

Navigating Successful Working Relationships with Your Elected Officials



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Professor Deborah Roberts
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University of Virginia, Charlottesville
<http://www.coopercenter.org/leadership/>

“Navigating Successful Working Relationships with Your Elected Officials”: OVERVIEW

- It is far harder to sail through uncertain, rough waters than to walk on dry ground – that is the tough reality for today’s council-manager relationships. You may be swimming in political waters, but you need to sail by the compass of professionalism and servant leadership.
- This lively session focuses on key “navigator skills” to increase your versatility and resiliency so you can help your governing body better collaborate. Every day you need skills that are part psychologist, diplomat, coach, team builder, troubleshooter, and mind reader.
- Take away dozens of practical peer tips to increase your social savvy and political astuteness for influencing others and governing yourself. Learn from neuroscience how to “trust your gut, remain cool, and stay balanced” in the midst of divisiveness.



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- Former Director of the University of Virginia’s Graduate Program in Public Administration and Public Policy.
- Former Director of the University of Virginia’s Mid-Career Executive Program for federal government employees.
- Doctorate from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University.

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ICMA-SEI, May 4-11, 2013
SEI, July 14-26, 2013



SECOND CENTURY LEADERSHIP – WHAT SKILLS NEEDED?



Staunton, VA
1908 – 2008

“Our profession is still a truly grand experiment in the Council-Manager form of government. SEI is the premier professional and personal development opportunity for us as stewards of democracy.”

Scott Sauer, Harnett County, NC

“Navigating – Swimming in Political Waters” Bob O’Neill, ICMA Milwaukee 2011 Session

- We swim in political waters in how to effectively implement policy, but what part of the food chain are we?
- Politics is more contentious and less civil, so as professionals, we will have to become more politically savvy, yet retain our non-partisan approach – walking a fine line. We need to enhance our community building skills.

**NOT SHIP'S CAPTAIN, But NAVIGATOR:
through storms & around the shoals**

- Understand and refocus unrealistic and/or conflicting community expectations
- Identify and involve relevant players
- Anticipate political timing, fallout, consequences
- Balance a respect for local tradition with the need for thoughtful change – finding low hanging fruit.



**Governing in Democracy's Waters:
Dynamic Tension in Elected Roles**

"ME & MY"

"WE & OUR"

**Representative
Role - Interests**

**"Stewards of the
Whole" Role - Policy**

Independence

Interdependence

Individuality

Collaborative

"Cathering"



"All for One"

**I. Navigating Strategies with
Your Governing Body**

1. You are the navigator – strategist – but not the "ship's captain."
2. Given the external dynamics and the many institutional obstacles built into the system and their roles, there are many ways for a governing body to become a dysfunctional team.
3. To help your governing body to be more effective, you need to be very skillful at navigating so they can be effective.

"Best Navigator Leader I Know"

- Center your thoughts on a Local Government Manager who personifies the best in our profession and excels at working with elected officials
- Reflect on *what were the capabilities and the qualities of the person that most impressed you?*
- KEY WORDS to share:

**I. NAVIGATING SKILLS FOR GOVERNING
BODIES - BUILD SEA WORTHY CRAFT**

<p>Self Awareness COMPASS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values Based • Purpose Driven • Self Insight 	<p>Social Awareness RADAR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Reconnaissance • Stewardship
<p>Self-Governing RUDDER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even Keel Control • Ballast Judgment • Trustworthiness 	<p>Relationship Skills PROPULSION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Shared Leadership

**Your EQ Skills for
Professional and Life Success**

<p>Self Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Self-Awareness • Accurate Self-Assessment • Self-Confidence 	<p>Social Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Leveraging Diversity • Organizational Awareness • Stewardship
<p>Self-Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self Control • Trustworthiness • Conscientiousness • Adaptability • Achievement Drive • Initiative & optimism 	<p>Relationship Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Others • Leadership • Influence • Communication • Change Agent • Conflict Management • Networking, Building Bonds • Teamwork & Collaboration

I. Navigating Success - Emotional Intelligence Skills

- Scientific research proves Emotional Intelligence (EQ) skills explain success in public life and most professions.
- The bottom line business research shows that EQ skills account for as much as 80% to 90% of effectiveness in leadership positions.
- “A revolutionary, paradigm-shattering idea -- the kind of idea that does not just advance the conversation, but permanently alters it.” -*Harvard Business Review*

II. NAVIGATING SKILLS FOR GOVERNING BODIES - BUILD SEA WORTHY CRAFT

Self Awareness COMPASS •Values Based •Purpose Driven •Good Judgment	Social Awareness RADAR • Empathy • Reconnaissance • Stewardship
Self-Governing RUDDER •Even Keel Control Ballast •Trustworthiness	Relationship Skills PROPULSION • Collaboration • Shared Leadership

Self Awareness COMPASS Social Awareness RADAR PEER LEARNING - Your NAVIGATING Strategies	Self Management RUDDER Relationship Skills PROPULSION With Your Elected officials ?
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Self Awareness COMPASS <i>Lane Ramsey, Chesterfield County, VA</i> • Never let your ego be bigger than theirs • Must have a sense of humor • Be sensitive, recognize your feelings and values • Never challenge them publicly	Social Awareness RADAR • Know each elected official • Treat them with respect • Really listen to them • Make them look good, give them all the credit • Flatter them, spoil them • Never let them read it in the newspapers
Self Governing RUDDER • Be slow to anger • Be honest, never give away your integrity • Need credibility with your community and staff before you have the trust of electeds. • Take risks, adapt, innovate and improvise but never get out in front of them unless planned	Relationship Skills PROPULSION • Don't play games with them. • Encourage them to talk to staff (and expect feedback from staff). • Communicate, communicate • Coach them (tactfully) • Shame them to do the right thing (privately)

Self Awareness COMPASS <i>Bob Striping, 4 Communities Texas & Virginia</i> • Have a high self esteem so you are not so bothered when you lose on issues • Must have a sense of humor • Recognize your feelings and values	Social Awareness RADAR • All of us see and live our lives through filters, and one is our experience. • Your relationship with them, as a group and individually, is so critical to your effectiveness.
Self Governing RUDDER • Be optimistic about the council-manager plan and your role in it. • Elected relationships is an art that comes from painful, experiential learning. • Counting to Four: On any day a majority have to want you to stay.	Relationship Skills PROPULSION • Have a passion for building these Number One relationships. • Electeds are often better at relationships & connecting than we are – they win & govern by personal connections. • Timing is everything, ex. No controversial issue 3 months before & after elections.

Self Awareness COMPASS <i>Regina Williams, Norfolk, VA & San Jose, CA</i> • Confirmed people-watcher, but still an Introvert • Can do this job only if I take care of myself, reenergize, let go • My role is how I help them make the best policies for the city	Social Awareness RADAR • One-on-One listen for the deeper meaning “what makes person tick” • If member feels awkward about voicing a real concern, I bring up the issue before Council • As nonprofessionals, unlikely they will give us strict priorities and likely they will change as they go along.
Self Management RUDDER • Be a confidante to Council but not a buddy, often just listen & don't express my views • Don't break trust that any one instills in me • Stay out, have no comment if they complain about each other	Relationship Skills PROPULSION • Communicate regularly, frequently, just-in-time, no surprises, brief every Friday • Float concepts without details to see if interest, who supports • Get council to agree ahead to their operating roles, “how we will do it” (ex. interactions with developers)

<p>Self Awareness COMPASS Gary O'Connell, Charlottesville, VA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You "serve" the community, but never lose sight that if you don't serve the Council well, you won't be around to serve the community. Humility yet be self confident, anticipate and lead. 	<p>Social Awareness RADAR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always treat them with respect - they are the Bosses. Good Councilors hear things in the community that you don't use these "radar reconnaissance." Expect that they react differently in public than what you see/hear in private.
<p>Self Governing RUDDER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always take the high road -the more public it is, the more important to be extremely professional. Focus on the Positives, if you allow it, you can become the magnet for the naysayers. Disciplined, detailed follow-up on Council issues builds trust for bigger, strategic issues. 	<p>Relationship Skills PROPULSION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Relationship building is most important or you lose the opportunity to get to big issues. Work behind the scenes, give them public credit, but step up front in a crisis or disaster. Build on the special role that the Mayor plays, for a special, very trusting relationship.

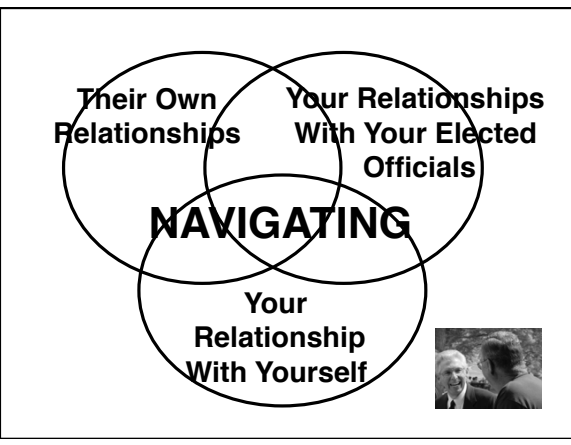
"SWAP NAVIGATING ADVICE"

"GIVE"

You write down your words of wisdom and turn in your sheets And give me your email address

"GET"

EMAIL Updated Advice Manual for working with Elected Officials from your peers nationwide



COMPASS - FROM THE ROMANS TO THE GPS SMART PHONE: RELATIONSHIPS



Latin Origin – Latin "Com" (meaning 'with') and "Passus" (meaning 'a step or pace')

Shakespeare used 'compass' in at least fourteen different senses. Webster's Dictionary gives fifteen definitions.

Ex. As a noun, A NAVIGATIONAL INSTRUMENT, a device for determining directions, circle or circumference, limits, range, capability, ingenuity, proper proportion, Or as a verb to go around or encircle, to measure, to achieve, to understand, to comprehend, to divide equally.

COMPASS RELATIONSHIPS -- SAME CITY MANAGER - Three Elected Officials With Very Different Feedback:

"My impression is that information, other than Council agenda material, is shared unevenly. As a result, I often feel like I am behind the curve."

"City manager tends to let personal position influence actions after council position has been established."

"We have not been an easy council to work for. Our own opinions are very diverse – Our City manager would have to be clairvoyant to judge council direction before votes are actually taken. We do not tend to let each other or city manager know in advance of council meeting what information or advice that might be needed at meetings, leaving staff apprehensive."

COMPASS - NAVIGATING – BEGIN BY RELATIONSHIP BUILDING SEA WORTHY CRAFT

"If you read the rest of the evaluations you would conclude I was doing pretty well as a relatively new City Manager. But it was clear I was not cutting it with my communications - and that was causing some distrust.

I felt like they were asking more then I could deliver --" I want to know what you know that I should know before we know we need to know it, but don't overwhelm me with information."

I when on to develop great relationships with the council members of the first two quotes - both of whom became mayors.

(Jackson Tuttle, City Manager, Williamsburg, VA)

SEA WORTHY CRAFT: TRUSTWORTHY

Relationships are everything. As a manager, you are dead in the water if your Board, Commission, or Council does not trust you. You must build relationships, and you ignore them at your peril. You need to get to know the elected officials and what is in their minds.

One day's opponent will be your best friend on the governing body the next day. Unless individuals are total idealogues, you need to figure how to **convince each** of the merits of each proposal.

Virginia State Delegate David Toscano, Former Mayor of Charlottesville VA, ICMA Session

III. RADAR ALERTS - SAILING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY:

Common Reality with Your Governing Bodies

- 1. Tougher Environment Today**
- 2. Easier to Become dysfunctional with low(er) Performance , to 'go off course,'** due to environmental stress, role demands, group dynamics, personalities, and operating conditions.

Democracy's Waters – Many Governing Body Challenges – NO SHIP'S CAPTAIN!

- ▲ Vague Task Definition
- ▲ No Hierarchy
- ▲ No Specialization
- ▲ Little Feedback
- ▲ Open Meetings



*Dr. John Nalbandian
Lawrence, Kansas*

120 Seconds Around Table –

Each share a few words, to Describe the Reality of....

"My Governing Body's Performance...."

Your Governing Body Shown Both?

SURVIVE-ALL or THRIVE-ALL

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fear, Blame ■ Envy ■ Anger, Bitterness ■ Selfishness ■ Defensiveness ■ Judgmental ■ Jealousy, Pettiness ■ Passive, Resistant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Generosity ■ Empathy ■ Cooperation ■ Self Sacrifice ■ Stewardship ■ Compassion ■ Ingenuity, Innovative |
|---|--|

Increased Stress for Your Elected Officials in the last three years:

- Working more hours?
- More complicated, divisive, polarizing issues?
- "Aging" likely retirements in next five years?
- Losing members experienced with the governing process?
- More "Outlier" Members – Single Issue, Conflicts with many, etc.



Elected officials have jobs, other lives. Still elected officials stepped forward to work long hours on democracy's front lines. They face the citizens every day. They do so without much appreciation.

"If it wasn't this hard, they wouldn't need us..."

We can have a thick skin, but still our feelings get hurt. Most of us get tied up in defensiveness. We need to master a very strong messaging communications strategy.

Jim Keene
City Manager,
Palo Alto
Formerly
Berkeley, CA
And Tuscon, AZ



"Wave the Magic Wand" for Better Elected Relationships:

WRITE DOWN : Two things I would want to become real would be:

1. _____

2. _____

- Your relationship with Elected officials is your Number One Work Relationship, But Elected Officials Relationship with you is usually NOT their Number One Relationship, they are more focused on each other.

- "For local elected officials, their Number One Constituent needs to be the other members of the governing body." (Jim Oliver, City Manager of Norfolk and Portsmouth, VA)

- If they are focused on YOU as Their Number One relationship, you may be in trouble!

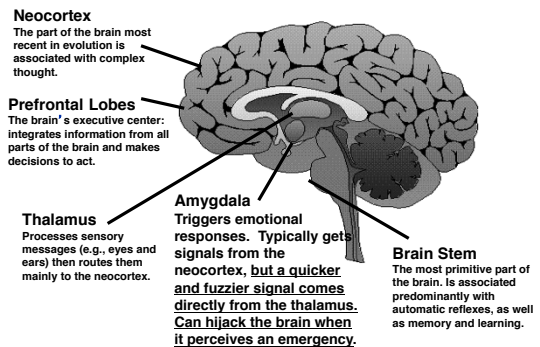
- "Elected officials are always more important to you than you are to them." (Professor Bob Matson, SEI).

IV. THRIVE-ALL - COMING THROUGH STORMS : EVEN KEEL, BALLAST AND RUDDER STRATEGIES

1. Why Do Smart Humans Do Dumb Things?

2. HARDSHIP AS A TEACHER – Learning from a tough situation

The Human Brain



"SHARK ATTACKS – AMYGDALA HIJACKINGS"

Why did I or Someone say or do such a "dumb" thing?!!



Facing a "predator" Amygdala reacts in 1/400th of a second

Self Defense - Provoked by value conflicts and threats -

DEEP WATER BELOW SURFACE: Local Elected Body is always negotiating and responding to values conflicts – every "Shark Attack" Issue is a Combo of Deep Conflicting Values, often "Beneath the Surface" of the debate



STORMY WATERS – AMYGDALA Hijackings Consequences

- **Out-of-control emotions deprive us of our cognitive abilities.** During a hijacking, when we are suddenly flooded with sensations, even smart people "become dumb."
- **Consequences are negative and lasting,** often keeping us from realizing our deepest values in positive action (these values are often our emotional triggers).
- **Ripple Effects.** Interpersonal ineptitude in leaders lowers everyone's performance and can be contagious!

"ANCIENT HISTORY" STORMS – YOURS & THEIRS!

How Old are You in the Tough Moment? Emotional Triggers Take You Back to Childhood Experience –

Explains Why Your Operative IQ can drop 30 points When you suffer an amygdala hijacking

PEER ADVICE:

There is no substitute for knowing ahead your triggers or blind spots -- this awareness will greatly help in managing yourself.

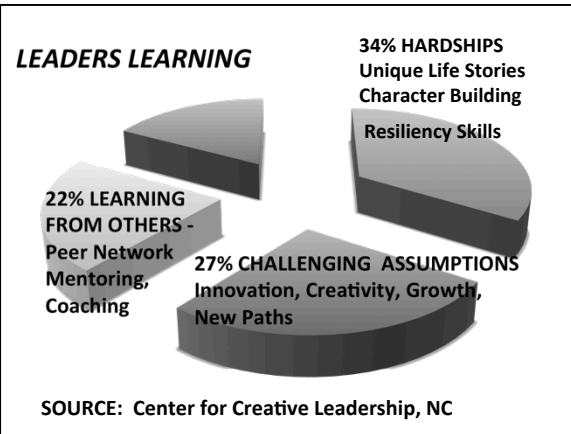
Trust Your Gut Instincts?

- Often called "gut feelings, business instincts, savvy, professional judgment, or intuition," it is an uncanny ability to detect patterns, perhaps subconsciously, that other people either overlook or mistake for random noise.
- **Leaders use gut instincts to solve complex problems when logical methods simply won't do.**

"When to Trust Your Gut", Alden Hayashi, Harvard Business Review, February 2001

Trust Your Gut Instincts?

- As local government managers and elected policymakers dealing with complex issues with many interests at stake, **you must rely on your gut instincts.**
- **But beware -- your gut instincts are set up to be incredibly fast (1/40th second) not highly accurate!**
- **You need** to have powerful self-checking mechanisms, self reflection, and sound feedback -- **the EQ skills.**



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: SEA WORTHY CRAFT
Michael Willis, former ICMA President, City Manager in Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain

- Productive relationship = Two ways, each has to get something
- Local elected officials are like relatives, you can't pick them – you just have to learn how to live with them. Be humble – It's our job to fit in with them, not vice versa.
- RELATIONSHIP BUILDING (learned the hard way): 1. RESPECT 2. RELATE 3. RIGHT - Legally, Ethically, Morally – Not just by law, but by the spirit of our ICMA Code of Ethics)

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: SEA WORTHY CRAFT
LEARNING FROM HARDSHIP – Michael Willis,

His Nemesis got elected to council - difficult and nasty at every meeting.

Michael's RESPECT: "No matter what the indignity or embarrassment, I will put it aside. I will achieve my objectives, I will put up with criticism, I will not engage in tit for tat, I have to separate myself or this person will suck the energy out of me."

Mayor's Advice "GEM THAT SPARKLES AND SHINES: "This will be the making of you... I won't judge you on your mistakes but on how well you recover from them." Mayor trusted me – we became friends for life – "When I needed you, you were there, and when I didn't need you, you weren't there."

What's My Nemesis? Examples

- Conflict over our values
- Very different personality
- Lack of a quality you admire
- Offensive behaviors and attitudes
- Mix of attractive and unattractive qualities
- Different basis for decisions
- Unpredictable, hard to read.
- Conflict over defining our roles
- Very different life experiences

LEARNING FROM HARDSHIPS –
"CRUCIBLE" STORM EXPERIENCE

In duos, discuss a difficult episode with your elected governing body or its members in terms of what it taught you

WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT HOW TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

PEER ADVICE - EQ Self Insight

- Never let your ego be bigger than their egos.
- Listen to your inner voice and conscience -- if you're not confident about a particular subject or person - explore why, then act to strengthen and improve your position.
- Can do this job only if you take care of yourself, re-energize, and let go.

***EQ = Deep Listening
to Yourself and Others***

Know your own emotions and how to keep disruptive emotions in check.

Can laugh at yourself.

Admit your own mistakes and learn from them.

Sense the effect your emotions have on others.

Listen for others' emotions and empathize with them, building rapport.

***EQ = Deep Listening
to Yourself and Others***

Carefully listen to other people and know how to communicate effectively.

Skillfully listen to a group's emotional currents and discern power relationships.


Be comfortable with new ideas and new information.

Act ethically and build trust through integrity and reliability.

V. NAVIGATING SKILLS FOR GOVERNING BODIES - CONCLUSION

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Ex. As a noun, A NAVIGATIONAL INSTRUMENT, a device for determining directions, circle or circumference, limits, range, capability, ingenuity, proper proportion, Or as a verb to go around or encircle, to measure, to achieve, to understand, to comprehend, to divide equally.


COMPASS → RUDDER → RADAR → PROPULSION → COLLABORATIVE “WE” GOVERNANCE

“GEMS OF WISDOM” PEER ADVICE

Find a new partner, and share The Best Piece of Peer Advice You Have Ever Had for getting your elected officials to effectively collaborate.

OUR COMPASS – NAVIGATING BASICS

CORE VALUES DRIVE OUR ACTIONS



1. ***COURAGE*** -- Innovation challenging assumptions and risk taking
2. ***CONVICTION*** – Passionate about Mission, even when “at sea” and hard to “see ahead”
3. ***CONSTANCY*** – thriving in face of Hardships, Thrive-All, not Survive-All
4. ***COMMITMENT*** to each other on the journey – ***TEAMWORK***, not Solo work

**Revisit Who are "YOU?"
RESILIENT NAVIGATORS**

"Characters" with Character & Integrity

Responsible Stabilizers, Problem Solvers

Public Servants with an Inner "Fire in the Belly"

Community Builders - Facilitate people coming together


Pioneers Moving to a Better Future - Innovators, Learners

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**"Join Us for a Extraordinary
Leadership Journey"**



**July 14-26,
2013**



**LIFE-CHANGING, THOUGHT PROVOKING
LEADERSHIP LABORATORY**

"SEI is a personal and professional audit - powerful in its contemplation and self-discovery that challenges convention and our assumptions - that frees us to make profound changes."

- Jamie Verbrugge, City Manager, Brooklyn Park, MN




July 14-26, 2013



EXCEPTIONAL TEAM CULTURE - 'SAFE HARBOR' TRUST

INTENSE SERIOUS WORK - ENJOY TO THE FULLEST

NATIONWIDE PROFESSIONAL KINSHIP NETWORK





**SEI ALUMNI ON-CORE
PROGRAM
(AUGUST 5-8, 2013)**

**Leadership Return on Your Investment - Bring Your
Core Challenge to Rethink, Reframe, Reimagine**

"I was encouraged to open up and receive the bounty of friendship and support that awaited me."

- Rochelle Small-Toney
Savannah, GA




**WE COME TO YOU -
BUILD YOUR LEADERSHIP
TEAM OF CHANGE AGENTS**

- High Performance Organization (HPO) Model
- On-site Consulting and Seminars by Faculty - ex. Council Retreats, Leadership Team retreats, Specialized seminars

