



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

Job Loss



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PM magazine periodically publishes articles that relate to how members cope with “in-transition” time in their professional and personal lives. The common theme of the articles: managers need to help and support each other in times of trouble or transition. We have collected several articles that you may find of interest; also included is a transition financial primer from ICMA-RC.

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10 Points of Change During Transition; or, Can Someone Throw Me a Rope In This Quicksand?

Michael Roberto

All managers go through transition in some way. How does the phrase go: Nothing changes like change itself? Whether in our personal or professional lives, change is one of the few constants. In my particular case, as I went through transition from a city management position, the past seven months have been among the most enjoyable, introspective, and defining times in my life. I would not have traded them for anything.

Actually, I have been in local government management for the past 18 years, 12 as a city manager in two cities. Beginning in January 2000, I “transitioned” into the private sector to work for a first-class consulting engineering firm. I chose the firm because of its commitment to quality, the wonderful people who work for it, and their strong sense of ethics, which places a high value on the firm’s clients. I was a finalist in four cities and a county and also was considering two other private sector offers when I chose to work for the firm.

My Own Story

I began my transition from local government in late July 2000. It was odd because, during my career, I have hired 10 managers who were in transition and never expected to be

one myself. Call it ego or naivety, but you always assume it will be someone else who is between jobs. I hired these managers because I believed it was an obligation in this profession to help out our fellow managers. If you can't be supportive and compassionate to a fellow government professional, then what do you stand for, and where are your ethics and values? Everyone gets into the barrel, and at what point do you help or hinder?

When I left, I received more than 200 phone calls, e-mails, and letters from citizens, fellow managers, and people I had never met. They were so incredibly supportive that it made me realize the value of what we do as managers. In a short period of time, I became convinced that I needed to make this opportunity something special. I began to see this experience as a chance to strengthen my core values, and I started to embrace this change as an important chapter of my life. In retrospect, I came up with 10 points on how to manage transitions in life.

1. Through the transition process, **stay in control**. I am absolutely convinced that at the point when it is time to leave, you are in the greatest position of strength. Exercise it thoroughly to protect your family and your future. Do not negotiate from a position of weakness. Force the issues if you must, but just as in negotiating a union contract, never let them see you sweat.

2. **Begin work early**. When you can read the tea leaves that it might be time to go, start putting your resume and contact list together well in advance. Talk with an attorney and an accountant to develop to both short-term (four to six months) and one-year plans. Eventually, you will use them, and when that happens you will not be operating out of confusion but instead from a plan that has a sound legal, professional, and financial foundation.

Also, hire a resume company to help prepare your curriculum vitae (c.v.). I have found that managers write the worst resumes, but this task must be

If you can't be supportive and compassionate to a fellow government professional, then what do you stand for, and where are your ethics and values?

done before you leave. Go back and have your staff summarize all of your accomplishments over the past few years. I always did this each year and kept the correspondences. If you have not done this, you will need your staff to remember key improvements and accomplishments, and it is easier to do this while you are still in your position. I wrote both a public and a private resume so that my options were open.

3. Once you leave, **get out of town**, and take time off. My family and I left for a three-week vacation to Minnesota, and it was a cleansing process. Getting away was an opportunity to read, relax, and think without interruption. Speaking of reading, two books I recommend are *Running to the Mountain* by Jon Katz and, for the guys, *Men's Passages* by Gail Sheehy.

Both books are not so much about change as about how a person deals with it. This, I came to find, was my single most important learning experience. You must embrace change. Do not run from it, rationalize it away, or imagine demons in it. Change is going to happen every day of our lives—how we confront and control it is what really matters.

4. **Get in physical, mental, and spiritual shape**. I know you have heard this before, but in my eyes it made

all the difference. I hired a personal trainer and started lifting weights, working out, and reducing my body fat, which resulted in losing three inches from my waist and gaining energy. Another great support was seeing a therapist, who helped me work through some personal issues and put thoughts in their proper context. Most managers have negotiated health insurance as an employee benefit, and most plans will cover this valuable service.

But, most important, I reconnected with my religious beliefs. I learned that as my relationship with my beliefs grew stronger, I developed a far greater understanding of myself. I credit this fact more than anything else with bringing value to my life during this period of transition.

5. **Rediscover your family**. I could not remember a time when I was at home when my daughter left for school or there when she got back. We started taking tennis lessons together. I coached her soccer team and drove her to places that I didn't even know she went. As well as your children, remember that person who sleeps next to you in bed. Take this time to strengthen and bring your relationship with your partner to a new level, and realize that all of this crisis will pass, but family stays constant.

6. Get rid of debt, and **create a solid financial plan**. I always had paid attention to long-term retirement goals, but it's easy to get caught in short-term debt. Eliminate all of it ahead of time, well before you ever leave a job, so that when all of the other issues hit, this is one giant burden that has been lifted.

7. **Take your time**. Develop a plan, and explore both public and private options. I worked on focusing on my ideal job. Since I had almost one year of severance pay, this cushion helped give me the chance to think through what I wanted to do. But, more important, it helped get my priorities in order. I was able to negotiate the city into paying for an out-

placement firm that helped me with transition to another sector. Look closely into this option. I found it incredibly useful, especially when I was researching the private sector. Remember, it is your choice to make.

Consider each option carefully, making every step correspond to the plan and priorities you have established. Transition is work! Set up an office with what works for you. For example, I installed a cable Internet connection because I was used to a T1 line. As part of your severance package, include your cellphone (a lot of people remember the number), your computer (avoids fighting over the home computer), a fax/printer (the entire world is not Internet-ready), and a Palm Pilot. If you have operated with these in your government job, technology will be equally important as you look for a new job.

8. It is important to **be open to the kindness of others**. As managers, we are so used to giving orders and being in control. Then, suddenly, all of that power disappears. It hurts, and it's easy to want to hide. But what you'll discover is that there are incredibly compassionate people in this world who will appear in your life, sometimes when you least expect it. Work at being receptive to them. Realize that each contact is an opportunity that opens another door, either within you or for a future job. So many people were incredibly supportive to me, and I shall never forget how their support helped me.

9. **Continue to believe in yourself**. It is easy to get "down" on yourself and to doubt things. For me, faith in myself, my family, and my religion has never wavered, and my beliefs have only strengthened with time. Don Stillwell, manager of Lee County, Florida, put it correctly at a recent conference where I was a speaker: "This is a job, not a life." It's easy to confuse the two.

10. Realize that **change and transition are just another opportunity to succeed**. You cannot dwell on the

past, but you can grab the future and take it where you want it. At the moment when it least appears that you are in control of your life, you are in the greatest control of it. I subscribe to an e-mail service called Daily Motivator (www.great-day.com), which sends me words of encouragement and strength each day. As I went back and looked at old messages, I came upon these thoughts, which make a perfect ending for my story: "What was once an effort becomes a joy when you decide you want to do it, when it fits your purpose, when it makes a positive difference. A great strategy for getting yourself to take effective action is to connect that action solidly with the things you truly desire." **PM**

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Managing the Emotional Realities of Job Loss

Jerry Johnson and Carol Nalbandian

Betty and Bill C. are in disbelief that Bill was terminated last night as city manager after 12 years of loyal service. The new council said the trouble was Bill's "failure to communicate," but they didn't give any specifics. Betty is outraged. Bill is in shock. They have two children, one in high school and one in the eighth grade. They were hoping to see the kids through school before they considered another move.

Does this sound familiar? Maybe it has not happened to you, but it could.

Local government management is one of the most honorable, challenging, and demanding professions. By the very nature of the high professional standards upon which it is established and the political environment in which it exists, it also is one of the most vulnerable professions.

People often talk about how tenuous a profession athletic coaching is, but even coaches have contracts with a time duration in them and a concrete measurement of their success: their won-and-lost records. While many managers have "contracts," their primary benefits are to provide for notice and to spell out severance provisions, should the governing body decide to remove the manager with or without cause.

Whatever the reason for a manager's termination, and however "sweet" the severance package, the reality of termination represents many losses to the manager as well as to his or her family, friends, and former employees and associates.

The purpose of this article is to help the city or county manager and his or her family members to deal effectively with the personal and psychological realities of job termination. No matter how well a manager is prepared, termination will be a painful experience whose challenges will take time, understanding, and energy to overcome.

Emotional Effects of Job Loss

A Deeply Upsetting Occurrence

Anyone who experiences job loss finds it to be a traumatic event. First, there is the loss of the structure of work, which provides a person with a place to go each day and a chance to do something meaningful. There also is the loss of professional identity, collegial support, and a sense of belonging, status, recognition, and stability. Many of these losses are felt equally by spouses and family members.

For the local government manager, there are the additional losses of power and recognition of one's public achievements, often with a corresponding sense of public embarrassment. It is important to recognize that these feelings of loss are natural ones that need to be recognized and dealt with, rather than denied.

A Threat to Self-Esteem

Termination is invariably a threat to or a perceived attack on one's self-esteem. The reason for this is that self-esteem is composed of two important elements: the inner sense, first, that one is lovable and, second, that one has worth. Both of these elements were given substance in our early lives and are reinforced or redefined as we grow into adults and gain more understanding and experience.

As we get older and gain a greater sense of mastery over our work, our con-

victions that we are lovable and that we are worthy are constantly being reinforced. Thus, when we are terminated, the event is a great blow to both of these convictions. The strong message is: not only is our personal presence not wanted anymore, but also we are not seen as having the competence to go on working in this capacity.

Because local government management is such an all-consuming profession, managers often get too much of their self-esteem from the work side of their lives. Termination becomes a greater threat than it might be for someone in another job or vocation.

Emotional Tasks of Job Loss

Given the psychological losses and the threat to self-worth, the manager has several tasks to deal with in order to move successfully through this transition.

Managing Disappointments. Disappointment has to do with unfulfilled aspirations and dreams. There may be special projects that must be left behind; there may be personal commitments that cannot be kept. There is the thought that we have disappointed those who have looked to us for leadership. Most difficult of all is the disappointment that we feel in ourselves. We set up aspirations for ourselves (sometimes unrealistic ones), and when we don't achieve them, we feel a profound sense of disappointment. With a job loss, we have lost an opportunity to fulfill some of our dreams.

What makes this task of overcoming disappointment even more difficult is that it must be done while still in the public eye. "Should I put up a brave front and show no disappointment, or should I be totally honest and express the strong emotions I'm feeling?" The best option probably lies somewhere between these two extremes. You may, in fact, move back and forth between them, depending on the situation and

on your mood. Clearly, however, the disappointments need to be faced and dealt with. In a study of 5,000 executives, one of the factors that separated successful executives from others was their ability to handle career disappointments.

Dealing with Anger and Depression. A traumatic experience like job loss will produce strong emotions, and anger is among the most common of these. No matter how well the termination may have been handled, there are bound to be feelings of anger and frustration. The task is to deal with this anger in a healthy way that will enable you to keep your self-respect and that will not unfairly affect others.

"Should I tell the council just what I think of their actions?" "Should I say a few choice words for the press?" These are not the key questions. The most crucial inquiry to make of yourself is "What are the consequences to me of the anger that I express?" There are ways to express these strong feelings in a safe, supportive environment, without losing control, without feeling subsequent guilt, and without unfairly hurting others. If the anger is unexpressed, it will often turn inward and cause depression.

While it is normal to feel "down" and disappointed, to struggle with guilt and shame, to be anxious and nervous, the challenge is to prevent the depression from becoming incapacitating. Depression saps energy from the process of doing things to help yourself, drives your self-esteem into a downward spiral, and is contagious. Family members will often follow your example and become depressed as well. Your task is to recognize depression as a normal part of change and at the same time to focus on what you can do to move beyond the depression. Maintaining a positive attitude and positive self-talk is critical to coping well.

Handling the Change Process. Understanding that change is a process, not an event, will help you to move forward and to adapt well to the change. In a

process, a person makes adaptations over time rather than expecting him- or herself to accept the change all at once.

At the Menninger Leadership Center, the authors have found beneficial a concept called the “morale curve,” which describes the adaptive process that people go through as they deal with a change (see illustration).

There are four major crisis points during this process, each requiring a psychological adjustment. Mastery at each crisis stage is characterized by personal growth and new adaptive skills.

The *arrival* stage occurs at the time of termination. Because the change in this situation usually is unexpected and unwelcome, there are deep feelings of shock, disbelief, and even denial. There is the outcry (whether spoken or not): “This can’t be happening to me!” The numbness that results actually helps to cushion the shock. During this stage, there may even be a slight lifting of the spirits and a feeling that things may not be so bad after all. There may even be some false hope that it will all be seen as a mistake. But

this hope is a “false positive” because the individual has not really faced the truth of the situation.

The next phase is called the *engagement* stage because the person is coming to grips with the situation. There is a realization of the impact of the job loss and of the additional losses associated with it. This is a time of strong emotions: anger, frustration, anxiety, depression. While the engagement is a low point in the curve, it also is the point at which the individual begins to take control of the situation. However, it probably is not a good time to make such major decisions as moving or taking another job.

The third stage is that of *acceptance*. The individual begins to reorganize thoughts, to restructure his or her life, and to consider the options available. The person is moving up out of the downswing toward an acceptance of a new life situation. It is a time for action and decisions, ideally based on thoughtful life and career planning.

The final stage of the morale curve is the *reentry* stage, at which the individual moves on to a new situation. For the

manager, this step may mean another job or retirement—another set of changes to deal with. This is a good time to look back and to assess how well you have handled the job loss, asking yourself, “What have I learned about myself, and what have I gained from the experience?” This introspection will be of value to you as you come to grips with your new job.

Even if you are fortunate enough to find another position soon after termination, this will not totally eliminate the feelings of anger or the realizations of loss. Depending on how long a person was in transition, 10 months to several years may pass before the manager and family members completely resolve the sense of loss. The message of the morale curve is that you must allow yourself time to adapt to the change, facing the strong emotions that you feel.

Using Energies Effectively During the Transition

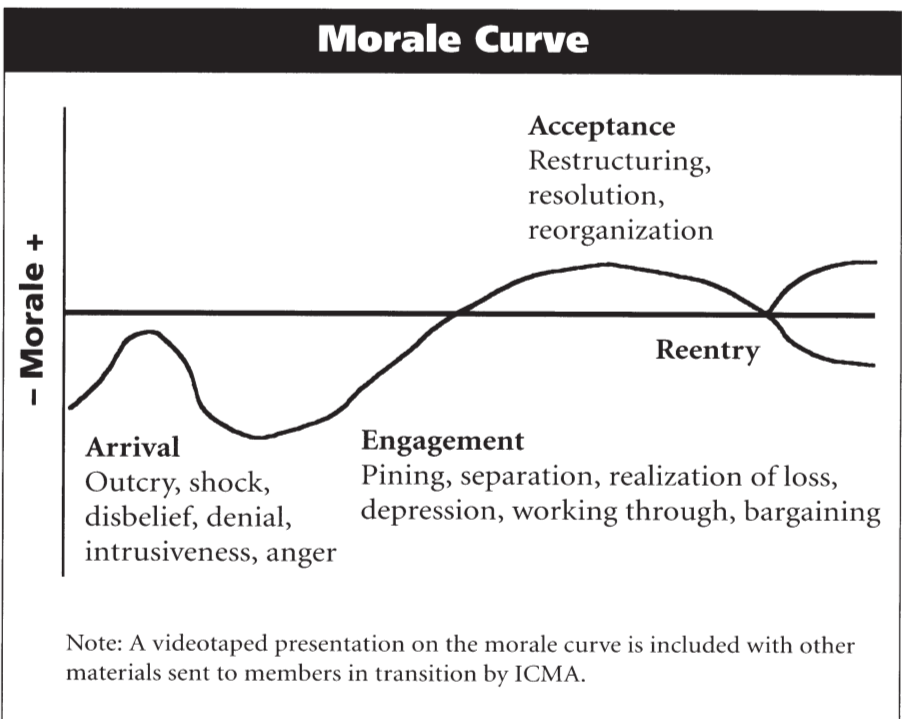
Fortunately, a person can do a number of things to help manage the trauma of job loss and thus to regain a sense of self-control.

Maintain social and collegial supports.

It is a natural tendency to want to withdraw from friends and loved ones. It is important during this transition period, however, to maintain close connections with others in our lives who are important to us, who care for us, and whom we care for. In numerous stress studies, the most effective stress management technique was the use of social support systems.

Likewise, we need to maintain and/or reestablish the professional networks of mentors, associates, and colleagues in the profession. Other ICMA members and the state Range Rider programs usually are easily accessible.

Monitor your living habits. It is important to maintain good living habits. If you use exercise as a way to manage stress, continue that regime on a regular



basis. If you find yourself increasingly resorting to unhealthy habits, such as smoking, overdrinking, or overeating, this increase probably means that you are having difficulty coping. You need to listen to these signals.

Reconfirm your philosophy of life.

You need to remind yourself of several ideas that are easy to forget under stress. One of these is the reason why you went into public service in the first place, knowing its rewards as well as its vulnerabilities. You might remind yourself that life is not always fair, that there are both pluses and minuses, and that we have no real control over how much of each we get. Good managers are frequently terminated. Recall that life does have a purpose, a goodness, and a flow to it that cannot always be understood. The essence of life is greater than a job.

Be aware of family needs. Family members often feel that they lack the amount of control that you have over what is happening. They too will feel anger, frustration, and depression, but perhaps they will express it differently from you. They may tend to feel that they are victims of circumstance and that they have little to offer to help with the situation.

They need reassurance—that they are not to blame, that things will eventually turn out fine, that they are still loved, and that they will be kept informed of any future changes being considered. Family members also need information on what is going on at city hall and what the severance arrangements are. They want to know what people are telling you and how you will plan the next steps together.

They also need “internal information” on how you are doing, what you are thinking, and what you are feeling. Communication plays a critical role in providing reassurance, support, information, and an outlet for the expression of emotions. Communication should increase rather than decrease.

Closeness should be emphasized, rather than distance. You and your partner should talk quietly and privately at least every few days.

Children should be kept informed often and regularly of what is happening and of what this may mean for the family. Even children as young as three or four years of age know that something extraordinary is happening, and they can understand some things. They will take their cues from you and your spouse on how to handle their stress. As new plans are being formulated, regular family council meetings may allow an exchange of ideas, as well as a chance to deal with anxieties and uncertainties. It also gives everyone a chance to help out and feel useful.

During this difficult time, talking to others may be the last thing you feel like doing. You may feel confused and depressed and not know what to say. Often, however, all you need to say is that you are feeling confused and depressed; then, communication will occur naturally. Most of the time, family members do not expect you to have all of the answers.

Keep structure in your life and your family’s life. Structure is an important consideration in adapting well to change. As you and your family begin to restructure your lives, you should keep things as normal as possible during this transition. Just as a building that is undergoing remodeling has scaffolding built around it, so your family needs an extra supportive structure. Because you have lost the structure of work, you will need to develop another structure for your daily routine.

As you provide structure for your children, it is important to monitor their behavior, too. Be alert to changes in behavior, schoolwork, friends, and routine. Any changes might be signals to you and your spouse of stress and anxiety.

The emotional realities associated with a job loss can be devastating for a manager and his or her family. Yet a number of things can be done to help

manage this transition successfully. Part of this process is to understand and be aware of what is happening emotionally and psychologically, to emphasize communication and connection. And most important, it is crucial to call upon the personal resources and skills you already have.

Checklist for Use During The Transition

- Am I aware of the disappointments associated with losing this job, and am I trying to deal with them?
- Am I expressing my anger and frustration appropriately?
- Am I getting feedback that I often seem depressed?
- Do I know where I am on the morale curve?
- Am I maintaining my friendships?
- Am I establishing or reestablishing my professional networks?
- Am I maintaining my good habits and monitoring my bad ones?
- Am I doing some things each day that give me enjoyment?
- Have I reminded myself of my overarching philosophy of life?
- Am I keeping my partner and children informed?
- Are my family members communicating enough with each other?
- Is there a routine and some normality in our lives? **PM**

Jerry Johnson, MPA, and Carol Nalbandian, PhD, are senior consultants for the Menninger Leadership Center in Topeka, Kansas.

Workshop

COPING WITH JOB LOSS

Lossing a job can be one of the most devastating personal crises of a lifetime. Unemployment, divorce, and the death of a loved one are considered to be the most stressful and potentially debilitating events that an individual ever experiences. Although financial decline is a serious issue, the blow to one's ego is even more difficult to face. The losses include:

- Loss of self-esteem
- Loss of daily routine
- Loss of purposeful activity
- Loss of income
- Loss of predictability and sense of security.

Like any other calamitous event, however, the job loss crisis can present an opportunity for growth. Commitment and diligence are required to transform present pain into future positive outcomes. There are a number of emotional reactions that can enhance the process of "moving on." These phases of coping are necessary to achieve resolution of the crisis of job loss.

Acknowledgment

The first reactions to loss are pain, fear, and lowered self-esteem. Next, denial of these feelings serves to cushion the discomfort temporarily. Acknowledging these feelings can be a helpful first step toward making efforts to cope successfully. In recognizing the need to boost self-confidence, a plan of action will mobilize your resources. You can ask friends and family for help and support. You can not easily approach a job interview while feeling depressed, angry, bitter, discouraged, or fearful. Dealing openly and honestly with appropriate persons can free up positive emotional energy for job-seeking tasks.

It might be helpful to "debrief" the circumstances and events leading up to the loss of your job with a friend, a loved one, a professional counselor, or a support group. Sometimes, keeping a journal can help to put such an experi-

ence into perspective.

Ask yourself the following:

- What actually happened to cause me to lose my job?
- How did I receive news of the layoff?
- How did I react to the news?
- How long was I in that particular job?
- What was my relationship with my boss, my subordinates, my colleagues?

Seeking Support and Help. It will help you to know that a reactive depression is to be expected and is usually temporary. Focus on ways to nurture yourself, and ask for support and reassurance from others.

Venting the Anger and Resentment. Letting go of bitterness and anger is essential for resolving any personal crisis. Healthy ways of dealing with frustration include vigorous physical exercise, volunteering time for community activities, tackling long-postponed home tasks, etc. Running, swimming, raking, painting, and sweeping are good outlets and give you a sense of accomplishment.

Reassessment. The initial shock of a job loss may bring about "tunnel vision." All you can see are the negative aspects of your situation. Even though it was a very important source of self-esteem and income, your former job could not have offered all the things in life that are important to you. Try to make a conscious effort to think about other rewarding aspects of life that are truly of value. This is the time to reassess your strengths, weaknesses, and interests if you are to gain the confidence and optimism necessary for starting over again. This may turn out to be an important turning point for positive changes.

Impact on the Family. For a child, the loss of a job by a parent represents a significant change in his or her world. Children as well as adults need to go through a grief process. Children are perceptive. It is usually futile to try to keep such information from them. Without knowing the source of adult

unhappiness, a child might feel responsible for the sadness or anger. It is important for all members of the family to talk together and help each other while a parent is between jobs. Children can be understanding and supportive when they know they are not to blame.

Strategies to Maintain Financial Stability

Investigate severance pay and other benefits to which you may be entitled, such as outplacement services, an office and phone to use while looking for a job, and the continuation of health insurance benefits. Request agreements about pay-out schedules in writing. Other pointers are:

- *Notify creditors* of your current situation. A flexible payment schedule might be arranged.
- *Apply for unemployment benefits* that are available to you if you lost a job through no fault of your own. Check with your local jurisdiction for other requirements.
- *Follow a daily schedule;* work on resumes, make calls, do research, set up interviews for at least six hours a day.
- *Be good to yourself*—eat well, exercise, have fun, get adequate rest.
- *Focus on possibilities* and accomplishments, not on failures.

—Dr. Helene King
COPE, Inc.
Washington, D.C.

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Career Alternatives For Managers: The Choice Is Yours

Laurence Sprecher

There never was a local government manager who didn't at one time or another reflect that "...maybe I'd be happier doing something else!" Whether the cause was a particularly disastrous council meeting, the realization that you had been away from home four evenings in a row last week, a meeting with a former colleague who is happy in a new and different career, or just plain curiosity—all of us have thought about making a change. Few actually have followed up on the impulse.

The typical career path in local government management is a curiously linear one. You start out at the bottom, perhaps as a student intern. After your first job as an administrative assistant or another entrance-level staff person, you move on to an assistant manager position or perhaps to that of city manager in a small town. Then you become a city manager in a larger city, or a county manager, and move up through a series of constantly bigger communities.

Now, it's true that there are many variations on this theme, but it is the most common progression. There are a couple of problems connected with this pattern. One is that as you move up the ladder, the number of cities available becomes steadily smaller, and the number of serious competitors grows steadily larger. The other is that you develop

“tunnel vision” and begin to see local government management as your only possible career path.

There is, however, an amazingly broad array of alternative career opportunities available to managers. Because most managers are focused on the traditional career path, they seldom give these alternatives serious consideration. The purpose of this article, then, is to examine a number of these options in the hope that one or more of them might interest a manager considering pursuing another career.

A Reasonable Alternative

The choice nearest at hand is one that few managers have ever considered: a position as assistant manager. Psychologically at least, this appears to be a step backward. Why would someone, having climbed to the top of the ladder, want to step down one rung?

Maybe for a lot of reasons! Many managers genuinely enjoy and are good at the administrative aspects of management. They like budgeting, organizing, coordinating, and so on. They are “POSCORB people.” They don’t enjoy nearly as much those parts of the manager’s job that entail dealing with community politics, engaging in a dialogue with numerous publics, selling the locality’s programs to the citizens, and talking with the media. These are “outside” activities, and they are “inside” people.

On the other hand, a number of managers, especially in mid-sized and large communities, find that they do not have time to do both the inside and the outside jobs well. They enjoy the public aspects of the position and would be happy to have someone else take charge of the day-by-day administration of the organization.

When you consider an assistant manager position, though, you should make sure that the manager genuinely intends to hand over the direct administration of substantial portions of the organization to you. Nothing can be worse than finding out after you are on board that

The typical career path in local government management is a curiously linear one.

the manager is unable or unwilling to keep his or her hands off the wheel.

More Alternatives

Another option is the management of special districts. Many managers don’t like to think about special districts, but they are a fact of life, and they are not going away. Many special districts, especially medium-sized ones, have found that they can no longer depend on appointing managers who have come up through the rank and welcome outside applicants. And most managers have had experience in managing utilities, for instance. There is something intriguing about managing an organization like a utility whose revenue is guaranteed and whose policy board only meets once a month for two hours.

Yet another possible alternative change, for city managers, is to county administration. The roles and responsibilities of counties vary immensely from state to state. In some states, counties are general-purpose local governments that provide all of the municipal services plus a lot of others. In other states, counties are merely administrative arms of the state. In some, a great difference exists between the roles and responsibilities of urban counties and those of rural ones.

Whatever their status, a growing number of counties have created county administrator positions with responsibilities similar to those of city managers. A fair number of city managers have moved over to county administration and have found the work challenging and rewarding. Burke Raymond served

as city manager in four cities before becoming the county administrator of Jackson County, Oregon, where he recently retired after 13 challenging and satisfying years.

Former municipal managers are certainly in a better position than most to understand the motivations of and to work successfully with the city managers in their counties. The relationship between a county administrator and a full-time governing body, however, often is different from a relationship between a city manager and a part-time council. If you are considering this move and want more information, you might want to attend one of the county administrators’ sessions at the next ICMA annual conference. County administration is a real growth area within the field of local government management.

State and Federal Positions

The next step up in the hierarchy is state government. Opportunities for management positions in state government vary considerably from state to state. In some states, management appointments are a matter of political patronage, while in others, a tradition exists of promoting from within or hiring only managers with previous experience in state government.

Many state agencies, particularly the more progressive ones, have hired a number of former city managers. In Oregon, for example, the executive department, general services, human resources, water resources, and the Oregon Liquor Control Commission have each, at one time or another, been led by former city managers. All of these departments, it should be noted, perform functions with which city or county administrators are familiar.

As a state manager, I found that once a state budget had been adopted, I had considerably more freedom to manage within the limits of that budget than I had had as a city manager. Besides, there is a certain attraction to an organization whose pol-

icy board only meets part of the time. In some states, the legislature is in session for only a few months of the year.

Then there is, of course, the U.S. government. At one time, in the golden years of the 1960s and '70s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development actively sought city managers to staff programs both in Washington and at the regional level, but this is no longer the case because a large proportion of federal funding now is routed through state governments.

There remain numerous opportunities, however, for managers who are looking for federal employment to find openings in lower- and middle-management and management-technician positions, where the skills of city managers are immediately applicable. The nice thing about the federal government is that federal offices are located throughout the United States, which means that managers who want to change careers can continue to live where they are, if they want or need to.

It is possible for generalist managers and technicians to move from one federal organization to the other, and with good salaries and fringes, too. To research positions that are available, you may visit a variety of federal Web sites. For the manager who wants to pursue an alternative career without relocating, the federal government may offer the chance to do just that.

Yet Further Options

Management of not-for-profit organizations will be one of the hottest growth areas for the next decade. Not only are NFPOs proliferating, but also more and more activities formerly carried out by local governments now are being performed by NFPOs.

Too, existing organizations have discovered that they need managers with real experience and management skills, not just knowledge and skills in the area(s) in which the organization operates. NFPOs tend to provide services that appeal to many managers' strong

desire benefit the public or in some way improve the human condition.

The staffs of state municipal leagues contain a number of former city or county managers. In fact, many league directors have come from the profession: Jim Miller, the executive director of the League of Minnesota Cities, for instance, is a former city manager. Many state leagues also keep a roster of former city or county managers who are interested in serving as interim managers. Some managers have developed nearly full-time careers as interim managers. The executive director of your state's municipal league probably is the best person to question on this possibility.

A career alternative that has been selected by a large number of local government managers is that of consulting. Basically, a manager can follow one of two paths. One is to join the staff of an existing consulting firm. A large number of these firms exist, ranging from gigantic international corporations to the much smaller companies that may serve a region, a state, or even an urban area. All of them regularly recruit staff from the ranks of practicing managers; they pay well and tend to reward good performance. The downside is that you will travel a lot and work long hours, and you will be expected to bring in new business. Among the best sources of information on opportunities in consulting would be some of the consultants who have worked for you.

The other path is simple. Declare yourself a consultant, and go out and look for work. You will be surprised at the number of your colleagues who may have assignments for you. They can trust you because they know you and your abilities. Besides, you will cost a whole lot less than your big competitors, with their high salaries and overhead. You also will be in a position to take on simple, short-term projects that they cannot afford to touch.

I ran my own consulting company for seven years, made enough money to raise six kids, handled many challenging assignments, and traveled to a lot of in-

teresting places. The biggest drawback of being a sole proprietor, however, is that you have to spend more time than you might like to in looking for future work. If you want to find out more about this option, talk to some of the people who are doing it.

Managers Make Excellent Teachers

Then there is higher education. Not many people realize how many former managers have entered the world of higher education. Here, there are three paths you might follow.

The first would be, of course, a teaching job. The conventional wisdom is that you need a doctorate to teach at the university level, and it is true that a Ph.D. or a D.P.A. is certainly not a hindrance to getting a teaching job, but there are a substantial number of people out there teaching without one of these degrees than you might expect.

If you are going to teach with just a master's degree—and I taught at the graduate level for more than 20 years without a Ph.D.—you do need to demonstrate ability and to gain experience. One of the best ways to rack up this experience is to teach as an adjunct professor, for which you will not need a doctorate. If you do a good job, your employer will keep you on, thus allowing you to gain experience and demonstrate competence. If you don't have a college or university in your area, try your luck at teaching management or government classes at a community college.

A second path in higher education would be to obtain an administration position. Most colleges and universities have come to realize that the things that make people great academicians do not necessarily make them good managers. A significant number of former managers have proven themselves successful as vice presidents of administration or as the holders of positions with similar titles. George Hanbury was the city manager of Fort Lauderdale before becoming vice president for administra-

tion at Nova University. Some people acquire a doctorate before coming on board, but most do not.

The third path within higher education would involve joining the staff of one of the institutes of local government service, or similar establishments offered by the local branches of state universities as staffs of consultants and trainers who provide services to local governments. Here, experience and ability are definitely more important than the degree(s) you possess.

Private Sector Possibilities

Last, but certainly not least, is the private sector, or the for-profit organization, including businesses that are big, medium-sized, and small. If you are interested in going into business for yourself, you need to seek the help of one of the variety of agencies, both public and private, that exist to help startups. You also can benefit from talking with people who have built successful businesses in the area that interests you. If your aim is to manage in the private sector, then you need to start thinking carefully about what you want to do, with whom, and where.

I happen to believe that ICMA really does stand for "I can manage anything." I believe that most managers have the skills and experience to succeed as managers in the private sector. I spent 10 years there before entering city management, and I have returned to the private sector both as a manager and as a consultant since then.

I have seen few private management situations that approached the complexity and difficulty of the world that a typical local government manager faces every day. It's a different world with different rules, but management skills are definitely transferable. A thoughtful account of these differences was included in the June 1999 issue of *PM*, in an article entitled "Public or Private Sector Work: The Eternal Question," by Dave Millheim.

Part of the reason that our profession lacks a good feel for the success of former

Managers may hesitate to seek an alternative career because they feel that once they leave city or county management, they will never be able to return.

managers in the private sector is that we don't have a tracking system with which to gain this understanding. When a manager leaves the public sector, he or she sort seems to disappear over the horizon. A few outstanding successes have been noted, like that of Ted Tedesco, a manager and an ICMA president who went on to become a vice president of American Airlines. But such an example, while inspiring, strikes most managers as well beyond their reach.

The success of former managers in the private sector frequently goes unrecorded. One reason is that managers often hesitate to seek an alternative career because they feel that once they leave city or county management, they will never be able to return. There is nothing to indicate that this is so. I personally know a fairly large number of managers who have quit the profession and returned to it later. In many cases, they returned, not because they failed in an alternative career but because they found that they missed local government management.

Councils can find the idea of hiring a manager who has experience beyond city management an attractive one. The manager who hired me for my first city management position told me that the 10 years I had spent in aerospace gave me a leg-up over the other candidates.

Numerous Opportunities

The purpose of this article has been to make city and county managers more aware of the many opportunities that are open to them. How you choose the career change to pursue and how you pursue it are points that will have to be discussed in a future *PM* article. In the meantime, if any of the career alternatives covered in this article seem interesting to you, I suggest that you seek people on your preferred career path and ask them for information. There are few things that people like to do so much as to talk about what they do and how they like it. If you decide you are interested in an alternative career, the next questions are which career and how to pursue it. **PM**

Larry Sprecher is the former city manager of Beaverton, Oregon. His public sector career has included service as assistant to the city manager in Burbank, California. He also served as director of the department of general services and as director of the executive department of the state of Oregon. His last public sector assignment was as manager of administration for the transportation department of Metro, the regional government for the Portland area.

He was an engineer and analyst in aerospace for nearly a decade, has operated his own management consulting and training company, and has built and administered a cable television system. He also has taught graduate public administration classes, full- and part-time, at four universities. He is looking forward to finding out what his next career will be.

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PM

Examine Your Emotional Intelligence

The article in the October 2001 *PM* on emotional IQ (“Do You Know What Your Emotional IQ Is?”) was extraordinary. I sit here today, having lost my dream city manager’s job in Brentwood, working on getting my resume out, and thinking about how I could have done a better job of saving my job and avoiding all the heartache I am facing. It all came down to being insensitive to my own emotional levels and how these played out in my everyday life.

Yesterday, the city passed a \$6 million bond issue for a new police facility. I crafted the proposal, and it passed with nearly 75 percent of the vote. But will anyone call me to say thanks? Of course not. Why? Because once you lose your job, you’re sort of off limits [for recognition of] anything good you did. That is something every city or county manager ought to understand.

If I had read the *PM* article months ago, I think that I would be employed today. I realized long ago that I was not received well by many and that rarely did folks come by for a visit. I dismissed it as just my being the boss and perhaps being lonely at the top, but when we isolate ourselves or are isolated by discomforts that we may have caused, it will eventually pay out.

Councilmembers want their manager to be well liked and respected and, above all else, to have a reputation for treating folks fairly and well, particularly those who work for them. They have a hard time defending our behavior when someone goes to them and complains about how they have been treated, even when, in some cases, it might have been necessary.

Presumably, if I am successful in getting another manager position, I will ask the council for the opportunity to create a management assistance program so that I can really understand where I am within the organization (that “fit” thing) and what areas I should be working on.

I realize that, for most of us, our firings were not an easy thing for councils to do. In my case, Brentwood’s council wasted a huge fiscal investment because just then, after nearly four years, I finally knew the system, the town, and the councillors well enough to really be the city manager. That is a loss for them, and even with an okay severance package, a loss for me.

So, good job in printing the article! I wonder, though: if I were still going along like I was a month ago, if I would have taken the time or had the interest to read it like I should have and saved my job in the process. Once we come under assault, it is hard to see the trees from the forest.

—Jon Elam
Brentwood, California

Do You Know What Your Emotional IQ Is?

James Bourey and Athena Miller

In today's organizational climate, local government managers no longer can rely solely on their technical and intellectual competence to distinguish themselves and their organizations. Compelling research compiled in 1999 by the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations (CREIO)¹ confirmed what most managers have known intuitively but not articulated clearly until recently: For outstanding performance, a person's emotional intelligence is more important than IQ *and* technical skill.

Emotional intelligence is the capacity to understand, value, and wisely manage our emotions in relationship to ourselves and others. Emotional intelligence and IQ are distinct yet complementary forms of our overall intelligence. While people need a certain baseline of IQ to perform well in their work and in life, emotional intelligence is what differentiates outstanding leaders, teams, and organizations from others.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of emotional intelligence to managers and to highlight the successful implementation of an emotional intelligence assessment and coaching program by the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) in Phoenix, Arizona. A case study on page 9 illustrates MAG's assessment and coaching process.

Importance to Managers

So, why is emotional intelligence so important to local government managers? Although IQ and technical skills are necessary in virtually every administrative position, their relative importance usually declines as a person moves into higher levels of leadership. According to Daniel Goleman, author of “What Makes a Leader?” in the November/December 1998 issue of the *Harvard Business Review*, 90 percent of success in leadership is attributable to emotional intelligence. On a daily basis, managers are faced with personal-leadership and organizational challenges that demand emotional intelligence. Here are some of these challenges.

Developing and sustaining productive partnerships. Much of what happens in government requires a reliance on partnerships with other private, public, or nonprofit agencies. The complexity and interrelatedness of social problems, coupled with declining resources and rising public needs, have resulted in managers’ reaching out for partners and collaborators with whom to address these concerns. As change agents, managers are less effective if they cannot lead a collaborative effort. It takes emotional intelligence to integrate people and to engage them in the cooperative effort.

The importance of emotional intelligence skills for managers also reaches into the political environment. Relations with elected officials and citizens require that the manager bring such emotional intelligence competencies as empathy, flexibility, and impulse control to a situation. These skills are needed for forming constructive and nonconfrontational relationships.

Managing change and stress. These are challenging times for managers, who must deliver services and execute their functions in an increasingly complex, rapidly changing, and often-threatening environment. They are faced with shifting political, social, and

Stressed individuals are more prone to mismanaging their emotions, verbally lashing out at others, and/or finding themselves consumed with anxiety and depression.

economic conditions, as well as rapid technological developments and growing volumes of information. Managers know that they need to address these changes head-on, adopting creative approaches and acquiring new skills.

Change triggers our human instinct to resist the unfamiliar. When organizations truly change, it is because the people in them have decided to change. According to authors Steven Stein and Howard Book, who wrote *The EQ Edge*, and Daniel Goleman, who penned *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, emotionally intelligent leaders and organizations are receptive to new ideas and ways of doing things; resist falling into old, familiar patterns of thinking and behaving; tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity; and are more resilient in the face of setbacks, than their peers.

The pace of change, coupled with the demands of high-pressure jobs, can be overwhelmingly stressful. Experts at the federal government’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health say the warning signs of a stressful environment include workloads that ignore workers’ skills and leave them with little sense of control, a lack of participation in decision making, too much responsi-

bility, and too many “hats to wear.” An individual’s stress is further compounded by the challenge of balancing work demands with the pressures of personal and family obligations.

Stressed individuals are more prone to mismanaging their emotions, verbally lashing out at others, and/or finding themselves consumed with anxiety and depression. Stress negatively affects sleeping patterns, communication effectiveness, ability to focus, overall mental clarity, and decision-making ability. Emotionally intelligent people are not only more effective in managing stress but are likelier to remain physically healthy and lead a high quality of life. Extensive research shows a strong connection between stress and disease. The inability to manage stress can compromise a person’s immune function to the point of speeding the metastasis of cancer and increasing vulnerability to viral infections, heart attacks, and coronary artery disease, as well as other illnesses.²

Creating high-performance teams. An organization’s—like a manager’s—success depends on people working together to achieve a common purpose.

Further, with the advent of total quality management (TQM), reengineering, and other process-reform efforts, the work of public agencies now occurs in a team-based environment. Research reported by Vanessa Urch Druskat and Steven B. Wolff in their March 2001 *Harvard Business Review* article, “Building the Emotional Intelligence of Groups,” shows that three basic conditions need to be present before a team can achieve high levels of participation, cooperation, and collaboration: trust among members, a group identity, and a sense of group efficacy. At the core of these conditions lie emotions that must be managed effectively for a team to achieve extraordinary performance.

From experience, managers know that even teams whose members have high IQs and superior technical skills behave in mediocre and dysfunctional

ways. Such teams do not allow people to share their talents and are characterized by low levels of trust, domination, backbiting, and infighting. High-performing teams are emotionally intelligent ones.

Selecting, promoting, and retaining high-quality talent.

When managers are asked to identify the key qualities they look for in choosing, promoting, and keeping employees, they immediately acknowledge the importance of technical skills, intellect, and work experience as baseline qualities. These qualities, however, pale in significance beside the long list of emotional intelligence-based intra- and interpersonal factors that have an overwhelming impact on their final decisions. Managers want employees who can work collaboratively in a team environment and are self-motivated, open to feedback, adaptable to change, service-oriented, trustworthy, and creative.

Retention of talented employees in periods of economic growth and prosperity is a challenge for any organization, especially for those dependent on individuals with high-tech skills. Emotional intelligence research shows that employee loyalty and productivity stem from employees' sense of being cared for, recognized, and valued by their managers and organizations. The absence of supportive and productive relationships with their supervisors is a key reason why talented people leave organizations.

Achieving the promise of diversity.

Managers also are faced with the challenge of realizing the promise of diversity, that is, of creating an environment in which employees' different identities and abilities are respected and appreciated, and in which the needs of a diverse society are effectively addressed. Emotional intelligence transcends race, ethnicity, age, and sex according to research conducted by Multi-Health Systems of Toronto, Canada. This research is cited in the book *The EQ Edge* written by Steven Stein and Edward Book.

Emotionally intelligent people are

more flexible and open, are empathetic toward others, have a greater sense of social responsibility, and are more interpersonally adept. These emotional competencies are key to honoring and drawing on the strengths of a diverse workforce.

Gaining results. Accomplishing results—efficiency, effectiveness, and equity—always has been a core value of public managers. Managers have employed a variety of tools as systems and processes to bring about these results: total quality management, reengineering, continuous improvement, downsizing, and restructuring, for instance. Used alone or in some combination, these tools have achieved varying levels of success, mostly because of “people issues.”

These problems include an inability to work as a team, to deal with change and ambiguity, to capitalize on diversity, to take and use feedback positively, and to develop organizational bonds. While process-reform tools are essential to management, it takes emotional intelligence to achieve optimal leadership and organizational performance.

Emotional intelligence is not a fad or a trend. It is not bound by time or circumstance but essential to effective human functioning in every aspect of our lives. It is a learnable form of intelligence, an avenue to enhancing individual, team, and organizational effectiveness.

Many businesses and public agencies, in recognition that their successes and sustained growth have had a lot to do with developing emotional intelligence, have applied it in a variety of contexts: employee development, managerial and leadership development, team building, promotions, recruitment and selection, and customer service training. As stated, one of these agencies has been MAG, the principal agency for planning and policy development for the Phoenix metropolitan region. In this capacity, the agency serves as a forum for the discussion and study of regional problems of mutual interest to the governments in the region.

These issues encompass transporta-

tion, air quality, water quality and solid waste management, and population updates and projections. MAG also addresses a variety of state-related issues like homelessness, domestic violence, the 911 emergency-telephone system, and building codes.

Implementing MAG's Program

The agency's leadership wanted to invest in its employees to enhance their personal and professional success and to communicate a strong message that each employee was valued. So, the agency has implemented an emotional intelligence assessment, training, and coaching program.

The program supports staff achievement of personal emotional-intelligence development goals and builds better staff morale, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and employee retention. At this point, two-thirds of MAG's employees have voluntarily participated in the program.

The coaching program can be conceptually viewed as having six phases: (1) organizational assessment, (2) implementation-plan development, (3) individual assessment, (4) development, (5) integration, and (6) evaluation (see Figure 1).

Phase 1. Organizational Assessment.

Working closely with a consultant team of two individuals, MAG's leadership identified the organizational issues that could be addressed by an emotional intelligence coaching program.

The growing complexity, interrelatedness, and linear flow of MAG's policy and planning tasks demand open communication, collaboration, and integration of work, not only within and across its divisions but also externally, with its many constituents. Its policy development efforts must respect and consider the diverse and conflicting needs of its various stakeholders. Further, the agency's highly technical and analytical work must be impeccable.

Figure 1. Phases in Implementing an Emotional Intelligence Assessment and Coaching Program

Phase 1 Organizational Assessment	Phase 2 Implementation- Plan Development	Phase 3 Individual Assessment	Phase 4 Development	Phase 5 Integration	Phase 6 Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Assess and target the organizational issues to be addressed by an emotional intelligence assessment and coaching program. ◆ Identify the organizational outcomes to be achieved. ◆ Identify the level of leadership support for the program. ◆ Identify the organizational obstacles to implementing such a program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Develop an implementation strategy consistent with the targeted organizational needs to be addressed and with the agency's culture. ◆ Establish leadership support for the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Assess individual readiness and motivation to change. ◆ Conduct individual emotional intelligence assessments. ◆ Obtain 360-degree feedback via critical incident analysis/ interviews. ◆ Jointly identify the organizational outcomes to be achieved as a result of the coaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide assessment feedback with care, one on one. ◆ Assist in the identification of emotional intelligence strengths and developmental opportunities. ◆ Assist in refining targeted, clear, and manageable goals for personal change. ◆ Provide personalized training and coaching on the targeted emotional intelligence competencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Give performance feedback on the change goals. ◆ Provide relapse-prevention training/coaching. ◆ Conduct "shadow" activities to provide just-in-time coaching. ◆ Facilitate an emotional intelligence team-building session. ◆ Facilitate workplace interactions as needed. ◆ Set up learning support teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Establish joint-outcome measures for targeted competencies, including job performance measures. ◆ Conduct post-evaluation interviews using pre-assessment data as the baseline.

Note: Time frames for each phase are driven by the client's needs and by the time required to achieve change goals. Copyright 1995 by Human Dimensions, Inc. All rights reserved.

Management wanted to enhance the agency's capacity to manage the demands and stresses of this dynamic and high-performance culture. It also, however, wanted its employees to leverage their emotional resources in order to reach a balance in their lives and to relate to one another and their constituents in a way that would build trust, instill confidence, and increase personal and interpersonal effectiveness.

Unlike most coaching programs, which target executives and mid-level managers, MAG's leadership decided on a more inclusive approach, offering the program as a voluntary, personal-development opportunity to all its employees. The executive director felt strongly that an organization must be willing to invest in an employee's development without the expectation of an immediate and direct benefit in productivity.

Phase 2. Implementation-Plan Development. The implementation of the program was a gradually intensified process, using a top-down, cascading approach. Participation in the more intense, individualized assessment and coaching program was offered on a voluntary, open-enrollment basis. Participants were given the freedom to develop their own personal change goals. The assessment results and the content of the coaching sessions remain confidential between the coaches and the participant.

The program began with a one-day, off-site session for the executive team. This session was followed by a presentation to the entire management team and an all-day staff retreat on emotional intelligence. At these sessions, the executive director offered the opportunity to participate in the coaching program to all employees. The entire executive staff

also communicated their support for the program and shared insights gained through their own participation in the coaching program. These leadership actions motivated the staff to take personal advantage of the program.

The implementation strategy produced management support for the program and helped set an appropriate pace at which individuals could assess their interest and degree of involvement. The confidential nature of the coaching, coupled with the freedom to shape the outcome of their own experiences, allowed participants to explore areas of vulnerability in a nonthreatening, mutually respectful, and supportive environment.

Phase 3. Individual Assessment. Coaching is only effective if the person being coached sees the personal value in it and is committed to making a behavioral change. The purpose of this phase

Figure 2. Major Factors Assessed in the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i)^a

<p>1. Intrapersonal Self-Regard Emotional Self-Awareness Assertiveness Independence Self Actualization</p>	<p>2. Interpersonal Factors Empathy Social Responsibility Interpersonal Relationships</p>
<p>3. Stress Management Stress Tolerance Impulse Control</p>	<p>4. Adaptability Reality Testing Flexibility Problem Solving</p>
<p>5. General Mood and Motivation Optimism Happiness</p>	
<p>^aTool trademarked by Multi-Health Systems of Toronto.</p>	

was to determine an individual's readiness and commitment to change and to identify emotional intelligence strengths and developmental areas that would enhance his or her personal and professional effectiveness. Having self-selected into the program, the participants generally came with a personal readiness and a desire to grow from the experience and maximize the benefits of the coaching.

Self-awareness, after all, is the cornerstone of emotional intelligence. It also is central to improving ourselves and our sense of well-being, especially in turbulent times. An accurate self-assessment of our current behavior is needed to determine precisely what we need to do differently to meet our change goals. Before the coaching session, each individual voluntarily completed an emotional intelligence assessment instrument.

In light of the concerns identified at the organizational assessment stage (Phase 1), an emotional intelligence assessment instrument, titled the emotional quotient inventory (EQ-i)TM, was selected.³ The EQ-i measures and identifies specific competencies that an emotionally intelligent person possesses. It has been amply validated across cultures, with extensive norming around the world. Besides being an emotional intelligence development tool, the EQ-i is used in some organizations for pur-

poses of employee selection, promotion, and retention.

EQ-i assessment identifies specific emotional intelligence strengths and developmental areas and gives recommendations for improvement. Factors rated by the EQ-i are presented in Figure 2.

EQ-i results are supplemented by additional information collected by consultants through the use of 360-degree assessments, a brief critical-incident analysis, and/or one-on-one interviews involving an employee's manager, peers, and subordinates as well as selected internal and external customers. Combining the results of the EQ-i assessment with other feedback assists employees in isolating those competencies that would have the greatest impact on their performance.

Phase 4. Development. Coaching is successful when an individual defines a desired state and decides that he or she must change in order to achieve it. Personal coaching sessions focus on examining participants' individual assessment results and their implications, personally and professionally; exploring emotional responses and behavioral patterns impeding their effectiveness; exploring organizational standards and expectations; and developing an action plan for a self-directed change process.

True behavioral change happens when

the desired change helps people achieve personal goals in addition to organizational goals. Giving participants the freedom to develop their own change goals will motivate them to focus on and take responsibility for addressing real-life, heartfelt issues and allow for immediate application of the coaching received.

While the coaching is confidential, participants are free to share their experiences with others. And many at MAG chose to do so, promoting the value of the program to their colleagues. The genuine, supportive, and trusting relationship developed by the coaches with each participant gave the program credibility and inspired those who at first lacked the motivation to participate.

Phase 5. Integration. Ongoing support is vital to achieving true change. Developing our emotional intelligence means changing our engrained behavioral patterns. Changing deep-seated habitual behaviors takes commitment, practice, and feedback, and these steps take time and support.

The integration phase involves providing ongoing feedback on change goals, giving relapse-prevention support, conducting "shadow" activities for just-in-time coaching, doing follow-up coaching, facilitating workplace interactions, and leading emotional intelligence team-building sessions. The coaches also offer participants tailored exercises, resource materials, and other tools to support their change goals.

The coaches encourage participants to form natural, internal learning and support teams to overcome obstacles, avoid relapses, and maintain momentum toward change. These learning teams might involve an entire existing work team, peer groups within a specific team or across different organizational units, as well as small and informal support groups. These learning teams are encouraged and reinforced by the organization's leadership.

Phase 6. Evaluation. The ultimate goal of the coaching is to achieve behav-

pant's performance and on those he or she works with.

Important Lessons

MAG has learned some important lessons from implementing its emotional intelligence coaching program:

- The top-down, cascading implementation strategy is respectful of the organization's culture and results in management support for the program. The gradual introduction and voluntary basis of the coaching program sets an appropriate pace at which staff can decide their own degree of participation in a nonthreatening environment.
- People are more motivated to change when they see the personal value in doing so, not when someone simply wants them to change. A coaching program's success is enhanced when employees can freely choose to participate and establish their own change goals.
- It is absolutely essential to ensure the confidentiality of any measurement instrument, as well as the content of the coaching session. This will maintain the integrity of the program and build organizational trust. Having a past practice of employees' giving confidential input, such as in evaluating the chief executive and managers, proves helpful and deepens the trust level.
- Leadership modeling and encouragement, as well as ongoing organizational support, are key factors in successful emotional intelligence promotion and implementation efforts. Chief executives need to be committed and active participants with staff. They also need to be open, honest, and willing to show how the effort can and has personally helped them. This is especially powerful when staff actually see a change in a chief executive's interactions with them, based on a shared emotional intelligence process.

- Openly requesting feedback on the targeted emotional intelligence competencies also is a powerful step, as long as the executive listens willingly and responds positively to the comments of others even when they are critical of his or her conduct. This, in turn, will create a psychologically safe climate for implementing and practicing emotional intelligence competencies—an especially important factor because the development and integration of emotional competence requires sustained focus, practice, and feedback.
- The trust and credibility developed by the coaches with the participants are critical factors in shaping people's perceptions of the value of the program to them personally and to the organization as a whole.

Benefits Derived

Happily, MAG also can report has these benefits:

- Investment in the emotional intelligence coaching program has communicated a strong leadership message that each employee is valued, enhancing staff morale, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and employee retention.
- Many of the coaching sessions have resulted in the immediate application of targeted emotional intelligence competencies, resolving real life workplace issues.
- Confidential, personalized coaching sessions have been safe forums for participants to explore concerns and areas of vulnerability. Sessions have also empowered employees to take the responsibility for devising and meeting their own personal change goals.
- The program has given staff the understanding and tools to manage their own stress and to create more balanced lives. An individual who can maintain this balance is a much happier and productive employee in the long run.

The emotional intelligence program at MAG has fashioned an organizational context for the effective expression and use of emotion in the workplace. This type of program will put an organization well on its way toward harnessing the power of emotional intelligence to enhance personal and organizational effectiveness. **DM**

¹Cherniss, Cary, "The Business Case for Emotional Intelligence in Emotional Intelligence: Optimizing Human Performance in the Workplace," conference proceedings, Chicago, Illinois, 27 September 1999; pp. 353–359.

²For a review of medical research on stress and physiology, see *From Chaos to Coherence: The Power to Change Performance* by Doc Childre and Bruce Cryer, published in 2000 by Planetary (Boulder Creek, California), a division of Heartmath, LLC.

Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman, published in 1995 by Bantam Books, New York City, describes the results of psychological and neuroscience research on emotional intelligence, delineating crucial emotional intelligence competencies and how they determine our success in our work, our relationships, and our physical well-being.

Goleman's second book *Working with Emotional Intelligence* presents emotional intelligence research conducted in a variety of private and public organizations. The book contains a detailed discussion of the specific emotional competences and related research to demonstrate the significance of emotional intelligence for achieving leadership and organizational success.

³A trademark of Multi-Health Systems, Toronto, Ontario.

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The Job Can Be a Cold, Cold Mistress

Leonard Martin

Local government managers spend a lot of time working, planning, meeting, and worrying. We're in the trenches of deadlines and responsibilities, but we survive because our successes keep feeding our drive. Sometimes these successes act as smoke screens, however, blinding us. Sure, our work is important but is it knocking us off balance?

We usually don't think of busy people like ourselves as lonely, but most of us probably are. Our activities just drive it so deep we don't even notice. We may not have many close friends or free evenings to spend with our families. Sharing our thoughts, frustrations, and challenges with peers who are in the trenches with us can help.

I recall journeying 90 miles north to Columbia, Missouri, to participate in monthly meetings of the Mid-Missouri City Managers support group. Dick Gray, former Columbia city manager, had initiated the sessions, at which a group of managers and assistants joyously spent two hours over lunch comparing horror stories about the woes of our chosen profession.

Being an open person, I will share my story about what happened when I didn't look outside myself for support. Many readers might think I am writing about them.

Sharing ourselves at home and with our friends in the business can be the difference between a satisfying and rewarding experience and one that ends with frustration.

Many years ago, I was lucky enough to be hired as an administrative assistant by Gerald Fox, who was the Wichita Falls, Texas, city manager. He was an inspiring mentor. From him, I learned about such elements of local government management as ethics, how to work with hostile councilmembers, how to delegate responsibly, and how to manage with a professional demeanor.

Jerry also taught some things by example that for some reason I chose to ignore. He tried to teach me that a manager does not have to devote 80 hours to the job, week in and week out, if the manager is organized and manages his or her time well. He attempted to show me the importance of maintaining a balance between my professional life and my personal life, and to involve my family in professional association activities. But I closed my eyes to these teachings.

His wife, Delores, devoted time to the partners and set an example of the importance of family involvement with the profession, but I closed my eyes to this lesson also. After all, I had received the “call” to lead the wandering residents of various cities in this great country down the path of great professional management. With such lofty ideals, all of my energy and attention had to be devoted to “The Cause.”

After three and a half years as an assistant, my time had come to change the world. On a cold January day, my friend and mentor bid farewell to me and my wife (uh, what’s her name? Oh yeah, Sharon), and my daughter, (uh, Mary, no, Michelle), as we left on a crusade to Arkansas, where I had been called to bring the good news of professional management.

Let me take you back to that time.

The Savior Arrives

When we arrive, I hurriedly settle what’re-their-names into a comfortable home, while I settle into a creaking swivel chair in a tiny office beneath a condemned jail. We find that the people in Arkansas are a friendly sort and the beauty and recreational opportunities of

**I do not blame
the profession.**

**I blame myself. My
busyness filled my
days but fractured
my family.**

the area are outstanding. . . but who has time for all that? I have a cause to pursue. Let the wife and daughter enjoy the people and the area.

I find a strongly supportive city council ready to improve their city with the help of a drawing Texan, who daily finds new evils of inefficiency that must be uprooted. With every council meeting, more change occurs, more efficiency is added to the organization, and more capacity is developed within the personnel. At the same time, more grumbling is heard among the old guard, because the city council and its new missionary no longer recognize the good old boys for special treatment.

By summer, the city is enjoying substantial progress toward improvements in services and management. Much of the credit for these improvements is attributed to the hard work and dedication of the city manager, who daily battles all sorts of villains and monsters that oppose total efficiency. Ever vigilant in his role, the manager never takes a day off or—heaven forbid—a vacation. Vacations are those two-week periods when uh, what’re-their-names, oh yes, Sharon and Michelle, go home to Texas to visit family. This permits the boss man to become totally absorbed in the fight for justice without any needless interruptions, like a leisurely dinner with family.

Around this time, rumblings about changing the form of government are heard. The city council decides that an appointed board which “manages” the water and sewer system should be dissolved for such atrocities as keeping all

funds in non-interest-bearing checking accounts and displaying total disregard for the good of the overall community in the management of the utility. Ultimately, an election is called to abolish the council-manager form of government.

A vicious campaign, fraught with lies and innuendoes, is waged against the existing form of government. Family tensions rise as my character, confidence, and ethics are openly questioned in newspaper ads. But I am too busy fighting the war to realize that an even more significant war is developing on the home front.

September brings a special election. The proposal to abolish the council-manager government and return to a mayor-council form wins by a 2 to 1 vote. The young city manager just suffered his greatest professional defeat but is too absorbed in his own life and career goals to recognize the devastation this event has had at home.

The new city rulers approach the manager with offers of employment to lead the new form of government as assistant to the mayor: “We hope there are no hard feelings. We know what you have done for the city and want you to continue, but we had to get rid of the mayor and city council to get our own people in. How about staying on? We’ll even increase your salary.”

“No way,” I reply as I put stamps on the envelopes containing my resume.

The Savior Moves On

Within a couple of weeks, interview opportunities present themselves. Away the three of us go to visit Rolla, Missouri, which would soon become our new home. The spouse voices concern about the distance she is moving from her family, but the comments go unheard. “How can family even be a consideration when so much is at stake? We have a mission, or at least I do,” I think to myself.

A job offer, negotiations, and acceptance come within a few days, and the Arkansas defeat has been turned into victory with a professional promotion and the challenge of managing in a

beautiful university city. Never mind the rumors that “Rolla is the fightingest city in Missouri” and “those people can’t agree on anything up there.”

Thanksgiving Day arrives, and the move is on: Never let a family-oriented holiday interfere with the profession. A couple of bologna sandwiches, and we’ll be all right.

The honeymoon in the new job is brief. Within six months, the new city administrator is stuck in the middle of heavy political infighting on the city council. To survive this situation, all my energy and even more hours are devoted to the JOB. I love it!

On the home front, guilt begins to set in. I offer to go out for dinner on Friday night at McDonald’s, but there is no interest from the woman I share a house with. When I stop by between meetings to get something to eat, a three-year-old greets me at the door saying, “Daddy, do you have another meeting tonight?” My thoughts: “Of course I have a meeting—I am the city administrator! Don’t ask dumb questions.”

I suggest to my spouse that she make friends in the community. She tells me that she does not want to make friends here because it was too traumatic leaving the close friends she made in Arkansas. Her attitude angers me. I tell myself: “She didn’t go through anything traumatic in Arkansas. I was the one who was assaulted in the newspaper and on the radio. I was the one who lost his job. She has no right to say she suffered in Arkansas.”

I notice that Sharon is becoming more irritable with our daughter. She complains of being ill a lot of the time. Friends visit from Texas, and they notice that Sharon appears somewhat withdrawn and no longer laughs. I notice all of these things, but I cannot spend energy worrying about them, because I have a battle to fight at work, which is more important than anything else.

Summer comes, and the other people in my house go home to Texas for a two-week visit. I dive headlong into work but subconsciously notice something differ-

Glance back over the past year and think about how much time you spent with your family and friends.

ent about this trip home. There are no calls from a homesick wife after a few days’ visit with the family. In fact, my calls to Texas go unanswered until late at night, when I find that they are having a wonderful time and needed this “vacation” badly. I am happy for them, but each time we talk on the telephone I find a more withdrawn and distant wife. By the end of the second week, I know that something is wrong.

On a hot Saturday in early August, I attempt several times (from the office, of course) to phone my family in Texas. At last the telephone is answered by a voice I recognize, but not by a person I know. In the early stages of the conversation, I realize that Sharon has not mentioned returning the next week. I ask, and she evades the question. With much anxiety, I say, “You don’t plan to come home, do you?”

After pushing the issue, the chilling answer cuts me like a knife. “No.” Her answer puzzles me. I cannot understand why she does not want to return to such a caring and lovable person. Finally, the truth comes out: “You don’t love me. You don’t love your daughter. You only love your job.”

Reality Sets In

Early the next morning, I leave for Texas. I drive all day to get there to discuss the situation with the stranger who is my wife. After a week of communicating for the first time in years, I recognize that I have become married to my job and the profession and have almost to-

tally ignored my family. Since I am a public figure, the following Sunday’s newspaper carries a front-page article that I am in Texas and divorce is rumored to be imminent. I am soon to learn about divorce—city manager style.

We initially agree to separate, and I will move to Texas to pursue a job opportunity there. The mayor and city council are advised of my decision to resign, and a press conference is called. On August 16, our 11th wedding anniversary, Sharon and I decide that the situation is out of hand and divorce is the only answer. We are not enemies; we are simply strangers who have shared a house and finances for the past several years.

Friends and councilmembers persuade me to reconsider my resignation; I

Through many lonely hours and the trauma of divorce, I learned a great deal about myself and the profession.

follow their wise counsel and stay in the manager position. Almost five years later, I remarry. My daughter visits me in the summers.

Lessons Learned

I am sharing my story with other professionals so that perhaps they can avoid the hard lessons I learned. I believe that my experiences are related to support systems. I could have avoided those mistakes had I kept the perspectives that Gerald Fox taught me years before. I do not blame the profession, I blame myself. My busyness filled my days but fractured my family.

Dedication to work is commendable, but it can breed extremes. Glance back over the past year and think about how much time you spent with your family and friends. Will they be with you when your career ends? Do your actions reflect your priorities?

Our profession is such that we can get so caught up in “The Cause” that we

isolate ourselves. In my opinion, we too often ignore colleagues who can help us maintain a balanced life.

Through the loneliness and trauma of divorce, I learned a great deal about myself and about the profession. I came to realize that I owe a lot to the profession, but I do not owe it my soul. The profession can do more for me than I can do for the profession, but only if I keep my priorities straight and live my life with the proper perspectives.

I am an admitted workaholic and the profession is an important part of my

I take advantage of the therapeutic value of sharing my frustrations and problems with other members of the profession.

life—but it no longer consumes me. I have learned to balance my personal and professional lives and find that I am a better manager for it. I have since enjoyed successful years in Edmond, Oklahoma, and am now serving in Carrollton, Texas. The scenery changes but the journey continues.

I get away from the job, and I share myself with my new wife, Sue (I remember her name). I also recognize the importance of her life and her business accomplishments and let her share those with me. I have learned to openly admit that her job is just as important to her and our family as mine is to me and our family. I also take advantage of the therapeutic value of sharing my frustrations and problems with other members of the profession.

I am proud of the active role Sue takes in my profession. She attends dinner functions with me and enjoys them, as do I. She is willing to devote a week of her vacation each year to attend my annual conference. Most of all, she has found the value of friendship with spouses of other local government managers.

The greatest hazard for me, and I believe for other managers, is the isolation

syndrome. Subtly, we begin to believe that we are the only people with the problems of living in a fishbowl, dealing with councils, providing services without adequate resources—the problems, the problems, the problems.

I make it a point to chat frequently on the telephone with friends in the profession and attend area meetings. Their counsel gives me fresh insights and perspectives. I always come away feeling better.

When I view my situation objectively, I realize I couldn't be luckier. I have an eight-member city council that supports professional management and me. I have a good staff and am well paid. But I don't want to become complacent and forget about my friends in the profession who do not have supportive elected officials, who are poorly paid, who may be on the brink of being fired or, more commonly, may simply be profession-

ally lonesome in an isolated town. I also don't want to forget the loneliness that new managers go through. This is especially true when they attend their first state conference and we do not make a concerted effort to bring them into the group and make them feel part of it.

Our support groups do not have to have formal meetings, but the friendships and common ties that we share in local government management are valuable. I remind myself that the weakest link in the overall support network is myself. Sharing ourselves at home and with our friends in the business can make the difference between a satisfying and rewarding experience and one that ends with frustration. The job can be truly a cold mistress. I know—I have been there. **LM**

Leonard Martin is city manager of Carrollton, Texas (Leonard.martin@cityofcarrollton.com).

Book Review

Caught Between the Dog and the Fireplug, or How to Survive Public Service

by Kenneth Ashworth. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001. 200 pages.

Ken Ashworth is a career public servant who has written a resource furnishing practical advice to the would-be bureaucrat. The book is a series of 16 letters to his niece/nephew Kim, who is enrolled in an M.P.A. program. In the letters, he describes the challenges and rewards of working as a professional in the political world of government management.

Published as a supplemental text for courses in public administration, this work should be required reading for every management intern, administrative assistant, and local government manager who thinks that the latest confrontation with the council was a unique experience.

In the letter entitled "Re: Working with Politicians," he writes about the dilemma of advocating doing what is right in the face of opponents whose competing interests may be less than honorable. He describes the all-too-familiar feeling of being the lightning rod for criticism, defending the policies established by elected officials who are more than willing to let the administrator take all the abuse. He shares the advice he received from a former board chair, who said, "You don't understand. Your job description is to stand between the dog and the fireplug."

Other letters in this well-written book focus on working with the press, dealing with unpleasant and difficult people, risk taking in government, dealing with pressure and influence, relations with a governing board, ethics, and leadership. These are the topics that have been the table talk whenever managers have gotten together to share war

stories and to seek the comfort and advice of their peers.

This volume of wisdom could have been written by any one of the "wise old men" of ICMA. Maybe it should have been. Maybe it will be. But this version will do extremely well until that one is published.

—Mark Levin
City Administrator
Maryland Heights, Missouri, and
Chair, ICMA's Advisory
Committee on Graduate
Education

these effects and went looking for someone who could help. Thus was born the counseling portion of Michigan's Manager-in-Transition program. Kenning and Wollenweber wanted someone with a background in workplace issues to head the program because, although counselors are trained in many areas of expertise, the workplace has its own esoteric and sometimes political twists to it. Workplaces involving the council structure are no exception.

For the job, Wollenweber tapped J. Chip Drotos, a counselor who is also a certified employee assistance professional (CEAP). An employee assistance program (EAP) centers on workplace issues and includes special training to help an employee return to full productivity as a manager after getting a pink slip.

Together, the three men developed a telephone model for contacting each separated manager and conducting an interview to determine his or her reactions to the job loss. And loss it is. "Many managers are not aware of the profound grief reactions that follow," Drotos notes. "Men especially have traditionally tied their job to their identity, and when the job is stripped away, many react in ways they never expected."

As part of the initial interview, Drotos outlines the steps that each of us

administrators have parlayed their public sector contacts into more lucrative positions in the private sector, Drotos maintains.

Stages of Grief

The natural process Drotos talks about with each separated manager is similar to a grief process. There are stages, and they usually look like this:

1. Anticipated change. Even before the boom is lowered in a council meeting to oust the manager, most managers know something is afoot. Meetings behind closed doors without him or her give way to secret (tete-à-tetes), and the rumor mill even may begin to churn out news that change is imminent. When the boom is actually lowered, usually in the council meeting itself, the next stage emerges

2. Shock. "I can't tell you how many managers knew it was coming, but when the vote finally came in, each manager was shocked, and some even went into denial," Drotos notes. "This is generally where the depression, anger, or isolation sets in. Depression, anger, and isolation are the natural ways we react when something or someone is taken from us.

"Some of us can express and feel the anger, while some of us keep it inside

F Y I

Michigan's Manager-in-Transition Program

"It's Monday morning. Where's Larry? After all, he came in, cleaned up the city, fired our crooked police chief, and brought money into the city coffers."

"Well, I guess the police chief must have had more pull in the back room than Larry did. Last night, the council voted four-to-three to let Larry go."

This scenario and others like it play out again and again in local government management. A manager is recruited for a specific purpose, albeit sometimes a dicey one, and then the person is dismissed for doing his or her job. Most managers have learned to insulate themselves with severance packages that soften the financial blow. What many are unprepared for is the almost certain psychological blows that follow a job separation.

Five years ago, Mark Wollenweber, city manager of St. Clair Shores, Michigan, and Michigan's ICMA Range Rider Bob Kenning observed some of

Some of us can express and feel the anger, while some of us keep it inside and it shows as depression (a common definition of depression is anger turned inward).

go through when experiencing a loss. Says Drotos, "Appreciation on the part of the manager is almost universal when the person learns that his or her feelings are part of a natural process."

During the telephone interview, Drotos assesses the manager's coping skills, support networks, and experience with past job separations. Studies show that a manager can have an average of seven job changes during a single management career. Some will be lateral moves to other managerial positions, and others will be moves into the private sector, leaving local government altogether. Several city or county

and it shows as depression (a common definition of depression is anger turned inward). The feelings of isolation come next, to help us put some distance between the event and the person. It's normal, but the person should not close everybody out," Drotos warns. "If we shut everyone out, we may have little strength and support to draw from.

"This is where the Manager-in-Transition program has been its most helpful. If we identify someone who has isolated themselves and is suffering some depression, it is my job to suggest and then find someone in the man-

ager's area to talk to [him or her] in person," Drotos adds. There have been occasions when he has himself become part of the separated manager's support system for a period of time. Regular weekly or monthly phone contact has helped bridge the transition for the manager, until a longer-term support network could be put into place.

This is where Drotos uses some special skills that he has acquired. His job as associate publisher of a trade publication in the counseling field has yielded him contacts in many of Michigan's mental health facilities. From this point, help is often a phone call away, followed by an evaluative interview with a local private practitioner to obtain a referral. "Sometimes, the manager's high visibility precludes a same-town referral," Drotos recalls. "So we find a professional in a neighboring community [to evaluate the terminated employee]." Michigan's Manager-in-Transition program is confidential, as are the referrals.

3. Confusion. Denial and shock give way to a lowered sense of self-esteem and to confusion on the part of many separated managers. "To a person, city and county managers are extremely competent and dedicated to their communities," Drotos notes, "so the separation sometimes causes an identity crisis in the manager that is explored during the session(s)." This is another key time to contact the separated administrator because these doubts, properly guided, can result in a new surge of creative energy and new possibilities for the transitioning individual.

4. Renewal. Not long after the stages of shock, denial, and confusion comes a period of renewal. Low energy and a sense of disruption, with no clear future, gives way to engagement, energy, and hopefulness. Ideally, it is during this stage that the separated manager comes to see that his/her own strengths and support system are not defined by the job but by those people who bring meaning to his/her life. This support system emerges as family and friends, mentors, and sometimes even fellow displaced managers come forth with an outpouring of support and encouragement.

"On more than one occasion,"

Drotos relates, "there was even a job offer." Although the grieving process usually takes some time, Drotos remembers one manager who seemed to go through three of the stages during the course of the first session. As it turned out, the person had to progress this fast. Right after the phone interview, the manager was off to a job interview. (The person got the position, and it was in local government management!)

5. Contentment. The model then takes transitioning professionals to a time when they get reconnected with work, sometimes in local government and sometimes in a related field. The sense of commitment and competence returns, and there is a feeling of overall contentment with that part of this individual's life.

The model has shifted significantly in the past 10 years. Originally, the employee went through the five stages, and there was some finality to the process. But because of the rapidly changing workforce and the continuing cycle of downsizings, the new model has no finality.

The new model represents an ongoing process that repeats itself throughout the manager's career. "It's like the grief process," Drotos notes. "We don't go through just one loss in our lives. It is a 'till the next one occurs' type of model.

"The [five-stage grief/job transition] model also has had to adapt to the corporate culture changes in the workplace. It also helps prepare the transitioning employee for the next 'go-round.'" Knowing the terrain beforehand helps soften the blow, Drotos thinks.

Now in its sixth year, Michigan's Manager-in-Transition program averages five to seven interviews per year. "Often," Drotos says, "there is one initial assessment and a follow-up, and the manager is on his or her way. The person has connected with a support system (the key element in the process) and has established a new direction."

Sometimes, however, Drotos spends more time with a manager and will establish weekly contact. Occasionally, this process will lead to a referral to a mental health practitioner. "Some 10 to 15 percent of the population is

depressed at any one time, and managers are no exception," Drotos says. "That's when the professional nature of the program really can help—especially for those with few supports or a more established depression or mental health concern."

Has the Program Been Helpful?

Wollenweber comments that often he receives calls months or even years after working with a person, expressing that manager's continued appreciation of the service received through Michigan's program at the time when it was needed. Comments have included these: "The program was there when I needed it. I was contacted within one day or two of the separation." "Timely and appreciated." "It helped me see there was life after city management." "It helped focus my plan for a new direction." "I didn't know that I'd feel so down when I lost my job." "And I didn't realize how angry I had become and how it was part of the whole process of grief."

A Guiding Light For Those in Transition: Member Insights

■ DON'T CLOSE YOURSELF OFF

My in-transition experience, 20 years ago, was precipitated by the sad abandonment of the council-manager form of government, which has been a bit less personal experience but nonetheless an equally traumatic one. Being between positions gave me many lessons that have remained valuable throughout my life. Here are my reflections.

Colleagues

This should be your greatest source of support. I lost count of the personal phone calls and messages (this was before e-mail and the Internet) just to see how I was doing and whether assistance could be rendered. These messages also included invitations to have lunch, dinner, or other social interaction.

Colleagues reminded me that registration fees for the state association conference were waived for members in transition and actively encouraged me to attend and “have a good time”! They continued to invite me to smaller, regional groups that met for lunch, usually gratis, and a most memorable and unannounced visit came from the executive director of the managers’ association just to see how I was doing.

Being in transition brings with it not only the loss of position but also a psychological loss of prestige. So we, as individuals or state and regional

associations, should endeavor to make those in transition feel that they are still valued members of the management profession.

Let the World Know

The biggest mistake a person who is in transition can make is not telling others they are out of work and looking for a job. Unemployment carries a foolish, yet still prevalent, stigma. And unfortunately, the corresponding reaction is to just cover it up and/or not mention it. ICMA does an outstanding job of letting our members know when a colleague is in transition, but did you ever consider that a busy manager might just miss your particular notice or be a little behind in their reading?

If you do start contacting colleagues, you will find that many have faced similar situations and will become invaluable sources of empathy and support. Additionally, and I say this from personal experience, your colleagues will be major sources of job leads, interim consulting assignments, volunteer opportunities, and even that new job itself.

Support from Unusual Sources

I am a Roman Catholic, and during my transition I became friends with and found support from, of all persons, a Baptist minister—and little of the support was spiritual in nature. During our relationship, we

learned from each other that job tenure for city managers and ministers was pretty much the same: you can stay as long as they like you. His “sin” was a novel notion to focus on youth activities in order to revitalize and sustain his congregation (church elders felt neglected). My “sin” was hiring youths to do a lot of backbreaking maintenance work during the summer months (job retirees would have liked to supplement their income).

Coincidence? The individuals calling for the minister’s ouster were the same as the ones leading the petition drive for the change of government in my jurisdiction. This relationship was a wonderful opportunity for mutual commiseration, and laughing and joking about our experiences eased the situation for both of us.

Keep the Faith

I did not, and later I regretted it. During my in-transition period, I stopped going to church. A number of parishioners were ardent supporters of the move to abandon the council-manager form of government. Wanting to avoid these individuals, I made a conscious decision to compromise my faith.

This chicken came home to roost many years later, when I was again attending church regularly and was moved by a sermon dealing with forgiveness. The message really hit home, as I had just gone through a difficult divorce, but it also brought me back to that in-transition experience. To this day, I often think to myself, “What if I had allowed myself to hear that message sooner?”

If you do start contacting colleagues, you will find that many have faced similar situations and will become valuable sources of empathy and support.

If you find yourself in transition, you are definitely going to have to deal with forgiveness, namely, the real issue of bitterness and letting go of this emotion. There is no magic formula for dealing with this; you as an individual must come to grips with it on your own terms.

Experience has taught me to guard against the temptation to close myself off and become isolated from those things that can prove supportive. So, “keep your faith,” whatever it is. You never know what might get you through this difficult time, so allow your heart, mind, and person to be open and receptive to all possibilities. Not only will this openness help you survive the transition but also you will be a better person for it.

—Kevin Kenzenkovic, city manager, Slater, Missouri (1984 to 1986); kenzeinc@aol.com

■ NEGOTIATE YOUR TERMINATION

As I’ve heard and read, firings seldom come as complete surprises. There are usually signs along the way indicating that there is “trouble in River City.” Reading these signs properly can give you both the incentive to begin updating your resume and a chance to reflect on desirable options. Reacting to the signs can cushion the shock and lessen the panic reaction when the ax falls. Bottom line: Don’t bury your head in the sand and assume a denial mentality. Preparing for the inevitable makes the blow easier to absorb.

Often, the governing body is not interested in creating a political issue for itself by firing a manager outright, especially if the firing arises from an issue of disappointing performance. If the firing arises from an egregious moral or legal issue, it is a totally different problem for the manager. The governing body has little to lose and everything to gain by terminating the relationship on its own terms.

But if the firing is a performance issue, the governing body is often motivated to negotiate a manager’s termination, as opposed to risking a public vote on the manager’s ouster. A public vote increases the potential for citizen supporters and detractors to point their accusatory fingers at the governing body or at the manager, laying blame, with the result that a nasty public, political mess ensues.

My Advice:

Bargain for the best deal you can get for a negotiated termination. It is amazing how agreeable a governing body can be when it wants to avoid a public controversy. You have more leverage than you might expect.

I have seen situations in which the manager feels strongly enough about a challenge to his/her professionalism and work quality that he/she will throw down the gauntlet and challenge an ouster effort. What a mistake. Pride and indignation cloud a longer-term perspective.

Our survival instinct should energize us to seek an avenue to best survive professionally. The longer-term perspective, which calls for protecting our professional reputation, should point the way toward an easier avenue to later employment.

Typically, the manager will not win a battle against his/her ouster. It’s possible that the manager may gain some modest improvement on the termination package, but it’s not likely. What is more probable is that the governing body will dig in its heels and defend its opinion about the manager’s need to go. In either case, the issue becomes public, and the manager is ultimately ejected from the job. The end-result is an ugly, open trail of performance problems that tarnishes the manager’s reputation and creates added baggage in seeking new employment.

One of the benefits of being employed, of course, is the sanity it can provide. You have structure and order; you have a sense of mission and accomplishment at the end of the day. When you’re suddenly without a job, all of this disappears. It will help your wounded psyche to establish a new structure and order, to give you a similar sense of accomplishment at the end of the day. I made a deliberate

decision to bring order and structure to my days. I used the morning hours to look for new work opportunities, making personal/phone/e-mail contacts through a growing network of potential resources.

My Schedule

I drafted and mailed or emailed applications and conducted follow-up correspondence and phone calls. In the afternoon, I reserved time for activities in which I had 100 percent control of effort and outcome. I reserved the afternoon for a regular exercise regimen at the local gym, a tremendous benefit both physically and mentally. I did those household jobs that I never had had time to do before.

My advice? Bargain for the best deal you can get for a negotiated termination.

It is amazing how agreeable a governing body can be when it wants to avoid a public controversy.

I made a conscious effort to involve myself in activities and a routine that got me out of the house and away from the temptation of waiting for someone to call. Being a hermit allows too many negative demons to plague the brain; exposure to outside activities can bring not only a healthier mental outlook but also an unexpected avenue for successful networking.

—Pat Guilfoyle, ICMA-CM, city administrator,
DeSoto, Kansas; pguilfoyle@desotoks.us

LEARN MORE SKILLS

This past year was my second time of being “on the beach,” and the circumstances have changed. The first time around, I looked at establishing a consulting business and kept myself entertained with writing a business plan and prospecting. I thought I could take advantage of my strong network of local government contacts to secure at least some small assignments and was partially successful.

This time around, I had returned to the state of Oregon after a 17-year absence, my new Oregon job had ended after only nine months, and I knew hardly anyone locally any more. Fortunately, I selected the Portland metropolitan area as a place to live and work, with the idea that it might have multiple state and local job opportunities.

With this in mind, I took advantage of the lull in my activities to take a beginning Spanish-language class. Many communities in the area have substantial Latino populations, and I knew of two vacancies where the Latino population would soon reach majority status.

Cornelius, Oregon, had its city-manager candidates

to speak to a public gathering, so I opened my remarks in Spanish, explained my beginning language skills, and quickly reverted to English for the remainder of my presentation. The risk paid off, and I got the job. Now, months later, things are going well, and I have been to numerous community meetings with translators. I’ll return to the classroom this fall for another semester and will continue to build my language skills.

—Dave Waffle, ICMA-CM, city manager,
Cornelius, Oregon; dwaffle@ci.cornelius.or.us

DEAL WITH YOUR LOSS POSITIVELY

Dealing with loss involves the four steps that this process entails: denial, anger, grieving, and acceptance. Unfortunately, it is not a linear process, and even long after acceptance occurs, with a new and better life, a little anger can creep in! Oddly, even in the midst of anger or grieving, acceptance can show up. Then again, after two years, some justice can occur after the next election!

—Roger Swenson, town manager,
Dewey-Humboldt, Arizona; rogerswenson@cableone.net

STAY ACTIVE AND BE UPBEAT

Coping with being in transition depends a lot on your specific domestic circumstances. Single, married, kids or not, and whether they are in school makes a big difference in how you handle your situation. Keeping a positive mental attitude during a transition can be challenging; a lot depends on the support you get from your spouse and kids. It’s important that they understand why you are no longer working, instead of being gone 50, 60, or more hours a week as you were before.

They need to accept the fact that money should not be as easily spent. They also need to understand that being in transition will affect them in other ways, too. If your children are in school, depending on their age, they might be confronted by other kids about why you are no longer working. Since being a city manager is a visible position, they might be teased or even harassed because you got fired.

Out of the House

Just as important, over the years I have learned that staying in the house all day is probably one of the worst things you can do. Even if you are busy on the computer or whatever else you might be doing, you are still disrupting the routine that has been your norm.

Getting out and being with other people at the library or coffee shop breaks the routine of being home. Because it’s important to be available for an interview in another city whenever you are called, it’s not too good to get tied down to “just a job,” unless your financial circumstances demand it. Volunteering for a nonprofit is a good way to see another side of the community you are living in. Everyone needs volunteers. Try working at the local food bank or art center. It’s a good move for your resume as well.

Going back to school has been extremely helpful to me. There are usually community colleges that offer a variety of courses of interest to everyone. I took paralegal courses online and got certified. During another transition, I took computer and environmental courses. Online courses are challenging because it's up to you to get those assignments done and get them in on time. For the more traditional learner, it takes a lot of extra effort to get what you need using e-mail, instead of by talking to the instructor and classmates in person.

The circumstances that put you in transition have a lot to do with your mental attitude. If it was an amicable parting of the ways (very unusual), then you can have some peace of mind. However, if it was a bitter firing, with the public closely watching the spectacle, you feel some humiliation and after a while keep wondering what went wrong. What could or should I have done differently so that my family wouldn't have had to suffer the hardships they now endure?

Money Management

There's really no way to know how long you will be in transition. After a while, your finances will become a bigger and bigger issue. It's then that you will start seriously wondering how long you can afford to continue looking for another management position. Is a career change in your future? One time, I took an interim management position, and it only lasted a week. However, the new manager hired me on as an assistant, which lasted for six months until I found another manager position. That was quite unusual.

Here's one suggestion not readily accepted by the folks who seem to know about financial matters. You are supposed to have about six months' savings put away just in case you are terminated. Instead, I have always relied on credit cards to carry me through. One time, I was more than \$60,000 in debt and about to start cashing in some of my retirement funds. However, I got a good position and paid it all off within a couple of years.

If you have a Range Rider or a similar person in your state whom you can keep in touch with, this can be a positive factor. He or she can help you find temporary work and give you insights into positions that might be coming open soon. Also, ICMA sends a packet of information to those in transition that is helpful. Finding someone to talk to who understands local government management, with all the challenges of the position, is important. Commiseration can be a positive factor when you really get emotionally down.

—Ivan Widom, Canon City, Colorado;
iwidom@earthlink.net

■ BELIEVE ME: TRANSITION CAN BE A BLESSING

Turn adversity into opportunity. That was my goal in February 2004, when I was forced to resign as city manager of Bristol, Tennessee.

After nearly eight years as city manager there, working for a proactive city council, events changed after an election. Intense pressure was put on me to leave by the new majority. Finally, I resigned.

Serving the people of Bristol was a privilege and a challenge. My family and I loved the community. We still have close ties to the many friends we made there. It's at times such as these that you find out who your real friends are. Despite the disconnect that happens with a few people, many friends and colleagues will likely provide needed support.

My wife and children were a true Rock of Gibraltar during this episode. Friends, family, and associates give you moral support. Discussing with them what happened can be therapeutic and can help you retain your professional focus.

After my transition began, I decided to follow this course of action:

- Maintain personal dignity and professional attitude.
- View the change positively. Don't look back!
- Get back in the game.

**It is tempting to lash out
at those who have treated you
poorly, but don't do it.
This puts you in the same
gutter with them.**

Periods of adversity bring out the true character of a person. There is a great sense of relief when they pass, and meanwhile the experience prepares you to face the next challenge down the road. In my case, the downtime was also a time-out with my family, an opportunity to exercise more, and a chance to get recharged.

It is tempting to lash out at those who have treated you poorly, but don't do it. This puts you in the same gutter with them. Their behavior defines their values and character, and who wants those traits? Move on. There are more important things for you to do and concentrate on.

I used my down time to focus on taking the necessary steps to get my career back on track. I read inspirational materials, stayed in contact with professional colleagues, talked to positive people, and concentrated on my job search.

Things do often work out for the best. In my case, I was offered the position of city manager of Frankfort, Kentucky, the state capital. This chance has opened up a whole new world for me, professionally and personally. There was, and still is, the excitement of being the new manager in a community. The political dynamics of being in a state

capital are exciting, and the opportunities are challenging and energizing. My family has adjusted quickly as well.

My transition has turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It has enhanced my career.

No doubt about it, going through a transition is difficult. It can also be a great learning experience. It can teach you patience and give you a perspective you can't gain from staying put. It can also teach that your future is what you make of it.

—Anthony Massey, ICMA-CM, city manager,
Frankfort, Kentucky; amassey@fewpb.com

■ RECOGNIZE THERE IS LIFE BEYOND CITY MANAGEMENT

During my local government career, I have had two in-transition periods that each lasted about a year. While I was not overly depressed about being in transition, some people do become depressed and might undergo significant pain if they have the same experience I had. Here's what I'm talking about:

While between management positions, I was called upon by a retired manager to have lunch. We did. Then, I found myself at our lunch trying to cheer him up about being retired. I felt better before we had our meeting than I did after it. I've always hoped that he felt better afterward because I did the best I could to make him feel better. I don't know if he had ever been in transition, but he seemed to think that not working was the end of the world. I didn't think it was at all.

There are a lot worse things that can and do happen to people, even managers. The fact of the matter is, though, that I didn't find being in transition all that difficult. It's one of the things that managers need to include in their repertory of "what the future may hold" possibilities. I have always had a life besides local government management, and I found this life to be a good source of strength. Of course, a supportive and understanding spouse and family are invaluable assets.

Another thing that is clearly helpful, I found, is to get calls, e-mails, and letters from peers. Even better—and this also happened to me—is being called in to help on consulting-type assignments with local agencies and a local government organization or two. Such consultancies brought me some income, which was welcome, but more important, they allowed me to stay better connected to the profession.

—Roy Pederson, retired manager,
Scottsdale, Arizona; royped@cox.net

■ RECOMMEND SEVERAL BOOKS

I always read the *ICMA Newsletter's* "in transition" column when it is published and, to assist my local government management colleagues, send everyone listed in the column an e-mail message to encourage them. You wouldn't believe the nice replies I receive. I thought your readers

might be interested in knowing how one who has "been there, done that" has chosen to assist today's managers. (As a side note, I began my public career in 1947 in Roanoke, Virginia.)

The e-mail is based on this wording: "As a life member of ICMA, I'm sorry you are in transition. I have been where you are now. I 'retired' in 1976 here in Sumter, under pressure. Subsequently, I enjoyed working in the private sector selling solid waste equipment with another city manager who was also in transition. We made out okay financially, but my heart was always in city hall. I bit the bullet, however, and started out on my own in 1980.

I like to recommend several books that may be of interest. If you do not have it yet, get a copy of Doug Ayers' book titled *Right in the City* (Trafford Publishing, 2002). Ayers is a longtime friend of mine going back to the 1940s, when he and I entered the field. He relates his city-manager experiences in California. It's a fast read.

Another book of special interest to managers is *Spending a Lifetime: The Careers of City Managers* by Douglas J. Watson and Rollin J. Watson. For information, go to the Web site of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government (University of Georgia), and click on Books.

I wish you well and am adding you to my prayer list. Good luck."

—Powell Black, retired manager (since 1976),
Sumter, South Carolina; pblack@sc.rr.com

■ GET YOUR LIFE BACK ON TRACK

No doubt about it. Being in transition is stressful—financially, personally, and professionally. The experience for me was positive because I took advantage of the time to strengthen my bonds with my family, take a step back and consider career alternatives, and take control of my finances.

But first I should say that I never liked the term "in transition." Each month, I had to decide how to identify myself at our state association meeting and would say that I was on sabbatical, on an extended vacation, or undecided. It wasn't that I was uncomfortable being out of work, but I didn't want to bring negative attention to myself. I always thought that being on a path to my next adventure was a good thing, with the realization that the path had to end somewhere if we were to continue to have food on the table.

Jack Coughlin, an ICMA life member and Range Rider, said it best: "You aren't somebody until you've been fired." Jack is right: I know that when I'm faced with a dilemma between making tough choices and doing what is necessary to keep my job, I will stand for what is right for the municipality, our profession, and honest, hard-working employees.

I was happy to be in transition, in the sense that the town I worked for did not necessarily share my values about professional management and many other things. Luckily, my wife was extremely supportive and understood

that I needed to leave the town that I had worked for. Professionally, I used the opportunity to explore various careers outside my normal comfort zone, including nonprofit foundation management.

In this connection, during my six-plus months of interviewing, I was considered for president of a national education foundation and vice president of an international relief organization. Both positions would have allowed me to explore the connection between some of my personal interests and my management experience.

In the end, I reaffirmed my commitment to local government management and became manager of a town that truly values our profession and that allowed me to use my extensive experience in economic development. I don't know if I would have enjoyed or appreciated this position if I had not had the opportunity to reflect upon my career and to "hold out" for the position I took. Maintaining a positive outlook allowed me to stay clear-minded enough to stay away from the jobs we all know we shouldn't take, and to keep my stamina up for the job-search marathon.

Personally, the time allowed me to reacquaint myself with my family, given the long hours we often put into our jobs. When available, I picked my daughter up at school and also spent as much time as I could with my son, who was less than 2 years old at the time. I was lucky in that my wife could not have been more supportive, despite her tendency to worry about finances. She gave me the job of painting and finishing our basement, a project I would not otherwise have had the time to complete.

Our relationship grew in strength through this period, and we came to make joint decisions about the life choices you face when in transition (geographic options, residency requirements, and so forth). We did enjoy the weekend in a resort town where I interviewed for city manager.

In the end, I took the job I currently have, abided by the residency requirement by moving two miles from township hall, am able occasionally to come home for lunch and take my daughter to soccer practice, and can be home for dinner on council-meeting nights.

To summarize, the experience of being on temporary leave from a paid vocation should be considered a chance to get your life on track to where you should be going.

—Stuart Brown, ICMA-CM, township manager,
Aberdeen Township, Aberdeen, New Jersey;
stuart.brown@aberdeennj.org

■ REMEMBER: YOUR NEXT JOB IS LIKELY TO BE BETTER

Being out of a local government management job is definitely not my idea of a fun experience. I have been in transition twice during my nearly 30 years in local government management, and I don't believe that either situation could have been predicted. One thing I did learn, however, is that a manager should not become complacent. In other words, don't get too comfortable in a job because you never

know when the political whims of elected officials might be dropped upon you.

Being in transition forces you to reevaluate whether this is the type of work you want to continue doing. Being out of work allows you a respite to conduct this evaluation and also to take some time for yourself and your family. There are always things to do at home that you have procrastinated about, and there are always school-related events that you may not have been able to be a part of, thanks to the schedule you have kept as a local government manager.

Network with your friends and colleagues. When they call you to have lunch, say yes because not only will they offer you the opportunity to vent but also they'll give you ideas and resources to investigate regarding your next job. Network as much as you can, and take advantage of the programs and services that ICMA and your state associations offer.

**One thing I did learn, however,
is that a manager should not
become complacent.
In other words, don't get too
comfortable in a job because
you never know when the
political whims of elected officials
might be dropped upon you.**

Start your job search by examining your resume and making appropriate revisions. Consider interim work, either as a manager or at the department-head level. The more clearly you can show your next employer that you have been continuing to work in the field while searching for a full-time position, the better off you are. Any major gaps of time in employment status wave red flags for prospective employers.

After a reevaluation of my career and interim work opportunities, I have again landed a full-time position with a city. I am grateful to the organizations that provided me with interim work and thankful for the assistance that my friends and colleagues showed me during my in-transition periods. ICMA and my state organization, the Minnesota City-County Management Association, were also extremely helpful during these times.

Remember that, in most cases, managers are forced into transition because of politics and not because they are incompetent. You need to remain professional and optimistic, as your next opportunity is usually better than the one you left.

—Edward Shukle, Jr., city administrator,
Jordan, Minnesota; eshukle@ci.jordan.mn.us

■ A PARODY: YOU'RE NOBODY 'TIL SOMEBODY FIRES YOU

When I read in the *ICMA Newsletter* that managers are in transition, I send them this parody that I wrote when I was fired. As the only person I know who has been fired in four hemispheres, I feel eminently qualified to write these lyrics. Along with wishing managers well in their job searches, I express my hope that reading (singing) the words will help them as much as writing them helped me. (Perform to the tune of "You're Nobody 'Til Somebody Loves You.")

You're Nobody 'Til Somebody Fires You

You're nobody 'til somebody fires you,
You're nobody 'til you're out the door.
You may have fame,
You may have plaques that cover your walls,
But plaques won't get a job for you
When that old ax falls.

Our jobs are all the same,
We just rotate them.
We just change address, you and me.
You're nobody 'til somebody fires you,
And you're where my next job may be.

—Jack Coughlin, retired manager,
Englishtown, New Jersey; jackcoughlin@hotmail.com

■ TAKE TRANSITION AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW

No matter how you look at it, being fired or forced to resign from a highly visible position in the community is stressful on you and your family. Yet, it can be an opportunity to grow—you've heard the saying "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

We have been told that the stages we go through after job loss is not unlike the stages of grieving after the death of family member. Both are true. Take the time to try to understand this, and coping with these reactions and feelings will come easier. It is hard to see that while you are both trying to sort through the present circumstances (the personal disruption to you and your family, the impact on one's self esteem and concern about your reputation, and in some cases, the financial consequences of job loss) and begin to think about the future (what are the next steps, what does the future hold, should I continue in public service, who do I need to contact for what purpose, and when will the answers arrive).

I offer the following advice: at one point or another in the experience, they helped me to cope and emerge from the experience "intact and with a positive and healthy outlook." That's not to say that I want to go through it again.

Find someone or several people that you can discuss what is on your mind during this time of transition; that can be a spouse, a trusted professional colleague, a close friend, a clergyman, a counselor, or all of the above. Depending on the issues, having a cadre of supportive people

can meet a variety of needs and situations. Our doubts, anger, fears, and uncertainties are sometimes better shared with one person over another and many can help us put them in the appropriate context.

Put your financial affairs in order so that you know exactly what capacity and capability you have as you address the financial transition period. Make sure that your insurance needs are properly addressed and do not become a problem during this time period.

Find the appropriate outlets that help create well being. For me, exercising kept me alert and prevented me from becoming lethargic. Taking charge of the "next phase of my life" gave me a sense of purpose and helped lead to a better understanding of what I wanted next and what I had to do to get it.

I evaluated several possible career paths simultaneously: consulting to the public sector, careers in the nonprofit sector, and continuing in city or county management. I talked with people actively engaged in all three fields. I explored the pros and cons of all and actually considered bonafide job offers in all three. I ultimately chose to continue in city management and have no regrets about that decision.

As a result of that process, however, I realize that at some point in the future I will seek out opportunities in one or both of these other areas:

- Find ways to use and sharpen your skills—whether that is a regular golf game, volunteer work, or securing a part-time or temporary position in another local government. I look back on the nearly 11 months I spent in transition as time not wasted. I sharpened my skills in several temporary assignments. That's not to say that I wasn't anxious or didn't grow impatient for resolution and clarity about the future.
- Keep in touch with your peers and use the network that you have cultivated while you were active in the profession. This is a good source of professional opportunities and ideas, both short term and long term.
- Take time for yourself and your family, whether this is a vacation or doing the things as a friend, spouse, family member, or parent that the demands of a professional management position made just a little difficult to do. The next opportunity will emerge when it is supposed to and in the meantime, these other activities can be rewarding and reassuring in terms of one's own self esteem and the "return on investment" that inures to you and to others.

In closing, I would ask that employed ICMA members think about these situations too and reach out to colleagues who are working through the transition.

—Robert LaSala, ICMA-CM, city manager,
Lancaster, California; rlasala@cityoflancasterca.org

This article was edited by Robert Morris, Evanston, Illinois, retired manager of Glencoe, Illinois. He served as an ICMA Range Rider for 15 years. When he was about to be in transition after 32 years as a manager, he got comfort out of the expression "Don't let the turkeys get you down."



MAINTAINING YOUR ECONOMIC WELLNESS

A Transition Financial Primer





INTRODUCTION

Managers in Transition can call ICMA-RC at 800-326-7075 if you have questions about how to handle your retirement savings during transition.



Throughout your career as a local government manager, you will have the opportunity to work with diverse and well-meaning people and perhaps in a variety of communities. That can be one of the greatest attractions of service in local government management.

Unfortunately, some situations eventually do not turn out as well as hoped and you may find yourself, as an appointee of a political body, being forced from your position without a new one waiting.

A great many questions arise at this difficult time in your career – hunting for a new job, psychological stress and family adjustments, just to name a few. There are also a variety of resources available to help you – including many through the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

This brochure is focused on one very real and important concern: maintaining your financial well-being during the transition period. It describes actions you can take throughout your career to prepare in advance of the unforeseen loss of your position as well steps to take during transition.

While not comprehensive, this brochure may help guide you before and during the transition period. With good decision making, you improve your prospects for brighter days as you resume your career.

PLANNING AHEAD

Ideally, you will never find yourself involuntarily between jobs, but that isn't always under your control.

Even the best managers can be in transition one or more times during a career. Since at some point you may find yourself in transition, the best moment to prepare for being without a job is when relations with your employer are good or when you start a new job. That's when you have the most leverage in your negotiations.

If you are financially prepared for a period of transition, you can feel more confident if relations with your employer change. Once you are looking for a new position, you will also be able to maintain the best frame of mind.

For those who do not have an immediate concern, one area of focus should be the employment agreement, where careful preparation can avoid many issues that arise during transition. One of the most important purposes of an employment agreement is providing clear and adequate terms in case of involuntary separation.

Another step that you can take is the creation of an emergency fund that will tide you over while you are looking for a new position. While planners generally recommend three to six months reserve, you are in a profession that argues for a larger cushion.

In addition, you should avoid mounting up excessive debt. You should be aware of guidelines used by planners, based on the value of your home, total income and types of debt.

And when you take out a mortgage to buy a home, keep in mind that you may not be able to sell your property at the top of the real estate market.

If you find yourself in transition now and needing to take action, let's take a look at what you should be doing today.

FIRST STEPS

Income

Regardless of how well you have prepared, you should immediately undertake a realistic evaluation of your current financial situation to ensure your financial wellness. The enclosed worksheet can help you get started.

The financial inventory should include all sources of income, including the paycheck from your spouse or partner and dividend and interest-producing assets. Then list your liquid asset accounts in order of availability (i.e., which you should access first, next and last). You may be pleasantly surprised by how many opportunities arise on the income side through interesting, interim assignments or consulting.

Next, evaluate other sources of income. Determine how much you can expect from your severance agreement or the severance clause of your employment agreement. Make sure you receive all benefits due to you. If you have doubts or questions, consider hiring an attorney. Rushing to an agreement at this point may leave you with regrets later.

Benefits that you have accrued during your service could also be a good source of income. Unused vacation and sick leave payout can amount to a substantial lump sum in addition to severance. Preserve these payouts as a reserve rather than spending them on discretionary items.

You may also be eligible for unemployment compensation, which varies from state to state and, sometimes, the circumstances under which you left your employer. Given the uncertainty of your period in transition you should investigate your eligibility for this benefit.

Expenses

As a manager in transition, you need to take special care to manage expenses and debt. In many ways, you have more control over this side of the ledger. Your long-term financial health will depend on careful supervision of your expenses during this period.

In an at-risk profession, you should make every effort to live beneath your income level at all times, and especially now when your sources of income are less certain. The first step is to look carefully at where you are spending your income. (See enclosed worksheet.)

If you are spending dollars on discretionary items, consider cutting back. If you have credit cards, you should lock them away and live solely on your cash income. If you are making regular payments on expensive cars and boats – or have high upkeep expenses – consider scaling back or selling these luxuries.

The accompanying chart gives you some common benchmarks to measure your spending.

It's also possible that, like many Americans, you have substantial credit card balances that you have built up over the years. It's important that you work through this problem, since failure to keep up with your debts can harm your credit rating. Often, credit card issuers are willing to discuss payment plans, and take into account your current job situation. You should initiate these discussions before you fall behind in your payments. You may also want to locate a U.S. Department of Justice-approved credit counseling agency at www.usdoj.gov/ust/bapcpa/ccde/cc_approved.htm.

For most families, their home is their most important asset. Your mortgage payment should take priority over other credit payments. Even here, you may have flexibility, if you consult with your mortgage issuer. It's possible that your mortgage holder will allow you to

pay only your interest until you find a new position, which could improve your monthly cash flow during the transition period.

Finally, you should evaluate your current insurance coverage. Health insurance is essential. You may have coverage through another family member or through your severance agreement. If necessary, take out COBRA insurance, which is available at your expense through federal law for 18 months after separation. Life insurance is also an important consideration.

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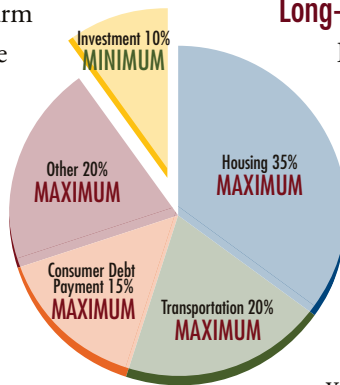
Long-term considerations

Reviewing your assets, you may be tempted to tap into your retirement fund, often the largest pot of money on your balance sheet. For several reasons, this can lead to very damaging consequences not easily reversed. Consider your retirement assets your safety net of last resort.

Before accessing any of your retirement assets, you should understand that the tax code treats different types of retirement assets very differently. If the money is in a 401 defined contribution plan or an IRA, and you are younger than 59½ years old, you will probably pay an extra 10 percent tax on withdrawals from these accounts, in addition to regular withholding tax. By the time you receive your check, you could be surprised that the amount is much less than you anticipate.

If you have money in a 457 deferred compensation plan, the extra 10 percent penalty does not apply. However, as in any retirement account, you will need to pay withholding tax that will substantially reduce your final payment.

Even more important than the tax consequences is the impact that withdrawing money today may have on your retirement. By reducing your account today, you will forfeit the benefit from the compounding of your assets, which





Transition Financial Inventory

ASSETS

Severance lump sum	
Final pay lump sum: vacation, sick leave payout	
Liquid investments	Savings accounts
	Brokerage accounts, investments
	Roth IRA after tax principal
	Other
Total liquid assets	
Illiquid investments – Retirement accounts	457 balance
	401(a) balance
	Traditional IRAs
Illiquid – Real estate other than home	
Total illiquid assets	

INCOME

Spouse/partner income	
Part time/temporary work	
Ongoing severance pay (# weeks)	
Unemployment	
Other savings	
Total weekly income	

BASELINE MONTHLY EXPENSES

Housing:	Mortgage		
	Property taxes		
	Home insurance		
	Homeowner dues		
Utilities:	Gas		
	Electric		
	Waste		
	Water		
	Refuse collection		
Health:	Insurance		
	Out-of-pocket		
	Prescriptions		
Life insurance			
Credit card, other debt payments			
Child support/alimony			
Communications	Telephone	Landline	
		Cell phone	
	Internet access		
Newspaper, magazines			
Entertainment			
Job search costs			
Groceries			
Clothing			
Tuition, school fees, supplies, etc.			
Personal care, haircuts, etc.			
Transportation	Car payments		
	Auto insurance		
	Gas		
	Auto maintenance		
Total baseline expenses			

produces most of your asset gains over time. You could be sacrificing your long-term financial wellbeing to cover short-term expenses. It's a choice you'll want to avoid, if possible.

ICMA-RC retirement professionals can help you with account projections so you understand the implications of any withdrawals. If you decide to take out assets, ICMA-RC can assist you with the paperwork. If you decide to move your assets into an IRA, ICMA-RC can help you through the process. Managers in transition can call 800-326-7075 to consult with retirement specialists who can answer their questions.

During transition may be a good time to visit a financial planner who can help you understand all of the implications of your options. The planner may also have access to a number of resources that could help you through your short-term situation. If you decide that you need financial guidance during your transition, you should take advantage of the services offered by ICMA-RC. Its staff of financial planners is familiar with managers in similar situations and can offer useful advice.

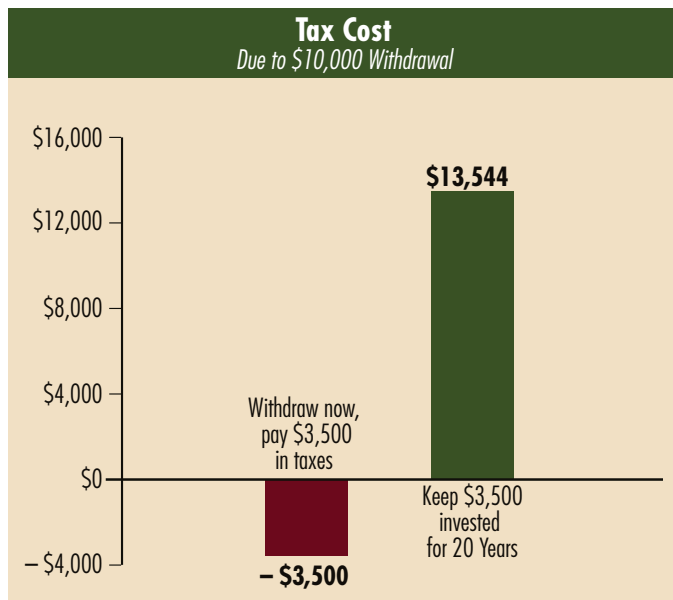
In addition, other resources are available for managers in transition. The International City/County Management

Association (ICMA) has a group of retired managers called Range Riders, former city and county managers who may have lived first-hand through your current transition status. They can advise you on how they managed the experience and provide useful advice on steps to take to maintain your financial health and to find a new position.

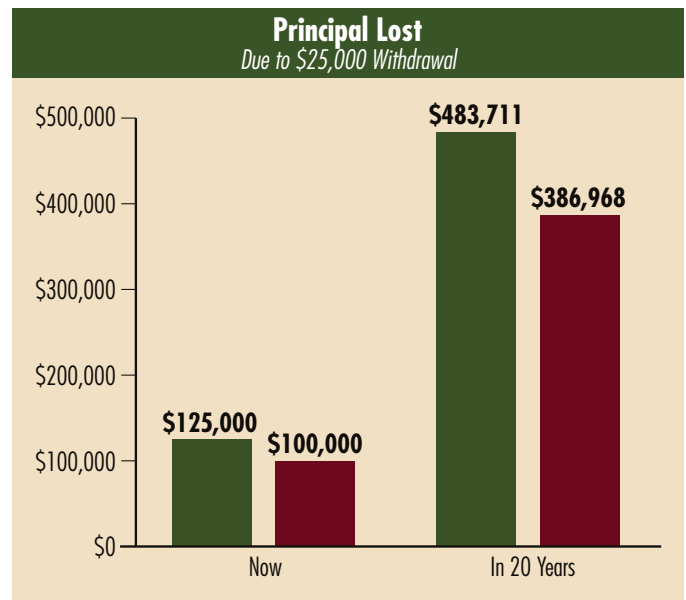
Range Riders also understand that it's important to find the right next job, which may not be the first one available, no matter how tempting it may be. They may also know about interim assignments that could be useful to tide you over while you are seeking a permanent position. You can go to the "Who's Who" section of www.icma.org to see the list of current Range Riders.

Conclusion

It's important to maintain your financial perspective during this difficult transition period. The steps you take today can have a long-term impact on your financial health. Making the right decisions can help you maintain the right frame of mind to find a new position and ensure your long-term financial health.



An early withdrawal of \$10,000 from an account taxed at 25 percent, with an additional 10 percent early withdrawal tax, will reduce the \$10,000 by \$3,500 in total taxes, leaving a net of \$6,500. If that \$3,500 was left in the account, it would grow to \$13,544 over 20 years with a 7 percent annual return.



A \$25,000 withdrawal from an account with a balance of \$125,000 will reduce it to \$100,000. In 20 years with a 7 percent annual return, \$125,000 would have grown to \$483,711, while \$100,000 would only grow to \$386,968, or \$96,743 less.

By James Thurmond



After recent council elections, 16 Texas city managers were no longer employed, which is about 3 percent of the total city management profession in the Lone Star state.¹ This number does not seem unwarranted, especially in the aftermath of the annual May city elections when turnover occurs frequently on councils, followed by increased city manager turnover. The first culprit identified in manager turnover is usually the elected officials who want change. Is this really the case, or is it just coffee table talk? Academic

research has identified other factors than the council that influence manager turnover, and 20 of these factors are discussed below.

Managers leave their jobs for a variety of reasons, most of which can be categorized as either “push” or “pull” factors. Push factors include unstable local politics, the council’s lack of confidence in the manager, or managerial disagreements with the council.²

Pull factors—ambition factors—include the manager’s career advancement, salary advancement, desire for

a larger government organization, and desire for new experiences. Push is usually the council’s decision; pull is the manager’s.

Usually the first cause of manager turnover is identified as the top elected official’s displeasure with the manager, which results in pushing the manager out. The council’s role in pushing out the manager also is not surprising, but why the council pushes is not easily identifiable. Councils are notoriously vague in explaining why managers are fired, possibly a wise strategy because

of legal or political reasons. Legally, councilmembers know they might be sued by the manager, and politically, they know they might lose the next election, especially if the manager is popular in the community.

I propose, however, that frequently councilmembers are not sure why they fire managers. The reason might be nonperformance; conflict with the council; citizen complaints; noncongruence between the council and the manager in style, roles, or behavior; or the fact that the council just happened to meet when they all had problems with the manager.³

Councilmembers might be vague because they are being pushed by such outside forces as citizens who have issues with the manager or a sense of the community that it is time for a change. Consequently, the council believes that something must be done, and firing the city manager is a good way of doing something.

Twenty Turnover Factors

To avoid termination for as long as possible, managers would be wise to know the factors that influence turnover and then address the appropriate factors for their personal situations:

1. Conflict. Many types of conflict are inherent by-products of the democratic process; conflict is not necessarily a bad thing because it can lead to better decisions.⁴ Ongoing conflict is not conducive to a pleasant work environment, however, and it does not facilitate policy making and can lead to manager turnover.

A survey of 174 managers in 1999 by James Kaatz, Edward French, and Hazel-Prentiss Cooper found that political conflict causes increased burnout among managers, but policy conflict does not cause burnout. It is possible that burnout is more prevalent among managers who are more technically inclined than politically oriented.⁵

Political conflict among councilmembers or between mayor and council does not necessarily push the

manager out of a job, but it could create problems if the manager is identified with the faction that loses control of the council. Also, constant conflict within the council can lead to the manager searching for another job.⁶ Nonpolitical conflict between the manager and elected officials includes disagreements over public policy or differences between the manager's behavior and the officials' behavior.

Ideally the council establishes the city's mission and the manager administers city operations. Any deviation from this pattern may lead to role conflict. A council that meddles in city operations increases conflict.⁷ Community conflict over issues such as school board politics or neighborhood problems may affect the relationship between the council and the manager. Also, partisan conflict involving Democratic Party or Republican Party disputes may also spill over into council and manager relations.⁸

2. Manager's role orientations. The roles taken by the manager—active versus passive policy making or strong versus weak community leadership—must meet the elected officials' expectations.⁹ There should be a good fit between the manager and the council on roles taken and roles expected.

3. Managers with less than full confidence of the council. Managers reporting less than full confidence of the council depart within two years even if local politics are stable. If policy disagreement also exists between the manager and the council, the probability of turnover is even higher.¹⁰

4. Elected mayor. Conflict between an elected mayor and the manager is more common than with an appointed mayor. Elected mayors often conclude that they have a mandate to do something, and they want the manager to be supportive and not a hindrance. The potential for conflict is great, especially when the mayor wants to do something not supported by the council or not good public policy.

5. Council changed by election. The greater the proportion of coun-

BEEN THERE?

If you've ever been terminated, or narrowly avoided termination, would you be willing to share your insights about the warning signs—how to spot them, how to handle them, or even how to avoid a state of denial—by contributing your story to PM?

Of the 20 factors James Thurmond identifies, which ones were a strong component of your experience? What changes did you make as a result of your experience? Your colleagues will appreciate hearing from those of you who've been there. Send your story to bpayne@icma.org.

cilmembers not reelected, the greater the chance the manager will leave. Managers must understand that the new council has its own new organizational chemistry, which requires a learning curve by both parties.

6. Demographic composition of the city. Cities are either homogeneous or heterogeneous in such areas as income, race, ethnicity, and social conditions. Because homogeneous conditions reduce conflict and increase political stability, turnover should be lower in homogeneous cities.¹¹

7. Poverty rate. The proportion of population below the poverty level is associated with lower turnover. For each percentage point of the population below the poverty level, the manager's tenure is increased by one month.¹²

8. Financial condition of the city. Wealthy cities are more politically stable, and the manager's performance in wealthy cities may be noncontroversial, thus leading to less turnover. Finance-related issues as taxes, debt levels, and bond ratings have no significant effect on turnover.¹³

9. Manager's performance. Two indicators for performance in economic development activities—economic change

FIGURE 1. Checklist of Managers' Turnover Factors

WARNING SIGNS FOR AT-RISK MANAGER JOBS

Check the turnover factors that exist in your city or county, with your elected officials, and in your job. The more factors you check, the higher your risk for termination by the council. Note that the risk is related to the magnitude of the factor. Also, several factors with low magnitudes might equal one factor with a high magnitude. The checklist should facilitate your awareness of your job situation so that you can take appropriate action to avoid termination.

FACTORS PUTTING YOUR JOB AT RISK	MAGNITUDE OF YOUR TURNOVER RISK	
	LOW	HIGH
<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict between councilmembers	Infrequent	On-going
<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict between you and council	Infrequent	On-going
<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict between your roles and council's roles	Infrequent	On-going
<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict in the community	Infrequent	On-going
<input type="checkbox"/> Partisan conflict	Infrequent	On-going
<input type="checkbox"/> Elected mayor	Supported by council	No council Support
	Initiates good policy	Initiates bad policy
<input type="checkbox"/> Council turnover	New members have no agenda	New members have an agenda
<input type="checkbox"/> City managerial years of experience	High	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> High number of managerial positions previously held	Without employment agreement	With employment agreement
<input type="checkbox"/> MPA degree	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/> Possess bargaining skills	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/> Possess collaborative management skills	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/> Per capita income is low	Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/> Economy	Has little effect on turnover. Bad economic news is high risk in short run. Good economic news' increases tenure in the long run.	

and per capita personal income—can influence turnover. Economic change, good or bad, actually has little effect on turnover especially in large cities. Positive economic change must be longer term to effect a modest decrease in turnover. The higher the level of per capita income in a community, the more likely it will retain its manager.¹⁴

10. Local politics. In a study of 10 Florida cities, two-thirds of manager terminations were the direct result of political disputes.¹⁵

11. Negative environment. A survey of 177 newly promoted city managers indicates that 9.8 percent were trying to escape a negative work environment in their previous jobs.¹⁶

12. Monetary. Thirteen percent of newly promoted managers were seeking more pay in a new position.¹⁷

13. Normal career advancement. Six percent of newly promoted manag-

ers were advancing on their planned career paths.¹⁸

14. Lack of negotiating and bargaining skills. A survey of 74 city managers showed that managers might experience difficulty in adjusting to the bargaining environment found in policy making with the city council.¹⁹ Lack of either bargaining skills or the desire to use them, especially in what a manager considers a political situation, can lead to turnover.

15. Council election format. City manager tenure may be shorter under councils elected from districts because political conflict and parochial interests increase in district formats.²⁰

16. Employment agreements between council and manager. Employment agreements indirectly affect turnover. The push factor of community conflict exerts more influence when managers work under an employment agreement. Pull factors are influenced even

more by agreements. Managers who have held more previous positions have shorter tenures when employed under employment agreements because agreements may facilitate managers' movement and provide review mechanisms that speed their exits.²¹

17. MPA degree. Managers holding master's of public administration degrees are more likely to have longer tenure.²²

18. Years of experience. Managers with more years of experience have longer tenure.²³

19. Growth and no-growth communities. All categories of growth, from zero growth to rapid growth, appear to have no effect on tenure. Long-serving managers are found in all categories of growth.²⁴

20. Managerial behavior. A survey of 31 city managers reveals that a lack of collaborative behavior—persuasion, bargaining, negotiating, team building, and facilitating—leads to shorter job tenure.²⁵

No Single Factor

As shown by these 20 factors, many variables can affect managers' tenures; it is difficult to attribute turnover to one variable; and the specific situation of each local government, the council, and the manager is important.

Localities can be vastly different, council compositions and issues vary, and managers' skills and experience vary as well. The main commonalities among council-manager cities are their form of government and state and federal laws establishing the constraints within which they govern.

Managers' commonalities include professional norms (ICMA Code of Ethics) and education levels (most have MPA degrees). Council commonalities consist of elected-official norms (association of mayors, councilmembers, and commissioners), democratic processes, and political party affiliations in some of the larger cities.

Simply put, differences are great and similarities are few, and finding a single factor that explains turnover is unlikely.

Most Important Factors

Several of the factors discussed here are statistically significant, however, and consequently they have the potential to exert more influence on managerial tenure than the other factors. These important factors include various types of conflict, managerial performance, elected-official turnover, MPA degree, years of managerial experience, number of managerial positions previously held, negotiating and bargaining skills, and managerial behavior.

By adapting to these significant factors (Figure 1), managers have a higher probability of surviving in their jobs. In other words, new councilmembers require new perspectives by the manager; more conflict requires more managerial negotiating and compromise; council district elections require more managerial empathy with councilmembers' perspectives; and having a newly elected mayor requires flexibility in adapting to the mayor's role expectations.

Once managers have identified the factors that could potentially affect their job tenure, they should develop a plan to address these factors.

Don't Wait to Identify the Factors

Most managers understand that there are many factors affecting their job tenures. The problem is that they wait until they are being pushed by the council to identify the factors. It is usually too late

by that time. Managers should identify the specific factors before they actually influence their job tenures and take action to remedy the factor before the council pushes them out. **RM**



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ENDNOTES

- 1 Council-manager cities in Texas comprise 295 general law cities plus 299 home rule cities; this equals 594. See Terrell Blodgett, *City Government That Works* (Austin: Texas City Management Association [TCMA], 1998).
- 2 Ruth Hoogland DeHoog and Gordon P. Whitaker, "Political Conflict or Professional Advancement: Alternative Explanations of City Manager Turnover," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 12, no. 4 (1990): 361–377.
- 3 James Kaatz, Edward French, and Hazel-Prentiss Cooper, "City Council Conflict as Cause of Psychological Burnout and Voluntary Turnover Among City Managers" *State and Local Government Review*, 31, 3 (199) 162–172).
- 4 Former Corpus Christi and Laredo, Texas, City Manager Marvin Townsend once advised that he tried to avoid gathering all the councilmembers together at one time when the subject was the city manager. He thought that only bad could come of it because every manager is almost always involved in a controversy or issue that has at least one councilmember perturbed. Because annual performance reviews are usually required in today's employment agreements, such gatherings are almost impossible to avoid, and managers should not necessarily be surprised by negative outcomes. Richard C. Feiock and Christopher Stream, in "Explaining the Tenure of Local Government Managers," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1998): 127, suggest that agreements provide a review mechanism that can speed a manager's exit.
- 5 Douglas M. Ihrke and M. Scott Niederjohn, "Conflict on City Councils in Wisconsin," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 27, no. 4 (2005): 453–462.
- 6 Gordon P. Whitaker and Ruth Hoogland DeHoog, "City Managers under Fire: How Conflict Leads to Turnover," *Public Administration Review* 51, no. 2 (1991): 156–165.
- 7 Ihrke and Niederjohn, "Conflict on City Councils in Wisconsin."
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- 15 Gladys M. Kammerer et al., *City Managers in Politics: An Analysis of Manager Tenure and Termination* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960).
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- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Joseph La Beau, "Executive Summary and Full Report to the Texas City Management Association on City Manager Personality and Career Impacts" (Austin: TCMA, 2005).
- 20 Feiock and Stream, "Explaining the Tenure of Local Government Managers"; James C. Clinger and Richard C. Feiock, "Council Views toward the Targeting of Council Benefits," *Journal of Politics* 57 (1995): 508–521.
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- 22 Ibid.
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- 24 Douglas J. Watson and Wendy L. Hassett, "Long-Serving City Managers: Why Do They Stay?" *Public Administration Review* 63, no. 1 (2003): 71–78.
- 25 James Thurmond, "Managing in the Bureaucratic and Collaborative Contexts" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Houston, 2007).

TALES OF *De-Termination*



Two *PM* readers generously share their encounters with employment terminations, prompted by *PM*'s call for stories in

the September 2009 article, "Causes of Manager Turnover," by James Thurmond. It is one thing to read about the termination phenomenon from a studied perspective and another experience to hear about it first-hand from someone who has lived it. These two stories validate Thurmond's "20 turnover factors" with personal insights that any manager can relate to.

Termination Lessons

Spring 2009 ushered in two significant professional milestones for me. The first was a notice from ICMA recognizing 30 years of public service; the second was a notice from my board of supervisors exercising the termination-without-cause paragraph of my contract.

I had spent 29 years in California county government, 20 of them as a chief administrator. During that time, I had had the difficult task of firing some people, but this was my first time being on that proverbial other side of the table.

The story also happened to be a local media delight because it involved allegations from the assistant CAO of a hostile work environment and revelations of her affair with a union official while negotiating with him on behalf of the county. Several months after my termination, her personal relationship led to her firing for cause and her subsequent lawsuit against the county, which also named me personally for allegedly creating that hostile work environment.

Although the ACAO's allegations were not the reason for my termination, they provided an opportunity for some of the supervisors to push for my departure. The board was careful to make clear that its action to end my employment was on a contractual "for convenience" basis and, in fact, board members did not investigate the allegations until after voting to terminate me.

The connection, however, was made in the local media, and although I believe the legal process

will ultimately show her allegations to be without merit, there is no question my career will be tainted by these events.

So, I'm responding to James Thurmond's article in the September *PM* on what insights I can offer colleagues from this experience. Thurmond's 20 turnover factors certainly capture the various dynamics that come into play when a termination happens, and mine was no different. For this discussion, I will split the factors into two groups: personality and circumstances.

Personality

I was CAO in San Luis Obispo County, California, for 11 years and, by 2009, board membership had completely turned over since the supervisors hired me in 1998. The 1998 board had wanted a strong-manager model and looked to me to run the organization. Turnover brought in different personalities who wanted to be much more hands-on, and lines of authority became much more ambiguous.

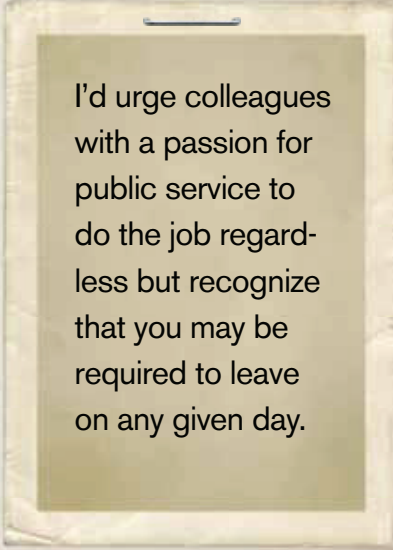
By 2009, tension on this issue was real with four of the five supervisors. This tension was exacerbated by a feeling among the supervisors that I was associated too much with the previous board—a board that had been rejected by the voters in the 2008 elections. Most managers know such circumstances are not unusual in our business, and the democratic process may bring a personality mix that simply doesn't work. A manager must learn to recognize this reality quickly and be prepared to move on—or be moved on!

Circumstances

Tensions within the organization, or the community, are often bad news for a manager's tenure. In San Luis,

such tensions were generated by budget and growth management—both familiar territory to many of my colleagues. In bad financial times, the manager is the face of a cut budget, which is welcomed by neither the community nor the elected body.

Such was the case in San Luis and, after two years of budget cuts, I had accumulated significant negative baggage. In addition, growth management had been the focal point of the 2008 elections and, in a sharply divided community, two incumbents were defeated. A pro-development



I'd urge colleagues with a passion for public service to do the job regardless but recognize that you may be required to leave on any given day.

board was replaced by a pro-environment board, and association with the old board was not good news. The new board members forced out the county planning director shortly before they fired me—both of us having that old-board baggage by the nature of our jobs.

The third variable to note under this category is the type of manager running the organization. In my case, the 1998 board had hired me, specifically, to act as a change agent. They believed

the organizational culture lacked an emphasis on accountability, performance, and customer service.

Although such a shift is not new in our business, it was a huge shift for San Luis, and it generated a lot of resentment from those who were benefiting from the status quo. That resentment found some sympathetic ears when board members changed.

By May 2009, this mix of personality and circumstances left me with a board that did not value my role as an organizational leader. I believe they were content to let me stay through my planned retirement at the end of the year, but they were also ready to take advantage of the particular circumstances at the time and fire me in order to show their intent to change the organization.

Lessons from My Story

In politics, perception trumps performance. Those things that I was hired to do were done effectively, but when I was perceived as the problem, the performance became irrelevant. I'd urge colleagues with a passion for public service to do the job regardless but recognize that you may be required to leave on any given day.

It can be lonely at the top. My experience suggests that one can be friendly—but not friends—with employees or elected members. The manager is always the manager, and for many individuals the top job may not be the right job. I submit, for many, the most fulfilling and satisfying position is in a key assistant slot. I'd encourage colleagues to think deeply on this issue and not be swayed by our "promotion = success" mentality.

Communicate, communicate, communicate. The organizational culture will create the stories in

the absence of your leadership conversation. Keep employees in the loop. For the elected body, show appropriate professional deference in the public setting but be willing to have what David Whyte calls "courageous conversations" with them in private. I believe effective government depends on the person who is willing to tell the emperor he is wearing no clothes. This is the manager's role, and sometimes it may cost you your job. If you don't do it, however, you are no longer effective.

Have a comprehensive employment agreement. Divorce court is not the place to be working out the details! On the occasions that I had terminated people for no cause, I had always offered a resignation-letter-plus-severance-package option to them. I had not, however, included such language in my contract. When we reached the point of separation, the board of supervisors was not willing to offer the resignation option unless I agreed to a lesser severance.

Ours is a noble and fulfilling profession. This is more a post-script than a lesson. I would not have chosen this particular finale for myself, but I cannot imagine a better career overall than I have been privileged to enjoy for the past three decades.

Public service remains a most noble profession, and pursuing continuous improvement in one's community and the organizations that serve it is worth all the personal sacrifices that go along with the job of chief administrator. I'd do it over without hesitation.



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One Take On Understanding Management Turnover

I served as the town manager of Cave Creek, Arizona, from July 1990 through February 1995. It was my second position as town manager, and I thought I was ready for it. My master's degree is in regional planning.

In retrospect, maybe I was overreaching. My years at Cave Creek were some of the most harrowing of my life. I say this because the town's politics was so volatile that I never knew from one day to the next whether I would be terminated—regardless of my job performance. Of the 20 factors James Thurmond identified in his September *PM* article, certainly conflict among the members of the town council played a part in my eventual termination.

I was hired by the Cave Creek Town Council several months after the mayor survived an extremely divisive recall election. In turn, I was hired on a split town council vote, and from the beginning of my employment I certainly suffered from less than full confidence of the council.

During my tenure a new mayor took office each year. The last mayor in that string of mayors was the only member of the town council who voted against terminating me when the question came up the final time.

As each new mayor took office, I had to determine how to respond

to that mayor's demands to change my approach to such major projects as the expansion of our wastewater treatment and collection system, the management of our road maintenance and improvement program, the prosecution of zoning enforcement, town zoning, and our daily operations.

The first mayor was strong on zoning enforcement and uninterested in the wastewater system because she feared that an improved system would foster growth. My second mayor was the opposite. My third mayor was by profession an engineer who generally opposed actions in support of growth, although he had an intense interest in the details of our gravel road maintenance and improvement program.

My fourth mayor was a strong no-growth advocate who, although she inherited a major wastewater system improvement that was in the final preliminary design stage, really didn't want the project to be completed.

Issues to Confront

The attitudes and approaches of each of these mayors resulted in issues being raised in open town council meetings without any advance warning to staff, consultants, or other councilmembers in order to disrupt a process or confuse opponents. In such a situation, it was difficult for me to develop any rapport with my mayors, who generally considered me a partisan opponent in relation to their high-interest issues.

A significant amount of turnover on the council also occurred during my tenure. The demographics of the town's leadership were changing in the early 1990s, from longtime resident businesspeople to newly arrived and younger professional commuters from the central Phoenix metro area.

A year before I was hired, the town council, which appoints the planning commission members, filed an unsuccessful lawsuit to attempt to overturn a

decision of their own planning commission. During my tenure, I wrote a completely new zoning ordinance for the town (it was recognized as the "outstanding project" of 1993 by the Small Town and Rural Planning Division of the American Planning Association), and I wrote the town a new general plan, which was adopted by the planning commission and town council.

Turmoil and contention were constants on the town council during my tenure, with split votes initially generally favoring the old-timers. During one council executive session, one member of the council stood up abruptly and before walking out of the meeting threw a three-inch binder of wastewater system reports and studies across the oval table around which we were sitting, hitting our 69-year-old mayor full-square in the chest. The mayor chose not to take legal action.

At least a couple of times before I was terminated, I was advised privately by members of the council that it looked like the council would vote to terminate me at the next council meeting. I did not take any evasive or assertive action in response to those warnings; neither did I encourage anyone to provide me with such warnings because I intended to continue to attempt to do my job to the best of my ability. I had a personal commitment to the citizens of the town that I intended to attempt to fulfill regardless of shifts in the town council's attitude toward me.

Have Your Parachute Ready

As far as what others can take from my experience, I suppose it is that not all warnings of impending terminations need to be believed, no matter their source, and that it is never good to accept an appointment to a top management position without some "parachute" included in your employment agreement. I took the position somewhat out of a sense of urgency

I had a personal commitment to the citizens of the town that I intended to attempt to fulfill regardless of shifts in the town council's attitude toward me.

about leaving my last position, and, as a result, did not assure before I accepted the position that I had a reasonable exit policy outlined for my eventual departure.

I should have either declined to accept the position when it was first offered to me or negotiated an employment contract that would have provided me some security in case of a termination. Failing to do that left me in an extremely vulnerable position during my entire tenure with the town.

As a result of my experience in Cave Creek, I began to look more closely into the politics of the towns I considered applying to for employment, because I did not want to work for another town like Cave Creek that was in the midst of so many divisive changes. My experience taught me that 1) some local governments have a culture that supports sacrificing management leadership as a problem-solving tool, and 2) it is perfectly reasonable, professional, and noble to decline an appointment to serve in such communities. **RM**



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De-Termination Continues

In the December 2009 issue of PM, readers shared their encounters with employment terminations in "Tales of De-Termination." They were prompted by the magazine's call for stories in the September article, "Causes of Manager Turnover," by James Thurmond. Replies received more recently and included here validate Thurmond's 20 turnover factors.

When Working Harder Doesn't Help

At a community where I used to work as city manager, I experienced several of the turnover factors listed in James Thurmond's article. All of these factors were the push factors rather than the pull factors.

I had interviewed and accepted the position in October. In November, an election changed two members of the council. Although all of the candidates had been involved in the interviewing process, this completely changed the dynamic of the council.

Part of the change was a big increase in conflicts among the members of the council. Some conflicts were due to different philosophies about city services, but most were due to an overarching issue regarding a state transportation project. There was constant discussion and argument as councilmembers on different sides of the issue sought to persuade other members. There were also some behind-the-scenes attempts at vote trading. Even after this vote was taken, the ramifications continued to play out as members on the losing side sought revenge for their defeat.

Councilmembers also disagreed from the beginning over my role as the first professionally trained manager in the community. Some councilmembers wanted me to handle most of the administrative details they had been previously handling while they focused more on overall policy. Others objected to this, feeling they were being left out of the loop on decision making. These arguments contributed to the sense of conflict among councilmembers.

I saw the handwriting on the wall months before I was fired. In fact, I saw how the part of the council that wanted me gone was going to trade for the necessary votes about a month before they were actually able to figure out how to do so themselves.

The conflict on the council continued, and the two managers who followed me both had short tenures. Fortunately, they were able to leave for other positions before being fired. It took several elections before the councilmembers who seemed to relish conflict left the council, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

What I've learned from that experience is that when conflict among councilmembers reaches a certain level, you can't solve it by working harder or working smarter. It's time to work on finding a new position.

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Frying Pan into the Fire: Singed but Not Burned

During a three-year period of my career, I transitioned through two local governments as chief administrative officer, and I have professionally and personally lived to tell about the experiences.

In 1989, the city of Cumberland, Maryland, needed to comply with Pennsylvania's health regulations because it got its water from Pennsylvania; thus Cumberland began a process to fluoridate the city water supply at its Pennsylvania treatment source. The Cumberland community was almost immediately polarized over this seemingly innocuous health care issue, which was supported by the local health care community.

A local group began a disinformation campaign that resulted in city council elections that year. The mayor was not reelected, and the city reversed the fluoridation process after only 30 days of implementation. The new mayor, who opposed fluoridation, informed me on his first day in office that, because I was a proponent of fluoridation, he would help me find a new job elsewhere.

I decided to secure my own future, and I applied for other management jobs around the country. I accepted a position in August 1990 as the first CAO in Marshalltown, Iowa. I supplanted a strong mayor incumbent and started working with a number of independent, long-term department heads who had had free rein under the previous CEO.

Imagine my surprise when, in December 1991, The Des Moines Register reported that a Ponzi investment scheme had obliterated \$110 million of the pooled investments of 88 Iowa governments and schools, including about \$7.5 million of Marshalltown's. The Iowa Trust scandal resulted in Marshalltown being sued by the state of Iowa because the city treasurer was president of the pool and a confidant of the pool's organizer.

As part of the city's recovery, the treasurer was asked to resign, and the rest of us had to oversee a \$3 million budget reduction in the middle of the fiscal year, which we accomplished. Because of the city's fiscal doldrums, I again found myself being asked to

think about leaving my CAO position. Again, I voluntarily sought and was able to secure my current position as county manager of Genesee County, New York.

In hindsight, I can see these warning signs in both communities:

1. Policy changes and conflict existed among councilmembers over specific local issues.
2. Community reaction and antagonism to city government and perceived wrongs were apparent. Minority opinions tended to dominate media reports, and headlines and perceptions portrayed a dysfunctional local government.
3. Elected mayor "situations" were evident: an incumbent who took a proactive health care stand was defeated by a single issue; a mayor who had earlier been declared incompetent by family members didn't finish his two-year term; and a mayor who couldn't abide being part-time aligned himself with a long-serving power broker.

Survival Tips

Here are my recommendations for job survival:

Continue building your community visibility, profile, and presence; perform your duties and responsibilities; and act in the best interest of the local government and taxpayers. In Iowa, the city attorney and I, with the aid of the Securities and Exchange Commission and state attorney general's office, were able to recoup 95 percent of the invested funds that Marshalltown had initially lost. I had nothing to be ashamed of, and there was no misfeasance or malfeasance on my part in either management position I held.

Build personal support with strong family ties, friends, and community relationships.

Continue monitoring the enactment of council policy directives and fiscal recommendations to ensure the functioning of essential local government services.

Take stock of career opportunities and decide if leaving under your own terms (in spite of certain employment agreement safety nets) is better than trying to ride out the storm and deal with the toll on family members. Ask yourself: Is the possible moral victory coupled with professional frustration and family angst worth the price?

I'm in my 16th year of service in Genesee County, where I think I've proven my capabilities and brought a successful blend of local government leadership, competence, and consistency to the manager's position. Adherence to the core tenets of our profession's Code of Ethics and my own core beliefs and principles, and my education and experience along with my having been mentored by an extremely capable ICMA colleague throughout my career sustained me through the trials and tribulations and helped me come out on the other side.

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