonstrate value? By exerting leadership. Everyone can be a leader and exert positive influence regardless of where you are placed in the organization.

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Here are 10 leadership strategies for you to help your organization in the midst of turmoil and fear, and, in the process, demonstrate your value:

1. Avoid "magical thinking"

Budget cuts will be made in your organization and in your department. Some people will think that the budget shortfalls will magically go away, or that cuts will only happen to other units, not their own, or that someone/something (the state?) will save them. You need to confront the ugly truth, help others do the same, and then decide to actively participate with others in crafting positive yet difficult solutions.

2. Seek out accurate information from top management

In tough times, inaccurate information and damaging rumors multiply. You need to get the facts and identify the intentions of top management, help your group openly discuss the budget situation and implications, and help stamp out rumors.

3. Support others

Once you try to control your own fears, you should support other team members. Listen to them, acknowledge their fears and concerns, encourage them, and listen some more.

4. Model positive behaviors

Modeling is the most powerful way that others learn. So, you need to model positive attitudes and behaviors. For instance, you need to get engaged, not withdraw. You can resist negative thinking that management does not care, or that managers will cut the jobs of others but not their own. And you can be forward-looking. As Betsy Fretwell writes in her January/February PM article "Coping with Economic Crisis and Some Lessons Learned," we need to "take the rear view mirror off the bus." New challenges require new thinking. We need to get beyond "we looked at that before" statements and "haven't we plowed that ground already" arguments.

5. Actively participate in team meetings

Now more than ever, you must actively participate in your unit, division, and department meetings and offer your ideas. You can't see yourself as a passive victim. You can proactively contribute to a variety of solutions.

6. Re-think service delivery

The massive nature of our deficits requires re-thinking of how we deliver our programs. Instead of the local government agency directly providing all services, can your local government…

- Partner with a nonprofit or private entity to provide the service or meet the need?
- Reengineer or automate business practices, cutting out non-value-added work and cost?
- Regionalize a service with other local governments?
- Restructure around vacancies, broadening the span of management control?
- Market your assets (e.g., facilities, equipment, expertise, services) to other governments and generate new revenue subsidizing your fixed costs?
- Stop providing programs that no longer serving a large community need?

Like our new president, your motto needs to be "Yes, we can!"

7. Engage others inside and outside in creative problem-solving

Many solutions are cross-cutting ideas. Such solutions need to involve staff in other units or departments, or outside stakeholders in other agencies or community groups. Given your network, you can help your organization engage others inside or outside city hall in designing creative solutions.

8. Volunteer to serve on the department or city-wide budget team

Don't wait to be asked. Raise your hand and jump in.

9. Demonstrate your value and ability to grow and learn

This is key. You must identify your assets and "gifts" and offer them to others as everyone struggles to address the budget crisis. You can offer your computer, writing, public speaking or facilitating skills to the overall effort. You must also work toward enhancing your existing value by continuing to learn and grow. Take a course or seminar, return to school, get involved in ICMA's Emerging Leaders Development Program, work on a new skill, take on a new assignment and stretch yourself.

10. Promote "serious fun"

In tough financial times, management often enacts new rules and procedures and creates a sense of deadly seriousness. The problem is that people can't be creative and identify new solutions in an uptight and overly serious environment. Creativity is generated when people are playful. Therefore, you can involve yourself and others in some playful activity. For instance, you can simply bring in some bagels and coffee to the staff meeting, or organize a fun outing or a crazy hat day. This is "serious fun" since it opens us up to new possibilities.

In times of financial meltdown, anyone can exert leadership influence, help the organization in small and large ways to regain its footing, and demonstrate their value as budget decisions are being considered.

3

Getting Ready for the Next Opportunity

Frank Benest offers advice and tactics on weathering turbulent economic times and how to come out ahead.

In this deep recession, there are few opportunities to get a better job with another local government or even a promotion in my own local government agency. Thankfully, my position is not being eliminated. However, how do I best prepare myself now for opportunities that will arise when the economy turns around in the next several years?

First, let me challenge the assumption that there won't be any opportunities for promotions. As baby-boomer managers retire (even during a recession), there will be a cascade of promotions and opportunities to move up. Even if the vacant manager or professional positions are eliminated and there is some restructuring around those vacancies, oftentimes a lead worker or unit leader will take on more responsibilities, a better job title, and usually more pay.

In fact, I would suggest that you be on the lookout for such restructuring opportunities as baby-boomer managers or others leave or retire. You should figure out how your unit or several related units could reform and thus save money for the organization. Then you should pitch your idea to your manager or department head. You may find career advancement as the department reorganizes.

Second, even without these kinds of opportunities, you should begin to prepare for the economic rebound. Just as organizations need to make targeted investments in times of recession so they can take advantage of better economic times, so too should individuals. Here are some ways to reinvest in yourself and position yourself for the future:

1. Undertake a self-assessment

With the help of a coach (more later about coaching), your manager or a colleague in your professional network, do a self-assessment of your skills, education, past experiences, capabilities, and capacities. Where are you strong? What is lacking? What do you need to learn? Who is missing in your network? How do you better position yourself for future opportunities? Self-reflection needs to precede and then guide action.

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2. Become a "go-to" person

In the coming years, local governments will continually restructure and resize. Consequently, organizations will need flexible and ever-learning individuals to take on new challenges and assignments as agencies morph. Don't wait to be asked—volunteer to take on new responsibilities. In the process, you will acquire new skills, experiences, and relationships, inside and outside the organization.

3. Focus on learning agility

To take advantage of these opportunities, individuals must be open to new kinds of learning. Because technical know-how quickly becomes obsolete as organizations experience accelerating change on all fronts, learn-how will become more important than know-how. Therefore, you must practice learning agility. Here's the basic approach: Take on new and "stretching" job assignments, research issues from many different sources and perspectives, and test out new ways of addressing the problems you encounter. Learning comes from doing.

4. Develop a "big picture" view

Most local government people are located in department or professional silos and do not develop a big picture view of the organization, the community, or the local government business. In this new era of continual restructuring and increasing organizational fluidity, a big-picture perspective becomes very valuable.

So, how do you develop a big picture view? Here are some suggestions:

- Consciously interact with staff outside your silo
- Develop relationships with representatives of community and business groups, other local governments, and nonprofits
- Schedule yourself to visit and listen in on the staff meetings of other units and departments of your local government
- Read professional literature not relating to local government (e.g., Fast Company magazine)
- Debrief after governing board meetings or significant experiences with your manager or coach and ask questions about why things happened the way they did.

5. Volunteer for a special assignment or internship

Based on your self-assessment, you should identify and create a special assignment or "internship" for yourself. For instance, figure out how to do a part-time, time-limited internship in the Budget Office and gain the support of your supervisor as well as the budget manager. Sell your proposal on the value-added for your unit and the Budget Office.

6. Focus on professional development

Get further involved in ICMA and your state association or some other professional association. Attend a conference, sign up for a committee or lead an association project and thus enhance your network and develop new skills. Better yet, participate in ICMA's Emerging Leaders Development Program or Leadership ICMA.

7. Grow your network

A large network of professional contacts is helpful in identifying job opportunities, offering career advice, and simply providing social support, especially in these tough times. You should try to identify ways that you can assist colleagues in your network (e.g., occasionally send them an interesting article) and they will help you. Plus it is fun to have friendly colleagues whom you encounter at local government meetings. Now is the time to develop additional relationships with ICMA range riders and managers and other colleagues in the region and state.

8. Get a coach

Everyone needs a coach to discuss career development or problematic situations at work. Participants in ICMA's Emerging Leaders Development Program are all assigned a coach. Your state association (e.g., California, Florida) may offer a free coaching program. Or simply approach a senior manager in your local government or another jurisdiction and ask for coaching. Remember—coaches love to coach!

9. Update your resume

In this down period, you should update your resume and ask colleagues or coaches to critique it. Then you will be ready when an opportunity arises.

10. Practice interview skills

Assuming that a few job openings do occur in your agency or other local governments in the region, you need to apply for appropriate positions, customize your resume, and practice and hone your interview skills for the future. Good interview skills are like any other skill—it is a matter of practice.

Times will get better. Will you be ready for future career opportunities?

4

Spot That Opening, and Take It!

Even in this recession, there are jobs to be had. Frank Benest recommends tactics for targeting and preparing for job openings.

I have noticed that there are job openings, in my organization as well in other local governments, in the current economic climate. How do I get ready to apply, research the opportunity, and generally increase my chances for getting the job?

Yes, there are job openings even in tough times. But competition for those jobs is up and research and preparation are critical to differentiating you from the rest. To become more competitive, here is a basic checklist:

1. Getting ready for a future opening

Before you start applying, you need to:

- Assess your skills, experience, and capabilities in order to identify the types of positions for which you might be qualified; get feedback from a trusted colleague or mentor (a colleague or mentor can help you determine if you're being too ambitious or not ambitious enough).
- Update your resume and get it critiqued from two or three colleagues, mentors, and/or Range Rider in your area.
- Be on the look out for jobs: let HR staff know of your interest in appropriate job openings in your current organization, notify the colleagues in your network to be on the look out; check out job sites that post local government job openings; join ICMA and other professional organizations that advertise job openings in your field.
- Increase your network: start with colleagues in your organization; make connections with local government professionals in adjacent communities; become active in regional and statewide professional associations; and introduce yourself to the Range Rider in your area.
- Engage your manager in a "development conversation," discussing your aspirations as well as your assessment of your skills, experiences and competencies; encourage the manager's feedback and ask for your manager's support in further developing your skills.
- Identify opportunities to fill gaps in your experience and skill sets; seek interim or acting positions, special assignments or new projects; use

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Getting a new and better position is a learning adventure. The effort will help you hone your research, interview, and other job-seeking skills and enhance your professional network. In the process, you will meet some interesting colleagues and discover different organizations and communities.

community or volunteer activities to fill out your portfolio of experiences and skills.

2. Once you identify a job opening

Once you identify a job opening, here are some steps to take:

- Do some research in order to assess the opportunity; customize your resume and prepare for any interviews; your research should help you answer the following questions:
  - What are the key duties?
  - What are the important challenges facing this position or the division or department?
  - Who is the manager? What is his/her management style?
  - With whom will you be working as part of the team?
  - Who will actually be making the hiring decision?
  - What is the reputation of the organization and the department? Why would you want to work there? Why wouldn't you want to work there?
  - What are the professional reputations of the department director and chief executive?
  - What are the demographics of the community, its values, its economy, major institutions, and the like?
  - What's the political climate of the organization and the community?
  - Does the organization value learning and employee growth and development?
- Ask yourself and members of your network if the job opening appears to be a good fit.
- Customize your resume and cover letter so it corresponds to what the hiring authority is seeking.

3. Sources for gathering intelligence

- Check local newspaper articles.
- Talk to colleagues working for the organization or in adjacent local governments.
- Talk to developers, nonprofit professionals working in the community or residents whom you identify through friends, colleagues or family or other research.
- Make an appointment to speak with the Chamber of Commerce executive, the publisher of the local newspaper, and/or the government affairs director of the hospital, university or other major employer or institution.
- Contact the Range Rider from the area.

4. Preparing for the interview

Assuming you are qualified for the position, you may well get an interview. To prepare for the interview:

- Look at the interview as good practice (while you don't want to apply for positions for which you don't qualify, practice makes perfect--the more interviews, the better you become at taking interviews)
- Brainstorm with a trusted colleague or mentor some likely questions
- Outline your responses to likely questions
- Conduct with a friend or colleague a mock interview; consider videotaping the mock interview and critiquing it
- Identify key points about your competitive edge for the position and work these into your responses to interview questions (or briefly summarize your competitive edge at the end of the interview)
- Use specific experiences as you respond to interview questions (vignettes and stories are powerful ways to communicate)
- Write down as soon as you leave the interview the questions that were asked and how you responded; consider how you could better answer the questions (this will help you for any second interview for the particular job opening or for interviews for future job openings)

5. Getting feedback and following-up

At the end of the interview or as a follow-up, you can (and should):

- Ask when you will hear from the manager making the hiring decision or from the HR department.
- Send immediately a brief note (not an e-mail) thanking the manager for the interview.
- Contact the HR staff person assigned to the recruitment in order to inquire about the status of the hiring (if you don't hear any word in a week or so).

Assuming that you did not get the job, you should wait several weeks and then:

- E-mail the manager (and/or the HR staff sitting in on the interview) and indicate that you would like to talk to him or her in order to improve your chances for the next position that you seek; schedule a telephone call and ask the manager:
  - How did you assess my portfolio of experiences and skills? How could I improve my portfolio so I can become more competitive for similar positions?
  - Were my interview answers responsive to the questions? Were my answers too long, too short, substantive enough?

Some final comments

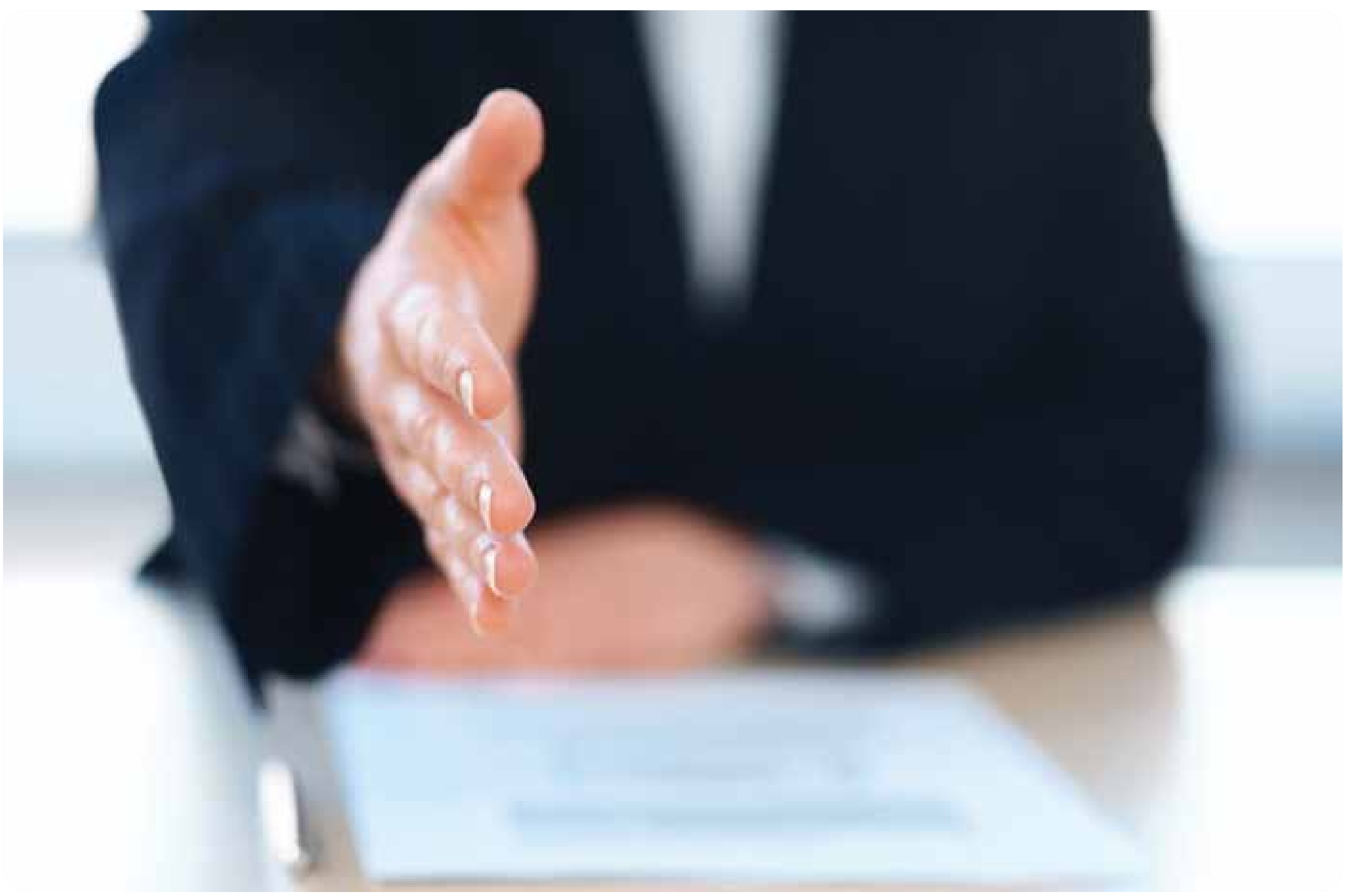
You are unlikely to secure the first or second job for which you apply. It is like any worthwhile effort—you need to be tenacious.

Getting a new and better position is a learning adventure. The effort will help you hone your research, interview, and other job-seeking skills and enhance your professional network. In the process, you will meet some interesting colleagues and discover different organizations and communities.

Moreover, job-seeking is an art. Any art takes practice.

Finally, I believe that there is some luck or fate involved. When as a department director I began to apply for manager positions, I got into interviews for several positions for which I was not qualified, and I got ignored for other manager jobs for which I would have been qualified. I did finally get a perfect first-time manager job that boosted my skills and experiences and kick-started a long and rewarding city manager career. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Good luck is another name for tenacity of purpose."

Enjoy the learning journey. Happy job hunting!



5

Developing Leadership Skills When You Have No Formal Authority

Moving up often requires skills we don't have. Frank Benest answers a question about gaining leadership experience necessary to advance.

I am a mid-level program staff person in a medium-sized local government who wants to advance into management. I know that I need to develop leadership skills if I am to become competitive for lower-level management jobs. However, in my job, I have no formal authority or supervisory responsibilities. How do I develop my leadership skills when I don't have the opportunity to exert any authority?

Here are some points to consider about harnessing leadership skills you may already have, and finding opportunities to develop these skills inside and outside of work.

First, you may have had a lot of leadership experiences; they may not have been related to your paid position. For instance, in the past, have you served as a recreation leader, scout leader, baseball coach, Sunday School teacher, or Big Brother or Sister?

Second, you can begin to develop new leadership experiences outside of your paid job. For example, in the early days of my career, I volunteered to lead a committee in my professional association and thus led a project involving a number of colleagues. As a younger local government staff person, I also volunteered to serve on a board of directors for a community nonprofit and developed several worthwhile improvement programs in conjunction with other

community members. As a young professional, I also served as the president of our employee association (no one else wanted the job) and developed both leadership and negotiation skills.

Third, you can take a training course or two in the areas of supervision, management or leadership. Some local government agencies offer their own training courses or belong to a regional training consortium to provide this kind of training. Your HR department can help you seek out such opportunities. In addition, professional associations like ICMA offer courses and training programs (for example, check out ICMA's

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Emerging Leaders Development Program) as do most community colleges.

Fourth, you need to seek out leadership opportunities in your job. You learn leadership by doing and learning from the experience. Here are some options:

- Ask your manager to be on the lookout for an acting or interim assignment in which you can supervise others or lead projects
- Ask your manager to appoint you as a lead staff person for an ongoing or time-limited project
- Call together colleagues who are working on different aspects of a larger challenge and help create an informal self-directed work team.

In any of these situations, you must learn how to exert personal leadership without relying on formal positional authority. Even as an acting supervisor, you must rely on your personal attributes and people skills. The formal authority of a manager can only force others to provide a minimal level of performance or compliance. Leadership, as opposed to management, can help people achieve great things.

In a team environment, I have found the following ten approaches help build and support your leadership capacity:

1. **Rapport.** Build rapport with others before trying to lead a specific project; get to know colleagues personally as well as find out about their personal interests and family; demonstrate that you care about your colleagues.
2. **Passion.** Demonstrate your own enthusiasm and passion for the challenge or project.
3. **Positive Opportunities.** Help the work group focus on the positive opportunities posed by the problem or issue, instead of emphasizing all the obstacles.
4. **Quiet Expertise.** Lead with quiet expertise, whatever your expertise or knowledge entails.
5. **Resources.** Offer any resources that you may have (e.g., your contacts, computer or writing skills, facilitation skills for a community meeting) to help your team members, not only on the team project but for any other effort in which they may be involved
6. **Listen.** Ask questions and be inquisitive of the perspectives of others; listen and then listen some more; help integrate the views and interests of other team members into the goals and strategies of the team; emphasize win/win opportunities; don't become overly invested in specific outcomes (leadership is a journey for which the end-point is often uncertain).
7. **Trust.** Trust other team members and they will tend to reciprocate that trust.
8. **Accountability.** Hold yourself accountable for the work of the team; meet your obligations and others will tend to do so as well.
9. **Serious Fun.** Make meetings "serious fun;" for example, bring bagels or cookies to a meeting or plan an offsite session at a downtown café.
10. **Celebration.** Help the group celebrate milestones along the way, thus building momentum, confidence, and group capacity.

Finally, you must reflect on your leadership experience. It is also helpful to ask a trusted colleague, mentor or coach to assist you in critiquing your leadership efforts. Learning anything, including leadership skills, requires self-awareness and critique. The key is learning from any missteps. As Jeff Immeldt, CEO of GE, once stated, "People can help you but leadership is one of those great journeys into your own soul."

In sum, you need to use opportunities on and off the job to build your portfolio of leadership skills. So, when you next apply for a job and the interviewer asks, "Tell us about your management experience," you can respond: "Let me tell you about a few of my leadership experiences." Good luck!

The formal authority of a manager can only force others to provide a minimal level of performance or compliance. Leadership, as opposed to management, can help people achieve great things.

6

The Multi-generational Workplace

In this installment of Career Compass, Dr. Benest discusses the multi-generational workplace and how to balance generational dialogue.

I'm a Gen X professional working in local government. Many of my colleagues are Gen X and millennials who work for baby-boomer managers. My manager tends to micromanage, horde decision-making, talks about the need for me and others to 'pay their dues,' and is reluctant to consider occasional telecommuting or flex-scheduling. He doesn't get it! How do I work with him so I can get more transparency and openness, and get him to respond to some of the values of my generation?

At the outset, you need to realize that there are a lot of managers who micromanage and emphasize experience over ability to produce results. One of the skills in becoming a seasoned professional is to adapt to the style of your boss and/or develop the ability to "manage your boss."

To better manage your boss, you should follow Steven Covey's advice: "seek first to understand, then to be understood." Or, as Eric Fromm suggests, you need to practice "positive regard" and get into the head of your manager in order to understand his values, hopes, concerns, and fears. Once you truly understand your manager's motivations and fears, you can then better shape and frame your proposals for more flexibility and freedom.

So, how do you get into the head of your manager and then frame a proposal with some likelihood of success?

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First, schedule several informal conversations with your manager in the office or over a casual lunch or coffee break. You are not only trying to better understand your boss but you want to also seek his advice on how you can better meet his expectations, advance over time in the organization, and generally develop your career. Remember—managers love to coach! Through these conversations, you want the manager to become invested in you and your career.

Second, focus on your top priority with respect to enhancing your relationship with your manager and achieving more flexibility. (The priority might be less micromanagement and greater trust in your ability to perform.)

Third, before you directly address the issue of micromanagement, you of course need to demonstrate that you are a committed, dependable staff person who produces results for the manager.

Fourth, after an important project is completed and put to bed, you can approach your manager and suggest a way you can lead future projects with more independence, such as:

> "I was able to meet your expectations and successfully bring Project X across the finish line. If I am going to move up and become more valuable, I need to demonstrate that I can work without so much support and assistance. Therefore, for my upcoming Project Y, let's test my ability to deliver without us checking on my progress every few days. Let's schedule a meeting every two or three weeks or at key project milestones. I know your expectations, have demonstrated my successful performance on these kinds of projects, and am committed to achieve our project goals. And, if I get in trouble, I'll certainly come to you for help. What do you think?"

Fifth, identify a small project or responsibility that no one else wants to take on and make the same pitch to your manager. Given your willingness to help the unit deal with the additional project or responsibility, your manager may be more open to providing more freedom in respect to that effort. You can then demonstrate your performance without the over-the-shoulder supervision.

Sixth, assuming that your manager will give you some more breathing room, you need to take the initiative to provide a thorough briefing at the agreed-upon intervals. And, if you encounter significant problems or obstacles, go to your manager and ask for help. That's what managers are for.

Finally, as it becomes safer for the manager to give you more operating freedom, you can increase the time between check-ins.

In terms of trying to get permission for flex-scheduling or occasional telecommuting, I suggest the following:

- Demonstrate that you are responsive to colleagues, especially the manager, even when you are away from the office. For example, when you take a day off or miss a day due to illness, respond to e-mails at the end of the day even if your message says that you look forward to discussing the issue on your next day in the office.
- Ask the human resources director of your local government what the organization as a whole is doing in terms of flex-scheduling, telecommuting, and otherwise developing a better alignment between organizational practices and next generation values.
- Use that information and share any organizational policies in a preliminary conversation with your manager about how flex-scheduling or telecommuting is being used elsewhere in the organization.
- Shape your proposal given the values and concerns of the manager. Be sure to stress that the proposed schedule or very limited telecommuting will help you better complete your work. For example, telecommuting will help you focus on a project at your home office with fewer interruptions.
- Propose a limited telecommuting or flex schedule and ask to test it out on a pilot basis (e.g., one telecommuting day every two or three weeks or a 9/80 schedule for the next 3 months).
- Meet after one or two months with your manager and evaluate accomplishments.

To create a state of readiness for these conversations, you can circulate an article on generational differences or the **Cal-ICMA "Hiring 2.0" Best Practices Guide** and discuss the material at a staff meeting. You can also discuss with the human resources director and your manager how flex-scheduling and limited telecommuting are no-cost benefits in a very tight budget situation. They are also ways for your organization to become "greener." Again, you need to frame the issues in ways to gain support depending on the mind-set of those who have the authority to approve the proposals.

Added support can come from your union or employee association, leaders who can raise the issue at labor-management meetings.

In summary, to effectively get your manager to better respond to your values, you need to make it safe for the manager. Therefore, I suggest that you:

1. Demonstrate your ability to produce results.
2. Practice "positive regard" in respect to your manager.
3. Shape proposals to respond to his or her values and concerns.
4. Show in tangible ways that you are a safe bet and that any flexibility or additional freedom will pay off for the boss.
5. Take incremental steps and evaluate success with your manager.

7

How Do I Create a "Dream Team" of Advisors?

Frank Benest explores how to enhance your professional value in the face of economic uncertainty.

I'm a mid-career professional and everyone tells me that I need a good network to support my career advancement. However, I know senior managers are very busy and I am therefore reluctant to burden them with another obligation. I also do not know how I feel about developing relationships and then asking others to help me. It feels a bit manipulative. In any case, how do I create this network?

Everyone is correct—you do indeed need a good network of advisors to help you on a number of fronts. Members of a network can:

- 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.
- Advise you on how to enhance your skills, gain new experiences, and position yourself for advancement.
- 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.

A network should include a diversity of people who can assist you with different kinds of challenges and issues. One advisor may be adept at coaching you when you face a difficult personal issue. Another advisor may be better at connecting you to others who have information or specialized expertise. Therefore, your network should encompass not just senior managers and other professionals inside your organization but also professionals outside your organization. They can be in your same discipline—finance, public works, community services—or better yet from several disciplines, including general management. Your network need not only consist of senior people but also peers in local government and non-local government colleagues from the business, nonprofit, or academic worlds.

Let's deal with a widely-held misconception. Asking someone to coach you or help you in some fashion is not a burden. Coaches love to coach. People love to give advice or share their knowledge and expertise. (Why do you think I write this column?) You are doing them a favor by asking for assistance. In addition, once a relationship is formed, you will be helping them as well.

So, what are some approaches for developing a "dream team" of advisors? Here are my 11 tips:

1. Be on the look-out for advisors

You should consciously search out and identify colleagues and senior people who can provide support

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in different ways. When you meet someone or get to know another colleague, ask yourself: "Would this person be a good advisor?"

2. Fill in the gaps in your network

If your dream team does not include someone with good connections in your state association or other professional organization, you need to attend some conferences or professional meetings, check out who is presenting or leading a committee, and then approach those professional leaders and offer your assistance to the committee or some other professional activity. Make sure you follow up with an e-mail or personal note.

3. Use dream team members to suggest other advisors

One advisor can connect you with another potential advisor and offer an introduction. Many people love to serve as connectors.

4. Seek coaches through your professional organization

Some professional organizations like ICMA and my own state association, Cal-ICMA, offer the services of senior managers as coaches. If you participate in ICMA's Emerging Leaders Development Program, you get a "legacy coach." The Cal-ICMA Coaching Program offers free one-on-one coaching match-ups through its online "Coaches Gallery" which profiles city/county managers, department heads, and other senior managers (go to www.cal-icma.org and click on "Coaches Gallery" on the right-hand side of the home page). Anyone can use this one-on-one coaching service - just go to the "Coaches Gallery," select a coach of your liking, and then make contact to get advice. It's easy.

5. Be ready to network

You should arrive at a professional or regional meeting with your business cards. Develop and practice a concise "elevator speech" of who you are, what you do, and what interests you. When you meet someone, have some questions prepared in advance to ask about the other person. People love to talk about themselves, their interests, and opinions.

6. Listen intently and be positive

When you talk to someone, look the person in the eye, smile, and listen intently. Don't look over the person's shoulder, scouting out other people to meet. Be in the present moment. And, in these stressful and often demoralizing times, be positive, upbeat, and forward-looking.

7. Don't just introduce yourself

Introducing yourself to a colleague, having a brief conversation, and exchanging business cards are necessary first steps, but don't stop there. The question is how to create an ongoing relationship. Follow-up your initial encounter by providing some information of potential interest or contacting the person and asking for advice or scheduling an informational interview.

8. Offer assistance and help to members of your network

To solidify relationships and to enjoy the give-and-take nature of networks, you need to serve as a resource to others. Don't wait to be asked. Send an article or a job announcement or some recent survey results to appropriate members of your network. They will then be more open to offering assistance to you when you need it.

9. Maintain relationships even when you don't need help

You need to sustain the social connection even when you are not looking for assistance. Call or e-mail a colleague to simply catch-up or schedule a coffee or make a point of touching base with a colleague at a conference.

10. Say thank you

Always, always express your appreciation. At least send an e-mail. Even better, a personal note will make an impression especially in this electronic age. Expressing your gratitude will help cement and further solidify your relationships.

11. Do it because it is fun!

Certainly, a dream team of advisors provides a lot of extrinsic value. However, you should consider extending your professional and social network because it is fun and intrinsically enjoyable. It is enjoyable to know colleagues at a professional meeting, to help others, to exchange information and perspectives, to tell war stories, to be connected to a valuable profession.

Now is the time to begin drafting members of your dream team. A team of advisors is not created overnight—it takes a while if you are consciously and incrementally building a team.

Don't wait! Start now. It's fun.

8

Leading From the Middle

Frank Benest offers advice to mid-level managers (and those who manage them) on how to lead from the middle and grow towards the next professional step.

I often hear at conferences and workshops that we mid-level professionals need to help lead our local government organizations. I am stuck in the middle of our bureaucracy and have little influence. How do I lead from the middle?

Yes! Local governments need you and other professionals to lead from the middle for two basic reasons:

First, executive managers at the top of the organization are too overwhelmed to do all the leading. The big challenges of the day (e.g., redesigning services in the face of our financial crisis, better using technology to serve and communicate with community, engaging citizens and building trust, finding and implementing environmental solutions) require leadership at all levels of the organization. Recognizing limited resources and especially constrained staffing, we need to build (in Margaret Wheatley's phrase) "leader-full organizations."

Second, you cannot "grow" your career and position yourself for advancement if you do not develop leadership skills even without formal authority.

Before identifying some strategies, we need to differentiate between management and leadership. Management is based on one's positional authority. As most long-time managers realize, one's positional authority can only force a minimal level of compliance and performance from others in the organization. Leadership is the ability to influence others in the pursuit of goals based on one's interpersonal, even moral or spiritual, attributes. So developing leadership skills

is about learning how to expand your influence in the organization in order to get things done and achieve organizational goals.

To lead from the middle, I would suggest a "top ten" list of strategies:

1. Develop "positive regard" for your manager

Through observation, conversations and reflection, you need to get into the head of your manager and identify his or her values, goals, concerns, and preferred work styles. This positive regard will then help you frame your ideas, suggestions and proposals in terms that appeal or resonate with your manager. For instance, if your manager is obsessive about reducing the budget, you should frame any proposal so that it highlights how your unit or department can become more cost-effective.

2. Offer to take projects or tasks off the plate of your manager or others

Higher-ups are often overwhelmed with demands and too many priorities or simply dislike some aspect of their positions. Therefore, a good way to expand your responsibilities and enhance your skills and experiences is to volunteer to take on a project that would help lessen the load of your manager or another man-

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ager, or to do a task (e.g., write a project report) that does not appeal to a superior. If you relieve a manager in this way, the manager is often willing to coach you in respect to the project or assignment. Plus, by helping your manager with a project, your boss may help you take on a new assignment that you desire.

3. Be selective about taking on new assignments

As a result of a new project, you want to learn new skills and expand your leadership capacity. So you need to evaluate possible assignments for which you can volunteer in terms of the opportunity to develop new competencies, including leadership skills, expand your relationships inside and outside the organization, and interact with boards, commissions and advisory groups. To gain the support of your supervisor, you should conduct at least a periodic “development conversation” with your boss so that he or she knows the kinds of new assignments that you are seeking.

4. Adopt your boss’ view

To influence your boss or the boss of your boss, you need to identify the needs and priorities of the whole organization and relate your suggestions and any proposals to the big picture, not the objectives of your unit or even your department. In addition to adopting a big picture view, it is helpful to relate any ideas to manager’s “hot button” issues related to key services, budget, critical stakeholders, or to your manager’s particular notion of legacy. In other words, you must adopt the boss’ point of view.

5. Communicate in your manager’s language

How does your manager like information? Is your boss a spread-sheet “numbers” guy or gal, or does he or she like a narrative?

You can even “paint a picture” by developing a video interviewing citizens or partners or take your manager into the field in order to talk with business people, seniors citizens, or neighborhood leaders. These kinds of efforts enhance your ability to communicate and your credibility.

6. Expand your network/use your network

To increase your value and potential influence, you should expand your network, especially to other departments and to partners outside the organization. By expanding your network, you can begin to identify and assess opportunities to solve problems, redesign services, create partnerships, or innovate in specific areas. Then you can volunteer yourself and your relationships to help solve the problems that you identify.

7. Leverage your assets

In addition to your relationships, you have an array of assets to offer in addressing important issues. While you may not have positional authority, you have knowledge and specialized expertise (e.g., budgeting, land use planning, environmental management, redevelopment) and energy and passion for a particular project. If you leverage your assets in addressing a key issue, you gain influence in respect to that issue and future efforts.

8. Become a key communicator

If you expand your relationships and use them to spread key messages of importance to top management, then senior managers become more dependent on you to help get the word out. Plus, communication is a two-way street. Senior managers need feedback so that they get a realistic view of how their ideas or proposals are being received.

9. Sell the benefits of your proposal, but also provide cost-benefit analysis

As you try to influence your manager and sell an idea or proposal, you must certainly focus on the key benefits, particularly those of interest to the manager. But in this day of constrained funding, time and energy, you need to also discuss how your idea is a good use of limited resources.

10. Help your manager or other team members in group meetings

Every team needs help to become more productive and achieve its goals. Even though you may not have authority as the formal leader of the team, ask yourself how you can facilitate the discussion, encourage others, galvanize action, start a courageous conversation, or take an a key responsibility or assignment in order to move the team forward. If you are viewed by the team leader or other team members as a valuable asset in helping the group become more effective, you will build your influence inside and outside the team setting.

The upshot is that you can lead from wherever you are positioned in the organization. Leadership is all about exerting positive influence in the pursuit of worthy goals. The ten strategies identified above all help you grow leadership capacity and use leadership for your benefit and the benefit of the organization.

9

Bouncing Back From Defeat

In this installment of Career Compass, Dr. Benest offers suggestions for how to "bounce-back" from work-related defeats and maintain your enthusiasm for public service.

I was just involved in an effort to get the governing board's approval for a major new land use plan that would promote economic vitality and enliven a part of our community. I was not the official leader of the project team but did much of the staff work and was involved in the presentation to the board. While the project was somewhat controversial, we did good staff work, provided solid analysis and sound recommendations. After some neighborhood and business criticism of the proposal as well as some support, the governing board rejected our recommendations. I feel very disappointed and the experience has sapped my enthusiasm for my local government work. I thought that this was a great career for me. What do I do? Where do I go from here?

Let me start off by saying that the local government system worked. Staff did its work, hopefully engaging the community and various stakeholders in the process. Given the lack of consensus, the governing body simply did not agree to go forward. The big issues of the day in local government involve differing views and tension between different stakeholders with often conflicting interests. You win some and lose some.

You and your team should be congratulated for taking on a controversial project. There is no progress without some calculated risk-taking by local government and their professional staff.

Moreover, just because the board said "no" does not mean that the local government and community cannot address the key issues in another way or even return in the future with a different approach or revised plan.

Finally, failures or defeats are great opportunities to reflect and enhance your practice and skills and grow as a professional.

In the aftermath of a major disappointment or "defeat," here are some suggestions on how you can respond in meaningful and tangible ways:

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1. Use a colleague or friend or family member to vent a bit

It is okay to vent and express some frustration. After all, you put a lot of good work into the effort and the project was not approved. It is in fact disappointing.

2. Reflect and be self-critical

After you vent a little, you need to turn to constructive reflection. In terms of your individual work and the team's effort, what went well and what did not? Where could you have provided more value or contribution? Were there opportunities to gain more community support that were not fully explored? Did your proposal fail to adequately address some legitimate concerns?

3. Reach out to a senior manager and request feedback

You can show great initiative, self-confidence and a willingness to learn if you informally reach out to the chief executive, department director or other senior manager and request feedback on your performance and the team's effort. Over a cup of coffee, you can gain some valuable insights and also seek advice on how to build on this experience.

4. De-brief with the team and re-engage

After any significant experience, a team should de-brief:

- What went right?
- What did not go well?
- What are some future opportunities to address the key issues or concerns that generated the plan?
- Where do we go from here?
- What are some lessons learned for our future practice?

Your team can still exert leadership in addressing the underlying issues and problems, maybe in different ways.

5. Get involved in professional organizations

Professional involvements can help you get some perspective, provide support, and re-energize you. I could not have survived as a local government manager without the ongoing support and encouragement of my colleagues locally, statewide and nationally.

> *One disappointment should not sour you on a fulfilling career. Get back on the horse.*

6. Find a new project to energize you

In the aftermath of this experience, you should look around for a new project. As part of this search, you can talk to colleagues and supervisors about a new assignment that can engage your skills, interests, "gifts," and passions; energize you; and promote new learning. One disappointment should not sour you on a fulfilling career. Get back on the horse.

7. Understand how you can become more resilient over time

Research from the Hardiness Institute has identified three key factors that are exhibited by resilient leaders who tend to successfully bounce back. Resilient people have three key beliefs known as the 3 C's:

- Commitment: Resilient people strive to be involved in events rather than feeling isolated.
- Control: They tend to control or try to shape outcomes, rather than lapse into passivity or powerlessness.
- Challenge: They view stressful changes (whether positive or negative) as opportunities for new learning.

In addition, resilient leaders take comfort (my 4th "C") from others and benefit from social support systems so they can better deal with disappointments. Part of your network of family, friends and colleagues (see Career Compass #7—How to Develop a "Dream Team" of Advisors, on page 15) should include people who can listen and provide support and encouragement as well as advise, expertise, and contacts.

In summary, local government is a great career, not only because it provides ample opportunities to contribute and serve, but it will stimulate new growth and learning even amidst our "failures."

10

Personal Learning–The Key to Adapting and Advancing

In this installment of Career Compass, Dr. Benest discusses how to integrate professional development and maintain work-life balance.

I am a mid-level parks and recreation supervisor. I do a good job and receive positive evaluations. However, I often hear from the city manager or speakers at professional meetings that I need to involve myself in continuous learning if I am going to enhance my value to my local government organization and be able to advance. Well, I have already earned my MPA but I am tired of going to school and want a life outside of work. Yet I do want to advance. What do I do?

Yes, it's true. Our world is changing so quickly and unpredictably (remember life before the economic meltdown?), that we need to constantly learn if we are to personally adapt and help our organizations adapt. As the management consultant Gary Hamel often asks, "Are we learning as fast as the world is changing?"

You don't need to go back to school to learn. In fact, the best learning happens on the job, not in the classroom. Classroom education may help you develop a conceptual framework about new behavior in a new world, but it does not produce desired new behavior. Learning new behavior results from experience—from doing. Therefore, your goal is to create new or different experiences which help you enhance your skills, competencies, and aptitudes; expand your knowledge; and create a wider view of the organization and the world around you.

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To incorporate learning into your everyday work, I suggest these seven personal learning strategies:

1. Be reflective (and help others reflect)

There is no learning without reflecting on your practice. So, debrief everything. By yourself—and better yet with colleagues—you need to conduct a debriefing of every project, board or community meeting, or other experience. This post-action report should include:

- What went right?
- What did not go so well?
- What did we learn for our future practice?

To promote this kind of reflection, you can start any unit or division meeting with a "learning report" about a recent work experience or professional article. Or you can simply ask during the meeting: "What was significant about last night's Parks and Recreation Commission meeting? What did we learn for the future?"

2. Cultivate a growth mindset

Many people have a fixed mindset. They view their talents as fixed. They avoid challenges and the possibility of failure. They like to solve the same kinds of problems over and over again, which reinforces their sense of competence.

Those with a growth mindset see challenges and even failures as opportunities for improving skills or acquiring new ones. In the face of adversity, they believe that talent grows with persistence and effort and that they can learn from adversity.

To cultivate a growth mindset, you need to consciously stretch yourself.

3. Stretch yourself

There is no growth without missteps and mistakes. You must find ways to stretch yourself and encounter new and different situations. The best approach is to engage yourself in a series of stretching job assignments. To do so, let your manager and other managers know that you are seeking out special projects and team leadership opportunities, interim management assignments, opportunities to interact with boards and commissions, and other new experiences, such as learning new technologies. In terms of securing these opportunities, you can be the first to volunteer, or you can negotiate with your manager for new assignments, obviously demonstrating that you are on top of your current workload.

Challenging yourself with "stretch" goals is key to learning and achieving. As suggested by Peter Bregman in the hbr.org blog, high achievers and active learners need to set goals for themselves where they have a 50–70% chance of success. According to psychologist and Harvard researcher David McClellan, that's the "sweet spot" for learning and achieving. Then, when you fail half the time, you can figure out what you should do differently and try again.

4. Observe others with a critical eye

To learn from others, not just in your department but throughout the organization, you need to observe their practice with a critical eye. You should ask yourself: What kinds of challenges are they addressing? What did they do well? Where did they stumble? Why? What could I emulate?

5. Read a lot

Reading a lot of diverse literature—both work and non-work—helps one develop a different set of lenses through which to view and analyze the world. So you should certainly read professional articles and books in your discipline and from other disciplines in local government or management and business. However, autobiographies, fiction, poetry, and essays all may be provocative and generate learning if you try to apply the lessons to your work life.

To support your reading habit, you can start or participate in a book or article club that meets once or twice a month at lunch.

6. Apply lessons from outside of work

An agile learner is not only reflecting about experiences but also trying to apply any lessons from those experiences. Therefore, you should be on the lookout for experiences involving your parents, spouse, children, neighbors, friends, and other non-work associates that could have some applicability to your professional life. Could a conflict with your children lead to enhancing your people skills? Could a nonwork experience, such as traveling to another country, provide some insight into environmental management?

7. Get a coach

A coach can provide valuable feedback on your practice or some problematic work situation, suggest new resources, offer advice, and expand your network. A coaching relationship can be formal or more likely informal. A coach can be a manager or peer inside or outside the organization. Your regional or statewide professional association may provide a listing of managers or senior professionals who have volunteered to coach. ICMA offers coaching resources (for example, the Emerging Leaders Development Program provides a legacy coach to participants). Or, you can just ask a manager or colleague to provide feedback or advice. You'd be doing a peer or manager a favor. Coaches love to coach!

A key competency for advancing in local government management is one's demonstrated capacity to learn and adapt. With accelerating change due to new technologies, demographic trends, climate change, value shifts, and other mega-trends, technical skills and knowledge more quickly become obsolete. Learn-how becomes as important as know-how.

In a disruptive world, most organizations will begin to understand that we need to hire and promote based on learning agility.

11

Frank's Rules for Resume Writing

In this installment, Dr. Benest offers advice on the age-old tradition of resume crafting.

I need to update my resume as I begin to look for promotion opportunities in my own organization as well as openings in other local governments. I have read some books on resume writing and ask informal advice from several colleagues but so much of what I hear is conflicting in terms of format, length, and information to provide. As a career advisor, can you help me?

I'll try but there is no perfect resume format or style. Every hiring manager has stylistic preferences. In any case, let me share with you my biases and provide some guidance.

1. Contact information

You should put your contact information (home address, work and home and/or cell phone numbers, and work and/or personal e-mail addresses) at the top of the resume. This is pretty standard.

2. Objective

Skip it. An objective takes up space on the resume plus it adds little value. If you apply for a specific position, of course the position meets your objective.

3. Length

It depends. For entry-level jobs, one or two pages are fine. For mid-level jobs, you should try to keep the resume to two or three pages. For senior manager or executive positions, three or four pages are appropriate.

4. Font

Hiring managers are often baby-boomers like me. Some of us are vision-challenged so use a font size of 12 and avoid use of italics or other fancy fonts such as Tekton Pro. You should use a clean, easy-to-read and business-like font such as Times Roman, Arial or Georgia.

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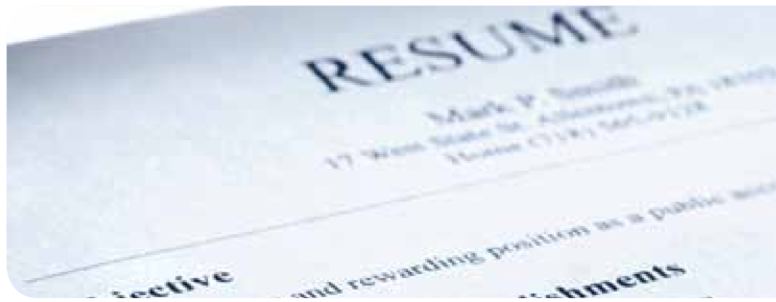

5. Education or professional experience first?

Again, it depends. If you have a fair amount of work experience, you should place "Professional Work Experience" first in the resume and "Education" last. If you do not have much work experience and your educational background is solid, put "Education" at the front and then go to "Professional Work Experience." List professional experience in chronological order with the most recent experience first.

6. Education

You should put your most recent degree first and include degree, university, and major (include program emphasis if it relates to the position sought). If you do not have a lot of experience in the subject area of the position that you are seeking (e.g., economic development, environmental management), you may wish to include several classes or major projects or papers in the subject area.

Under "Education," you should include any certifications earned on the job.

7. Quantifiable or verifiable results

Wherever possible, you want to show tangible results from your job efforts. Therefore, you should quantify your job responsibilities and the results of your efforts or indicate verifiable results. For example:

- Supervise five full-time and three part-time staff
- Prepare and manage program budget totaling $450,000.
- Led team that produced and is now implementing Revitalization Plan for disadvantaged neighborhood
- Secured new developer for blighted shopping center
- Negotiated IT vendor contracts totaling $3.5 million
- Organized youth summit which attracted 275 teens and led to Council approval of a Youth Development Action Plan

See the sample resume below.

8. Listing of Skills, Knowledge or Qualifications

Don't include a separate section on skills, competencies, knowledge, or qualification areas, especially at the beginning of the resume. It will appear to the reviewer that you are trying to hide your job experience until later in the resume. Most importantly, resume screeners in the HR Department or the hiring manager in the department want to immediately see your specific education and job positions.

9. Bolded Sub-Heads Reflecting Functions of the Position

This is important. Most resume screeners or hiring managers will spend five or six seconds scanning your resume. They will focus on your education and the listing of your job experiences. In scanning your resume, they tend not to read a lot of verbiage which runs together under each position listed. Therefore, I suggest you use bolded sub-heads under your most recent or your two most recent positions. These sub-heads should correspond and reflect the skills or functions of the positions that your are seeking. For instance, you can use some of the following sub-heads:

- Staff Supervision
- Budget Preparation and Management
- Program Development
- Facility Management
- Capital Project Management
- Team Leadership
- Environmental Sustainability
- Personnel Administration
- Labor Relations
- Civic Engagement

The bolded sub-heads may change or get tweaked for any new position that you seek. See sample resume below.

10. Internships and Volunteer Experiences

Do include internships and volunteer experiences under "Professional Experiences," especially if you need to show skills and experiences beyond your limited paid work (you do not need to indicate if an internship is paid or unpaid).

If you do have ample paid work experience, you should not include internships or community service under "Professional Experience." You can create a separate section entitled "Other Experience" or "Community Involvements."

By the way, you may wish to say "pro bono" instead of "volunteer" service.

11. Professional Involvements and Affiliations (and Awards if any)

You should include a section towards the end of the resume entitled "Professional Involvements and Affiliations" in which you can list any memberships in professional associations, especially if you serve as an officer or on a committee or have taken on some other leadership responsibilities.

If you have a lot of professional or community involvements, you should select the ones that are most relevant or impressive.

If you or your team has earned any awards, this is a good section to list them.

A cautionary note: Don't get carried away! You do not need to attach copies of awards and certificates. A simple list is more effective than pages of attachments.

12. Personal Interests

Unless your leisure or other personal pursuits are relevant to the position, don't include them. Most hiring managers don't care if you are a wine connoisseur, Methodist, surfer, runner, or devoted parent.

13. References

Typically, you should not put references in the body of the resume unless the hiring agency specifically asks for them. Listing references takes up space on the resume plus it is sometimes hard to ensure that your references will resonate will the hiring manager. If the agency does ask for references, you should use professional references only (again, unless they ask for personal or non-professional references) and include them in the cover letter. Usually, you should not include elected officials as references unless you worked directly for them or you are applying for a chief executive position.

Assuming that you do not list references, the hiring manager or HR department staff will request references for the finalists.

You should contact appropriate references early on and get them lined up even before any particular recruitment process is initiated. When asked for references, you should provide contact information.

Now, if you do not have extensive work experience, some well-regarded references included in the cover letter may help differentiate you from others who also do not have a lot of experience.

14. Cover Letter

I suggest that you provide a cover letter no more than one page in length, preferably one half to two-thirds of a page. You should ensure that the cover letter is not addressed "To Whom It May Concern" or to the "Public Works Director." Rather, you need to find out who is making the hiring decision and address the cover letter to that person by name and position even if you are required to submit your resume to the HR Department.

In the cover letter, you should cite any professional experiences or qualifications or unique skills that make you particularly suited for the job or any traits that are being sought by the hiring authority. In other words, you need to emphasize in the cover letter your competitive edge in seeking the job.

15. Online Applications

Remember to include your resume with an online application. Most job boards allow you to attach or insert your resume into the electronic application. It is best to attach your resume as a pdf file. If the job board or web site does not allow attachments and only allows you to copy and paste the resume into the comment section, then get rid of all special characters and text effects. Bullet points, bold, italics, and other special effects should be removed because they either do not come through at all or are turned into other characters making the resume hard to read.

I recommend you complete any online application without referencing "see resume," even if some of the information is duplicated. You want the hiring manager to use a familiar format (their application), augmented by your polished resume when considering you for a position.

Other Tips

Here are some other suggestions that you can consider:

- Gear your resume specifically toward the position or promotion that you are seeking. Do not rely on a standard resume.
- Keep a resume file and throw in notes about key accomplishments, awards and possible references as you think of them. This file of notes will help you easily update your resume when you need to.
- Update your resume and keep it updated even when you are not actively seeking a new job. It is easier to tweak a resume than create an entirely new one.
- Spell check!
- Ask a trusted colleague or coach to critique your resume and identify any skill or experiential gaps which you need to fill over time as you pursue advancement.
- Send your updated resume to coaches so they can keep an eye open for opportunities.
- Send your updated resume to executive recruiters and ask for an in-person or telephone meeting to explore opportunities in the profession (or, request a coach to send your resume and then you can follow up with a meeting). Remember, requesting a meeting with a recruiter is not a burden on recruiters—they need "product" to peddle, especially in a time of scarce talent.
- Send your updated resume in advance of an informational interview with a department head or chief executive or other senior manager inside or outside your organization.
- Bring copies of your resume and references with you to any interview. Don't assume everyone has a copy, even if you sent it in advance.
- Use your resume to participate in LinkedIn or other social media sites.
- When you apply online, print the application and resume you have submitted so you can see exactly what the hiring manager will see.

A Final Word

Again, the "best" resume takes time to develop and depends on your personal approach and preferences. So seek feedback and suggestions from a variety of sources. Good hunting!

Sample Resume

The following sample resume illustrates some of the suggestions above.

Richard Jones
123 Main Street
Palo Alto, CA 94301
650 400-8000 (Mobile) / 650 320-4200 (Office)
richard.jones@gmail.com

Professional Experience:

Recreation Supervisor, Community Services Department, City of Palo Alto
August 2005 to Present

- **Staff Supervision –** Manage 5.75 FTE direct reports, 100-120 hourly employees, 80-100 volunteers; chair department's safety and customer service committees
- **Budget Development –** Prepare and manage program budgets equaling nearly $1 million; oversee revenue collections at two facilities; administer service, professional and revenue contracts
- **Program Administration –** Manage aquatics, special interest classes, customer service desk, facility reservations, summer camps, junior staff programs; managed field, park and tennis court reservations, special events; oversaw middle school athletics and teen programs
- **Facility Management –** Manage aquatics complex, community center; fields, parks, and tennis court complexes
- **Capital Projects –** Implemented automated point of sales and registration system at aquatics complex, initiated renovations of several sports fields engaging community partners

Special Projects Coordinator, City Manager's Office, City of Palo Alto
January 2004 to Present

- **Legislative Advocacy** – Reorganized contract with consultant; worked with departments, City Council and community to establish new priorities
- **Workforce Development –** Manage city and regional internship program; organized job shadow day, tri-city youth summit, and management fellow programs
- **Leadership Development –** Serve as liaison to Next Generation Committee of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties; participated on city-wide Leadership Development Team

Recreation Coordinator, Community Services Department, City of Palo Alto
December 2001 to August 2005

Intern, Economic Development Team, Foundation for Global Community,
Palo Alto, CA
June 2001 to December 2001

Certification/Academies:

Management Academy 2004, Palo Alto HR Department
Lead Worker Academy 2003, Palo Alto HR Department
Essentials to Managing the Palo Alto Way, Palo Alto HR Department
Citizens Police Academy, Palo Alto Police Department
Palo Alto Neighborhood Disaster Activity, Palo Alto Fire Department
Family Ambassador Program, Palo Alto Community Services

Professional Affiliations:

- Member, International City/County Management Association
- Member, Municipal Management Association of Northern California
- Member, California Parks & Recreation Society
- Member, Next Generation Committee of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties
- Board of Directors, Silicon Valley Chapter of the American Red Cross
- Treasurer, Board of Directors, Palo Alto Rotary Club
- Participant, Cal-ICMA Coaching Program
- Participant, Management Talent Exchange Program

Education:

Masters in Public Administration
College of Professional Studies
University of San Francisco
San Francisco, CA

B.A., Global Economic Relations
School of International Studies
University of the Pacific
Stockton, CA

12

Communicating with Your Boss

Need help understanding what your boss wants or needs? In this installment of Career Compass, Dr. Benest offers advice on assembling an "operations manual" for the Big Cheese.

Not only is my manager very busy, but she and I don't seem to have a connection. Therefore, I don't get a lot of time to meet with my boss and sell my ideas and when we do meet, we're not on the same page. I know that effectively communicating with my manager is critical to my success. So, what do I do?

You are absolutely right. Effective communication with your boss is essential to your success. By developing a positive relationship and effectively communicating with your boss, your manager is more likely to:

- Support your ideas
- Provide resources to implement your proposals
- Promote you or recommend you for visible or "plum" assignments
- Advocate your ideas up, across and the down the organization
- Serve as your strong supporter and "sing your praises" with executive management.

In terms of developing better communications with your boss, you must first understand that it is more than communications. It is about "relationship." Positive relationship precedes effective communication.

Here are some strategies to enhance your relationship as well as communications:

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1. Practice "Positive Regard"

First, you must practice "positive regard." If you want to effectively communicate with your boss and influence her, Eric Fromm, the noted psychologist, suggests that you must first get into the mind and heart of your boss and acknowledge her values, aspirations, goals, fears, and motivations. You also need to identify her key interests, hobbies, and idiosyncrasies. Positive regard will assist you in shaping or "framing" any proposal. For instance, if a manager is more oriented toward social justice than economic development, you can frame your affordable housing proposal to focus on social equity as opposed to housing the workforce.

How do you develop positive regard? You can get into the mind and heart of your manager by observing her in action (for example, at meetings), asking seasoned employees or close associates about her, or

conversing with her and asking questions about any number of topics.

2. Develop rapport

It is always helpful to develop rapport as a prelude to problem-solving or at least at the same time as you are solving problems with your boss. You can invite your manager out to coffee or sit with the manager in the lunch room and talk about non-work issues or discuss work projects of interest to the manager. Positive regard will suggest some topics or issues that may provide a basis for developing rapport. Simply knowing that a supervisor's kids or pets or favorite sports teams are positive topics can help you better relate and converse with your supervisor. Plus, work becomes more fun if you can connect with team members, including your boss.

3. Use referent power

Positive regard will help you identify key reference groups to which your manager is oriented. Getting the faith community or the Chamber of Commerce on board in support of an idea or involved as a partner will create interest on the part of your manager depending on her reference groups.

4. Understand the communication style of your manager

To enhance communications, you need to figure out how your boss prefers to communicate. Is your manager informal or formal? Does your boss like for staff to simply pop into her office with a new idea or make an appointment? Does your manager like to talk about an idea first, or does she prefer to get a memo or e-mail first, read it, and then talk about the issue? Does your manager like a talking outline from staff with bullet points or a formal and comprehensive proposal? Does your boss like to converse for a while about non-work topics before getting into the work items or get to the work issues immediately?

Regardless of the communication style, you need to identify what your manager wants to know about an issue—for example, goals, costs, service to underserved groups or other service implications, partnerships, or political ramifications. Obviously, find out what she wants and give it to her.

5. Figure out the decision-making style

It is also critical to understand the decision-making style of your manager. Is your manager an "analytic," requiring a lot of data before making a decision? Or is she an intuitive, "ready-fire-aim" type of decision-maker, willing to run with a good idea? The decision-making style of your boss will determine how you shape your communications.

6. Present a solution, not just a problem

Most managers do not like staff to dump their problems on them without a proposed solution or better yet several potential solutions. After describing the problem, it is always a good idea to recommend one or several approaches to address the problem. It will demonstrate that you have thought through the issue and you are taking responsibility for helping address it.

7. Ask for what you need from your supervisor

Here is a final word of advice. After presenting your proposal or concern, you need to specifically ask your manager for authority to do something. Do you need permission to form a team, write a board report, spend some money, approach a new partner, or go out to bid? Whatever you need, ask for it! Even if your boss wants more time to think about the proposal or issue, you need to identify what you need from your manager.

In summary

Your manager can be a supporter, promoter, and advocate, or a roadblock. If your values, ideas, and career advancement are important to you, then figure out your boss.

13

Developing a Finance IQ

Do you "speak finance"? And if you're not a beginner, have you developed your financial mind enough to aid your career progress? In this installment of Career Compass, Dr. Benest offers advice on becoming fluent in the poetry of finance.

I am a public works program supervisor and would like to move up into my department's general management. I am very skilled and experienced overseeing program operations. However, in a development conversation with my division manager, she advised me that I have a skills gap in terms of finance and budget. How can I fill this gap when I do not prepare our division budget?

Your manager is correct. Finance and budgeting skills are critical competencies if you'd like to advance into general management. Even if you are not responsible for raising revenue or preparing a formal budget, there are a variety of ways that you can develop financial skills.

Here are my top 10 tips for developing finance and budget IQ:

- Volunteer to serve on your city or county-wide budget team or ask your department director if you can help prepare the department or division budget.
- Even if you only typically submit expense projections in several key budget areas for your program, prepare a full budget for your program. Ask your division manager to review and critique your proposed program budget.
- Request the finance director and your department head if you could do a time-limited special assignment in the finance department or budget office or fill a vacancy in the finance department on an interim basis. If a special assignment for several months is untenable, volunteer to serve as a part-time budget analyst for your city or county or special district and conduct a first-level review of another department's proposed budget.
- Make sure that you receive *PM Magazine*, your state association magazine and other professional publications, and dutifully read articles on local government finance and budgeting.

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- Enroll in a public finance or budget course at a local university.
- Conduct an informational interview (or job shadow) the budget manager of your department or local government.
- Attend finance-oriented workshops or sessions at conferences or professional meetings.
- Engage your division manager, department head and/or finance director in conversations about the finance challenges facing your local government. With the permission of your department director, invite the finance director to your department staff meeting for a finance update.
- Review regular reports developed by the finance department for your local government such as the quarterly or mid-year budget update, five-year financial forecast, and of course the budget message from the chief executive in the annual budget submitted to the governing board. If your local government does not produce a "budget-at-a-glance" brochure for the community, volunteer to help produce a draft publication with a finance department colleague.
- Get a finance-oriented coach—either a finance or budget manager in your local government or a similar coach through your state association or the state-wide finance professional association (for example, the California Society of Municipal Finance Officers conducts a free coaching program). The national Government Finance Officers Association (www.gfoa.org) is another great resource for financial publications and professional development opportunities. Also, search ICMA's Knowledge Network and the Financial Management and Finance and Budgeting topics for additional resources geared to general managers.

If you take several of theses steps, your Finance and Budget IQ will soar!

Frank wishes to acknowledge the assistance in writing this column from Carol Atwood, Administrative Services Director of Cupertino, and Jenny Haruyama, Assistant Finance Director of Los Gatos, California.

14

Selling Your Ideas

Even when we have a great idea, sometimes it's hard to convince the powers-that-be that a) it's workable, and b) now is the time. In this installment of Career Compass, Dr. Benest suggests some steps you can take to take your ideas from blueprint to implement.

I have a great idea. The utility department operates a small electrical substation on land located downtown. As the housing coordinator, I want to propose that the utility department consolidate this small substation with another small substation, freeing up city-owned land downtown for an affordable housing project serving low-income working families. The problem is that I've had difficulty selling my ideas in the past to top city management and other decision-makers. What do you suggest?

We can't solve the big problems facing our local governments and communities without great ideas. However, you've got to sell your great ideas or they are impotent.

So, here are my seven tips on developing support to implement good ideas:

1. Start with the problem.

Before you propose a solution, you need to spend time talking to colleagues and outside stake-holders (including potential opponents) about their perceptions of the problem. Is the problem the lack of affordable housing for everyone or just for certain income groups or household types? Are land costs the big issue in your community or is it political opposition to affordable housing, or both?

2. Integrate the interests and concerns of others.

Again, before proposing the solution, you need through your conversations to identify the interests and concerns of different groups. For instance, the utilities department management may have no interest in affordable housing, but they may be concerned about

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the high costs of maintaining many small substations. Consolidating substations, as you propose, may decrease their costs. Top city management may not be a big advocate for affordable housing for low-income families but may be concerned about the difficulty of recruiting city employees given the high-cost of housing in the community. Or they may be concerned that many first-responders to emergencies live so far away from the city. Therefore, you may wish to incorporate some city workforce housing into your eventual proposal.

3. Identify a group of potential supporters.

It is a good move to informally convene a group of insiders and outsiders to discuss responses to the affordable housing challenge in your community. This group should represent "referent groups" who are respected by decision-makers. In addition to providing good data about the problem and possible solutions, group members will become good ambassadors for the eventual solution because they have influence with decision-makers. They will also be able to suggest ways to market the proposal once it is unveiled.

4. Build a broad and engaging vision.

Based on your conversations with diverse groups, you are now able to build a broad and compelling vision for your idea that resonates with many different stakeholders. For example:

- Given the high-cost of housing in the community, will the idea help your local government attract employees to its workforce?
- Will the idea provide housing for the working poor who have the greatest need for affordable housing?
- Does the vision include a beautiful and well-designed complex adding value to the downtown?
- Will the proposed housing be a "green" building?
- Will the housing be located near transit, schools, parks, and services?

5. Develop different "frames" for the idea.

As suggested above, you must practice "positive regard" and get into the heads of different players, acknowledging their values, goals, hopes and fears. Once you identify their goals, interests and concerns, you can frame your idea in different ways for different decision-makers and influentials.

Great ideas do not sell themselves. You need to build a broad and engaging case including data, stories, and influential partners in order to secure support for your proposal.

6. Tie your idea to larger agendas.

To better market your idea, you should tie it to the larger agendas of the governing board, top management, or other players such as the downtown business community or neighborhood groups. For example, do the governing board and neighborhood associations have a stated goal to reduce traffic congestion related to a jobs/housing imbalance? If so, by linking your idea to this agenda, your proposal becomes more powerful.

7. Put a human face on your idea.

It is certainly necessary to provide hard data about the need for affordable housing for low-income working families. However, data is necessary but insufficient. You also must humanize the issue for everyone. Perhaps you and others can visit some other communities that have developed projects similar to what you are proposing as a means to:

- Highlight successful case studies
- Feature profiles of several families who are being served and in turn contribute to their communities
- Identify some powerful stories supporting your idea

Stories about real-life people are the most powerful way to communicate.

In summary, great ideas do not sell themselves. You need to build a broad and engaging case including data, stories, and influential partners in order to secure support for your proposal.

15

Dealing with Angry Crowds

Public outreach comes with the territory in this profession, even if your only contact is at a business meeting open to the public. To truly be successful you must enter the realm of community-owned processes, and be prepared to listen, listen, and listen some more.

Recently our team conducted a neighborhood meeting to discuss a tentative redevelopment project, to be undertaken by a proven developer. It was a terrible experience! It was an angry crowd and they were in no mood to listen to anyone. People shouted down the developer and staff, and they had no appreciation for any data or professional judgments. It was a disaster and something I don't want to experience again. Do you any tips on how to deal with emotional, angry crowds and survive the encounter?

This is not an unusual situation and I can understand why you're gun-shy. Oftentimes, the local government agency must help the community confront gang violence, the need to close a branch library and reallocate resources, an affordable housing project, a day worker problem, or a proposal to expand a revenue-generating business which abuts a residential neighborhood. These issues are complex, messy, emotion-laden and divisive. But they must be addressed if the community is to move forward.

So, how do local government leaders at all levels plan for and address a difficult and conflict-ridden issue which often leads to angry crowds? First, staff must understand why people get emotional. As mentioned in the Institute of Local Government publication Getting the Most Out of Public Hearings, people get emotional when they feel that they may be hurt (e.g., their homes or businesses will be taken by eminent domain), or their quality of life is threatened (e.g., a project will lead to significant traffic congestion), or their fundamental beliefs are being challenged (e.g., a local government prohibits a Scout group from using a public facility because it discriminates against gay Scout leaders). Anger intensifies when people feel they are. . .

- Weak or powerless in the face of power (e.g., developer or influential business)
- Treated unfairly, disrespectfully or dishonestly (e.g., city staff does not respond to their concerns)

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Understanding that a group is upset for a rational reason is a good start to dealing with the situation. Your understanding of why people are upset may help you craft a set of responses to minimize their anger and get them involved in the problem-solving.

Second, I can suggest a number of measures to take before, during and after the meeting with a potentially emotional crowd.

Before the meeting

Before the encounter, staff needs to reach out to neighborhood groups, businesses in the area, PTAs, and other potential stakeholders. Go beyond the usual groups and conduct outreach to youth, different ethnic groups, and all congregations in the area. It may be best to find a staff person or a community volunteer who already has some relationship with the group and have that person make the initial contact and perhaps bring along one of the team members.

After identifying the problem that the local government is trying to address (e.g., the blighted shopping center), listen to what people have to say, acknowledge any concerns and fears, thank them for their interest, and invite them to the meeting. Make sure that the meeting is not the first time that people hear about the specifics of the proposal. You want to provide information before someone else characterizes (or mis-characterizes) the effort. Most importantly, you want to develop a relationship and hopefully rapport before trying to involve people in solving problems or working with you.

In terms of preparation, you obviously need to do your homework before the meeting. Not only study up on all facets of the project but ensure you are aware of possible concerns and fears. Outreach and listening are part of your homework.

Regarding the type and location of the meeting, you want to avoid at all costs a formal public hearing in front of a commission or governing board. The public hearing is the worst mechanism ever devised for engaging people and solving problems. The public hearing should be the culminating point confirming understandings and consensus and the problem-solving that has already occurred. You are better served by organizing a community meeting hosted by a neutral party (e.g., a church in the neighborhood) or better yet a series of family room dialogues where someone invites city staff to present tentative program ideas in their family rooms to invited neighbors.

Designing and Conducting the Meeting

In designing the meeting, you should develop a structure that allows the team to pose the problem or challenge, present some ideas (not final plans), generate lots of feedback and lets people know how you're going to follow up on their issues. The structure of the meeting is important. At the meeting, I would suggest the following:

- Personally welcome people as they arrive and introduce yourself.
- Remove any tables, dais or podium that separate meeting leaders from participants.
- Arrange the room to encourage participation—use round tables, a circle of chairs or a U-shaped arrangement of chairs.
- Consider use of community volunteers as neutral conveners and "community connectors" who invite people to the meeting and help present the problem statement and initial ideas.
- Identify the purpose of the meeting and what the city team hopes to accomplish with everyone's help.
- Discuss the structure of the meeting but be open if people want a more flexible agenda.
- Avoid technical language! Therefore, don't use an expert in redevelopment but rather someone who uses lay language in describing the general idea or proposal.
- Demonstrate an openness to all perspectives and concerns by acknowledging what people are saying and recording the feedback or issues on flip charts or other means.
- Show you care about the issues that people raise (don't be dismissive).
- Listen, respond, listen some more. This is a "healing" three-step sequence when dealing with angry crowds (or any other type of group). Again, listen; acknowledge a concern or issues (never say that a person is wrong!); respond with some information or data; and listen some more.
- Be careful with humor. Oftentimes in a tense meeting, we try to use humor. If people are angry, they will not want to hear attempted humor and it may be taken as trivializing their concern.
- Use visuals such as photos of existing conditions, sketches, project elevations and site plans.
- Use open-ended questions and interactive exercises to generate ideas, hopes, dreams, and concerns.

For instance, instead of providing presentations and asking for feedback, ask meeting participants to sketch ideas on index cards which are presented and clustered around themes.

- Communicate the "whole truth" about any project, including any potential downsides (if you don't present some possible problems, someone else will and you will be perceived as an advocate.
- Present options whenever possible—people want to consider choices not one set-in-stone proposal.
- Break up the big meeting into smaller discussions, giving people an opportunity to meet face-to-face in small groups with team members and ask questions and give feedback.
- Invite people to contact members of the team to further discuss the proposal or talk about issues that are not central to the discussion.
- Create a written record of comments.
- Discuss the follow-up to the meeting and opportunities to be engaged as the effort unfolds (ensure that these are authentic opportunities and not just for show).

After the meeting

After the meeting, your team must obviously ensure that the follow-up steps occur. Specifically, your team should:

- Distribute an accurate summary of the proposal and all issues and concerns that were raised at the meeting.
- Ensure that the summary is distributed widely, not just to those who attended the meeting.
- Follow up personally with key stakeholders group representatives and "influentials" (those who are highly regarded).
- Make yourself available to people who want to meet with you about their concerns.
- Figure out some ways of engaging neighborhood groups and other stakeholders in addressing some of the issues raised (e.g., conduct some working group meetings on traffic or parking).
- Schedule another meeting to present ideas for enhancing the original proposal, ways of addressing the concerns raised at the first meeting, and generating additional feedback. Ensure that people who participated in the working groups present the new ideas or solutions, not local government staff. The key to the community meeting is not to "sell" your proposal to the community but rather gather information, learn about concerns, and continue engaging people. It is about learning, not educating. Moreover, the community meeting cannot be seen as a one-time occurrence. Rather, residents and businesspeople must perceive that community meetings are part of a comprehensive way to engage people in solving problems as partners with local government. Community engagement is indeed a messy process but a critical part of our local government work and service.

16

Should I Consider a Lateral Move?

There are times in our climb up the career ladder where someone's blocking the ascent, or you're at the top rung. At times like these, the ladder next to us might offer more vertical movement.

I've been working in a mid-level position in my local government agency for three years and am getting bored. I want to advance but due to budget constraints there are fewer promotional opportunities in my organization as some supervisory and management positions get consolidated when people retire or leave. However, there are mid-level positions that have come open in other departments for which I am qualified. Should I consider a lateral move in my organization even though it may not be a promotion and the money is about the same?

As you might expect, the answer is, "it depends". You may wish to consider a lateral move, especially under some of these circumstances:

1. You work for a good local government that has a sound reputation and treats its employees well.
2. You are bored and deal with the same reoccurring problems and there seems little more to learn.
3. Your supervisor is over-controlling, uninterested in you or your work, and/or unwilling to support your growth and development.
4. You have been in your current position more than two years. (The ICMA Code of Ethics indicates that a two-year commitment is a minimum; even if you are not an ICMA member, a two-year minimum tenure is a good standard.)
5. Your position is fairly focused or limiting and does not offer a broad range of experiences or relationships inside and outside the organization.
6. You want new and broader experiences but perhaps not more responsibility or stress because of family commitments or because you are taking courses or earning a graduate degree.

In considering a lateral move, you should recognize that most good organizations encourage or are at least open to lateral moves for its well-regarded employees.

First, it is easier and less costly to fill a position if there are qualified in-house employees interested in the position. **Second,** good organizations encour-

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age lateral moves in order to keep talented employees who are no longer challenged by their current jobs. **Third,** lateral moves are a wonderful way to prepare emerging leaders for management positions when they become vacant (as they most certainly will as baby-boomer professionals retire over time regardless of current budget problems and consolidations).

As you keep your eyes and ears open for a possible lateral move, here are some criteria to evaluate the opportunity:

1. Will the new position offer new experiences, skills and relationships inside and outside the organization?
2. Is the new position more visible to top management or considered more critical to the most important challenges facing your local government (e.g., neighborhood revitalization, environmental sustainability, infrastructure management, economic development, land use planning, budgeting)?
3. Would you be working for a well-regarded supervisor or manager who would support your growth and development?
4. Would you have the opportunity to supervise one or several other employees or oversee a small program budget, thus broadening your management experience?
5. Does the position offer diverse kinds of experiences that would keep you energized?
6. Is the position in a department where there tends to be more positions and opportunities to advance?

Finally, if you think that a lateral move may meet some of your considerations, you need to check it out thoroughly before applying:

1. Schedule an informational interview with the supervisor or manager overseeing the position. Discuss your interests and probe the opportunities provided by the position.
2. Take out for coffee several employees who work in the department in which you are interested. In these one-to-one conversations, discuss the nature of the work and the potential new supervisor and top management of the department.
3. Explore the opportunity with an informal coach inside or outside the organization.
4. Check on what kind of persons in the position have been previously successful with what kinds of skills. Also find out if they have been able to advance.

If such a lateral move makes sense given your professional and personal needs, go for it. In the process, you will broaden your portfolio of experiences, skills and relationship; learn a lot; and make a continuing contribution.

17

The Subtle Art of Promoting Your Value

You know you're great. Your Mom knows you're great. But how do you blow your own horn without making a lot of racket? It can be a fine line to tread, and a lot of people are uncomfortable and feel that 'bragging' isn't professional. Well, our Career Coach tells you how.

As a program manager, I work hard and contribute on several fronts to our department's success. However, I am often passed over for plum assignments that would get me some better visibility in the organization and help my efforts to advance. I don't like bragging about my abilities and accomplishments but I'm not getting noticed. What can I do?

Successful professionals master the subtle art of self-promotion. Appropriate self-promotion is about achieving acknowledgment for the good results that you produce.

Why Self-Promotion?

There are a variety of reasons to work on better promoting your value and accomplishments:

- We all desire and deserve recognition for our good work and commitment. It is a basic human need to be recognized for what we contribute. You won't be fully satisfied at work unless you are acknowledged.
- You may want to position yourself for future advancement and therefore need your boss or other higher-ups to know about your skills and abilities.
- You need to get noticed if you are to get the assignments which will provide further meaning and challenge, promote learning and stretch you. Without these kinds of opportunities, you will stagnate.
- Choice assignments won't come your way unless you are considered an "A" player. "A" players get the "A" assignments that offer the opportunity to produce significant results and further create visibility. Those who achieve good results in taking on "A" assignments enhance the likelihood of advancement.
- You may be new to your position or department and no one knows about your ability to produce. Or, you have a new boss who knows little about your work.

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- In tight financial times, you may want to enhance your opportunities to receive an annual raise or performance bonus.
- Layoffs are a possibility and you want to feel more secure in your position.

The two extremes to avoid are no self-promotion or bragging. If you do not promote yourself, you go unnoticed or may remain under-valued. If you brag about yourself, you are considered a grand-stander.

Bragging is all about "I"—"I did this, I did that." Appropriate self-promotion is about "we" and your role in helping your team achieve results.

Seven Self-Promotion Strategies

Given all these valid reasons to promote your worth in the organization, what are some strategies to achieve recognition of your value?

1. Frequently inform your manager in one-to-one meetings, informal chats, and e-mails about your team's or unit's progress and ongoing achievements, your role in the team effort, and ideas for future initiatives.
2. Anticipate discussion at staff meetings or multi-department team meetings and be prepared to add something of value to the conversation or suggest ways to overcome some problem and move forward.
3. Accept acknowledgement from your manager or peers regarding your efforts and contributions. Don't be overly modest—thank your boss or co-workers for the praise and then acknowledge the significance of the group effort.
4. Volunteer to write a staff report about a team project which is progressing well and/or make a governing board presentation. You will then be associated with the project and its success.
5. Write a piece for the employee or community newsletter or a professional article promoting a new project or initiative and your team's success.
6. Make a presentation about the project on a panel at a professional meeting or seminar. Again, people will then associate you with the effort.
7. Promote your accomplishments to an array of significant others. Your boss's manager may be the one deciding on who is promoted or who gets the next plum assignment. Today's peer may move up in the organization or get a higher position in another local government and therefore may be able to further your career goals in the future.

If you successfully toil in the middle of the organization, it is easy to go unnoticed. If you do not appropriately promote your value, you do yourself a disservice.

The strategies identified above suggest that self-promotion is a subtle art form which if practiced effectively will help you achieve acknowledgment, get challenging and rewarding assignments, promote further learning, and enhance your ability to advance.

18

Taking Smart Risks

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest shares wisdom on risk taking, with recommendations on when to avoid a risk and when to take the leap.

I am a special projects coordinator in the County Manager's Office. While we have done a lot of budget-cutting in our organization (with some actual layoffs), the County Manager says we need to change the way we do business, take some risks and innovate if we are to overcome all our financial problems. However, no one talks about the negative fall-out if the risk-taking does not produce a positive result. In fact, our local government operates in a very risk-aversive political environment. Everyone is afraid of making a mistake because the governing board or a community group will criticize you. I want to help us innovate and grow my career at the same time. How do I take risks in this kind of environment?

Yes, we local government professionals face dual realities. We must take risks given our challenges, and we need to minimize the potential fall-out from risks given the zero-risk environments we often face. How do we deal with this duality?

Why Take Risks?

Local governments desperately need to adapt to change and innovate in times of financial meltdown. We need to design new service models, such as:

- "Shared" or collaborative services with other public agencies (e.g., sharing a police department or hazmat or other specialized service)
- Self-service (e.g., certain inspections)
- Multi-sector partnerships (e.g., partnering with a parents group to deliver an after-school program)
- Outsourcing (e.g., park maintenance)

- Off-loading (e.g., letting a private swim organization operate a municipal pool)
- Discontinuing a service (e.g., police traffic motors)

All these alternative service approaches, including the "no-service" option, pose a risk for local government staff (as well as elected officials) who may propose the new policy or attempt to carry it out. However, not taking action is even a bigger risk. We cannot cut our way out of the fiscal crisis. We need to cut but also innovate. And there is no innovation without risk.

In addition to helping our local government agencies create new solutions, you must also take risks to advance your career. In terms of career advancement, you won't get noticed unless you are taking some risks in moving the agenda forward. If you take on a project involving a multi-sector partnership, there is a risk of failure. If you request an interim management assignment when your Division Manager retires, you may not do an exemplary job. It is a risk. If you make a lateral move to another unit to expand our portfolio of skills, it is another risk.

Finally, taking risks is essential if you are to learn. There is no learning without mistakes.

The "Sweet Spot"

It's pretty reckless to take wild gambles recognizing the risk-aversion of some elected officials or community interest groups. However, it is desirable to take calculated risks.

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A good calculated risk is one that has a decent chance of success. In fact, the "sweet spot" for risk-taking and learning involves a project with a 50-70% chance of success. If the likelihood of success is over 70%, it is really not much of a risk and may not generate much learning. If the likelihood is less than 50%, it may be too much of a gamble.

Ten Tips for Taking Smart Risks

I suggest the following tips or guidelines in taking calculated risks:

1. **Consider risks only if they are important:** Risks with potential downsides should be taken only if the potential pay-offs are significant for the organization or the community.
2. **Take the risk if the project or initiative is aligned with your passion:** You are more likely to make an extraordinary effort and thus succeed if the project is fueled by your passion or deeply-held values.
3. **"Ready, fire, aim":** Don't try to get it perfect or you'll never launch the innovation. Experiment, try out some ideas, and fix it up as you go along. Your goal is getting it "roughly right."
4. **Use a respected sponsor:** You can share your project idea with a respected Division Manager or Department Head. If a higher-up agrees to get involved, you need to engage the potential sponsor in developing the proposed work plan and then ask the person to serve as the "front" for the team when the project is proposed to the chief executive and/or the governing board.
5. **Spread the risk:** You minimize the risk if you broadly engage others internally and externally as full team members. By fully engaging colleagues from your agency and outside agency representatives and integrating their interests into the project, you can turn stakeholders into partners. Stakeholders can easily criticize you and your effort. True partners become committed and will support an initiative even if it needs fixing up as it goes along.
6. **Tie your innovation to another initiative or investment underway:** Your risk is minimized if your effort is an extension of something already accepted or initiated.
7. **Pilot everything: Call any new project a "pilot." Why?** Because, with a pilot, top management, other organizational members, elected officials, and community stakeholders will expect some "mis-steps" which will then help you fine-tune the program. The right language helps you shape expectations and minimizes the risk. (Remember how long Gmail bore the beta label? Five years).
8. **Take incremental steps and ramp up over time:** It you take a few incremental steps in starting a project, it is easier to back-off a risky project if you get hit with a wave of significant opposition. Some initial steps typically do not require a heavy financial investment from the beginning. In other words, it is "reversible." Conversely, if you take some positive incremental steps, you can develop momentum for the project and slowly build support, allowing you to move the initiative forward.
9. **Debrief the experience as you go along:** As you implement the creative program or take the next career move, you should de-brief what is happening as you go along as well as at the end. Debriefing with your partners helps you take corrective steps as you progress and consolidate your learning at the end. In debriefings with others, ask:
   - What is happening?
   - What is going well?
   - What is not going well?
   - How de we fix it up?
   - What are we learning for future practice?
10. **Seek guidance from your "dream team" of advisors:** Everyone needs informal coaches and advisors (see Career Compass No. 7). When you perceive an opportunity to innovate or to move up professionally, you should go to a trusted peer or manager or professional contact. Get some feedback on the following:
    1. Is this an important risk with significant potential pay-offs, worthy of the possible failure or other downsides?
    2. What is the potential for learning (for me and others)?
    3. How do I minimize the risk?
    4. Who can support me?
    5. How do I "frame" the project?
    6. Given the organizational or community culture, is the risk acceptable?

Nothing Ventured. . .

In this disruptive world, taking no risks is a risk. If you want to help your agency adapt to accelerating change, gain visibility for yourself and advance your career, you need to take calculated risks. You may fail. However, there are practical ways to take the risk, minimize the downside and achieve the pay-off for your organization, the community and yourself.

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Why Should Anyone Follow Me?

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest helps us understand the importance of trusting ourselves and being confident so that we can lead at every level of the organization.

I'm an early-career program specialist who wants to be a leader in my special district organization. I want to know how I can develop my leadership skills even though I'm not a manager. I know you have said that anyone can lead but why would anyone follow me if I'm not in a "leadership" role?

People decide to follow. It is a choice. Jim Collins states that you know it is leadership when followers can decide not to follow.

Non-managers often bemoan the fact that they do not have any formal authority. It is true that formal authority is helpful, but you need to recognize that formal management authority can only force a minimal level of compliance and performance. As opposed to management, leadership is not based on your formal authority but rather on your interpersonal attributes, even your moral or spiritual traits. Leadership is about winning the hearts and minds of people who choose to follow your lead.

My Mom Rosy

So what are your values and other attributes that would attract followers? Here is one way to find out. Identify a person who earlier in your life significantly influenced who you are and most shaped your values.

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In my case, it was my mother Rosy. Rosy was an Arab woman who grew up in Beirut, Lebanon. As a young single woman, Rosy bravely traveled by herself during World War II to Baghdad, Iraq, to teach in the Jewish community. After the war, Rosy decided to come to America. She met my father on a freighter coming to the U.S. and ended up in Kansas where she gave birth to my brother and me. After a divorce, Rosy joined VISTA (the domestic version of the Peace Corps) and taught migrant farm workers, coordinated student housing at a university, and returned to school and became a gerontologist.

Besides basic ethical behavior, my mom Rosy taught me to:

- Never give up (Rosy flunked her drivers test 12 times in a row before passing on the 13th try!)
- Serve others
- Apply your energy to make a difference
- Face your fears and then do what's right
- Embrace learning (including learning through mistakes) throughout your life
- Be strong and sufficiently confident in yourself to be self-critical
- Work hard at something worth doing
- Give a lot and you'll get a lot (Rosy decided that her tombstone should read "I Care!")

While I do have specific skills (I'm a good communicator; I am good at strategy), people do not gravitate to me because of my positive authority or my skills. They follow me because I care; I want to make a difference; I will do whatever it takes; and I display courage. People follow me because of the values that I learned from Rosy at an early age and exhibit on a daily basis.

Self-Reflection

My mom taught me to be self-reflective. In critiquing my leadership capabilities, I have come to conclude that I need to learn several new behaviors if I am going to better exert leadership in the service of others:

- More profoundly listen to others without evaluation
- Respect different values, perspectives and interests
- Integrate different interests and values into any proposal or venture that I want the group to pursue
- Facilitate, not direct action

Since I left my long-time City Manager career, I have been trying to better learn these behaviors. In my "encore" career, I have been experimenting as a group facilitator and consultant. Successful consultants listen well; withhold judgment; identify different needs, perspectives and interests; and incorporate these views and interests into a plan. I am becoming a better (and more humble) leader as I facilitate and consult.

Exhibiting Leadership Behavior

To demonstrate and practice day-to-day leadership on the job, try these suggestions:

- Talk about important values in conversations with colleagues
- Listen to co-workers and other stakeholders and integrate their interests into the work plan
- Speak up at a staff meeting, recommending how the team should proceed
- Verbally support the leadership endeavors of others
- Actively help others on the team accomplish collective goals
- Model hard work, service and tenacity
- Treat every obstacle as a barrier to jump over (or work around)
- Work with others to find creative solutions

Key Questions

To become a better leader, ask yourself these critical questions:

- What are my values?
- What are some behaviors that can enhance leadership capacity?
- In what kind of situations can I demonstrate my values in active and tangible ways?
- What are some experiences that will help me further learn these behaviors?

As you address these questions and take on new experiences, you will become a better leader. As John F. Kennedy once remarked, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." To succeed, our local government organizations need leaders at all levels, not just at the top. As Margaret Wheatley suggested, great enterprises are "leader-full' organizations.

To succeed, our local government organizations need leaders at all levels, not just at the top. As Margaret Wheatley suggested, great enterprises are "leader-full" organizations.

The simple question—"Why should anyone follow me?"—is very provocative. Addressing this question can lead you to explore who you are and how you can exert leadership for the benefit of others.

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They've Oversized My Job!

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest reviews some steps you can take to handle additional work that's landed on your desk during periods of economic belt-tightening.

I work as one of two purchasing agents in the Finance Department of a medium-sized city. I have enjoyed my position and am committed to the organization. However, as part of recent budget cuts, the Finance Director has eliminated one of the purchasing agent positions and now I am doing the work of two people. Expectations have not diminished; I feel that I am always behind and I am stressed to the max. They've oversized my job. What can I do?

With several straight years of budget and staffing cuts, most local government employees have taken on more work. Our jobs are much more demanding and we all feel stressed. However, I can suggest a few approaches to make your situation more tolerable, or better yet, to use the situation to your career advantage.

Before I explore potential strategies, you must understand that you are in a position of strength as you take on additional work. Management cannot get the work completed with fewer resources without skilled and committed people like you. Therefore, you need to leverage this opportunity.

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Ten Strategies

Strategy 1: Identify priorities

As a first step, you should meet with your manager, acknowledge together that your workload has dramatically increased, and mutually agree on some priority projects or assignments. It is also important that you discuss these priorities with the departments that you serve and your larger Finance Department team. Based on these discussions, you and your manager may decide on tweaking the priorities.

Strategy 2: Negotiate timelines

In conjunction with your manager and your customer departments, it is imperative that you negotiate and agree upon some realistic timelines for both priority and non-priority assignments.

Strategy 3: Redesign the service

Since management has oversized your job, the same service delivery with fewer staffing resources may be untenable, so you need to redesign how you do the job. For instance, is some self-service a realistic option? With some training and technical support, can smaller purchases or contracts be handled by the staff in the customer departments? Can the departments handle several steps in the process? Can you and the departments eliminate a few steps and streamline the process to make some self-service a viable alternative?

Strategy 4: Secure additional administrative support and coaching

In the discussions with your manager, you should request more administrative support from other Finance Department staff in order to handle some of your lower-level tasks. It is also legitimate to request coaching for any challenging tasks or assignments.

Strategy 5: Subtract

As you add more work to your plate, you have the opportunity to take some work off as well. When you review your additional assignments with your boss, you should come prepared to discuss what you can subtract or shift to someone else, especially if the delegated assignment is a development opportunity for the other person. Delegating may include some reporting or other administrative work. Subtracting could focus on ritualistic non-value-added work that can be totally eliminated.

Strategy 6: Add

To complement your subtraction efforts, you may seek ways to add. Could you add resources from another department, a part-time employee, an intern or even a volunteer?

Strategy 7: Know your limits

Once you have explored priorities, reasonable timelines, opportunities to redesign the work, subtracting work and adding resources, you must identify your limits and stand firm on what you can accomplish and what you cannot. Of course, you want to help your agency and support other team members as much as possible in dire times. However, you have a responsibility to yourself and to others to insist on a do-able workload. You are not doing anyone a favor if you are overwhelmed and therefore ineffectual. Assert yourself!

Strategy 8: Negotiate more control over your work

While you may wish some assistance in one area or another, including help from your boss, you may also relish less over-the-shoulder supervision. If so, you can agree with your boss when it is reasonable to check in and report progress and any problems, but basically you can handle your job without daily or weekly supervision. In other words, you can use the oversizing situation to create less reporting and more freedom in how you do your job.

Strategy 9: Secure higher-level assignments or more enjoyable tasks

Amid all the new work, you need to identify some higher-level "stretch" assignments that would provide new experiences, promote learning and new skills, and create new relationships. As you accept more tasks, you must ensure that a few are developmental opportunities. Likewise, you can negotiate a few more enjoyable tasks to be included in your expanded portfolio.

Strategy 10: Negotiate some key benefits

After acknowledging with your manager that the organization is making many more demands on you and significantly increasing your workload, you can legitimately negotiate some important benefits. For instance, how about a better working title that would help you secure a higher-level position in the future? Or, after you have demonstrated that you have risen to the challenge, how about negotiating a promotion? The organization is still saving a substantial amount of money by eliminating the other purchasing agent position even after giving you a raise. Another option is negotiating a flex schedule or working from home one day per week where you can do more work in an uninterrupted environment. At the very least, you should indicate that you would like some more visibility in the organization as you seek advancement. You may agree with your boss that you will make some presentations to the City Council or Department Head team or serve on a high-visibility taskforce representing the Finance Department.

Whatever agreements you make with your boss or others, it is a good idea to make them as explicit as possible and put them in writing.

Take Care of Yourself

As you undergo more stress, you need to cake care of yourself.

- Eat well
- Exercise on a regular basis
- Take a weight control class
- Walk at mid-day or after work
- Take a yoga or meditation class
- Avoid self-medication though drinking or drugs
- Get adequate sleep
- Don't neglect your hobbies or friends
- Avoid isolation; connect with others
- Have a good laugh and blow off steam with coworkers (for example, joke about whose jobs got oversized the most).

To get some advice or guidance on employer-sponsored wellness programs, you can visit your HR Department. Your agency might also provide an Employee Assistance Program that can identify available wellness programs. Your health care provider is another source of prevention and wellness resources.

Use Your Leverage

Again, if your local government agency is oversizing your job, you have leverage. You should neither over-reach ("I want a promotion and more money or I won't take on the additional work") nor underestimate the opportunity. You can use your legitimate leverage in negotiating priorities, timelines, administrative support, coaching, and learning and development opportunities as well as other benefits.

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My Micromanaging Boss Is Driving Me Crazy!

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest offers some approaches to coping with a supervisor who is always looking over your shoulder.

I am a park and recreation program coordination with a micromanaging supervisor. I joined my city government because it has a good reputation and offered good opportunities; however, I'm about to look for a new job in another agency. My supervisor is driving me crazy. She is constantly checking on me and how I'm progressing with my project assignments. I am a good performer and have gotten good reviews but her micromanaging style has become debilitating and is sapping my energy and creativity. I have begun to avoid her in between our scheduled once-every-two-week meetings because I'm afraid she will once again inquire about my progress. I've become more negative, less engaged, and dissatisfied. Help!

As you point out, people join an organization because of its general reputation and positive opportunities to do good work, make a difference, and advance. People leave an organization because of a poor relationship with a supervisor. Since you are a good performer and are now thinking of leaving your agency, this is an important issue for you. For your own sake (and the sake of the agency), don't passively drift—take action!

Here are several approaches to improve your situation.

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1. Blow off steam

It is alright to complain a bit over beers with your spouse or partner, family members, or some nongovernment friends. Blowing off some steam is good for the soul as long as you then decide to proactively confront the situation.

2. Seek to understand

As Eric Fromm indicates, you first need to engage in "positive regard" and try to understand why your supervisor is a micromanager. Is it because she is receiving unrelenting pressure from her boss; or her previous bosses were all micromanagers and this is the only approach she knows; or perhaps she is insecure in her role despite your good performance. To the extent possible, you should try to minimize your supervisor's anxiety and need for control. If you can discern what is behind the micromanaging behavior, you can then develop an appropriate set of strategies.

3. Critique Yourself

In addition to understanding your supervisor, you also need to engage in self-reflection and critique your own behavior. What part do you play in this bad situation? Ask yourself:

- Have I lived up to all expectations?
- Have I missed any deadlines?
- Have I always kept my supervisor and others up-to-date on projects?

If you have not always lived up to all commitments, you must figure out how you can now demonstrate higher performance.

4. Create work plans for key projects

Even if you have always met all expectations and timelines, it is a good idea to create a written work plan for each project assignment of interest to your boss with specific timelines and milestones.

5. Share work plan and gain agreement

At one of your biweekly meetings, you can share your project work plan or plans and ask for feedback on desired outcomes, milestones, and timelines along the way. Then you need to specifically ask for approval of the work plan, secure any support that you may need, and commit to review your progress at upcoming biweekly meetings. In the case that your supervisor is getting pressure from above, you should encourage her to share your work plan with her manager.

6. Provide written updates to work plan

After every meeting with your boss, you can provide a quick-and-dirty email summary of your progress and any issues that you are dealing with. Again, if your supervisor is working for a micromanager, you may suggest that your boss forward the email summary to her manager.

7. Have a courageous conversation and make a deal

Once you have fully demonstrated that you are committed to results and excellence, you need to have a courageous conversation with your supervisor. Schedule the conversation at a different time and in a different environment than your biweekly meeting. For instance, you may invite your boss out for coffee to get feedback on how you are doing. In the conversation, you should focus on yourself—what you are willing to commit and what you need in order to perform. Do not focus on your boss' behavior. During the conversation, suggest a deal. Given your high performance and your need to exercise some autonomy, you can directly propose an agreement to provide results as specified in your work plan without any of your supervisor's informal check-ins. If something comes up between meetings and you must deviate from the work plan or milestones, commit to advise your supervisor without being asked.

8. Get coaching

Confidentially approach someone you trust in the organization who knows your supervisor and ask for guidance on how to proceed. An outside coach can also serve as a sounding board and advisor. In these conversations with coaches, you can test out your game plan and get feedback.

9. Rely on supportive colleagues

While your supervisor may be a pain, you should focus on other workplace relationships, especially your immediate team. Just about all important work requires the efforts of a team. If you contribute to a strong and high-performing work group, you will find meaning and support from like-minded peers. Members of a strong and supportive team or various teams in which you participate can demonstrate caring and compassion and minimize the negative impact of a micromanaging supervisor. You support them; they support you. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter says, "The best cure for horrible bosses is wonderful colleagues."

10. If all else fails. . .

So, there is a lot you can do. However, if nothing works, by all means seek another position inside or outside the organization. You have talent and deserve better.

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Overcoming Your Blind Spots

My department head talks about listening to employees, wanting their ideas, promoting innovation, and providing support for staff. He seems sincere about these intentions but his actions demonstrate that he does not live these values. It seems to me that he has major blind spots like most of us. He does ask for feedback but no one tells him the truth.

As I develop my leadership capabilities, how do I become more self-aware so my behavior matches my intentions?

You are right; self-awareness is a primary competency for leaders at all levels of the organization. However, subordinates and colleagues do not typically provide candid feedback and therefore leaders do not have the opportunity to become more self-aware and make self-corrections. Without self-knowledge, a leader cannot know how to deploy his or her skills effectively, leveraging strengths and minimizing weaknesses.

There is no ideal leader. As Amgen CEO Kevin Sharer states, "Leadership has many voices." So the trick is to be "authentic"—

- Know your purpose and calling
- Practice your values
- Lead with your heart as well as your mind.

Therefore, the challenge is how to become more self-aware and ensure that your actual behavior is aligned with your values and intentions. There is no perfect way to promote self-knowledge. Typically, you should try to integrate several of the following practices into your journey of becoming a more self-aware and better leader:

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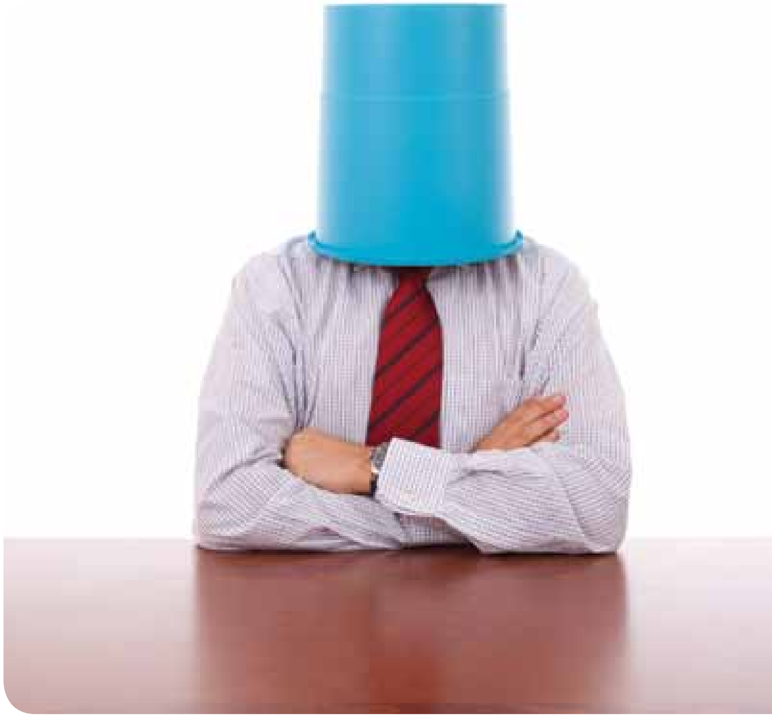

1. Understand your life story

In a February 2007 *Harvard Business Review* article "Discovering Your Authentic Leadership," Bill George and his colleagues suggest that you must first learn from your life story if you want to become authentic. Given your formative experiences, what drives you? What is your calling? What are your "gifts" that you are willing to give away to others?

Having reflected upon my life story, I know that I am energized by improving communities and teaching others. My mother Rosy was a life-long teacher who was fearless. I spent my young adulthood as a community organizer in Mexico City and then in Connecticut. Like my mother, I am a teacher and coach. I too am adventuresome and a taker of risks. While my courage often enhances my leadership capabilities, I also understand that sometimes I am needlessly bold. Since I understand my life story, I can leverage my calling as a teacher and a leader of change, yet minimize any reckless behavior.

2. Debrief experiences with colleagues

To promote self-knowledge, you can create a habit within your unit to debrief all experiences. Even if you do not head the unit, you can ask your colleagues at a staff meeting to reflect with you about last night's governing board session, the recent community workshop, or a multiagency meeting. You can all respond to three simple questions:

- What went right?
- What did not go so well?
- What did we learn for future practice?

If your team makes it a habit to debrief, you will help create a culture of learning, self-awareness, and self-improvement for all.

3. Set time aside for self-reflection

To debrief with yourself, you need to set some time aside to think about your leadership interactions with others and be purposeful about self-critique ("I'm going to take a walk or go to a café in order to think about how I'm leading my redevelopment project"). Ask yourself:

- How are people responding to my intentions and ideas?
- Are people choosing to follow my suggestions?
- What should I do differently?

I find it helpful to write down my conclusions and what I resolve to do, and then tickle a review on my calendar.

One of the most effective ways to promote self-knowledge is to write a journal. According to the book *The Progress Principle*, writing down a simple narrative of your daily events and identifying what went well and what did not go so well will assist you in:

- Acknowledging accomplishments, contributions to projects, and personal strengths
- Understanding missteps
- Gaining insight into your interactions with others.

In short, journaling helps you make sense of your efforts and promotes an awareness of self.

4. Reveal yourself to others

Assuming that you are a good performer and are respected by others, you can safely create an environment of candid and helpful feedback if you reveal some self-criticism about a less-than-positive move you've made. You are more likely to get constructive feedback if you have exhibited on several occasions some appropriate self-critique. By modeling an openness about your actions, you encourage forthright feedback.

5. Ask for specific and actionable feedback and take corrective actions

When requesting feedback, you need to focus on a specific experience or an aspect of a specific project. You are more likely to get helpful feedback if it is about a specific situation.

To get feedback that is "actionable," it is wise to ask follow-up questions such as "what is one thing I could I do more of?" "What is one thing I could do less of?"

It is easy to get defensive when receiving feedback. If we get defensive, colleagues will tend not to give us feedback in the future. Therefore, it is a good idea to listen without interruption, summarize what you heard, ask a clarifying question if needed, and then simply thank the person for their feedback.

Of course, feedback is impotent if you do not reflect upon it and try to make self-corrections. Once you take corrective action, it is a good idea to share with your team the steps you have taken. Sharing with colleagues in such a fashion accomplishes two aims. First, you are reinforcing your changed behavior by verbalizing your actions and making them "public." Second, you have encouraged helpful feedback in the future because the feedback has been acted upon.

6. Use a self-assessment tool

Through a seminar or course, it is helpful to take a self-assessment tool (for instance Myers-Briggs or Strength Deployment Inventory) in order to identify the way you perceive the world and your style of interacting with others. After you get the results, you can discuss the findings with the instructor or trainer and consider the implications of the scores and if they ring true in assessing your interactions with others.

7. Scrutinize your "strengths"

We often acknowledge our strengths and look elsewhere for improvements. However, if our strengths are "over-done," they turn into weaknesses of which we may be unaware.

Let me give you a personal example of one of my strengths. I love to come up with new ideas and talk about them. Sometimes my ideas have attracted others and led to creative team projects. However, other times I throw too many ideas in a short time at a team, am too passionate about the ideas, and grab too much space in team meetings talking about my ideas. I can easily lose people's attention if I am not selective in the ideas that I promote. Worse yet, colleagues may shut down if I don't adequately provide the time and opportunity for people to think about a few choice ideas, react, and offer their best thinking. Dialogue and listening usually enhance and transform the idea, thus creating a shared ownership of the proposed project or initiative.

8. Ask your coach

In developing a "dream team" of special advisors (see *Career Compass No. 7*), one of your formal or informal coaches (a colleague, senior manager, family member or friend) may be in a position to observe your behavior and give you appropriate feedback. Even if a coach does not directly observe you, you can debrief a specific experience, share your intent, describe various reactions to your actions, and get some perspectives from your advisor.

9. Learn from your "crucibles" of leadership

Periodically, we are tested by a difficult challenge. How we act and lead given this adverse experience will shape us and transform our future leadership capacity. These situations are called "crucibles."

One of my crucibles of leadership was trying to develop a job center for day workers. As a young city manager, I worked in a somewhat conservative community that was struggling with the problem of recent Latino immigrants (some of whom were undocumented) congregating on downtown street corners, causing traffic problems as they ran out into the street to solicit day work from contractors and residents seeking their services. There was littering, urinating in the bushes, and complaints from businesses and their customers. As city manager, I got much pressure to use the police in moving the day workers out of the downtown. Instead, I proposed a city-operated job center located in a trailer on a vacant city-owned lot. I encountered a fire-storm of opposition to helping "illegals," doubted my own judgment, was tempted to withdraw the proposal, yet persevered with the help of the ministerial association and one council member who the saw the job center as a practical approach to a difficult social problem. We tried out a pilot program and then made the job center a permanent facility. I was tested as a leader but learned that I could take calculated risks, experiment, and succeed for the benefit of the community, even amid much adversity and criticism.

10. Use a "movie" metaphor

In the November 2011 *Harvard Business Review* article "Fire, Snowball, Mask, and Movie," authors Peter Fuda and Richard Badham encourage leaders to think of their interactions with others as part of a "movie." The movie metaphor suggests that leaders evaluate—on their own or with a trusted colleague— the "raw footage" after an incident or experience and think of what they could have done differently. A leader can "view" and "replay" their actions, "edit" their performance, and "direct" a story that is better aligned with their values and vision.

To become an authentic and better leader, you must be willing to look inward. As Jeff Immelt, CEO of GE, states, "Leadership is one of those great journeys into your own soul."

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Building Your Personal Brand

I recently attended a workshop for emerging leaders. In a time of great turmoil in local government, especially fiscal crisis, the speaker emphasized the need to promote your value, and to take it a step further and develop a "personal brand" that will protect you in times of budget cutbacks.

Developing a brand sounds like marketing a product. How can you create a brand that promotes your value?

The speaker makes sense. In disruptive times, all positions are vulnerable. You need to go beyond your title and position in the organization, assert your value, and create a distinctive identity or brand. A personal brand is based on what is unique or distinctive about you. It is about your extraordinary knowledge, skills, aptitudes, and capabilities. A brand is often tied to your passion.

The Benefits of a Powerful Brand

If you are successful in developing a distinctive personal brand, it will come to everyone's mind when they think of you. A brand can

- Protect you when top management needs to eliminate positions and lower headcount.
- Lead to attractive assignments and projects.
- Shape the perceptions of others so they see you in terms of your strengths and assets as opposed to your weaknesses or deficiencies.
- Enhance your "promotability" inside the organization or lead to new opportunities in another organization.

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Since a brand is often related to a passion or something unique that you offer, further developing or enhancing your brand is not a burden. It is often fun.

We operate in a "project world"—most important work is done in teams that cut across division or department boundaries. In fact, a career is increasingly a portfolio of important projects. Therefore, a powerful brand will help you secure the best project work. Consider these typical conversations and assignment decisions:

- "Mary is smart and an agile learner. She will solve this perplexing problem. Let's assign her the challenge."
- "Jose is a doer and gets things done. I want him on my team."
- "Joanne knows how to engage neighborhood and community groups. Let's appoint her to lead the project."

Steps for Constructing a Brand

Step #1—Inventory your unique skills, knowledge, and capabilities.

Among all the other hard-working and smart people in your organization or profession, what makes you special? Self-reflection is important as you begin to define your uniqueness. Ask yourself: "Who is the real me?" (See *Career Compass* column #22—"Overcoming Your Blind Spots.")

Earlier in my career, I identified one of my strengths as "community organizing." As a young man, I had worked in Mexico City organizing cooperatives and learned as an early-career professional how to apply these community organizing skills to local government work.

Step #2—Get some feedback in identifying your brand.

Just like corporations seek out customers to identify their unique value proposition, you too need to get feedback on what you uniquely offer. Consequently, you can schedule a few coffees with colleagues, managers, program partners, and professional associates (including coaches) in order to informally discuss how they perceive the distinct value that you provide.

Your brand must be "true." It cannot be wishful thinking. You must ask yourself: "Is my desired brand the real me? Can I live up to it?"

Step #3—Focus on a few high- or unique-value areas.

Each of us have several high-value knowledge, skill or capability areas. However, to define a personal brand, you need to select one or two areas to promote. You cannot try to be known for everything to everyone.

During my career as a city manager, I consciously promoted my knowledge and expertise in creative budget strategies as well citizen participation. Now in my "encore" phase, I have focused on facilitating leadership development.

Step #4—Write a brand statement.

Based on your analysis, self-reflection and feedback from others, you can now write a brand statement. The statement can be in the form of "I want to be known for ______________(something) so that I can ________________ (verb plus results)." For instance, my brand statement could read: "I want to be known for my training and coaching skills so I can help develop the next generation of local government managers."

Your brand statement can help you decide where to invest your time and energy. While you may be assigned certain mandatory activities, you do have some leeway in other discretionary areas. The brand statement can help you select those projects or other activities that allow you to build and leverage your brand. Conversely, you need to jettison or otherwise delegate where possible tasks that sap your energy and do not reinforce your brand identity.

Step #5—Identify "proof points" to validate or demonstrate your brand.

To use in promoting your brand, you should identify specific experiences that support the validity of your brand. For example, if you are an environmental sustainability expert, you must identify several "proof points" or specific experiences or accomplishments that demonstrate your expertise. Telling a story that includes a proof point is an excellent way to validate your brand. Stories are the most powerful way to communicate.

Step #6—Look for ways to promote and leverage your brand.

You have a multitude of ways to promote and leverage your personal brand:

- Volunteer for a project team that allows you to add value through a particular skill, expertise or knowledge.
- Step up and write the board report or press release on the project so you get associated with the successful effort.
- Provide a presentation at a staff meeting, management team session, or conference on a particular project.
- Write an article for the employee, professional association or community newsletter on your particular area of expertise.
- Teach a class for your organization or for a professional association showcasing a knowledge area.
- Search for an award for your team accomplishments, nominate the team, write the application, and let others know that your team is worthy of the recognition.
- Contribute to an in-house wiki or blog or otherwise use social media to make a contribution.

Any time you develop "content" that is related to your distinctive value area (i.e., an article, presentation, mini-guide) you are promoting your brand. Anything that can be forwarded or re-posted is especially valuable in establishing or reinforcing a brand. This Career Compass article helps to reinforce my brand. (By the way, please forward it to a friend or colleague.)

Brands are created and promoted every day in small ways. Let's say that your brand involves facilitation skills. If your team is having a difficult time focusing on a new direction, you can offer to facilitate and lead a strategic direction discussion that could positively shape their perceptions of you and the perceptions of others.

As you promote your brand, remember to give back to others and be generous with your time. If you give a lot, you get a lot.

Step #7—Protect your brand.

A brand can be easily damaged. Just like AOL and Yahoo lost their brand strength, your brand, too, can lose its luster. If your project group fails to deliver results and you are known for creating positive outcomes, you must quickly find another opportunity to create a success and thus reinforce your brand.

You do not want to weaken your brand over time. In this time of accelerating change, you need to continuously learn, practice your skills, and "stretch" in even more challenging situations so you can maintain your unique value proposition.

Rebranding

Throughout my career, my personal brand has changed. You, too, may wish to be known for other things or capabilities. Consequently, you can begin the rebranding process now by taking a class, doing research and reading, tackling a new challenge, and stretching and growing in new assignments. Once you are working on a new capacity or knowledge area, you can start to promote this new emerging brand.

Chief Branding Officer

You are your own "chief branding officer." So, get started! What is your personal brand? How can you enhance it?

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Asking Powerful Questions

My manager seems to be always asking our team questions. In fact, we spend a lot of team time responding to her queries. We are a high-functioning and productive team but I wish my manager would just come in and tell us where she wants us to go. I thought a leader took charge and made decisions.

These are times of great flux—new technologies, demographic changes, and severe financial shifts all are forces disrupting our local government world. In these uncertain times, a manager cannot know all the answers and be certain about direction. While we in government, business, and education have traditionally focused on having the right answers, there are no right answers. Therefore, "a good question beats a good answer." In these times of great flux, leaders need to harness the energy, creativity, and commitment of everyone to adapt to this disruptive world.

We tend to think that leadership is all about having the answers, making decisions, and determining direction. Ron Heifetz, in his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, emphasizes that the big issues of the day are not "technical challenges" (such as designing a road), which can be addressed by technical experts. Rather, we face "adaptive challenges." With adaptive challenges (such as addressing a homelessness problem in a community), there are no right or wrong answers; choices often involve value conflicts among stakeholders; and leadership is required to bring people together to do difficult work.

In this kind of environment, the role of leaders is to invite people on a journey whose destination may be unclear. Asking powerful questions is an effective leadership approach in order to engage team members and external partners. Moreover, posing genuine questions allows the leader to demonstrate a little humility and vulnerability and thereby become more human and authentic, enhancing one's ability to lead. People are less likely to follow if they cannot relate to you on some level as a person.

The Importance of Questions

Why are the right questions so powerful? First, leaders cannot force followers to follow. Therefore, leaders use questions to generate conversations. The

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poet David Whyte suggests that leadership is the art of conversation. So, who are we engaging in conversations? What is the content of our conversations?

Second, questions are also the key to engaging people and securing their discretionary effort and commitment, without which we cannot be successful as organizations.

Finally, in a disruptive world, learning agility is the critical skill. Technical knowledge (knowing the correct answers or solutions) becomes quickly obsolete in a world of accelerating and non-linear change. Learn-how becomes more important than know-how. The foundation to learning agility is the ability to ask fundamental questions.

Powerful Questions

As a leader, the trick is asking provocative and engaging questions. Anyone can exert leadership by asking 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?
- 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?

As Polly LaBarre discusses in her hbr.org blog piece "The Question That Will Change Your Organization," the more disruptive your questions, the more opportunity that your team or organization will create or shape your future. The questions of "Why?" or "Why not?" or "What if?" will invite possibility, not doubt about the future.

Beginner's Mind

All of us can lead through asking important questions. To do so, leaders must not only ask questions but be open to the responses. As the Buddhists say, we need to avoid an "expert's mind." An expert's mind is full—there is very little room for new or contrary information or other perspectives. Therefore, leaders who wish to truly engage others must exhibit a "beginner's mind." A beginner's mind is empty and thus open to all kinds of ideas and different views. A beginner's mind demonstrates authentic curiosity about what is happening in a dynamic world and how we might respond to it.

Leading the Way

To use powerful questions, leaders at all levels must:

- Prepare for the conversation and identify courageous questions that will provoke the kind of conversation that the team needs in order to move forward.
- Demonstrate some humility and vulnerability by asking questions for which you may not have the answer.
- Be open to the responses to your questions and be unafraid of where the conversation may lead.
- Make it safe for others to ask questions by modeling—asking tough questions, being non-defensive to the responses of others to your questions, and encouraging others to do the same.

A New Leadership Competency

In our disruptive world of local government, leaders at all levels of the organization must be able to ask questions and start conversations. This new leadership competency will help us engage others in shaping a new future for the organization.

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Winning Office Politics, the Right Way

In this issue of Career Compass, Dr. Benest coaches us through the game of office politics, with the goal on winning—for our community!

I am a younger supervisor in the Building Department. Recently I presented a proposal to change the way we do business, better serve the development community, and generate revenue at the same time. Some colleagues who didn't want to see the change lobbied against my idea behind closed doors with the Chief Building Official. Some deal was made that resulted in a cosmetic change in procedures, but nothing substantive. My proposal was quickly shot down.

Organizational politics got in the way of a needed improvement (not to mention morale). I hate politics and game-playing--I don't play favorites or trade favors. How can I be more successful and avoid these tactics?

I can understand your frustration but organizational politics will never disappear. They are a part of organizational life. To think otherwise is magical thinking.

Politics are Good

As suggested by Ron Ashkenas in an hbr.org blog piece "Use Office Politics to Your Advantage," organizational politics are in fact good for the organization. First, the early indication of "politics" is a warning sign that different organizational groups or stakeholders may have concerns about your idea or proposal. You need to take heed. By sensing some internal or external opposition, you can take corrective action.

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Second, politics promote dialogue and even debate which is good for an organization. Without debate, management may rubber-stamp ideas from influential or "well-connected" factions without adequately vetting the ideas.

Embracing Politics

"Politics" are about exerting influence. Instead of trying to avoid politics, you must embrace them.

While some politics and power come from "backroom" deal-making, you can focus on the power and influence that come from connections, shared ideas and collaboration.

To achieve a more positive hearing of your ideas, you certainly want to enhance your relationship with the Chief Building Official (see Career Compass No. 12: Communicating with Your Boss) However, you need to go beyond relationship-building with the decision-maker.

Here are some strategies to become more astute in making organizational politics work for you and your ideas:

Strategy 1—Commit yourself

If you want others to commit their support, they need to see your passion and commitment to the idea. Why should others get invested in your proposal if you are not visibly enthused about the possibilities?

Strategy 2—Draw a political map

You need to understand the lines of social connections and informal influence between key players and stakeholders inside and outside the organization. Then you can engage those players based on addressing the following questions:

- Who will benefit from my idea and may support it?
- Who could be negatively affected by my idea or perceive it as a loss of resources, influence or status and may therefore resist the proposal?
- Who is the real decision-maker and to whom does that person relate?
- Who might influence the decision or outcome?

Strategy 3—Engage in authentic ways those who may be affected

Once you identify the potential players who may be affected or who may perceive a positive or negative outcome, you must reach out to them. As you engage them in several conversations, you need to focus on asking questions, listening, identifying their interests, and integrating at least some of their interests into your plan. By getting their "finger prints" on the proposal, the proposal may become their proposal. Or, at the very least, they may not actively oppose the proposal.

If after several conversations, you encounter opposition, you need to accept it and then move on to conversations with other people. It is better to identify substantial opposition from some groups early on in the engagement process.

In terms of engaging these other players in conversations, you want to create an authentic relationship. An ***authentic*** relationship is developed when you are genuine and transparent. Describe your proposal with not just all the benefits, but also identify some of the potential negatives. In the process, you must also convey why the idea is important to you. This kind of authenticity deepens your connection, builds trust, and provides the foundation for some joint action.

As part of the authentic engagement effort, it is a good idea to offer someone who supports the proposal some real work to do, no matter how small. As Schlesinger, Kiefer, and Brown point out in their hbr.org blog piece "How to Create Raving Fans," you need to engage supporters in some tangible task (such as reaching out to other colleagues or sending their ideas in an email to you). Immediate action cements support.

Strategy 4—Frame your idea or proposal in different ways

By conducting "listening sessions" with various people or group representatives, you can discern their values, perceptions, and interests. Then, depending on their values and interests, you can develop a different "frame" for different players.

For a painting, a blue frame brings out or accentuates the blue in the painting. Likewise, by emphasizing different aspects of a project proposal, you can refocus people and tie your proposal to their interests or priorities. In your situation, your proposal to better serve the development community can be framed as a customer service enhancement, an economic development benefit, a revenue generator, or a way to better address the Council's agenda.

Strategy 5—Retool the proposal

Based on engaging others, you can retool your basic proposal to incorporate other ideas or minimize opposition. This may require some compromise, but remember that "politics is the art of the possible."

Strategy 6—Build alliances

To become a better political player, you must help others and support their reasonable ideas and efforts whenever possible. Then you can ask for their support when you need it. In other words, if your proposal to better serve the development community is important to you, it is a good time to "cash in some chips."

Strategy 7—Use a sponsor

Now that you have attracted additional support and minimized opposition, you can further campaign for the proposal and build on your initial support base.

As part of your campaign, you may wish to identify and engage a sponsor for the proposal. The sponsor can be someone who is a "higher-up" or well-regarded by the decision-maker or the organization as the whole.

Don't Withdraw. Engage.

Don't use politics as an excuse for losing or withdrawing. Embrace organizational politics and make good things happen.

ICMA *Leaders at the Core of Better Communities*

777 North Capitol Street, NE
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002-4201

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