



**ICMA**

# LEADING AND MANAGING OTHERS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT eBook SERIES PART 2:

Empowering Others

Performance and Capability

Recognition and Motivating Others

Difficult Conversations

What Matters Most

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# INTRODUCTION

Like any leadership role, managers have the responsibility of leading and managing others in the workplace. In local government, it is essential that managers are able to build one-on-one relationships with their staff, not only because it makes for a great work environment, but also because successful relationships equal happy employees, which could result in the organizational and community excellence you strive for.

The purpose of the ICMA Leadership in Local Government eBook Series is to provide professionals of all career stages with leadership best practices and tips to help their communities achieve organizational excellence.

Each eBook is a compilation of articles from ICMA's *PM Magazine* and are written by thought leaders in and

out of local government. The focus is on three main areas of leadership and management: (1) managing yourself, (2) leading and managing others, and (3) leading teams and change.

In the next four sections of **Part 2: Leading and Managing Others in Local Government**, we will take you through different levels of leading and managing others on your team, including: empowering others, performance and capability, recognition and motivating others, difficult conversations, and what matters most to emerging leaders, public administrators and the "next gen". These four sections are foundational to any successful leader. They will help you elevate your skills and get you one step closer to developing organizational excellence to achieve a successful community.



EMPOWERING  
**OTHERS**



# ENHANCE YOUR LEADERSHIP BY TAPPING INTO STAFF ATTITUDES

By Patrick Malone

Local government managers are expected to be innovative and successful. Whether it be public health, crime prevention, going green, or developing a self-sustaining economic base, the nation looks to them for successful approaches on every scale.

But leading in today's environment is not easy, especially for managers working with shrinking budgets, fewer qualified personnel, and less support from state and federal entities.

Recent events highlight these challenges. Both local elected and appointed officials struggle with how to involve residents and attract investment as they plan for the future. Residents expect more services and less taxes from their over-burdened communities.

And when the unexpected occurs—the devastating tornado in Moore, Oklahoma, or Superstorm Sandy's far-reaching effects—resources are stretched to the limit as communities grapple with the results of devastating natural disasters.

What today's managers need are as many tools as they can muster to do an extremely difficult job. Many times they approach this challenge by building skill sets or adding certifications for selected staff members. Not a bad approach but in the midst of the chaos, the best tools and most valuable organizational assets are not new technical talents.

The most beneficial tools within reach of the public sector manager are the minds of those they lead. Understanding and tapping into the mindsets of staff can build lasting synergy for organizations large and small.

## Practical Workplace Applications

Author Susanne Cook-Grueter's groundbreaking 2004 work on the developmental mind provides a solid foundation for understanding the importance to leaders of tapping into specific mental attitudes possessed by those with whom they work. Cook-Grueter points out

## WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THE DEVELOPMENTAL MIND WE GET A CLEARER PICTURE OF TWO KEY ISSUES: 1) HOW WELL A PARTICULAR INDIVIDUAL IS SUITED TO THE TASK AT HAND; AND 2) HOW WELL THE INDIVIDUAL CAN READ AND INTERACT WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIFFERENT PREFERENCES.

that when we understand the developmental mind we get a clearer picture of two key issues: 1) how well a particular individual is suited to the task at hand; and 2) how well the individual can read and interact with people who have different preferences.

The benefit to a public sector manager is clear: The greater our ability to assess others, the more effective we can be in tapping into the discretionary energy and thought processes of those whom we lead.

While the breadth and depth of these various temperaments is significantly more intricate than can be addressed here, three mindsets that are the most common found in the workplace are of particular significance to the local public official. When managers understand these temperaments, organizational innovation, synergy, and success are bound to follow.

This article includes three brief scenarios for each way of thinking, which are shown in italics; a detailed description of the developmental stages; and practical suggestions that can be used to create conditions for motivating in the workplace.

### The Opportunist

*Elaine was a long-time employee in the county's consumer protection office. Despite her many years of service, however, it wouldn't be fair to say she was well-liked by her coworkers. They tended to describe her as cutthroat. In a recent team meeting with the agency director, for example, she was quick to point the finger at a colleague, insisting that a confrontation with a customer was not her fault. Team members weren't surprised because she never takes responsibility. In their experience, anytime*

*anyone offered constructive feedback, Elaine quickly rejected it anyway.*

Elaine demonstrates one of the classic signs of an opportunist: a "me versus the world" mentality. One thing about opportunists is they're easy to spot. They tend to be self-oriented, manipulative, and they possess a drive to win in any way possible.

To make matters worse, they feel their approach is completely rational. This is because they see the world as a place where everyone is out for themselves. In the opportunist's view, people are simply competitors in a vast war-torn landscape.

Leading an opportunist is no easy task. They do little for team cohesion and are often more effective working alone. People typically don't like working for opportunists. They often feel betrayed by, and distrusting of, their opportunist colleagues.

As managers, it's important to try to get opportunists to see beyond their own perspective. Invest time in helping opportunists recognize that their actions have impacts on people and the organization in both small and large ways.

It is perhaps best to begin this conversation by acknowledging the value the opportunist brings to the organization (able to work independently, good in emergencies, decisive). Establish rapport and encourage opportunists to share their feelings about the organization. Once opportunists open up, it's much easier to help them understand the contributions of others.

### The Diplomat

*Steve is proud of his role in the parks and recreation office. In fact, he's so proud he can be counted on to*

wear his parks and recreation jacket all year. As a supervisor of three staff handling registration for the city's yearlong programs, he is well-liked by his employees, though they sometimes wish he would go to bat for them a little more often with the city manager's office.

They have some innovative ideas for which they would like to get funding. But Steve is not one to rock the boat and pushing his supervisor too hard is just not something he likes to do.

Diplomats, like Steve, make up the vast majority of first-level supervisors. They define themselves greatly by the organization where they work and by the approval of others. As such, they are loyal souls who thrive on harmony. Confronting authority figures and pushing for the approval of new programs, as in Steve's case, is not their strong suit since it creates an atmosphere of conflict.

They tend to do well in their roles, as assigned, but you're not likely to see them venture beyond those specified job functions. Likewise, diplomats are not the most talented at giving or receiving feedback.

While it might seem leading diplomats would be easy, such is not the case. It is true that diplomats help create a supportive atmosphere, but their risk-averse nature creates tension and frustration among those they lead. Not all work environments remain conflict free for long.

In fact, conflict in organizations is actually a positive thing if handled properly. Since diplomats define themselves through the approval of others, conflict puts them in a risky position they would prefer to avoid.

When leading diplomats it's important to help them build their confidence by aiding them in understanding that they have value beyond how they're seen by others. Diplomats most certainly bring skill sets that are needed by the organization, but their ability to recognize this is often clouded by a lack of internal strength.

A newly discovered self-confidence may help them develop the courage necessary to make tough decisions. It also gives them the fortitude to provide a candid evaluation to an employee or much-needed feedback to a supervisor.

## The Expert

Sara is one of the more accomplished members of the city's office of planning and code compliance. As an architect, she brings an exceptional depth of knowledge in design, planning, and enforcement of city statutes.

No one could dispute her knowledge base, but many would admit she uses that expertise as leverage in any

conflict. Worse, she's been known to use it in a ridiculing and hostile manner. Some have confronted her about this but without the requisite degrees in architectural science, their feedback falls on deaf ears.

Experts like Sara are common in public service where technical skill is rewarded and fostered. Experts are adept at using hard logic and data to gain support for their ideas—something appealing to county commissions and city councils. Logic rules in the world of experts, and the average resident is easily impressed with their quick answers and airtight thinking.

Unfortunately, this impressive intellectual palette comes with a price. Experts are often one-of-a-kind, especially in small communities. As such, they are seldom challenged. When they are, they aren't likely to accept the feedback with grace unless it comes from someone they consider to be their expert-equal.

Experts are much like diplomats in their need to feel they matter in the workplace. What they lack are the fundamental skills or interest to work in teams and with others who may not have their professional background.

Managers are well-advised to help experts appreciate the roles of others in achieving an organization's mission. This won't be easy, but experts are smart people.

Once they become more aware of the contributions made by others, they are more likely to be able to accept other viewpoints as valid. Strategically placing them on high-performing teams where they can contribute in concert with staff will also help mitigate the more negative inclinations of the expert mind.

To be fair, the opportunist, diplomat, and expert bring positive aspects to the workplace. Opportunists are driven and energetic. Diplomats can bring people together even in the most challenging times. And experts, through their extensive knowledge, can play important roles in project management and change initiatives. But taken to the extreme, all three temperaments have serious limitations.

As today's local governments lead the way in innovative approaches to public leadership, tapping into the unexplored aspects of these mindsets can prove beneficial in tackling the challenges of that leadership.

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# STOP SCARING THE COMPETENCE OUT OF YOUR EMPLOYEES:

*How to shift employees into their “smart state”*

By Christine Comaford

Most leaders know that command and control is obsolete and that fear doesn't motivate employees. In fact, command and control does quite the opposite. Only the worst “bully bosses” make it a practice to scream at an employee, call the individual abusive names, or threaten to fire the person. Yet even good managers can unintentionally strike fear in the hearts of their workforce. More accurately, strike it into their brains.

And the consequences are more dire than a manager might realize. From time to time, all managers probably say or do things that spark unconscious fears in employees. They might dismiss their ideas or give performance feedback a little too harshly. The primitive fight, flight, or freeze part of the brain takes control. When that happens—when people are stuck in what I call the “critter state”—all they can focus on is their own survival. In other words, everything that makes

them good employees—their ability to innovate, to collaborate, to logically think through problems—goes out the window.

All decision making is distilled down to one question: What course of action will keep me safest? Obviously, an organization needs its employees to be in control of their whole brain—especially the parts responsible for the emotional engagement and intelligent decision making that lead to high performance. Today's economy demands it. That's why leaders need to know how to use the best tactics from neuroscience to get teams unstuck and shift them into their so-called smart state. So how might we be inadvertently holding back our teams and crippling an organization's culture? What, exactly, are leaders doing to send people into their critter states? Here are some common offenders.

1. **You help out by giving solutions. Or, you advocate when you should be inquiring.** When we consistently tell people what to do instead of encouraging them to figure things out on their own, we develop a company full of order-takers instead of innovators. By training them to always ask, we create a workforce of employees who are perpetually frozen in their critter state. On the other hand, when we engage them in solving problems themselves, we create a sense of safety, belonging, and mattering, which are the three things humans crave most after basic needs like food and shelter are met. And, of course, we help them develop a sense of ownership that will serve them—and the employing organization—well.

Start inquiring and see what happens. Ask: “How would you do it?” “What impact might your course of action have?” After you do this a few times with someone, the person will start expecting you to ask questions instead of give orders. He or she will start coming to you with ideas, seeking feedback and validation. And after a few of these sessions, the person will be saying, “I have a plan, here it is, and speak now if you aren’t okay with it.” Finally, she’ll stop coming to you altogether. Aim for five inquiries for every advocacy. An advocacy is when a person gives orders and tells people what to do instead of engaging them in finding a solution, which is what inquiring does. You’ll be amazed by what a powerful difference this makes with the employees and the organization.

2. **Meetings are heavy on sharing and point-proving, light on promises and requests.** Why might a meeting scare employees? Because confusion and uncertainty create fear. Meetings that are rambling and unfocused send people into the fight-flight-freeze of the critter state. On the other hand, short, sweet, high-energy meetings that have a clear agenda keep everyone in their smart state. The key is to understand these five types of communication:
  1. Information-sharing.
  2. Sharing of oneself.
  3. Debating, decision-making, or point proving.
  4. Requests.
  5. Promises.

The typical meeting is heavy on the first three and light on the last two. Ideally, a person should focus on only enough information-sharing in order to solicit requests from parties who need something and promises from parties who will fill that need. Tune up your communication by sharing information by e-mail and keeping meetings shorter as a result. If everyone learns that information will be shared 24 hours before

a meeting, they will come better prepared to tackle the issues at hand and the result will be meetings that are efficient and effective, and that keep your team happy and clipping along to glorious accountability and execution.

6. **You give feedback to employees without first establishing rapport.** Imagine for a moment that your employees are antelopes. Because you have authority, they quite naturally view you as a lion. It’s not that you’re purposely ruling with teeth and claws. It’s simply their critter brains at work, peering out and coding who is a friend and who is a foe. That means unless you can get employees to see you as just another antelope, you won’t be able to influence them. They’ll be too busy ensuring their own survival to accept your feedback.

I could offer neuroscience tactics for helping leaders get inside employees’ heads and truly establish rapport. But most of them are too complex to convey in an article. Meta programs—how a person processes information is one of the most potent—so here are three shortcut phrases that help people feel safe enough to shift out of their critter state.

- **“What if. . . .”** When you use this preface to an idea or suggestion, you remove ego and reduce emotion. You’re curious—not forcing a position, but kind of scratching your head and pondering. This enables someone to brainstorm more easily with you.
- **“I need your help.”** We call this a dom-sub swap, because when the dominant person uses it, they are enrolling the subordinate person and asking them to rise up and swap roles. This is an especially effective phrase when you want a person to change his or her behavior or take on more responsibility.
- **“Would it be helpful if . . . .”** When someone is stuck in the critter state and spinning or unable to move forward, offering up a solution will help illuminate a possible course of action or positive outcome.

7. **You focus on problems rather than outcomes.**

First, some background. People lean toward three default roles—victim, rescuer, or persecutor. Dr. Stephen Karpman first created this concept, and his article detailing these roles won the Eric Berne Memorial Scientific Award in 1972.<sup>1</sup> The roles are interdependent—there must be a persecutor for there to be a victim for the rescuer to save—and they play out every day in the workplace. Together, these roles make up the tension triangle—and when we’re

in it we're problem focused. We see everything as a problem, which causes anxiety, which leads to a reaction, which leads to another problem. It's a self-perpetuating cycle. The solution is to switch your focus from problems to outcomes. Instead of asking, "What's wrong?" and "Why is this happening?" we should ask, "What do we want?" and "How will we create it?" Being outcome focused feels different. It's empowering and energizing and fills you with confidence. It firmly places you in your smart state, where possibility, choice, innovation, love, and higher consciousness are abundant. Victims become outcome creators. Rescuers become insight creators. Persecutors become action creators.

So, how do you make the switch? First, identify each role that you and the other person are playing. Speak to the other person as the positive counterpart. If that person is in victim mode and you tend to be a rescuer, don't say things like "I'll make it better for you" or "Let me help you." Instead, say, "What outcome would you like?" and "What will having that do for you?" If you do this in every conversation, and teach others to make the shift as well, you will transform your culture and quickly start getting the outcomes you want.

Also realize that "change" can be framed the wrong way. Almost all leaders want—probably need—their organizations to change. It's the only way that growth can be achieved. Yet, people inherently resist change. In fact, according to business development executive Rodger Bailey's groundbreaking work on meta programs in the workplace,<sup>2</sup> 65 percent of Americans can tolerate change only if it is couched in a specific context (see author Shelle Rose Charvet's book on meta programs, *Words That Change Minds*, for a source on Rodger Bailey's work<sup>3</sup>). That context is "sameness with exception." What does this mean? Essentially, it means leaders need to present the

change as merely an improvement to what already is being done: The bad stuff is being removed, and good stuff is being added. Seriously, this is the best way to package a change message. And don't use the C-word. Use "growth" instead. By the way, resistance isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's just the first step on the organizational path.

The other four steps are mockery, usefulness, habitual, and new standard. But once you can clear the resistance hurdle—and it will go fairly quickly when you present change the way I just described—you're well on your way. Did you recognize leaders—even yourself—in the list above? If so, you're not alone. And the good news is that once you can make some relatively simple changes, you are likely to see dramatic improvements in your results. All leaders want to outperform, outsell, and out-innovate the competition. And most of us have teams that are quite capable of doing so. We just need to stop scaring the competence out of them.

## References

- 1 Stephen Karpman, "Fairy Tales and Script Drama Analysis," *Transactional Analysis Bulletin* 7, no 26 (1968): 39–43. For more information on Dr. Stephen Karpman's work, see <http://www.karpmmandramatriangle.com/index.html>.
- 2 Rodger Bailey's work in NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP) particularly his Language and Behavior (LAB) Profile, is the foundation of Shelle Rose Charvet's *Words That Change Minds*.
- 3 Shelle Rose Charvet, *Words That Change Minds*, 2nd ed. (Kendall Hunt, 2010).

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# PERFORMANCE **AND CAPABILITY**





# ASSESSING AN ORGANIZATION'S READINESS FOR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

By Howard Risher

"Can't live with it, can't live without it" might be a good way to describe the status of employee performance management in public organizations at all levels. The practice has been a frequent theme in "Dilbert" comic strips. Managers and their staffs probably agree—the way performance management has been handled has made its value negligible. Some critics would argue it's a no-win for everyone. And that is true in every sector.

Despite the resistance, however, in some organizations performance management is an accepted and valued process that has contributed to improved performance. In fact, studies by Gallup show that performance management is central to employee engagement, and engaged employees are more productive,

have lower turnover and absenteeism, and have better safety records. Some also argue that younger workers who have grown up with video games, with their instantaneous feedback and rewards for good performance, expect the same when they go to work. Thus, many argue that the payoff from investing in more effective performance systems easily offsets the cost.

The pressure for improved performance seems to be true everywhere, from our intelligence community to our public libraries and to our public schools. A thread that is relevant at every level of government is that employees and their individual work efforts are or should be a core issue in initiatives to improve performance. Another thread, however, is that the many crit-

ics and reported problems over the years have made many public officials skeptical. They do not see the performance management system as a tool to improve performance. This article focuses on the steps that agencies should consider to build support for more effective performance management practices.

This article follows from a study funded by the IBM Center for the Business of Government.<sup>1</sup> It reflects conclusions drawn from a survey conducted by the author and Dr. Charles Fay (of Rutgers University) that included state and local jurisdictions, colleges and universities, and a group of corporations.

Our survey builds on a recent McKinsey and Company study that looked at the impact of selected management practices on the success of more than 700 companies in four countries.<sup>2</sup> That study is relevant here because it helps to explain why there is a shared commitment to performance in the typical corporate culture. Culture and the emphasis on performance are central to the management of employee performance.

## What Is Effective Employee Performance Management?

In many organizations, public and private, the existing employee performance system should be allowed to die. In these organizations, managers go through the motions, complete the forms, and then no doubt put the ritual out of their minds until it is required again a year later. The practice exists on paper but it has no practical value; managers would like to see it eliminated. Even the human resources (HR) managers in these organizations would be reluctant to defend the practice.

On the one hand, the problems are real and all too prevalent. On the other hand, we know how to manage employee performance effectively. The Gallup analyses show how simple, commonsense practices can contribute to improved performance. Their focus is on the day-to-day interactions between the manager and the manager's staff.

We know, for example, that employees need to know what's expected of them. It's also important for employees to know their opinions count and that they feel their jobs are important and that they receive regular recognition and praise. The Gallup analyses highlight the importance of performance management in high-performing work groups.<sup>3</sup>

By comparison, the traditional appraisal is best seen as a required task—the completion of the form—that is unrelated to the management of work. Performance management, in contrast, starts at the beginning of the year with performance planning and goal setting; involves regular discussions on performance issues,

with feedback and coaching to help the employees reach their goals; and concludes with that same form but with a key difference—the ratings focus on how well the employees performed compared with their performance plans. Ideally the process is integral to the day-to-day management of the organization.

When performance is managed effectively, it contributes to a sense of engagement, which Gallup defines as employees who “work with passion and feel a profound connection to their employer. They feel involved in and enthusiastic about their work.” Every employer would of course like to have workers who feel this way. These are the employees who are likely to stand out as high performers. The goal should be to increase the number of employees who are engaged and committed to the success of their employer.

Not too many years ago, the purpose of performance appraisal was simple—to ensure workers met minimal performance standards. Workers were required to comply with expectations dictated by supervisors and with rules established by their employers. The thinking reflected a “machine” model of organizations. Employees were cogs in the wheel. Their jobs were highly prescribed, often by industrial engineers. In that context, compliance was the primary concern. That philosophy is now an impediment to realizing higher performance levels.

The new focus dates roughly to the 1990–1991 recession, when world competition forced companies to reduce costs and rethink the way work was organized and managed. The emergence of “knowledge organizations” is central to the change. The dramatic impact that technology has had on work and jobs is another part of the story. As our economy has shifted from production to services, the focus of performance improvement efforts has shifted from machines to people. Public agencies are clearly moving in the same direction.

The business press throughout the 1990s carried stories confirming that people are capable of much more than their employers expected in the past. The focus now is on what capabilities are inside an employee's head, rather than employees' body strength. The new work paradigm gives employees more discretion and responsibility and raises the bar of performance much higher than in the past. Studies have shown that it is fully possible to expect performance gains of at least 30 to 40 percent with different work management practices.

Our understanding of possible strategies to improve worker performance comes together with the pressure on public agencies to find ways to improve performance. Some experts contend that finding ways to improve public sector performance is an imperative that is going

## WHEN PERFORMANCE IS MANAGED EFFECTIVELY, IT CONTRIBUTES TO A SENSE OF ENGAGEMENT, WHICH GALLUP DEFINES AS EMPLOYEES WHO “WORK WITH PASSION AND FEEL A PROFOUND CONNECTION TO THEIR EMPLOYER.”

to continue to grow in importance. For too many public agencies, the capabilities of the workforce represent a resource that has not been fully tapped.

Ratings are also used for personnel actions such as salary increases and promotions, and they need to be perceived by managers and employees as credible indicators of an individual's performance. If the ratings are not credible, that belief will undermine any use of the information.

Finally, another purpose is to provide feedback to employees that is useful for their individual development planning. This rides on three factors: (1) the manager's ability to provide the feedback in a constructive way, (2) the relevance of the information to an individual's job and career ladder, and (3) the organization's support for employees who want to act on the feedback and pursue developmental programs. Some advocates of performance management contend individual development should be the primary purpose.

Too often, performance management systems in the public sector are, at best, only marginally satisfactory for any purpose. Discussing and agreeing on the goals in tackling this problem are essential beginning steps. Managers and employees alike will need to understand how a new performance management system will benefit the organization.

If a new system is adopted as an isolated change, however, the results are likely to be only more of the same. Putting in place only a new system is analogous to saying financial results will be better if we install a new accounting system. Raising the bar of employee performance even marginally requires a re-examination of the context in which performance is managed. It rides on organizational change and a renewed commitment to better performance. This article outlines the framework for tackling this problem.

### Whose Problem Is This?

The failed practices that have passed for performance management are embedded in an entrenched culture. Entitlement is probably not too strong a description. A central issue is the continued reliance on “living and breathing” step increases (to use a federal reference). The use of pass-fail ratings is another piece of the puzzle. Badly inflated ratings is another. When poor performance has no real consequences, it sends an unfortunate message. But the prospect of moving to more meaningful practices will make many employees and managers anxious.

The overriding issue is that managers and supervisors will have to assume responsibility for managing, not simply supervising, the performance of their people. Ideally, for an organization to be “ready,” managers at all levels will need to own the performance management process. One of the primary reasons performance appraisal is so often not viewed as effective is that managers and supervisors see it as an HR requirement that is almost irrelevant to their day-to-day world. For performance appraisal to become a valued tool, managers need to be involved in shaping it to meet their needs.

This is obviously not an HR problem. HR has virtually no responsibility for managing employee performance. HR needs to provide training, send out the forms, and keep the records. These specialists also need to monitor the process for compliance with policy and for possible problems, but the management of employee performance is a line responsibility. Like those on the sidelines at a football game who carry the water and the towels, the HR staff is not in the room when the manager (or coach) discusses performance.

The most crucial step in preparing an organization to move to a more rigorous approach to performance management is convincing managers to accept this responsibility. Reluctance is a sure signal that they are

not ready. Managers need to understand why this is important to the organization and to accept responsibility for what for many is a new role.

## Communication Is Fundamental

This is at its core a communications problem. That is consistent with the Gallup analyses; Gallup's conclusions focus on the manager's role and the messages the manager's actions send. Managers are responsible for working with their people to define performance expectations, for encouraging their development and career prospects, for recognizing or praising them when they do good work, and for putting them into positions where they can use their capabilities. That is basic to employee engagement.

There is also a higher-level communications issue. Studies of high-performance organizations show that employees want to understand what their organization is working to accomplish and to know how well it is doing. The mission or vision is important; thus, leaders should make clarifying that mission a communication goal. Advertising specialists contend that an ad must run a minimum of 13 times to get through the noise level of other daily messages, which suggests that leaders should repeat their message in different forums.

Employees also want to know their organization is well managed and moving in the right direction. That involves both the statement of mission and the strategic plan, as well as their group's work plan. They want to have confidence in their leaders and their manager. That again is communications.

People also want to understand how their work contributes to their employer's success. The idea of "line of sight" is used to refer to an employee's understanding of how their personal work efforts contribute to the performance of the organization and work group. That is consistent with the cascading-goals strategy—a well-established principle in the business world—that is discussed in textbooks on management.

What is not communicated is also important. This is especially true if a new performance system is to be linked to salary increases or cash awards. It's a question of trust. Managers should keep employees informed of any initiatives to plan new policies or practices. If the goal is to introduce practices that contribute to improved performance, employee acceptance is essential.

## Shifting the Focus to the Better Performers

An interesting aspect of the problem is the impact of W. Edwards Deming, the TQM guru, who referred to

performance appraisal as one of the "deadly diseases of management." He contended that the appraisal process leaves employees "embittered, dejected, and unfit for productive work for many weeks after the rating." He recommended that employers eliminate the practice completely. His criticism was voiced roughly two decades ago, but since then performance management has become far more important.

His criticism of appraisal practices was largely ignored, but in his own way he started a revolution. He was one of the early advocates of what is now called "empowerment," and one of the first to argue that frontline workers were in the best position to satisfy customers. His writing preceded and no doubt contributed to the changes in work management practices that commenced in the 1990s. Now many workers perform their jobs with little, if any, direct supervision; empowerment is no longer a radical idea.

He also influenced another private sector trend. If it is reasonable to expect more, then it is important to recognize and reward those employees—the stars—who stand out. Because corporations want to motivate high performance and not lose their best contributors, recognizing and rewarding star employees with larger salary increases and bonus awards, stock options, individual development, and special assignments has become a common thread running through corporate performance management practices.

Every private company has a few poor performers, but for the most part they are handled quietly and confidentially. The focus is on the high performers. That gives pay for performance in the business world a more positive connotation than it has in the public sector. Too often in public organizations, the few poor performers are the focus of attention, which gives the year-end performance review process a negative connotation.

Private companies celebrate success and reward the individuals responsible for that success. They want their people to exceed their goals. Individual and team success is recognized. Employees at all levels benefit when their employer is successful. Their focus on the positive contributes to an environment that reinforces the value of high performance. It would be decidedly advantageous for public employers to refocus their practices to recognize the contribution of the high performers. Refocusing would build better support for change.

## Best Practices in Performance Management

Another recent study—this one by Ed Lawler, the director of the University of Southern California's Center for Effective Organizations (affiliated with the

Marshall School of Business) and one of the best thinkers in the field—highlights the best practices in performance management.<sup>4</sup> Lawler's focus in the study was on the process and the ties to the organization's strategy and operating goals. His respondents were corporate HR managers, so they presumably worked in organizations where the management of performance is already accepted as a priority.

The ideal performance system, according to Lawler, would be based on these practices:

- "Ownership" of performance management by line managers.
- Training for both managers and the individuals being appraised in the use of the system as well as in the skills and behaviors important to the process.
- Leadership by top management in creating a climate that focuses on high performance.
- Individual performance goals and expected results that are driven by and linked to business strategy.
- Ongoing performance feedback from managers throughout the year.
- Ties between performance ratings and financial rewards (or other consequences).
- "Calibration" committee meetings where managers are expected to compare and level ratings.
- Use of e-HR technology to facilitate the process and the record keeping.

It is important to note that Lawler is focusing on the process of performance management, not the completion of the appraisal form. Significantly, in the article, he does not mention the appraisal form. The year-end appraisal meeting, as an isolated event, is not discussed. Performance management, in contrast, is a process that starts with performance planning at the beginning of the year.

As an emerging best practice, the idea of a calibration committee has proved to increase support among both managers and non-managers. These committees are composed of peer-level managers who are asked to review and approve performance ratings for employees rated at the highest and lowest ratings. It forces managers to develop solid justifications for their ratings, which reduces the rating inflation problem. It also gives employees greater assurance that ratings will be fair and consistent across the organization.

Lawler's conclusions focus on the practices involved in managing employee performance. The performance system brings together and attempts to institutionalize the proven practices managers need in their role as managers of employee performance. His first point about ownership is fundamentally important. His list is

a good starting point for any employer that decides to rethink the way employee performance is managed.

### Public Agencies Are Different

There is no reason to think Lawler would have reached different conclusions if he had studied government organizations. Public agencies are, however, different in one important respect—managers and employees do not make performance the high priority it is in a corporation. The pressure to perform varies from company to company but is understood by every employee; it is endemic in the corporate culture. It is not the same critical issue in government because survival as an entity is not in question.

The culture issue has been the subject of numerous reports and articles both here and abroad. The phrase "performance culture" is now widely used in government circles to refer to an organization where good performance is a priority and broadly accepted as an important goal. Corporations have little choice but to make continued profitability a priority. Every corporate manager and employee understands that; it influences their behavior. The shared commitment to success surfaces regularly in conversations.

Companies reinforce the importance of good performance in their daily management practices. The McKinsey study focused on the importance of those practices. Over time, those practices define the culture—"the way things get done around here."<sup>5</sup>

Culture governs the beliefs and ideas shared among employees. It influences behavior. When a shared commitment to performance exists, the prospects for gaining acceptance for a new performance management system are considerably higher.

The management practices that are important in the corporate world are certainly not alien to government although public agencies will never be run like businesses. Competition triggers unique differences in the private sector, but good management is good management. A number of the best management practices from industry, such as the balanced scorecard, have already been adopted by many public employers.

Our Risher-Fay survey looked at the differences in the management practices of for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. We started with the 18 practices in the McKinsey study, excluded three that were specific to manufacturing, and then focused on the use of the 15 generic practices available to all employers, public as well as private (e.g., performance tracking and the use of stretch performance goals).

Overall, the 15 practices represent good management and are relevant to both government and industry. Public employers like the city of Charlotte,

North Carolina, that have a reputation for being well managed would score relatively high on the practices. However, the response pattern from public employers differed consistently from the responses of private employers. On every management practice, public employers' responses indicate they rely on practices that are not as rigorous or as focused on performance. For example, they do not place much emphasis on tracking and communicating organizational performance to staff. That is consistent with our experience as consultants to these organizations. High-performing companies, especially those that are publicly traded, communicate results widely and frequently.

Each of the 15 practices reinforces the message that performance is a corporate priority. When managers pay less attention to performance, their implicit message is that the organization is not focused on performance (or, perhaps worse, that they don't think employees will be interested). The lack of focus is consistent with our experience as consultants and leads us to believe the differences explain why performance is often not a cultural priority.

Although not specifically an issue in the survey, public agencies also differ in that they typically do not have an explicit, easily understood goal comparable to the pressure for profitability. In the business world, that is a powerful motivator that is clear to everyone. Government agencies share the abstract purpose of public service but an overarching goal would help to unite their efforts. President Kennedy's goal of reaching the moon is an obvious example. A more practical example might be a parole office that commits to reducing the rate of recidivism. People respond to challenging goals.

The work to articulate a compelling mission and one or more overarching goals is likely to boost employee commitment to an agency's success. They should also consider emphasizing the practices highlighted in the McKinsey study; for example, agencies could announce their goals to all staff and start tracking and communicating progress toward reaching the goals. Those steps will create a culture that resembles a well-managed company. The move to a more rigorous employee performance system, as outlined by Ed Lawler, needs a strong commitment by top management. It also needs to fit the culture of the organization. And it has to be accepted by managers and supervisors as important personal responsibilities.

## A Critical Difference – Executive Pay and Performance

Differences in pay and performance practices are of course highly significant at the executive level.

Compensation levels are of course different but the linkage of incentive awards and stock-based compensation to company performance is the more important difference. The philosophy governing the pay of government executives is very different.

Public employers have initiated efforts to emulate corporate performance planning and measurement practices. Goal setting, performance tracking, and midyear plan adjustments are common now in corporations down through the management ranks and below. Public agencies, however, are still struggling with a key issue: the integration of organizational and executive performance plans.

There are two vital differences between the public sector and the private sector. First, when a company is successful, every executive and manager stands to benefit, and a portion of their year-end cash incentive payouts depends on company performance. That is also true of stock options. Together, those links make this a team compensation scheme; these practices provide powerful incentives for executives to pull together and work as a team to make the company successful.

Agencies often have a set of organizational goals, but they rarely assume the importance of a company's need for profitability. Moreover, it is still unusual for the goals to be linked to executive rewards. All of that is possible, however, and would undoubtedly contribute to improved performance.

Second, typical linkages are close to a mathematical formula, tightly tied down and predictable. That, in part, comes from the tradition of a profit-sharing formula. Corporate executives and managers can track their performances relative to goals, and they have a good sense of what they can expect to earn. According to the old donkey-and-carrot analogy, the carrot is in sight at all times. That is a different and more powerful incentive than the subjective bonus awards that are typical in government organizations.

The management of cash awards in public agencies also differs in another important respect: Agencies usually pay awards from leftover funds. It is only when an agency does not spend its entire budget that awards are paid. In contrast, companies budget for awards, with adjustments as the year and projected results unfold. They plan for awards as an integral component of the compensation package.

At the federal level, the regulations governing the pay and performance of members of the Senior Executive Service establish a framework for assessing executives that mirrors practices in the private sector. Federal agencies budget 10 percent of executive salaries for awards. The District of Columbia has a some-

what similar approach to awards for those who head local agencies.

For organizations that are contemplating the adoption of a more rigorous performance system, the executive cadre should be the starting point. With true executives or managers, they should be able to specify what they are expected to accomplish. Goal setting is a proven practice in every sector. If performance management is not taken seriously for executives and managers, it sends a powerful message about priorities to lower-level employees.

### Preparing Managers and Supervisors

A performance management system is only as good as the managers who use it. The best-designed system can fail if it is not used as intended. The adoption of a more rigorous approach to performance management will change managers' jobs and their relationships with their people. It actually redefines the psychological contract that governs those relationships. Managers are likely to be reluctant to embrace the change; their jobs were easier when performance was less important. They may in fact be more anxious than their staffs.

An open question to consider is the readiness of managers and supervisors to buy into the changes that may emerge from a performance improvement initiative. Generally, the status quo is preferable and if they are risk averse, they may be reluctant to embrace changes.

At a minimum, managers need to understand why the change is important to the organization. They also need to understand what is expected of them as the change is implemented. Those are key communication issues. Actually, that message is best handled as a marketing campaign that needs to be repeated several times and in several different ways. Managers need to be convinced.

Managers will of course need to understand the implementation plan and, at an appropriate time, the details of the new system and any new policies. This can be introduced during a brief training session or two on using a new system. The more important training, however, is focused on the skills to manage performance—performance planning, providing feedback, coaching, handling problem employees, and so forth. Those skills are essential, and a manager is not ready to manage in the new system until that manager can demonstrate those skills.

If performance management is seen as a key duty for managers and supervisors, that is a good reason to make it a prominent issue in evaluating their performance and specifying their salary increases. They should be rewarded for how well they handle this responsibility, especially in the first year or two. That

should help them to appreciate that this is an important part of a manager's job.

A good starting point is the creation of a task force composed of managers; the task force can plan and guide the creation of new performance management practices. The managers on the task force need to develop policies and practices that fit the organization and reflect their needs. They are also in the best position to determine training needs and to decide how to communicate their plans throughout the organization.

All of this should be reflected in the competencies used to evaluate the performance of managers and supervisors. For example, adding the competency "Supportive of Change Initiatives" sends the message that they need to get on board. The profile of competencies should spell out the management priorities and desired behaviors. They also need to know what is expected.

### Involving Employees in the Planning

The use of the word "system" in this context is misleading. Performance management is not a system as that word is commonly understood. It is carried out in the day-by-day discussions between a manager and that manager's staff. When we think of it as a system, it prompts the image of something like an inventory system, but performance management is far messier and disjointed than that.

The importance of the interactions required to manage performance cannot be overstated. Those discussions should be frequent and focused. The skills that managers need to handle those interactions should be a vital concern. No other system is as completely dependent on the skills and the commitment of individual managers. Because the primary goal is to improve employee performance, the best way to assess the effectiveness of the process is to change the perspective: Look at the changes through the eyes of the staff. Surveys and focus groups can be used to explore employee perception of current practices to understand what's broken and to identify particularly sensitive issues. That should be a basic step in the preliminary planning for a new performance system.

Experience also confirms that employees can be valuable during the planning for new practices. They know their jobs and the impediments to good performance better than anyone. With guidance, small groups of high performers in the principal occupation groups will be able to define competencies and other system components. They can be expected to set the bar high because they know what's needed for success. When they discuss what's happening with coworkers, they are far more credible than a manager. Managers should not be reluctant to involve employees in planning.

The final reason is that staff will help to surface sensitive issues that could quickly trigger resistance. If a new performance system, for example, threatens future step increases for employees close to retirement, it would be better to learn of that possibility in the planning stage instead of after it is announced.

## Central Role of Recognition and Reward Practices

This is a complex organizational change that has to be accepted and assimilated into the day-to-day work routines of managers across the organization. Ideally, effective performance management will become a way of life. People are often reluctant to accept change, however, especially in government when they anticipate newly elected officials will have new ideas.

To facilitate and reinforce the importance of the changes, it makes sense to reinforce the planning and implementation with the reward system. The idea mentioned previously of including a competency for managers and supervisors—for example, effective management of employee performance—is one possibility. It would also make sense to develop one or more goals focused on the implementation of new practices. These issues should become central in the evaluation of employees' performance for at least the first year or two.

As the McKinsey study shows, recognizing and rewarding star performers is a key to good management. The better-performing companies work actively to identify, develop, and promote top performers. They also take action to end the employment of poor performers, or they move them to less critical roles. Such practices reinforce the importance of good performance, which is equally relevant to managers who need to develop the skills to manage the performance of their people.

Realistically, the performance management system is not needed to identify the star performers. They stand out in every work group. It would make sense to start recognizing these individuals before a new performance system is adopted in order to reaffirm the importance of high performance.

An issue that often surfaces in assessments of employee attitudes is fear of the unknown—employees do not know how honest ratings will affect them, and they also have no way of knowing whether other managers will commit to honesty. Actually, they know that's extremely unlikely. If there is one issue that can undermine the change in practice, it is the distinct possibility that its impact will not be consistent across the

organization. A simple strategy to address employees' concerns is the creation of a "calibration committee"—Lawler's label—as a way to assure employees of fairness and consistency.

For performance management to be effective, employees need to know there are consequences. And that message has to be consistent at all levels. If pay for performance is not a possibility, a number of no-cost rewards are available. The book by Bob Nelson, *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*, is a useful resource. Everyone wants to see their contributions valued and recognized.

## Is the HR Staff Ready?

Performance management should not be treated as a responsibility of the HR department, but those specialists are no doubt going to play a prominent role in the planning and implementation of improved practices. They will need to be knowledgeable advocates and assume a lead role in many of the meetings. Each HR specialist who gets involved will have to be a believer who can convince others that the change is needed. A lot of managers and employees will need to be convinced.

There is a tendency in the public sector to staff the HR office in each agency with administrators. Broad-based change occurs infrequently, so these administrators have not had many opportunities to develop change management skills. They are not change agents by inclination, and they would not have lasted in roles where the focus is on "firefighting" and compliance.

This is compounded by shared beliefs based on years of tradition that a primary HR role is serving as an employee champion. In that tradition, HR is responsible for looking out for the interests of employees. As the employee champion, HR staff worry about issues like morale, discrimination, and work-life balance. Certainly, nothing is wrong with that thinking. Here, however, that traditional thinking must be balanced with a commitment to changes that channel larger rewards to the high performers.

## The Importance of Leadership

Broad-based change requires effective leadership. It has to come from the highest levels. The organization's leaders need to convince their direct reports that effective performance management is a priority, and that has to cascade to lower-level managers and supervisors.

The importance of leadership cannot be overstated. It should be reiterated and reinforced in what is communicated and in the way people are managed. The

“walk the talk” message carries over to all of the changes eventually adopted to improve performance.

Leadership is particularly important at the level of agency head. One of the realities of government is that each agency is different, with its own culture, values, and management style. For performance management to be effective, it has to fit the organization. Agency heads need to take active roles in defining the needs of the agency and in balancing those needs with jurisdiction-wide plans. They need to not only “sell” the importance of performance management to their people but also resist policy changes that are not in the best interest of their agency.

### Pulling It All Together

This is not a simple problem. It is clear the answer is not as simple as installing a new performance system. The successful plan includes changes that give new emphasis to performance and to the way employees are managed. The onus here is on managers to develop the necessary skills and to accept responsibility for managing the performance of their people. The performance system is an essential tool, but only if it is used effectively.

Generalizations are also not useful. Too many factors could affect an organization’s plans to improve performance. Public employers at all levels comprise many different organizations, with different cultures, values, and histories. It is completely reasonable to assume some offices are ready while others are not. A good first step would be to make a preliminary assessment of each. A failed attempt could set back the chances for success by several years.

We know from Ed Lawler’s research and a long history of previous thinkers what an effective performance management system looks like. There may not be a perfect system in any organization, but it is important to appreciate that performance management will be accepted more readily by managers and employees if they are involved in its planning and implementation. With guidance, managers and staff are fully capable of developing effective policies and practices. Their acceptance or at least acquiescence is far more important than the technical design considerations.

It is essential to decide at an early date whether an organization is ready for a more rigorous approach

to performance management. Top management has to commit to improved performance as a priority. This article outlines a number of issues and possible steps to reinforce the importance of performance and thereby prepare the organization for performance management.

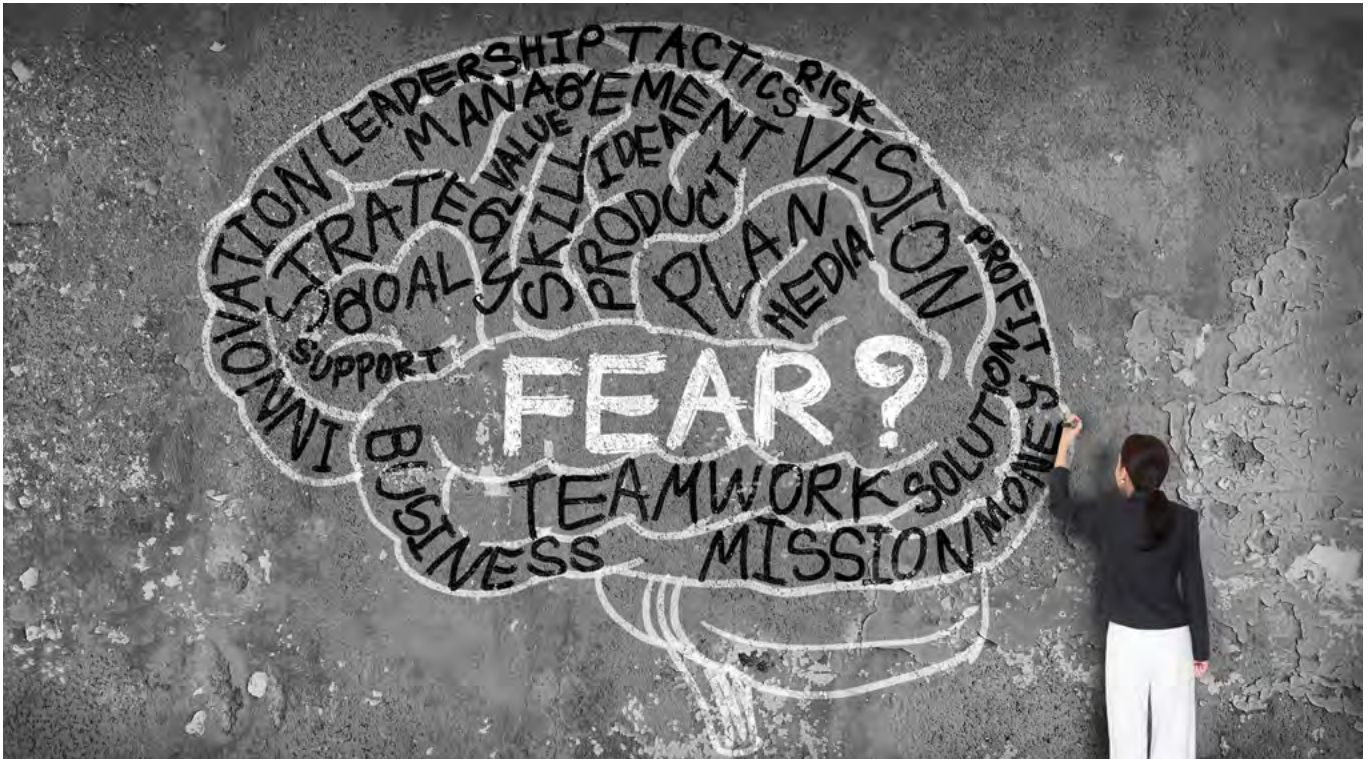
The idea is not to tackle every problem; that’s not realistic or necessary. Employees, however, should not perceive performance management as something being done to employees; instead, they have to appreciate that their employer has a concerted strategy to improve the way performance is managed. Achieving that perception requires more than changing the way employee performance is assessed.

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# ELIMINATING THE FEAR FACTOR

By Mike Staver

It's a tricky time to be a leader. With the economy so unforgiving right now, making smart organizational decisions is critical. That's true not just in terms of strategy (whether to change community service provisions or adopt a new financial plan) but also relationships (whether to fire the toxic high performer or address a conflict head-on). All actions have consequences.

So does lack of action, and, with the margin for error so slim, you want to make sure you're thinking as coolly and clearly as possible. My advice is to not allow fear to cloud your decision making.

We all feel fear but what separates the proverbial adults from the kids is how we respond to that fear. Courageous leaders face what needs to be faced and do what needs to be done.

Cowardly leaders make excuses, hide their heads in the sand, and generally take the easy way out. Besides harming your organization and crippling your career potential, fear-centered leadership can hurt the very people you are supposed to be guiding and nurturing: your employees.

By definition, all leaders "mess with people's lives." That's why it's so important to make sure you're leading from a place of clarity and awareness—courage—and not letting fear drive your decisions.

Whether you're messing with their lives in a positive, growth-inspiring way or a negative, spirit-crushing way depends on the clarity with which you make decisions and execute them. Fear obscures that clarity—especially fear that masquerades as something else.

You don't have to be an out-and-out coward to let fear impact your leadership. Many people are unaware of how profoundly fear influences their decision making. You may be leading from a place of fear if the following behaviors apply to you:

1. **You frequently take the easy way out.** In other words, you avoid taking bold, decisive action because it makes you uncomfortable. Then, you rationalize why you didn't do what you really needed to do: *I wanted to go to the national trade show, but we just couldn't get the prototype ready*

## MANY PEOPLE ARE UNAWARE OF HOW PROFOUNDLY FEAR INFLUENCES THEIR DECISION MAKING.

*by the deadline...or I've always thought we should take part in the green initiative, but the CEO would just shoot down the suggestion, so there was no point in bringing it up.*

Generally, such rationalizations boil down to fear. What if you unveiled the new financial planning strategy and it flopped? What if you approached elected officials with your green initiative idea and they rejected you—or worse, what if they didn't reject you and then you had to make it work? It's easier to avoid taking action (at least in the short term), but it's also a sure path to mediocrity and stagnation.

There is no doubt that action drives results. A plan doesn't drive results, willpower doesn't drive results, and not even goals drive results. Action drives results. Period.

2. **You pretend you don't know what you actually know.** Pretending is common in the workplace. You pretend you don't know about opportunities in order to avoid risk. You pretend you don't know that a high performer is behaving badly and making other employees unhappy. You pretend that your biggest client isn't crushing morale and needs to be fired. Maybe, you even pretend you don't know it's time for you to move on.  
All of this pretending allows you to avoid pain and feel good in the short term, but it exacts a heavy price over time. There is always a price to be paid for needed actions not taken. Never doubt it. Your job as a leader is to look reality in the face and accept it so that you can make the tough decisions that need to be made.
3. **You fall victim to "shiny ball" syndrome.** Can you relate to this scenario? You're trying (well, sort of) to focus on a serious project when a "shiny ball" rolls by. It may be an e-mail or a phone call or just a less urgent task. You break away and chase the shiny

ball until—well, would you look at that! It's time to go home!

Most of us can't say no to such distractions. In fact, we don't want to say no because what we should be focusing on is usually difficult, unpleasant, or anxiety producing. Anyone can stay busy. It takes real courage to stay focused and on task.

I heard a shocking statistic recently: The average Sunday edition of the *New York Times* has more information in it than the average human being in the 1700s received during his entire lifetime. If we can't achieve focus and manage the deluge of information that comes at us every day, we'll drown in the chaos. We'll fail to do the important things. We'll fail as leaders.

4. **You ignore what's causing "weight and drag" in your organization.** You already know what this is, don't you? Maybe it's a policy, a person, or a scarcity mindset that's holding you or your team back from optimal performance. Ask yourself now: *What am I doing, or not doing, that is adding weight and drag? Am I refusing to make a decision, waiting to hire an assistant, delaying a hiring or firing issue?*  
At the core of your job is your role as an obstacle remover. Be courageous: Remove the obstacles you can and work around the ones that remain so that you can stay productive, directed, and focused.
5. **You refuse to balance your head and your gut.** It takes both facts and intuition to analyze properly. Many leaders stick to the analysis style they're most comfortable with. (I call the data deciders "mullers" and gut deciders "gunslingers.") To blend the scientific and artistic is simply too intimidating. (What if you make a mistake?)  
Courageous leaders, on the other hand, understand that decisions that have a direct impact on people's lives require both aspects of analysis—and that

means most of us need to step outside our comfort zones when it's time to make decisions. Your leadership will be enhanced, the performance of your team will improve, and they will likely trust you more if you lead with both your head and your gut. They are like two sides of the same coin.

**6. You hide behind the “I’m not quite ready” excuse.**

Leaders and organizations spend too much time getting ready to be ready to get ready to almost get ready to be ready to get ready. Then they form a committee or a task force (which is just a committee on steroids) to evaluate more and look into the situation more so that they can really be ready.

Getting overly ready is a result of fear. You don't want to fail so instead you put off the moment of truth by perpetually getting ready. Should you prepare? Of course! Do your research? Yes. But stop hiding behind the “we aren't quite ready” curtain. Say, “Enough is enough,” and just do it—even if conditions aren't perfect.

If you are going to build a culture in which people take action and aren't afraid to boldly step out, then you had better be courageous enough to endure a lack of perfection and a dab of chaos. Messy and quick is better than perfect and slow.

**7. You forsake the present in favor of the future or the past.**

It takes courage to be fully present. It takes discipline to not ruminate on what happened yesterday, look at your iPhone, check your e-mail, or think about tomorrow's agenda instead of fully committing to and engaging in the present.

Worry, anticipation, regret, and hope are some of the mental processes that rob us of fully and courageously experiencing our leadership and influence on a day-to-day basis.

I am not suggesting you should not plan for the future. I am not suggesting that you ignore the past instead of learning from it. What I am suggesting is that all the planning and reflecting in the world provides no guarantees. If you decide to trade this moment for the memory of yesterday or the concern of tomorrow, you are likely to miss what's happening now.

**8. You see only the information that agrees with your beliefs.**

We all have a natural tendency to ignore information that contradicts our beliefs about the world, especially our negative beliefs. If we believe someone doesn't like us, we will see only those behaviors that support that impression.

If we think we are bad at something, we will see only more evidence of that conclusion. This tendency

is so strong that it blinds us to contrary evidence. As long as we don't see other possibilities we don't have to take action.

**9. You're constantly blaming others.**

This is an energy-draining, counterproductive way of dealing with difficult circumstances. Blaming someone else puts you in the position of a victim, like something happened outside your control. Therefore, you won't take action to change your circumstances because it's someone else's problem. (How convenient, huh?) Victim thinking affects not just individuals but entire organizations.

Blame-based leadership seeks to find a bad guy so that there is someone to absorb the problem, like a lightning rod absorbs a bolt of otherwise dangerous electricity. If a bad guy can be found, then everyone else can take a collective sigh of relief. For that particular problem, they are off the hook. If it's marketing's fault, then operations can't possibly be responsible for the train wreck. If it's operations' fault, management can't have done anything wrong.

Acknowledging that you are ultimately responsible for the results of your life, thoughts, and actions creates a level of freedom not experienced by those who choose to blame others. It empowers you to act. Courageous leaders are driven by, even obsessed with, the imperative to eliminate excuse making and blame from themselves and their organizations.

**10. You apply more pressure instead of looking for “pinch points.”**

Imagine that you are trying to drink from a water hose that has a kink in it. What do you do? Do you un-kink the hose...or do you run up to the faucet and turn up the pressure? Obviously, you would do the former. Until you eliminate the kink—the pinch point—all the pressure in the world won't do a bit of good. Water will just begin to leak from the weak spots, and if the pressure isn't relieved, the hose will explode.

Now, think of this hose as an analogy for your organization and the individuals who work in it. Consider a pinch point as anything that slows, impedes, or stops desirable results. It could be a process, a policy or procedure, a tradition, even a way of thinking. (Heck, maybe it's you.) It is your job to seek out and eliminate pinch points—and just as important, to free your people to openly and clearly identify them as well.

Too many leaders turn up the pressure in the hose when they need more output from their people. They push employees harder or offer new programs, initiatives, and incentives to try to push them into compli-

ance. Imagine how much more effective it would be to summon up your courage and address the pinch points that need addressing.

**11. You're too harsh.** Do you recognize the achievements of your employees? If you don't—or if you don't do it properly—you'll be unable to motivate your team. If you find yourself withholding recognition until the goal is completely accomplished, guess what? You're too harsh. If you say “good job” but then immediately shift your focus to the next goal, you're too harsh. If you qualify your recognition or take a little back after you've given it, you're too harsh.

The idea is to celebrate your employees' accomplishments without compromising their momentum. That means acknowledging progress *with full and complete focus on the success of what is right here, right now.*

Sometimes leaders fear that pouring on the recognition before the job is done will demotivate followers. Other times, they're uncomfortable with the intimacy and vulnerability it takes to sincerely thank an employee. Sometimes courage looks like trusting your employees; sometimes it looks like getting out of your comfort zone long enough to provide face-to-face recognition that people crave.

**12. You're an over-recognizer.** On the other end of the spectrum from the harsh leaders are those who are so ready to praise and encourage everybody for anything that their acknowledgment loses all effectiveness. This can take the form of gushing (recognizing so much and with such flair that it isn't trustworthy or meaningful) or fake recognition (recognizing in a way that seems inconsistent with the rest of your behavior). Both forms come across as inauthentic and actually erode trust.

If you're an over-recognizer, ironically, your problem might be the same as the harsh leader who never recognizes: You fear the intimacy involved in having a heartfelt, honest conversation. Or maybe at the root of the behavior is a fear of the “confrontation” involved in giving meaningful, critical feedback. Regardless, you owe it to your followers to make your acknowledgments trustworthy.

**13. You reward effort rather than achievement.** It's a mistake to be too “soft” about expectations. It's a mistake to say, “Just do your best.” People will not achieve just because you encourage and motivate them. Somebody must drive performance.

Somebody must plant the flag on the hill and

refuse to accept anything but success. That somebody is you. Courageous leaders lay out expected results in the most effective and humane way possible and are clear about the consequences of not meeting them.

Bosses worry about upsetting their employees so they don't set high expectations. I am in full support of a respectful workplace where people enjoy their jobs and look forward to coming to work, but I am also in full support of less whining and more doing, less passing the buck and more personal responsibility, less explaining why you didn't and more showing how you did.

**14. You're a helicopter leader.** Accountability is a major buzzword for leaders. And it is important for leaders to keep people focused on what matters and performing in alignment with expectations. Unfortunately, some leaders think accountability means constantly standing over employees to make sure they're doing what they're supposed to be doing, in the way you think they should be doing it. This is not accountability. It's hovering. And yes, it's yet another manifestation of fear.

Helicopter leaders are afraid to let go because they believe the work won't get done if they don't oversee every detail. Either this fear is unfounded or it's a sign that employees really aren't capable of doing the job they're paid to do. The solution is simple: Do your job and let them do theirs, or get rid of incompetent employees and replace them with people who can get the job done.

Your job is to identify the outcomes you expect and then to develop strategy. Your direct reports' jobs are to commit to the results. You set the parameters, but remain flexible about how your people accomplish their tasks. Accountability, in most cases, is about making sure the results are achieved.

**15. You solve problems for people.** Problems and conflicts are a part of life. If you aren't dealing with one problem, or 80, you will have some show up very soon. Learning to solve these problems is a big part of leadership.

And guess what? It's also a big part of “followership.” Your employees will also face problems of their own, and in the same way they need to figure out how to accomplish results, they need to find their own solutions.

Do not solve all of your followers' problems. Don't even solve most. Remember that the more you are involved in solutions, the more likely it will be that your reports will depend on you. The more they

depend on you, the more they will hesitate when solving problems. If they know you will come in and fix the problem, they will wait. They will also feel that you don't have confidence in them.

If you're a parent this may sound hauntingly familiar. Many parents fear that their kids don't have what it takes to handle life's problems, so they step in and do it for them. Of course, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Manage your anxiety and have a little faith in others. Your employees will rise to the occasion, and you'll be a lot happier.

**16. Mental clutter is keeping you from noticing.** The more you fear, the more you try to do. The more you try to do, the more you have to think about. You have more meetings. More calls to make. More e-mails to read and send, and more commitments to obsess over.

Once you can let go of some of the fear, you can turn down some of the activities and commitments. This will free up the time and space to do the things that inspire and invigorate you—that allow you to be fully present and quiet in the moment.

Without those moments of peace and clarity, you will keep on rushing until you burn out, never realizing that you could have stopped, adjusted, and

continued with less stress and greater success. These moments will be the times when you notice that your veteran sales rep needs you to back off a bit, or that your morning grumpiness is affecting everyone's enthusiasm.

These will be the moments that show you how to support your followers and inspire them to greater success. These moments will refresh your ability to notice the rest of your life. When you think selfishly for a moment, you'll realize this may be the best reason of all to confront your hidden fears and, ultimately, vanquish your inner coward.

Fear-centered leadership wreaks havoc with your entire life. The anxiety that comes from not doing what you know deep down needs to be done—and from managing the fallout from your poor decisions—drains the energy you could be spending on friends, family, and the outside interests that make life worth living.

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# A MANAGER'S PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL: PREPARE WITH CONFIDENCE

By Rick Dacri

Imagine you're responsible for organizing the family vacation. It's all planned, and everyone piles into the car ready to go. From the back seat, you hear: "I want to go to Disney." "No, I want to go to the beach." "No, we always do what you want, let's go camping."

Your partner gently leans over and says: "I want to go for a romantic vacation, without the kids, and by the way, we should fly, not drive." And now, if things couldn't be worse, you know they will all judge you, and the quality of their vacation will be based on your decision.

Crazy? Is this scenario all that unrealistic? In fact, for many, this resembles the life of a local government manager. As one city administrator defined it, "multiple conflicting priorities," topped off with a performance appraisal.

## Powerful Tool With Benefits

As a manager, your job is to carry out the wishes of the governing board. But if you cannot find agreement on where you are going, who is driving, and who is in charge, you are on the road to dysfunctional government and a strained relationship with elected officials.

An evaluation of the manager—a process hated by most and ignored by others—should be an opportunity to both develop a manager's knowledge and move a community forward.

If we are able to step back from the report-card aspect of most appraisal processes and realize that a performance appraisal is simply a tool used by elected officials to ensure that community goals are being met, then one can appreciate the power of this tool.

So why doesn't that happen?

## DEFINING WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU BELIEVE, AND WHERE YOU ARE GOING—ALL RUDIMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC PLAN—IS CRUCIAL.

One Pennsylvania township has a five-year plan in place that marries its business plan to its strategic and financial plans. The town is run like a private sector business according to its town manager. When the five-person, elected board hired the manager 11 years ago, board members recognized that a professional manager who embraced sound business and financial practices was needed to run their organization.

With a background in accounting, he pushed long-term planning with goal setting, and out of this process came the need for both strategic planning and an evaluation process. Nothing in business works effectively without clear direction and strategy, along with clearly defined metrics to measure progress.

But simply having a business plan does not ensure positive results. These five essential components found in most well-run communities should be present:

- Well-defined mission and vision.
- Clearly defined goals and expectations.
- Defined roles and responsibilities.
- Positive working relationships.
- A method to evaluate the progress and success of the manager.

**Mission and vision.** Defining who you are, what you believe, and where you are going—all rudiments of an effective strategic plan—is crucial. In one Vermont tourist community, administrators view their town as a business that is dependent on tourism and marketing to visitors, while still focusing on primary and secondary homeowners.

Elected officials always make decisions with an eye on this mission, keeping them focused and forward thinking. Managers and officials must regularly discuss their mission, vision, and strategy, while defining values that they believe, and from which they operate and conduct business. When mired in constant crisis or reacting to the day-to-day issues, communities can

sacrifice their future and the opportunities this future presents.

**Goal setting.** The goal-setting process can be the most dynamic and harmonizing event that managers and governing boards experience. Many communities do it annually, while others do it after each new board is seated.

Here, the board can establish clear expectations and accountability standards for the manager, ensuring that he or she is aligned with the board's interests. Done well, this becomes a vibrant, proactive experience. Without it, people could find themselves sailing on a rudderless ship, destined for disaster.

**Clarity of roles.** Local governments work best when there is only one manager. Yet too often, councilmembers get confused about their role and think they, too, are the manager. Like the two-headed monsters of Greek mythology, they find themselves moving in different directions. It doesn't work.

Good governance makes good government. One town manager quotes Plato when he discusses governance during board orientations. "To do one's own business and not to be a busybody is justice," which basically means justice is found in fulfilling your own role while not overstepping it.

Taking the time to define roles and adhering to them minimizes problems in the future and is essential to meaningful appraisals.

**Positive working relations.** I regularly tell people who I work with that results can only occur if there are three elements in place: 1) a positive working relationship between the board and the manager; 2) a shared mission about what the locality is and what the locality wants to accomplish; and 3) a commitment to move forward together in a collegial manner.

With that foundation, communities can progress. But absent any one element, things come tumbling down.

Relationships based on trust, respect, and confidence are essential.

Governing and managing are all about the relationship. Managers must know that they have the backing of the elected officials and vice versa.

**Evaluation process.** Putting in place a progressive process to evaluate the manager allows for healthy discussion; clarification of expectations; refocus of direction, if needed; and open communication. No business relationship can occur without accountability standards, and this is the power of the appraisal process.

### What Makes a Good Evaluation Process?

**Agreement on the process.** Ideally, the governing board and the manager should come together to decide how to do this, when it should be done, and on what basis the manager will be evaluated.

While many shy away from evaluations, one Connecticut manager built the process into his contract to ensure he had open communication with “his new bosses,” to understand their viewpoints, and to make sure he was in sync with each of them.

When I have developed appraisals with managers and governing officials, I have found that simply discussing the process opens lines of communication, breaks down barriers, and often leads to discovering emerging new areas of communality.

More than a form. Good evaluations are simply conversations, not forms. In fact, the forms are often a distraction from what is truly important. A frank open dialogue, with all individuals participating, is much better than including a five-point Likert scale and boxes to check on a form.

Forms are good for clarity and recordkeeping. They make the human resources professionals and lawyers happy, but they can never replace the feedback received during the appraisal interview. Good evaluations occur when people are talking and listening with each other, not when forms are written, read, signed, and forgotten in a file.

**Manager self-evaluations.** Managers should take time to both critically evaluate their own performance and that of their organizations. Elected officials readily admit that they do not know what managers do each day—and why should they?

It is not their responsibility to monitor everything the manager does. Managers should, however, communicate what they have done and more importantly, what they have accomplished during the period.

After all, they were hired and are being paid for

accomplishments, not activities or simply showing up. A pinch of selfless self-promotion is also a good thing.

**Review of goals.** As noted earlier, this is an ideal time to review progress on the manager’s goals and objectives. It is also a period when new goals can be established. Goal setting is the heart of the appraisal process.

In one Connecticut town, every two years, the board, the manager, and the department heads get together for a formal goal-setting session. They incorporate a three-step process that includes:

1. Identifying the overarching issues facing the town.  
The top five umbrella issues nearly always include public safety, quality of life, infrastructure, education, and economic development.
2. Breaking down each issue using a modified SWOT analysis and then addressing what they want to focus on and improve upon the next year.
3. Coming up with 50 to 100 individual action items, prioritizing them, and then creating a workplan.

The manager and the department heads then allocate responsibilities and time frames for completion. This plan forms the basis for the manager’s and the department heads’ performance appraisal.

**Development of the manager.** Having a manager with yesterday’s ideas is like eating day-old bread. It won’t kill you, but it also won’t satisfy your palate.

The demands of running a multimillion-dollar business with staff, equipment, changing technology, constant changes in regulations and legislation, employees, unions, and resident demands requires a manager who is up-to-date, understands best practices, and manages with knowledge and confidence.

Ongoing professional development readies the manager. It must be a requirement of each manager and an essential component to discuss during the review process.

Performance appraisal cannot simply be a look back. What happened yesterday cannot be changed. The review must include a look forward, and one way to guarantee that a manager can get a community to where it wants to go is through professional development.

Managers need continuous skills training, exposure to new ideas and concepts, interaction with other successful managers, knowledge of changes in legislation and regulations, and awareness of emerging trends. Seminars, professional association programs, conferences, and college seminars are essential elements to this development process.

**Communication is the key.** Whether it is on or off the record, fluid, open, and meaningful dialogue that

ensures that everyone is in the loop guarantees success. Managers must talk and listen to the board and vice versa.

The best reviews contain more conversation, with less emphasis on the forms; a clear understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities; well-defined goals and expectations; metrics and timeliness; and genuine respect and trust. When this is present, the appraisal process is working.

## Potential Stumbling Blocks

Unfortunately, too often these stumbling blocks can derail the process:

**Politics.** As I regularly find out from talking with managers and elected officials across the country, politics and everything that connotes often poisons the evaluation process. Conflicting agendas, singular motives, scores to settle, or an unwillingness to embrace the community's mission and vision make governing difficult, thwart consensus, and derail the process.

As one Florida councilmember stated: "Agendas by councilors prevent good evaluations." When politics gets in the way, managers become afraid to make bold moves. They fear losing their jobs and become too paralyzed to be effective, and then often shy away from addressing the difficult issues.

**Surprises.** Surprises should be left for birthday parties, not evaluations. The review process cannot endure many surprises. Issues should be addressed as they occur and not stored in a gunnysack and saved for review time.

The governing board and the manager must always be transparent, open, and forthcoming. Matters that seemingly emerge from left field kill conversation, put individuals on the defensive, and serve no other purpose than to derail the process.

**Report-card approach.** A review is a development tool. It is a mechanism to plan for the future. It cannot be a merely a grading mechanism that reminds you of your past shortcomings. You can't be effective with a club over your head.

**Lack of differentiation between performance and personality.** Managers are hired to perform. While getting along and congeniality are important, the more critical piece is getting things done. Having a nice guy who accomplishes little is not an enviable standard.

That said, defining the important traits of a successful manager is important during the hiring process and reinforcing these during the appraisal process is appropriate.

## A Successful Relationship

Local government management can be difficult and complex. To be successful, the relationship between the manager and elected officials must be open and positive. Each must understand the other's roles and expectations.

The manager's job is to take care of everyone in the organization. Officials expect them to run and grow the business; carry out their mandates; recruit, retain, and develop the internal talent; and prepare the organization for the future.

It is the role of the officials to take care of the manager in a supportive manner. Managers, like any employees, want their basic needs met and when they are not, resentment occurs.

They want a governing board that provides clear expectations and accountability standards, understands managers' needs and expectations, and provides timely performance reviews. Late reviews and salaries that fall below their peers are two areas that cause the greatest resentment resulting in breakdowns in the relations and turnover of managers.

Next vacation, when everyone happily piles into the car and agrees on a destination and driver, then and only then can it be viewed as a positive experience. Managing a city or county requires the same. And when that happens, everyone can enjoy the ride.

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# RECOGNITION **AND MOTIVATING OTHERS**



# CONVERSATION MOTIVATORS

## *How to Get Information You Need at Work*

By Maryann Karinch

For those of us conducting interviews or having difficult conversations in the workplace, how do we get the information we need from people? How do we motivate them to talk and share details? Here are seven conversation motivators:

**1. Childlike curiosity.** A good questioner is purposeful and provocative. The questions lead somewhere and they stimulate interest in the person being questioned. In terms of seeking the truth, therefore, we can view curiosity as a two-way street. You are driven to know something, but the person who is your source of that information will probably have questions rushing through his or her brain as well: "Why do you want to know?" "What else do you want to know?"

You can exploit the fact that your questions trigger curiosity in your source. You may be asking the questions, but those questions suggest you may know something that *the other person* wants

to know, too. When people feel they have a gap in their knowledge, it's like an itch that must be scratched. The more you can stimulate a person's curiosity, the stronger the itch.

**2. Incentives.** Human beings are more inclined to want immediate gratification rather than wait for an incentive that comes later, even if it's better than the quick choice.

Studies involving brain scans indicate that decisions about the possibility of immediate reward activate parts of the brain associated with emotion. Consideration of a long-term reward option activates brain systems associated with reasoning. For a lot of people, the emotion-related parts of the brain win out over the reasoning-related parts of the brain.

An important thing to note about the first two motivators is that both often relate to satisfying a desire for something as soon as possible. Another important link between them is that one of the

strongest incentives is sometimes providing information that satisfies the other person's curiosity. This is the foundation of the *quid pro quo*, a Latin phrase meaning "something for something." You tell a harmless secret of yours, and you might get a big secret in return.

3. **Emotional appeal.** Think in terms of positive emotions and negative emotions and how you can use your awareness of them in others to get them to tell you the truth. Also think in terms of a desire for pleasure versus an aversion to punishment.

There's a big reason why it may be easier to get an individual to cooperate if he or she is motivated by anger, disgust, hurt, or anything else in the family of negative emotions. People tend to spend more time and energy thinking about events that evoke strong negative emotions than strong positive ones.

On the positive side of the equation, love is thought by many experts to be the most powerful motivator of all. But not just any love—the kind of love that stimulates the same reward centers of the brain as cocaine is romantic love, not selfless love like your kindergarten teacher gave you. Romantic love is an addiction, and we all know what addicts will do to get a fix: anything. Sometimes "anything" means telling the truth.

4. **Boosting and deflating ego.** You may be cynical and say that flattery from an auto salesman about your good taste in cars is supercilious junk, but this technique works. Flattery is a tactic that makes people more positive about and cooperative with the source of the compliments.

At the heart of this phenomenon is the simple fact that people enjoy feeling good about themselves. Our brains are fertile ground for compliments, and people who understand how and when to plant those compliments gain a psychological advantage over others.

Deflating ego and attacking a person's sense of self-worth enables you to move that person into a vulnerable emotional state and make him or her more compliant. It's often best used in conjunction with another technique that later makes an individual feel better. You use the desire to reconnect with you to get your information, and then you bring the person out of a self-esteem slump.

When deflating ego is done poorly, you could easily alienate the individual if you've misjudged how far to go with that person. And you might get pummeled by crossing the line from ego deflation to insult. Watch the body language of someone with

whom you use a deflating-ego technique. If you see the person close up—arms folded in front as though the person is in a hug, slight slump of shoulders, head down—you know you've succeeded in undermining the person's sense of self-worth. At that point, give the person an immediate path to reconnect by prompting him or her to provide information.

5. **Easing fears.** Mitigating or removing the fear of someone whom you want to confide in you is one of the most powerful tools in your arsenal of conversation motivators. There are many possible situations at a workplace, for example, where someone's competence or honesty comes into question, and the prospect of being fired makes that person close up and not want to divulge anything out of fear.

Offer protection—emotional, psychological, and, if necessary, physical—to help boost the person's feeling of security and trust in you, and then carry on with the conversation.

6. **Certainty and uncertainty.** Projecting certainty about what you know can get another person to talk openly. This is the value of knowing the person with whom you are speaking. You can go into a conversation with a level of detail on at least a few issues that suggest you know more about the person than you do.

A person feels a little off balance and out of control in the face of uncertainty. If your source is in that state of mild confusion—not completely disoriented, but a little off balance—the information you're after may leak out because the person has less control over what he or she says.

7. **Silence.** Japanese call it *shiin*. It's that awkward silence in a conversation that causes people to glance at their laptops, shift their posture, and look at the door as though they hope someone will enter the room and end the tension. Finally, someone can't tolerate it any longer and says something.

Creating silence in the modern world is intentional. Even in a room full of people experiencing *shiin*, anyone has the option of speaking up, even if it's just to beg, "Somebody please say something!" For many people, if not most, silence is unsettling, and someone will say something; it may even contain some substance.

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## BUILD UP YOUR PEOPLE

By D. Michael Abrashoff

Leadership is mostly the art of doing simple things very well. However, we sometimes make it far tougher than it needs to be. Unlike some leaders, I prefer to build myself up by strengthening others and helping them feel good about their jobs and themselves. When that happens, their work improves, and my own morale leaps.

I left drill-sergeant bullying to other leaders with other goals. Running the USS *Benfold*, a guided missile destroyer, demanded brains and initiative, not brawn. Only competent and self-confident sailors could handle the ship's complexities and fulfill its missions. These sailors could not be sculpted into a fighting crew by ruling with fear and punishing them as though they were inept kids. My job was to turn kids into grownups who would make [Navy Petty Officer] Edward C. Benfold proud.

Show me a manager who ignores the power of praise, and I will show you a lousy manager. Praise is infinitely more productive than punishment—could anything be clearer? But how many managers give this fact more than lip service? How many really live it? Not enough.

I focused on building self-esteem. I know that most of us carry around an invisible backpack full of childhood insecurities, and that many sailors often struggled under the load of past insults, including being scorned at home or squashed at school. I could make the load either heavier or lighter, and the right choice was obvious. Instead of tearing people down to make them into robots, I tried to show them that I trusted and believed in them.

Show me a manager who ignores the power of praise, and I will show you a lousy manager. Praise is

## PRAISE IS INFINITELY MORE PRODUCTIVE THAN PUNISHMENT—COULD ANYTHING BE CLEARER? BUT HOW MANY MANAGERS GIVE THIS FACT MORE THAN LIP SERVICE? HOW MANY REALLY LIVE IT?

infinitely more productive than punishment—could anything be clearer? But how many managers give this fact more than lip service? How many really live it? Not enough.

The same principle applies when you're dealing with bosses: Never tear them down; help them grow strong. If you want to achieve anything in a large bureaucracy, get inside the bosses' heads. Anticipate what they want before they know they want it. Take on their problems; make them look so good that you become indispensable. When they can't get along without you, they will support nearly anything you seek to accomplish.

### Little Things Make Big Successes

Within a couple of months of my taking over, other ship commanders began visiting *Benfold* to find out how we were getting our sailors to work so well. I was delighted to share all our secrets. They were hardly profound; mainly, we were attentive to people's feelings and potential. A lot of seemingly small gestures added up to a friendly and supportive atmosphere.

For example, I ordered a big supply of greeting cards that read "The Officers and Crew of the USS *Benfold* Wish You a Happy Birthday." Each month, my ship's office gave me a birthday list of my sailors' spouses. I would write, say, "Dear Marie" at the top and sign it "Love, Mike." Every card included my P.S., saying, "Your husband or wife is doing a great job," even if he or she were not. I knew the cards worked because sailors often came by to express their appreciation. It was my way of bringing their families into our orbit.

The CO of one of our sister ships loved the idea and immediately ordered his executive officer to send out birthday cards to the spouses of all his sailors. Of course, he meant they should be sent out at the appropriate time—on the spouses' birthdays. The next day, a year's worth of cards went out on the same day in one huge batch. Ouch.

But in fact, this was symptomatic of that ship—the officers were good, but they sometimes didn't get things quite right. They weren't *Benfold's* officers. I think they hit a performance ceiling because they didn't create a supportive climate that encouraged sailors to reach beyond their own expectations. Ultimately, that was *Benfold's* edge.

I observed that most of my young sailors came from hardscrabble backgrounds and had struggled to make it into the Navy. I put myself in their parents' shoes and imagined how they would feel if they got letters from their kids' commanding officer, and I imagined how the kids would feel when their parents told them.

I began writing letters to the parents, especially when their sons or daughters did something I could honestly praise. When the letters arrived, the parents invariably called their children to say how proud they were of them. To this day, I get Christmas cards from grateful parents.

One young man who wasn't star material was working on a project with four outstanding sailors. I debated whether he deserved one of my letters; because he was part of a stellar group, I went ahead. His parents were divorced, so I sent a letter to each parent. About two weeks later, the sailor knocked on my door with tears streaming down his face.

People seem to think that if you send somebody a compliment online, it's as good as the human touch. It is not. It's easier but much less effective. Social interaction is getting lost in a digital world that trades more in abstractions than in face-to-face relations. It's more than a shame—it's a bottom-line mistake.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "I just got a call from my father, who all my life told me I'm a failure. This time, he said he'd just read your letter, and he wanted to congratulate me and say how proud he was of me. It's the first time in my entire life he's actually encouraged me. Captain, I can't thank you enough." My own tear ducts held, but I was very moved.

One of my true star sailors was a second-class petty officer, Darren Barton of Little Rock, Arkansas. Darren was one of the sailors who did an outstanding job with the Tomahawk cruise missiles. I wrote his mother, Carol, about how well her son had performed, and she was so proud that one day, when President Clinton was visiting Little Rock, she staked out his motorcade and asked him to countersign my letter. She sent me a copy of that letter signed by the president of the United States, and I was extremely happy to share in her pride of her son.

My officers knew that they could always use me in their leadership toolkits. They never hesitated to knock on my door and say, "Hey, Captain, next time you're out walking around the ship, Sonarman Smith really aced that databank," or "Seaman Jones is doing a helluva job in the laundry. Could you stop by and tell him how much you appreciate him?"

Those conversations were the highlight of my day, and they didn't cost me or the Navy a dime. The more I went around meeting sailors, the more they talked to me openly and intelligently. The more I thanked them for hard work, the harder they worked. The payoff in morale was palpable. I'm absolutely convinced that positive, personal reinforcement is the essence of effective leadership.

Yet some leaders seem to be moving away from it. They stay connected electronically with e-mail and cellphones, but they're disconnected personally, and many leaders almost never leave their offices. People seem to think that if you send somebody a compliment online, it's as good as the human touch. It is not. It's easier but much less effective. Social interaction is getting lost in a digital world that trades more in abstractions than in face-to-face relations. It's more than a shame—it's a bottom-line mistake.

My sister Connie works for a major bank. One of her people did a phenomenal job, making hundreds of thousands of dollars for the bank, and Connie's boss sent an e-mail congratulating and thanking her. That very afternoon, he rode the elevator with her and didn't even acknowledge her existence. It completely wiped out any good his e-mail could have done.

Recall how you feel when your own boss tells you, "Good job." Do your people (and yourself) a favor. Say it in person, if you can. Press the flesh. Open yourself. Coldness congeals. Warmth heals. Little things make big successes.

The Navy has a program that assigns an ombudsman for every ship as a contact point for sailors' families. The idea is to make it as easy as possible to keep families informed of new orders, events aboard ship, the ship's movements in general, and, of course, to have a

communications link between sailors and their families. In practice, the ombudsman is usually the spouse of someone on the ship and is the hub for all the other families wanting to keep in touch with their relatives on board. We set out to make *Benfold's* ombudsman program the best in the Navy, and in fact our ombudsman was phenomenal.

Sylvia Schanche had a special phone line for families to call and leave messages for her, which she responded to by calling the ship or sending an e-mail. She kept everyone informed about the ship's changing schedule; if there was an accident on board, we told her immediately what was happening, and she passed the word to the families of anyone involved. If there was a death in a sailor's family, the ombudsman would make the arrangements to fly him or her back to the States.

If a relative was hospitalized, she passed information back and forth. She even helped families who were having trouble coping with the stress of separation. She was a great resource and another way of keeping the crew strong and united. The less they have to worry about home, the more time and attention they have for the ship.

Most businesses should have a similar program, but hardly any do. For instance, I know of a manager who had a heart attack while on the road, but the company had no procedure in place to fly his family out to be with him in the hospital, and in general to ease a time of trauma. Personnel departments aren't usually organized to do that.

In fact, many of the techniques that I developed in the Navy could be easily adapted for personal reinforcement in the civilian workplace. For example, the Navy hands out medals for superior performance, but not when a sailor leaves the service. Leaving is perceived as breaking ranks and mildly inconsiderate of those left behind. I disagreed with that policy, believing that medals send two important signals even when they are given to departing people. They tell those leaving that their services have been valued; equally important, they show those remaining that their hard work will be recognized in the same way when they leave.

The commanding officer of a ship is authorized to hand out 15 medals a year. I wanted to err on the side of excess, so in my first year I passed out 115. Nearly every time a sailor left, I gave him or her a medal. Even if they hadn't been star players, they got medals in a public ceremony, as long as they had done their best every day.

Recall how you feel when your own boss tells you, "Good job." Do your people (and yourself) a favor. Say

it in person, if you can. Press the flesh. Open yourself. Coldness congeals. Warmth heals. Little things make big successes.

I delivered a short speech describing how much we cherished the recipient's friendship, camaraderie, and hard work. It wasn't unusual for people to cry at those ceremonies. Sometimes, the departing sailor's shipmates told funny stories, recalling his or her foibles, trials, and triumphs.

The award I handed out was called the Navy Achievement Medal. I often think that every company should have an equivalent—the General Electric Quality Star, say, or the IBM Order of Excellence, or the Microsoft Medal of Distinction. There is absolutely no downside to this symbolic gesture, provided it is done sincerely and without hype.

### Trust People, They Usually Prove You're Right

Once a year, all Navy ships undergo a thorough assessment in which outside inspectors validate the ship's readiness. The ship as a whole and the crew's abilities and proficiencies are rated in 24 categories, on a scale ranging from basic Level One to advanced Level Four.

The purpose is to determine how much additional training the crew needs to be ready for combat. But if you assume that the higher a ship's level was, the less time it would spend training at sea, you would be wrong. In fact, regardless of its readiness rating, every ship spends the next six months training at sea. Thus, there was no incentive to reach Level Four, and in fact, no ship ever did. Level One was the required minimum, and that was usually considered good enough. Then, *Benfold* came along.

Originally, my goal was to reach an overall rating of Level Two, but when I recognized the enormous potential of my crew, I raised the bar to Level Three, much to the chagrin of those who saw it as a quantum leap in their labor and my hubris.

I must also admit that, in addition to my noble motive of making the ship as good as it could be, I wanted to blow my archrival out of the water. That ship's assessment was scheduled to begin the week following ours. My rival's strategy was to do little and attain basic Level One. The CO had no idea that we were laying the groundwork to shake things up a little. In fact, we were about to rock his world.

Our first challenge was finding enough senior people to supervise the 24 areas of testing. My combat systems officer hit me with the unexpected news that we had only 20 qualified people who were not involved in other critical operations. Thinking fast, I said, "Fine—

pick supervisors from the next group down. You don't always need a senior person in charge. It could be a young, third-class petty officer."

"That's never been done before," he said. "See what they can do," I said. "The alternative is to do nothing, right? Let's assign senior people to the most demanding areas, and work our way down to the junior ones. If we don't get Level Three in some categories, so what? We will get Level One or Two. We have nothing to lose."

As it turned out, the third- and second-class petty officers were so honored to be chosen that they worked hard enough for several of their teams to outshine those supervised by senior people. The search-and-seizure team was particularly impressive. We assigned it to one of the ship's most junior sailors because we suspected he had the ability to honcho it.

The outside inspectors protested, saying they could not validate the work of an important team that wasn't headed by a commissioned officer. But I insisted, and the young sailor did such a fantastic job that the inspectors ate their words and placed us at Level Four in that category.

Breaking out of our stratified systems to trust the people who work for us, especially those at or near the low end of the hierarchy, was a useful, progressive change. It let us unleash people with talent and let them rise to levels that no one had expected, simply by challenging them: Make *Benfold* the readiest ship afloat. In that context, how could we not have done well?

The huzzahs for our incredible performance were just rolling in as another ship was starting the assessment process. Its skipper, sensing disaster, exhorted his people to forget about Level One and shoot for Level Four. But you can't "order" an outstanding performance. You have to plan, enable, nurture, and focus on it. Indeed, that ship finished at Level One.

Four months later, the Navy's top boss, the chief of naval operations, streamlined the assessment process and settled on a formal program that allowed ships to skip the six-month training process if they could achieve the same performance levels that the *Benfold* had managed. This model is now standard throughout the Navy. And it came about because we delegated responsibility to people who were ready and able to accept it.

### Newbies Are Important, Treat Them Well

One of the things the Navy was absolutely miserable at, as are many companies, was welcoming new employees. Recruits were sent to the Navy boot camp at Great Lakes, Illinois, just outside Chicago. They graduated on a Friday morning, boarded a plane in

the afternoon, and landed in San Diego that night. And somehow, they found their way to the ship—to be greeted by no one.

Think about the welcome-aboard program in your company. Do newcomers arrive for the first day of work and find that no computer awaits them, their pay and benefits are delayed by red tape, and the only employee available to answer their questions is second-rate because the best people are too busy? If so, it isn't surprising that they become discontented with their jobs and disparage the organization. It's the end of their idealism.

Worse still, no one even knew they were coming. After enduring boot camp, their first encounter with the actual Navy was to walk in on a bunch of sailors who were getting ready for weekend leave and would have no time for them.

I started talking with new arrivals, asking them about their first day. They said they felt totally intimidated, that they had no friends and knew no one. They were lost for the first 48 hours, on their own aboard ship while nearly everyone else was on leave. I was 17 when I first entered the Naval Academy, and I remember how scared I was. If that was frightening for me, I could imagine what arriving in San Diego must have been like for these young men and women.

I called my XO, Lieutenant Commander Harley, into my cabin. "What's our welcome-aboard program?" I asked. "I don't have a clue," he answered. "Well, go find out and report back to me." The next day, he was back in my cabin. "Captain, the news is pretty embarrassing. We do nothing to prepare for their arrival."

"You have a 5-year-old daughter," I told him. "Twelve years from now, she may join the Navy. How would you want her treated on that first day?"

"I'd want her treated very well," he said.

Every sailor who reports to us is someone's son or daughter. We owe it to them to treat their kids well. It is our duty. "What's the first thing you'd want her to do if she was 17 and just showing up on ship?"

"I'd want her to call home and tell me she'd arrived safely."

"Bingo! Why not bring them up to my cabin, and they can call their parents or boyfriends or girlfriends and tell them that they have arrived and are okay? With the government's telephone rates, a 30-minute call will cost Uncle Sam only 90 cents. It will be the best 90 cents the Department of Defense ever spent."

We designed our welcome-aboard program. We found out who we were getting from boot camp, what flights they would be on, and we met them at the airport to bring them to the ship. Since I didn't sleep on the ship when it was in port, the command duty officer

met the new people on the quarterdeck, shook their hands, brought them to my cabin, and let them call home. Their beds were made, their names were on their lockers, and the best performers from their divisions, assigned to be their "Running Mates," led them on a tour of the ship.

The next morning, the Running Mates drove them all over the base, pointing out the gym, the pool, the theater, the commissary, and the medical and dental facilities. They also got the hot skinny on base life—inside info that's very important to a 17-year-old just stepping out into the world: who and what to avoid, and why; or warnings about, say, places not to go after dark because they could be attacked or robbed.

The Running Mates acted as tour guides, showing them San Diego's Sea World and the Hotel del Coronado. We wanted these young men and women to feel as though San Diego were their new home and we were their new family.

For their first five workdays on the ship, they weren't allowed to stray from their Running Mates. And within the first 48 working hours, they came to see me for a get-to-know-each-other talk. I greeted each the same way: "Welcome. I appreciate having you on our ship." In addition to welcoming these new hires, the program was designed to infect the jaded vets with their enthusiasm.

Jealousy and envy are powerful emotions and, if acted upon, can cause serious problems. Leaders must always watch out for them. A jealous commander may behave in ways that inhibit and soon paralyze his or her subordinates, who eventually turn off and tune out.

All too often, a gung-ho newcomer runs smack into a poisoned corporate culture that sucks the enthusiasm right out of her. I wanted the newcomers to remain so revved up that they would recharge the batteries of those who no longer felt that way.

Think about the welcome-aboard program in your company. Do newcomers arrive for the first day of work and find that no computer awaits them, their pay and benefits are delayed by red tape, and the only employee available to answer their questions is second-rate because the best people are too busy? If so, it isn't surprising that they become discontented with their jobs and disparage the organization. It's the end of their idealism.

I wanted *Benfold's* environment to be exactly the opposite, and it was. Our new sailors appreciated our efforts, which paid tremendous dividends in the form of workforce enthusiasm and self-confidence. Once people heard about it, our Running Mate program was adopted by many other ships on the San Diego water-

front. The commander of our destroyer squadron even made a home movie about the welcome-aboard process for other ships.

### Be the Rising Tide That Lifts All Boats

Since World War II, and possibly before, the Navy has issued foul-weather jackets that are made of ugly blue duckcloth that keeps you neither dry nor warm. To my young sailors, they were a fashion statement not worth making. While browsing in a marine gear store, one sailor spotted a civilian version he loved—it was made of flashy blue Gore-Tex with reflective stripes and a built-in flotation device.

Naturally, he told me about it immediately. The Navy jackets cost \$150 apiece; these were \$90 and superior in every way. They would actually keep you warm and dry, and they'd be safer than the standard issue because of the flotation device. And, as a bonus, "USS Benfold" could be stenciled on the back. Not your usual U.S. Department of Defense procurement, this was more value for less money. "Great idea, sign me up," I said. We used the ship's credit card to buy 310 jackets and passed them out to all hands. We had a very cool-looking crew.

The next day, when another ship pulled into our pier, its sailors saw our sailors wearing the jackets. Half an hour later, that ship's command master chief strode over to say, "My captain has ordered you to stop wearing those jackets."

"Really? Why?" I asked.

"We almost had a mutiny over there—our crew wants the same jackets."

Had that ship's captain not been one of the most senior commanding officers in the Pacific Fleet, I would have laughed in the master chief's face. According to Navy protocol, the senior officer present is responsible for a pier's security, and he had decided that pier security was endangered because his sailors coveted my sailors' jackets.

"Why not just buy the same jackets for your people?" I asked. "They'd steal them," he said. "Before we pull into port, we collect all our foul-weather jackets and lock them up. Can't trust these people."

What a difference between ships: We never worried about *Benfold* sailors stealing their jackets. They could wear them home if they wanted to. In fact, they were so proud of the new ones that they rarely took them off.

I told this gentleman that I considered his captain's order illegal, and I refused to obey it. If he insisted, I said, I would be happy to go to the admiral's office and accept an immediate court-martial. If that was an over-reaction, I considered it justified. In part, I was remem-

bering an incident that occurred while I was working for Defense Secretary Perry.

The four military services use their personnel budgets in very different ways. The Air Force stresses quality of life: its people get beautiful housing, great bases, and excellent medical care. The Army and Marine Corps take nearly the opposite attitude. A comfortable Air Force base could be next door to an Army base where soldiers are living in slums.

But this was becoming embarrassing, so while I was in the Pentagon, the Army and Marine Corps asked Perry to take money out of the Air Force budget and give it to them so they could upgrade their bases. He pondered their request for a few moments, then refused, telling them that the goal shouldn't be to reduce the standards for some but to raise everyone else to the highest possible level.

This had struck me as universal wisdom. Now, rather than buy his crew new jackets, this ship's captain wanted mine to stop wearing them, and I wasn't going to let it happen. He could have tried to have me fired, but that was a chance I was willing to take. That command master chief delivered my message and returned half an hour later with a new directive: "My CO has decided you can wear your jackets after all."

That ship could have bought those jackets but never did. Meanwhile, the so-called *Benfold* Jacket became the rage, and my squadron commander ordered them for the five other ships under his command.

Jealousy and envy are powerful emotions and, if acted upon, can cause serious problems. Leaders must always watch out for them. A jealous commander may behave in ways that inhibit and soon paralyze his or her subordinates, who eventually turn off and tune out. The antidote lies in trying to make the people who work for you feel needed and highly valued. Help them believe in that wonderful old truism "A rising tide lifts all boats." With perhaps a few exceptions, every organization's success is a collective achievement.

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# CREATING A WINNING WORK ENVIRONMENT

By Scott Hunter

In its ongoing survey of the American workplace, Gallup found that only 30 percent of workers “were engaged, or involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their workplace” as reported in the Los Angeles Times on June 17, 2013. Although this number is the highest since 2000, it is overshadowed by the number of workers who aren’t committed to performing at a high level.

In fact, the remaining 70 percent have either “checked out” at work or are “actively disengaged,” according to the survey. It is our experience that poor communication in the workplace is a leading cause of this high level of job dissatisfaction.

If everyone would like to work in a thriving and nurturing environment, why is it that almost no one loves being at work? Why is it that most of us simply acquiesce when confronted by the drudgery and suffering that, according to seemingly every statistical measure, characterizes life within many organizations?

Why is it that, given the possibility of real fulfillment and satisfaction, we tolerate the gossip, petty jealousy, personal undermining, and adversarial communication that seem to pervade many offices, assured of the inevitability of this condition?

But is this condition inevitable? Are we destined to exist in an environment where the most we have to look forward to is Friday afternoon?

I say, not at all. There are specific steps that you can take to begin to reclaim some of the enthusiasm, some of the air of celebration, and some of the fundamental respect for individual human dignity that is apparent within flourishing business organizations.

**1. Don’t take it personally.** Given the dysfunctional communication strategies demonstrated by most adults, repressed anger and upset are frequently brewing just beneath the surface within many individuals. Their angry and offensive outbursts have little or nothing to do with any occurrence in the present moment. Some unresolved upset from the past has simply been triggered and bursts forth in an inappropriate manner.

Under such circumstances does it make sense to take another’s outburst personally? Logically, the answer is no. Taking someone else’s anger personally is insane because it simply never is a personal phenomenon.

This is not to say, however, that it is easy to remain calm in the face of another person's anger, recognizing that it is not personal. It is never easy, but armed with this insight you can begin to develop an ability to stand firmly in the face of another's upset without taking it as a personal attack.

**2. Listen with compassion.** Life is a difficult and challenging enterprise for everyone, and this fundamental truth goes largely unrecognized. Given this knowledge, rather than reacting to someone's anger or upset, demonstrate empathy for his or her feelings and experience. Rather than reacting to someone's anger or upset, just try to demonstrate empathy.

**3. Just hear the communication.** In order to lessen tension within the workplace, it is necessary to provide a safe environment for open, honest communication. Get people to talk about what is going on with them, to describe their present experience, and then just listen.

Don't respond. Don't offer advice. Don't try to console. Just listen with compassion and understanding. In the vast number of cases, quiet and attentive listening will allow the upset to disappear.

**4. Give up the need to be right.** For most human beings, the necessity to be right, the unconscious desire to win, is all important. This drive is expressed with employees, coworkers, and even with family.

Individuals are reduced to objects, and friends and family are sacrificed simply to preserve an egocentric point of view. We would rather be right, would rather win the argument than coexist happily, but being right and being happy are mutually exclusive.

**5. Look for the best in people.** Focusing attention on oneself, caused by one's own sense of insufficiency, drives people into competition with one another and creates a bias toward critical, negative analysis of another in order to enhance one's own social standing and appearance.

We literally look for the worst in others in an attempt to conceal or dilute our own self-perceived shortcomings by comparison. In order to counter this seemingly natural tendency, learn to look for and expect the best in all coworkers.

What is it about each individual that makes him or her a valuable contribution to the company? Who are these people really, and what are their best attributes and strengths?

**6. Acknowledge people.** Everyone craves positive attention because most individuals live with a sense

of insufficiency and an awareness of their own shortcomings. Look for opportunities to acknowledge coworkers. What positive impact are they making on the organization?

Acknowledge people for doing a good job, for making a deadline, for keeping their promises. Acknowledge them for their appearance, for the way they manage their workload, or for the way they treat others.

Always remember to keep it authentic and sincere, and look for and find numerous opportunities to thank people for the many large and small contributions that they make to the organization.

**7. Forgive others.** Given the unconscious desire to win at all costs and the necessity to be right, we tend to hold on to every injustice, every wrong, every resentment, and every regret. What often goes unnoticed is that unforgiven resentments must always be suppressed, managed, or controlled.

They arise, again and again, whenever the person who is the object of the resentment comes into the room or is mentioned in conversation. What makes matters worse is that the suppressed anger also arises whenever any similar instance resembles a past transgression. Resentments divert attention, breed gossip, and provoke physical illness.

For your own sanity, it is critically important to forgive others. Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself. Forgiveness does not deny the inappropriate nature of another's acts; it does not condone or tolerate future abuse. But in forgiveness, in giving up the resentment and the right to punish, you are left with serenity, freedom, and peace of mind.

**8. Communicate upsets.** Human beings embrace the illusion that unexpressed anger, upset, and disappointment will simply disappear over time. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Like resentments, unexpressed upsets inevitably arise, again and again. They divert your attention and sap energy. Also, unfulfilled expectations, thwarted intentions, and undelivered communications—the stuff of which upsets are made—provide the “evidence” by which other individuals are tried and sentenced. Only communication can provide salvation for continued viable and productive relationships.

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# DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS





# WHAT GOES AROUND, TURNS AROUND

By Dale Iman

It has been said that “it is not the strongest species that will survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.” It’s clear that most local government managers understand the importance of keeping an open mind, seeking innovative solutions to difficult problems, and valuing creative thinking. These are clearly personal attributes that contribute to individual success and enable managers to reach lofty goals.

These same characteristics are vital to the success of the organizations we manage. A vibrant and progressive manager, as well as local government officials who are of the same mindset, will embrace opportunities for change and never shy away from the constant challenge of finding a better way to serve citizens and improve communities.

Unfortunately, and for a variety of reasons, managers will from time to time lose sight of the fact that they must remain highly competitive. They also sometimes forget that they must be on the cutting edge and that

positive change is a key core value of every successful organization.

When a local government loses its competitive drive and becomes willing to settle for something less than excellence, it’s a sure sign that mediocrity has gained a strong foothold. It is when these telltale signs of stagnation become obvious that the governing body turns to a manager who thrives on the concepts that embody an upbeat, positive, can-do attitude—a management style that expects the unexpected and demands nothing less from staff members than an unrelenting pursuit of excellence.

## To Salvage the Situation

The challenge for a manager is to convince the entire organization, including staff, elected officials, and citizens, that the benefits of embracing change management will yield the desired results of reinvigorating the organization and the community it serves. As a city manager who has developed a reputation as a

“turnaround manager,” I was asked by *PM* magazine if I would share my insights and experiences on the subject of change management.

This article identifies and discusses the frequent problems and pitfalls that contribute to stagnation, missed opportunities, and disgruntled citizens. It will also explore successful techniques used to fix problems, right the ship, and indeed revitalize and turn around the organization.

A multitude of issues can contribute to less than stellar organizational performance. Libraries are filled with books that reflect on management techniques that if left unattended will lead to sluggish performance and a loss of momentum. The balance of this article will focus on what contributes to an ineffective local government that will eventually need an inspired change manager.

## Don't Agonize . . . Organize

It is amazing how often you find local government administrators who don't understand how important it is to update their community's strategic plan and comprehensive master plan regularly. Updating plans takes discipline, but few things are more conducive to high-performance government than strong planning and implementation.

The strategic plan establishes the mission, core values, goals, and objectives for the entire organization. It's the work plan that, if properly implemented, will lead a city or county to prosperity. Goal achievement is paramount to success, and success breeds success. The strategic planning process promotes teamwork at and between all levels of the organization. A manager without the support of a strategic plan is truly like a carpenter without tools.

The comprehensive master plan is equally important in that it provides long-range planning for all infrastructure, utilities, capital improvements, land use, and facilities. All too often, the comprehensive master plan is not updated regularly, and it becomes antiquated and ineffective.

The benefits of undertaking a comprehensive planning process are far-reaching and long-lasting. The planning process itself represents an outstanding opportunity to inform the public of the many assets and opportunities within the community. An added benefit is that it engages the public in a process that clearly defines the goals and plans for economic and community development potential.

A comprehensive plan eliminates the guesswork, reduces the bureaucracy, and streamlines the development process. In short, the plan enhances the development readiness of a community and positions the organization to maximize opportunities for quality development.

## Top 10 Things a Turnaround Manager Should Do

1. **Bring elected officials together (retreat) to build a strategic plan.** Establish a clear direction for the organization. This helps to build consensus, and it helps to build a positive relationship with the new manager, staff, and the elected officials.
2. **Target an important project or program and make it a reality.** This is the idea of getting an early victory under your belt. Success breeds success. It will help bring the elected officials, staff, and management together and start to solidify the bond of a successful team.
3. **Create an environment that encourages and requires a fully engaged team.** It's imperative that the new manager addresses the “curse of complacency” early and often. The manager and key senior staff must constantly fight the curse.
4. **Establish an organizational culture that is founded on discipline.** Use a disciplined process in the development of budgets, policies, operational procedures, and decisions.
5. **Recognize the importance of building and maintaining strong, healthy relationships with as many community stake-holders as possible.** Allies are important when you need support of your proposals and programs.
6. **Don't try to be everyone's friend.** If you ignore poor performing employees and don't adequately reward outstanding performance, the result will be that you make your best people mad.
7. **Focus. Focus. Focus.** Be consistent in your decisions and your actions. The last thing a community needs is a manager that changes his or her opinions as often as their socks. Stability and consistency in direction is important.
8. **Place a high level of emphasis on results.** Organizations need to be results oriented in this fast paced, stretch the dollar, “get it done” environment that we live in today. Just about everything we do as public employees should be directed towards results. Ask the question, does this add value to your organization?
9. **Create an environment that embraces technology.** New and emerging technology represents the best opportunity to improve efficiency and effectiveness without increasing the budget.
10. **Be open, honest, ethical, and above board in everything you do.** Abraham Lincoln said it in 1862, and his words still hold true today: “With public trust we can do any-thing...without it, nothing.”

### Momentum in Moline

In 1995, Moline, Illinois, had just opened a beautiful new civic center, The Mark of the Quad Cities, and it attracted an award-winning Radisson Hotel to the city's downtown, on the banks of the Mississippi River. Across the street stood a new Deere & Company office complex and visitor pavilion with collector shops and a restaurant.

Earlier in the decade, the city had established a public-private partnership and a nonprofit economic development corporation known as Renew Moline. Moline certainly was enjoying the taste of success during the mid-1990s, much of which was attributed to a strong dose of corporate citizenship by John Deere. The city then took a collective break from the difficult work of redeveloping the heart of the city.

In 1998, I was appointed city administrator of Moline and quickly went to work. Within 30 days we planned, scheduled, and brought the council and senior staff together to develop the city's first strategic plan. By the end of the first year, we had commissioned a planning firm to facilitate the development of a comprehensive master plan.

This was the first time since the mid-1960s that the city had taken a good look at the comprehensive plan. Corridor studies and downtown development plans were completed at the same time and were folded into the new comprehensive plan. Planning is hard work because it involves collaboration with countless stakeholders, consensus building, and negotiation. The very fact that it is such difficult work is probably the reason that good community planning is frequently neglected.

Results from Moline's intensive planning efforts began paying benefits almost immediately. The key to any successful plan is implementation. City council, staff, and citizens who participated in the development of the plan now had a vested interest in seeing those plans become reality. The development community quickly embraced the city's plans and became an active part of the team.

Momentum that nearly had been lost was now revived. Riverfront condominiums, office buildings, historic restoration, new downtown restaurants and shops, and a new campus of the University of Illinois were projects that resulted from the extensive planning effort. Residential housing in newly annexed areas of the city was being developed.

A second riverfront hotel was constructed, and new retail shopping areas emerged. Public improvements included a \$25 million water plant expansion, a new police headquarters, and a 400-space parking garage. The dreams that citizens had held for decades—such

as the new public library—finally came to fruition. And the crown jewel—my personal favorite—was the total restoration of the 1890 Historic Prospect Park.

Yes, planning is hard work, but the satisfaction of helping citizens fulfill their dreams makes it all worthwhile.

### Power of Teamwork

There is universal agreement that organizations that promote and employ a team approach are more likely to enjoy success than those that do not, and I've found this to be true in the turnaround environment. Why, then, is it not uncommon to find elected officials who are extremely dysfunctional when it comes to working together as a team? Isn't it incumbent upon us as public servants to set aside differences and do what is best for the community?

All too often we find city councils and county boards making decisions for the wrong reasons. Decisions are too frequently made with the next election in mind rather than what will produce the most favorable long-term benefit for the community.

Compounding the problem is the decline in civility and a lack of trust among elected officials, which also can hamper the work of a turnaround manager. I still remember the first time I heard a councilmember refer to himself as a politician and the resulting sick feeling that quickly formed in the pit of my stomach. It hasn't always been this way, and I know there are still plenty of good, hard-working local elected officials out there doing their jobs solely for the purpose of improving their respective communities.

When members of the governing board can't set aside their personal conflicts for the good of the community and don't understand the importance of teamwork, it sends a message that permeates the entire organization. It is extremely difficult for a manager to come into a situation where the council is not working well as a group and try to get the staff to pull together, support one another, share resources, and function as a well-oiled machine. But that is precisely the challenge confronting the turnaround manager in today's environment.

### What Can Be Done?

So, what does the manager do in this situation? I've found that the most effective way to combat negatives is to create positives. The first thing a manager should do is to create opportunities that will allow the council and staff to become successful and see themselves as winners. Put your council and your staff into a light where their self-image and the perception of others are enhanced.

## SUCCESS BREEDS SUCCESS. ONCE EMPLOYEES BEGIN TO SEE THE RESULTS THAT ARE ACCOMPLISHED FROM WORKING TOGETHER AS A TEAM, THEIR FEELINGS OF SUCCESS WILL START A CHAIN REACTION.

Success breeds success. Once employees begin to see the results that are accomplished from working together as a team, their feelings of success will start a chain reaction. Everyone wants to be a part of a winning team.

I witnessed this as city manager of Gallipolis, Ohio. We implemented a highly successful downtown revitalization program. The facade restoration projects started slowly, but as soon as the first storefronts were finished, they so impressed the property owners that they lined up to take part. In the end, the award-winning project was a huge success and provided a great sense of pride for the city.

I learned even earlier in my career about the power of teamwork and how success brings people together. In 1982, soon after I was appointed the first city administrator of Frostburg, Maryland, this relatively small university community realized that its water reservoir was no longer dependable. A series of droughts and major water leaks made it necessary to take drastic steps.

The city, concerned about its ability to provide enough water to its residents and the university, had little choice but to declare a moratorium on new construction. Frostburg was not a wealthy community, and the city did not have the resources to expand its Piney Dam Reservoir.

To say the least, things looked rather bleak. Working as a team, the current city administrator, John Kirby; the city engineer, Chris Hovatter; and I developed and implemented a plan to create a broad-based coalition of city, county, state, and federal representatives who pledged to help Frostburg secure the funding needed to build a new Piney Reservoir.

The council, which had never been dysfunctional but had also not been highly effective, came together in support of the plan and worked it. Thus, the council

and staff, through a team effort, developed the needed support and obtained a large federal grant. The new reservoir was constructed, the moratorium lifted, and some rather impressive residential and commercial development followed. The council and staff had transformed itself into a high-performing team.

The most satisfying part of this story to me personally came about this past summer. While visiting family members in western Maryland, I stopped at our favorite restaurant in Frostburg. Much to my delight and (let me admit it) pride, I saw my former mayor and city councilmembers dining in a group with their partners. After we caught up on what everyone had been doing, they explained that they still try to get together every Saturday evening.

It is obvious that, after 25 years, the power of their team is stronger than ever. Never underestimate the power of teamwork!

### Curse of Complacency

In his bestselling book, *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins proclaims the “enemy of great is good.” His book focuses on the differences between good companies and great companies. The same concepts apply to public organizations, including local governments. You don’t have to look far to find communities that have implemented outstanding projects and successful programs that have been recognized for excellence. The challenge is to sustain high performance and maintain an image of excellence.

Localities, however, are made up of individuals and, unfortunately, many people tend to rest once they have reached high plateaus. Organizations tend to do the same. Think about the annual list of All-America Cities, which are presented by the National Civic League. Achieving All-America status is a great honor, a true symbol of excellence and outstanding achievement.

## DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

How often, though, do you see an All-America award winner continue to excel at peak performance? I've had the privilege of managing in four All-America cities during my career—Marquette, Michigan; Grand Island, Nebraska; Southfield, Michigan; and Fayetteville, North Carolina. Each of these cities has experienced an exciting and unique level of success as well as challenges that make sustainability difficult.

Located on the southern shore of Lake Superior, Marquette enjoys unparalleled natural beauty and has a restored historic downtown contributing to its charm. The city's geographic, far-north isolation and harsh winters hinder its economic development efforts. Grand Island, Nebraska, rebounded from one of the worst tornadoes in U.S. history in 1980 to achieve All-America status, only to be set back by the agricultural recession of the next two decades.

Southfield, Michigan, features a spectacular skyline filled with modern high-rise office complexes and Fortune 500 companies. The devastating decline of the automobile industry has left the city with deficit spending and a leadership that is struggling to adapt to the new economic reality. Fayetteville, North Carolina, is a rapidly growing city with a revitalized downtown and a bright future. This city of 175,000 people is working hard to overcome years of inadequate planning and undisciplined budget practices.

### So What's the Key?

A turnaround manager is often recruited after a community has been lulled into long-lasting complacency.

Fighting complacency is a continuous struggle, but it is a fight that must be fought.

Telltale signs of complacency in an organization include lackluster performance, diminished accountability, disengaged employees, low employee initiative, and lack of discipline. The job of the manager is to clearly define the goals and expectations for the future, identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and set in place a plan of action to accomplish the goals.

In short, the manager must reinvigorate an organization by energizing employees and emphasizing the importance of accountability and discipline. The job of the manager is to provide a seat on the bus for every team member who is willing to meet or exceed expectations. When the bus leaves the station for its destination, all the seats should be filled with team players. Those who have not found their seats will have to be left behind.

Numerous issues can contribute to poor organizational performance, and the job of a turnaround manager is filled with challenges, frustration, controversy, and—frequently—conflict. That is to be expected because change is almost certain to be met with strong opposition.

The turnaround position is not a job for a thin-skinned person. But nothing is more rewarding than looking back over several years of work and realizing that the community you served is a more successful, vibrant, and progressive community because you dared to make a difference. Challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.

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# CAN WE TALK? FOUR TIPS FOR DELIVERING BAD NEWS

By Geoffrey Tumlin

Bad news is no fun to deliver. That's why even leaders and highly successful people will go to great lengths to avoid doing it.

You might, for example, tolerate a longstanding, but mediocre, vendor instead of contracting with another company. Or maybe you make excuses to hold on to an underperforming employee. And admit it: You've almost certainly hung around in a problematic personal relationship (romantic or platonic) longer than you should have.

These delays buy us a reprieve, but they surely don't improve the situation. In fact, as we hesitate, prevaricate, and beat around the bush, the underlying problem gets worse and the web of complications grows ever more tangled. That's why we owe it to ourselves to study up on the fine art of delivering bad news.

## Delivering Bad News Isn't Fun

If you were hoping for a way around the unpleasant emotions that accompany the delivery of bad news, I'll

have to disappoint you—there isn't one. But there are some strategies to help you deal with these conversations more promptly and successfully.

Delivering bad news is an essential skill, even if it won't win you any popularity contests. Dealing with issues promptly and decisively can save you time, energy, and even money—not to mention all the mental anguish you feel while putting off a difficult conversation.

Here are four things to keep in mind the next time you need to deliver a message the other person probably won't want to hear:

1. **Get to the core of the matter.** When you were writing essays in high school, dredging up a thesis statement may have made you feel like banging your head against your desk. Even now, coming up with the perfect language to put into a proposal might take hours of your time. But determining your core message will be surprisingly easy when it comes to delivering bad news.

## DEALING WITH ISSUES PROMPTLY AND DECISIVELY CAN SAVE YOU TIME, ENERGY, AND EVEN MONEY—NOT TO MENTION ALL THE MENTAL ANGUISH YOU FEEL WHILE PUTTING OFF A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION.

Your core message is obvious when you're giving bad news: It's the thing you don't want to say. Your core message might be "We're switching vendors" or, "We have to let you go" or, "We should stop seeing each other." The message you've been avoiding is the message you need to deliver.

2. **Stick to your guns.** Determining your core message was the easy part. You may not find the remainder of your task as simple. Think back to the tough conversations you've had in the past: Have you ever been talked out of your decision by the other person ("But we've worked together for 15 years—you're not really letting me go, are you?") or even changed your mind before delivering the bad news ("She's going to be so upset—I just can't go through with it")?

You don't do yourself or the other person any favors by putting off an unpleasant conversation. Remember, when giving bad news, you're not negotiating, fact finding, or gathering input. Resist the temptation to get pushed, cajoled, or charmed off your message.

Keep your end goal in mind and deliver your less-than-pleasant message here and now. Bad news is like taking off a bandage—it's best done quickly.

3. **Explain yourself (but not too much).** It's important to make sure that the other party understands your bad news message and doesn't walk away with the wrong impression. For instance: "We have to let you go because we're bringing on someone with a different skill set." "We're switching vendors because we need different service schedules." "I think we should stop seeing each other because we're both miserable."

As in these examples, strive to state your core message and explanation—the reason behind the message—in one sentence. You can repeat variants of your message and explanation if you want to say more, but don't add new information or you may encourage a drift away from your core message.

4. **Get out (of the conversation, that is).** If you've communicated your core message, and if the other person understands, it's probably acceptable to start thinking about an exit.

Naturally, you should address any obvious questions ("Do we keep making deliveries this week?" "When's my last day?" "Who keeps the cat?"), but be wary of answering too many speculative or probing questions.

In a bad-news type of conversation, your core message pretty much speaks for itself, and a great deal of unnecessary damage is often done when you overstay a difficult conversation. You might end up giving up ground you hadn't intended to, talking about topics that are better left undressed, or escalating the conversation to the point of hostility.

When it's time to deliver bad news, don't get pushed off of your core message. It's a simple formula: Be clear, be concise, and be gone.

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*Geoffrey Tumlin is author of Stop Talking, Start Communicating: Counterintuitive Secrets to Success in Business and in Life (McGraw-Hill, August 2013, ISBN: 978-0-0718130-4-4, \$20.00). He is chief executive officer, Mouthpeace Consulting LLC, Austin, Texas (geoff@tumlin.com; www.tumlin.com).*



# DEALING WITH DISTRESSED PEOPLE

*Nine ways to make it easier to serve your community's residents*

By Joseph and JoAnn Callaway

When the economy tanked in 2008, the way we saw the world shifted. Fear took over. People worried they'd go to work one day and discover they no longer had a job. They worried that they might fail their families, that their retirement savings were gone forever, and that they might never get back on their feet. For a great many people—maybe including some you are in contact with daily—that sense of insecurity still lingers. In some cases it has led to hectic, stress-filled workweeks that bring less pay, little thanks, and often a host of problems in their personal lives.

In a word, distress.

Distressed residents/customers and employees are everywhere. Sometimes the reasons are money-related, sometimes personal, sometimes a mixture of both. Regardless, when you open your eyes and really notice the pain these people are in, you will have taken the first step toward helping them.

Unfortunately, many people don't want to deal with distressed employees, residents, or customers. That's

because they can be time-consuming. Indecisive. Needy. Maybe even angry and hostile. But rather than avoiding such difficult people, you can embrace them and do whatever you can to make their situation better.

Sincerely putting their needs first—regardless of how hard to deal with they may be—is a strategy that has the power to change your life, to transform your organization, and to help bring about financial security. Even when residents and employees make your life a lot more difficult than it theoretically should be, your job—your professional reason for being—is to serve them. And that is never more important than when they are going through their toughest times.

Here are tips on incorporating a customer-first method into the way you interact with distressed people:

**Make the commitment.** Really putting others first is a big commitment. And if you're comfortable with your current way of doing business, level of success, and relationships with people, that commitment is not for you.

## INSTEAD OF DREADING EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS, THINK OF ALLEVIATING THE CUSTOMER'S WORRIES, INSECURITIES, AND FEARS AS PART OF YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION.

You need to put your own needs second, base all of your interactions on transparency and honesty, and make it your priority to always do what's best for the customer or employee. It won't always be easy: Consciously putting your own best interests in second place goes against the grain of human nature!

But you will find that a lot of the tough decisions—like how to give your best to someone who makes you want to pull your hair out—will practically make themselves.

**Realize the benefits of sticking with customers in distress.** When you truly succeed in helping a distressed person, you will have built an important relationship. Often, these are the people who go on to tell others how wonderful you are and what lengths you went to on their behalf.

Sticking with your distressed customers isn't just the right thing to do, it makes good business sense. Yes, the economy may be slowly pulling itself out of the dark, deep, and depressing hole known as The Great Recession, but an organization can still be far from booming. How you conduct your organization's business now, when the going is tough, can set you apart and give you a solid foundation in the future.

**Learn to like people.** Even if you already consider yourself a people person, chances are you still need to learn to like people more. Think about it: Do you hold yourself emotionally aloof from people and complain about their foibles to your coworkers and family, even though you were all smiles during a meeting with them?

Or do you always make a genuine effort to put yourself in their shoes and to learn more about them as people, not just as users of local government services?

To truly put your residents first, for example, your No. 1 goal should be to invite them within arm's length and make each one less of a stranger. It's important to remain professional, but there's no reason you can't strive to make a deeper connection with a person by

asking about their kids, their pets, their hobbies, and their jobs.

Sometimes it's not easy to like people. They can be difficult or have bad attitudes, and they can be a source of pain, ridicule, and embarrassment. But if you get out there and engage, you'll find that most of them are just like you: filled with worries, hopes, and dreams.

**Get comfortable with out-of-control emotions.** We're all human. And while it's true that most of us try to leave our emotions at the door, it's not always possible. Sometimes our fear, pain, and anger just spill over. If a resident loses his or her cool or bursts into tears, don't get upset. Look at the event as an opportunity to help in any way you can.

Instead of dreading emotional outbursts, think of alleviating the customer's worries, insecurities, and fears as part of your job description. And remember, putting customers first means not reflecting their turmoil back to them. Resist the urge to snipe back or to let yourself be caught up in a feeding frenzy of worry and anxiety. Instead, let animosity and frustration end when they reach you. You and the customer will be better off.

**Honesty is always the best policy.** When people are distressed, they need the truth. Yet when things aren't going well, our instinct is often to sugarcoat, to paint a picture that's a little brighter than reality actually is. When you do that with a distressed person, you might be able to placate them in the short term, but if things go south, they'll bottom out.

Instead, look them in the eye and say, "This is the reality. And here's what I'm going to do. Remember, I'll be here every step of the way."

Kidding distressed customers, or sitting back and letting them kid themselves, can be costly. When you are truthful, you know you're doing the right thing. You don't feel as if something was left unsaid or undone.

**Stay competent.** Often, it's the best way to help your customers. Hone your management skills. Take a class. Attend a conference.

**Always care, even (and especially) when your customers or employees don't.** Distress can bring with it despondence and ambivalence. If you have distressed employees or are distressed yourself, you know what that means. It can mean phone calls that end with, "Do whatever you want. We're screwed either way." Or, "There's just no hope. I guess I'll have to let employees go."

**Care about people who have stopped caring.** They don't care whether a local government's budget is shrinking. They blame the government for not providing what they need. Managers will have to deal with their grief, anger, and remorse.

Consider your "karma bank." Serve every person, regardless of the return on investment of time, energy, emotions, and money. We believe there is a karma bank out there somewhere, and when times are particularly difficult or a customer or employee is a real pill, remind yourself that you are making deposits in your karma bank.

And guess what? While we've learned not to have firm expectations when it comes to karma, our efforts and goodwill usually come back to us multiple times over.

**Help people look to the future. (It's a bright one for them and for you.)** Most of us need to be reminded from time to time that "this too shall pass." Distressed people are no exception. When they are up against the wall and feeling hopeless, you have to help them look to the future.

Emphasize your willingness to help them through whatever crisis they're currently facing and then let them know what the future can look like once the problem is resolved.

You may be dealing with a resident, employee, friend, or maybe even more than one, who is struggling to see the bright side. By simply letting them know that you're committed to helping them in whatever way you can is a great first step in helping them feel better.

Knowing that someone is on their side can ease their stress at a time when it feels like the world is conspiring against them. Take care of people during these dark days, and they'll take care of you down the line. Everyone wins when you strive to serve.

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*Joseph Callaway and JoAnn Callaway are coauthors of the book *Clients First: The Two Word Miracle*, Phoenix, Arizona (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., October 2012, ISBN: 978-1-1184127-7-0, \$21.95; [www.clientsfirstbook.com](http://www.clientsfirstbook.com)).*



WHAT  
**MATTERS MOST**



# WHAT WORKPLACE ISSUES MATTER MOST TO EMERGING LEADERS

Despite their “outsized” presence, according to the [Pew Research Center](#), the baby boom generation, which peaked at nearly 78.8 million in 1999, will be eclipsed for the first time in 2015 by the millennials, who will grow to 75.3 million while the boomer cohort will shrink to 74.9 million.

In the August 2015 *Public Management (PM)* magazine cover story “Next Generation Professionals: An Inside Look at What Matters to Them,” a group of local government experts predict that this shift in workplace demographics will lead to significant changes among public sector workplaces. Government leaders at all levels, say these experts, will need to adopt a new mindset in which government becomes an employer that competes for top marketplace talent along with a variety of other public, nonprofit, and private sector organizations.

In early 2015, the group conducted an informal Local Government Workforce Study (LGWS) of younger local government staff members and concluded that these changes require a contemporary approach to

workforce development that varies greatly from the “business as usual” approach often implemented by localities. The *PM* article describes how public sector recruitment and retention—and the ways in which governments proactively prepare their workplaces for the workforces of the future—will look altogether different than in the past.

## Recruitment Practices

Two-thirds of the LGWS study respondents indicated that “making an impact on community/public service” was the number one attraction to serving in local government. Government organizations will need to respond by building a pipeline of valuable skill sets among all staff members, rather than simply attracting candidates to specific jobs. This will require them to proactively reach out to potential candidates through social media and web-based channels.

Mobile recruiting will also play an increasingly important role in future government recruitment practices. [Research conducted by Glassdoor.com](#) in 2013

## WHAT MATTERS MOST

revealed that 82 percent of all job seekers use their smartphones to search for jobs. Less than a year later, that number increased by 7 points to 89 percent or nearly 9 out of 10 job seekers.

Using attention-grabbing ads to attract top talent has also become a necessity, since young professionals won't respond to boring job descriptions. Consider attracting someone who wants to "....make an impact on [their] community by helping to fund services that will benefit [their] neighbors and friends" versus searching for someone with the "ability to understand statistics and research data." Expediting the hiring process—even when it requires the completion of written exams or performance tests—is also crucial to maintaining the interest of candidates, as it demonstrates a sincere interest in the candidate and a willingness to customize the interview process.

### Retention of Top Performers

Good management, culture, and the quality of coworkers were more important than compensation and benefits to more than twice the number of LGWS respondents who were asked what motivated them to continue their careers in local government. Eighty-six percent of employed workers are looking for work outside their current occupations, according to *Fortune*, and are essentially seeking their "dream jobs" in non-traditional careers. Because job-hopping today is less stigmatizing to a career than in previous years, nearly a third of employers expect employees to move more rapidly from job to job, as indicated in a 2014 study conducted by CareerBuilder.com.

This means that local government managers must look for ways to not only attract but retain top performers, including:

- **Flexible work programs.** Job sharing, flexible hours, and telecommuting can make an organization more attractive to women, millennials, and older workers.
- **Relationships.** According to *Gallup's State of the American Manager* report, one in two employees leaves their job because of a failed relationship with their manager or supervisor. Manager engagement is also an indicator of employee engagement, a phenomenon known as the "cascade effect," and employees supervised by highly engaged managers are 59 percent more likely to be engaged in their organization than those supervised by disengaged managers.
- **Workplace culture.** Nearly one-third of the LGWS respondents indicated that they want their culture to

focus more on employee input and communication. The most commonly reported demotivating factor reported by respondents is poor organizational management and oversight.

- **Professional development and growth.** Forty-five percent of LGWS respondents indicated that investment in employee development by an organization in the form of leadership and professional development and training, coupled with growth opportunities, topped the list of things an organization could do to help employees advance their careers.
- **Experiential learning.** More than one-third of the LGWS respondents indicated that "general experience with management and leadership" was the number one skill they needed to improve in order to further their careers.

### Changes

Government managers must proactively prepare their workplaces for the future, said the authors of "Next Generation Professionals." Successful strategies include:

- Engaging in proactive workforce planning by analyzing current demographics and projecting attrition among not only older workers but all age groups.
- Partnering with local learning institutions to make staff development opportunities available to employees and to develop a pipeline of future workers through internships and apprenticeship programs.
- Evaluating paid-time-off policies that can provide the foundation for flexible work arrangements and create an employee retention "carrot."
- Providing cultural awareness training to appeal to the desire among young employees to cultivate a diverse workforce and to send a signal that the workplace is a platform for the discussion of such challenging issues as cultural communication styles, giving and receiving feedback, and reviewing and assessing employee performance.

Listening to the employees of today who will soon become the government leaders of tomorrow is the key to effectively preparing organizations to maximize the great work of the next generation of public servants. Encouraging young professionals to understand the impact of their efforts on a community; increasing training, professional development, and involvement; and banishing bureaucracy and outdated thinking are just a few of the ways government organizations can attract and retain a talented, highly motivated workforce.



# WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS

By Pamela Gibson and Diana Deadrick

Do federal and state peers discuss the same issues? “Government” is typically identified as the collection of federal, state, and local entities attending to the public good. Public administrators (PAs) are commonly bundled together and labeled bureaucrats, like an assortment of candies in a box, without delineating the unique and distinct nature of each level in defining an issue, applying theory, and evaluating practice at each level of government.

The levels, however, are distinguishable based upon the scope of authority, proximity to the public, and type of jobs held. Legislative and budgetary parameters dictate the differing responses available to practitioners at each level of government. This would suggest the possibility of differing focus in what is of interest to public administrators relative to their level of interaction and degree of authority when engaging the public.

Publication in practitioner journals is based mainly on the relevance and importance of the topics to the

daily work of public administrators in the field; that is, current problems. Although it appears that public administration scholars and practitioners are interested in similar topics, apparently refuting the supposition of an academic-practitioner gap in public administration (Gibson and Deadrick, 2010) one notable difference did occur in the frequency with which two specific topics were addressed.

According to this article, academic journals have concentrated more on organizational theory whereas practitioner interest has focused more on the topic of personnel and human resource management. This finding suggests that whereas public administration academicians focus on journal topics that are more knowledge creation-oriented and long-term in nature, practitioners are characterized by journal topics that are more pragmatic and more problem-solving in nature.

In a similar fashion, the question arises as to whether interest-area gaps exist among public sector

practitioners. The opportunity to discover what topics rise to the attention of federal employees versus state and local employees appears in an investigation of the content of their respective journals.

Specifically, does the federal employee focus on different topics of interest than his local counterpart? An examination of more than 3,900 articles published in *The Public Manager* (formerly *The Bureaucrat*), and *Public Management* (PM) magazine over a 30-year period of time (1976–2005) was conducted to examine that question.

These two publications have covered a broad array of topics throughout their respective histories. A content analysis of the body of work in these professional archives over three decades relay key considerations of the times and inform our future focus on well-informed and prepared practitioners.

### Retrospective of PA Practitioners' Interests

According to legend, *The Public Manager* came into being in 1972 through discussions at the home of Carl Stenberg with founding editor Thomas Lynch and their wives. Stenberg and Lynch, and others of the Washington, D.C., chapter of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), were drawn by a desire to promote the policy activism arising from advocates of a new public administration evident at the 1970 Philadelphia ASPA Conference.

According to Chester Newland (1996), "In practice, from the outset of publication, this journal became a bridge between new and traditional concerns in public administration." The journal's ability to "demonstrate both intergenerational connectedness and practical intertwining of policy and management concerns," as professed by Newland in celebrating the 25th anniversary of the journal, holds true as it reaches its 40th year in print.

Whereas *The Public Manager* targets federal employees and more macro interests, *Public Management* (PM) has served the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) for nearly 100 years in addressing issues of concern for local government professionals.

The January/February 2012 issue of PM leads with the cover story "Picturing It: The Year 2020," reflecting the magazine's continuous efforts to fulfill its mission "to create excellence in local government by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide."

Taken together, these two journals represent the interests of PA practitioners at different levels of analy-

sis: federal interests and local interests. By examining the focus of articles written over a period of time, it's possible to use that study as a basis for determining what topics were of most interest to each group of PA practitioners.

A total of 3,922 articles were published in these two publications during a 30-year period. From this total, 1,023 articles were omitted from review because the content was coded as miscellaneous (e.g., book reviews, editorial commentaries, and advertisements) and therefore didn't fit into any of the coding categories. The final sample size used in the analysis was 2,899 articles.

PA practitioners have experienced a great deal of change between 1975 and 2005. From the resignation of President Richard Nixon to the inauguration of George W. Bush for his second term in office and during much of the Burger Supreme Court (1969–1986) and the Rehnquist Supreme Court (1986–2005), federal employees managed significant changes in the bureaucracy.

New Federalism and the focus on state and local provision of services; privatization; and three decades of change in governor, mayor, city manager, and city council membership have demanded flexibility and adaptation from state and local government employees as well.

And yet, the issues remain constant: pollution, poverty, infrastructure, schools. President Nixon, for instance, noted in his Budget for Fiscal Year 1975 message, "I am again proposing a comprehensive plan for national health insurance that would make adequate insurance against the costs of health care available to all Americans. This far-reaching reform is long overdue."

Thirty years later, President Bush's message accompanying his Budget for Fiscal Year 2005 proposes ". . . we will make health care more affordable and extend the full benefits of our health care system to more Americans who currently have no health insurance."

The topics of consideration by public employees during the three decades examined here may reveal patterns in the areas of shifting focus and others receiving constant attention, which inform how public administration confronts new and ongoing challenges in governance. Most recently, advances in information technology and the accompanying globalization of production ask what we have learned and can apply from our past.

### Issues of Key Interest

Figure 1 lists the content coding categories used in the analysis and the number of articles dedicated to each category. Figure 2 lists the rank-ordered frequency of each topic (category) over the 30 years combined.

**Figure 1.** Articles Published from 1976 to 2005 in *The Public Manager* and *Public Management (PM)* Magazine.

| Content Coding Categories Listed Alphabetically | Total # of Articles Over 30 years |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Budget and Finance                              | 144                               |
| Conflict Resolution                             | 27                                |
| Education/Training                              | 50                                |
| Environment                                     | 200                               |
| Ethics                                          | 227                               |
| History/Retrospective                           | 30                                |
| Information Technology                          | 210                               |
| Intergovernmental Relations                     | 89                                |
| International                                   | 120                               |
| Leadership                                      | 159                               |
| Legal                                           | 74                                |
| Methods                                         | 37                                |
| NGOs (Non-Governmental Orgs)                    | 18                                |
| Organizational Theory                           | 213                               |
| Personnel/Human Resource                        | 445                               |
| Privatization/Nationalization                   | 94                                |
| Program Delivery/Evaluation                     | 143                               |
| Public Participation                            | 63                                |
| Public Policy Analysis                          | 354                               |
| Reinvention                                     | 104                               |
| Urban Studies                                   | 98                                |
| <b>Total Number of Articles</b>                 | <b>2,899</b>                      |

Overall, the top-five interest areas were personnel/human resource (P/HR) issues, public policy analysis, ethics, organizational theory, and information technology respectively (see Figure 2). These five topics comprised 50 percent of all the articles written during these 30 years. Not surprisingly, the day-to-day management of our workforce to implement policy is of paramount concern for public managers at all levels of govern-

ment. Ethical challenges arise as managers constantly strive to stay up-to-date with technological advancements while operating in an ever-changing political environment.

Interestingly, two of the most frequently published topics for each publication, P/HR and ethics, had the greatest difference in the amount of coverage when comparing the two (see Figure 2). P/HR received 10 percent more attention in *Public Manager* (federal-level focus), and ethics received 8 percent more attention in *Public Management (PM)* (state/local focus). The other topics had less than a 6 percent difference in frequency with which they appeared in both journals. Further discussion of this finding is warranted.

### Personnel/Human Resource Management: Federal Coverage

Personnel/human resource consistently outnumbered all other interest areas throughout the 30-year span in both journals. Without question, the key ingredient of public service is the public servant. Therefore, of paramount concern for both the federal and local administrator is the recruitment, hiring, promoting, and firing of the workforce.

The sheer size of the federal workforce and numerous laws and regulations dictating P/HR operations explains why the topic received such considerable attention in *The Public Manager*. As a somewhat uniform and easily identified system, personnel and human resource at the federal level is capable of being captured in a journal, and its message is applicable regardless of the agency.

The same termination protocol, for example, must be followed at both the U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Energy. Therefore, implementing a reduction in force would likely yield similar lessons learned that would be informative across federal agencies.

Although sustaining a significant presence in *Public Management (PM)*, state and local personnel/human resource issues are more diversified and carry unique features, making it less likely to appear in a nationally distributed journal. The issues and challenges, for example, regarding employee terminations for the city of Detroit, Michigan, are likely to be different from the challenges facing such a smaller city as Richmond, Virginia.

Although the policies and regulations surrounding the management of the workforce are as important at the state and local level as they are at the federal level, informative sources reside primarily at a more localized level in internal politics and P/HR programs.

**Figure 2.** Rank-Ordered Importance of Different Topics, Comparing Federal and Local PA Practitioners.

| Overall Rank | Coding Categories             | % of Total Articles | < % of Public Manager | % of Public Mgt | % Diff |
|--------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------|
| 1            | Personnel/Human Resource      | 15.35               | 21.01                 | 11.44           | 9.58   |
| 2            | Public Policy Analysis        | 12.21               | 9.11                  | 14.35           | -5.24  |
| 3            | Ethics                        | 7.83                | 3.04                  | 11.14           | -8.11  |
| 4            | Organizational Theory         | 7.35                | 8.86                  | 6.30            | -2.56  |
| 5            | Information Technology        | 7.24                | 8.02                  | 6.71            | 1.31   |
| 6            | Environment                   | 6.90                | 6.67                  | 7.06            | -0.39  |
| 7            | Leadership                    | 5.48                | 7.68                  | 3.97            | 3.71   |
| 8            | Budget and Finance            | 4.97                | 3.97                  | 5.66            | -1.69  |
| 9            | Program Delivery/Evaluation   | 4.93                | 6.92                  | 3.56            | 3.36   |
| 10           | International                 | 4.14                | 2.87                  | 5.02            | -2.15  |
| 11           | Reinvention                   | 3.59                | 6.67                  | 1.46            | 5.21   |
| 12           | Urban Studies                 | 3.38                | 0                     | 5.72            | -5.72  |
| 13           | Privatization/Nationalization | 3.24                | 3.46                  | 3.09            | 0.37   |
| 14           | Intergovernmental Relations   | 3.07                | 2.36                  | 3.56            | -1.20  |
| 15           | Legal                         | 2.55                | 1.94                  | 2.98            | -1.03  |
| 16           | Public Participation          | 2.17                | 1.43                  | 2.68            | -1.25  |
| 17           | Education/Training            | 1.72                | 1.60                  | 1.81            | -0.21  |
| 18           | Methods                       | 1.20                | 1.69                  | 0.99            | 0.70   |
| 19           | History/Retrospective         | 1.03                | 1.10                  | 0.99            | 0.11   |
| 20           | Conflict Resolution           | 0.93                | 0.59                  | 1.17            | -0.58  |
| 21           | NGOs                          | 0.62                | 1.01                  | 0.35            | 0.66   |
|              |                               | <b>99.98%</b>       | <b>100.00%</b>        | <b>100.00%</b>  |        |

The command-and-control hierarchy of the federal system witnessed an ever-increasing expansion of responsibilities during this 30-year time span. The P/HR departments were stretched beyond performance and compensation issues to include training and education programs as well as support services that address mental health and well-being concerns of the federal workforce.

Arguably, attending to the systematic rules and processes took precedence in the past and, with time, attention turned from the system itself to those operat-

ing within it. Private sector competition, antigovernment sentiment, and inflexible top-down orchestration of P/HR practices required attention and a call for changes. *The Public Manager* demonstrates the shift by dedicating considerable space to these issues throughout these three decades and there is no indication it has subsided.

### Ethics: State and Local Coverage

Ethics shows continuous growth with ever-increasing numbers of articles dedicated to it in both publi-

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cations; however, it received considerable more attention by *Public Management (PM)* than *The Public Manager*. The frequency with which ethics is addressed in *The Public Manager* is not a testament to the lack of interest or relevance of ethics to the work of a federal employee. It is far from it. In fact, each federal agency has a designated agency ethics official (DAEO), typically housed in the general counsel office and readily available for consultation on ethical matters. Federal ethics training and guidance is provided by DAEOs, so the topic is attended to in some respects through that venue.

The Office of Government Ethics, which provides the training for DAEOs, and the accompanying legislative support in structural codes of laws, rules, and regulations, serves as the foundation for compliance with expected standards of conduct. Also, ASPA's Code of Ethics, adopted in 1984, and ICMA's code of ethics have provided the aspirational guidance. ASPA's code is currently undergoing review and revision in order to remain a relevant and guiding source for sound ethical decision making. The ICMA code first emerged in 1924 and with adaptations, extensive training in professional development, and strong peer enforcement is a well-established and supported code for its membership that may be credited with satisfying ethical considerations of the federal workforce.

*The Public Manager* dedicated particular attention to ethics. Editor Thomas W. Novotny noted in the Spring 1994 issue the results of a readership survey that ranked "ethics as the number one topic of interest by a substantial margin" and a series on ethics in government was instituted with Stuart Gilman serving as series editor.

As an applied topic, ethics can be a risky endeavor, for specific case scenarios commonly serve as the vehicle for addressing ethical issues and airing dirty laundry isn't at times viewed as necessarily informative to the

readership of a professional publication. Scenarios at the local level can be made comfortably unidentifiable for purposes of examination and learning by example. Large-scale political corruption or financial mismanagement are typically the issues surrounding ethics identified at the federal level and are drawn to other outlets for dissemination and analysis.

### A Shared Interest: The Public Good

Even though the scope and nature of the work vary at all levels of government, the common directive is the public interest. *The Public Manager* and *Public Management (PM)* dedicated the majority of their pages to P/HR, policy, ethics, theory, and information technology, which captures the essence of public service in an ever-increasing and complex sector. It's not necessarily surprising to find *The Public Manager*, a journal for federal service, devoting significant attention to P/HR issues given the uniformity of the federal P/HR system and to discover *Public Management (PM)*, with a state and local audience, dedicating prominent focus to ethics given the diversity of ethics scenarios possible with closer proximity to the public and administrative discretion at the state and local level of service.

On the other hand, there is some surprise in finding little attention to conflict resolution (CR) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in either journal. CR was expected to have more interest due to traditional concerns regarding multilevels of unions and inherent bargaining conflicts, as seen in the recent conflict in Wisconsin that resulted in a recall attempt of the governor; however, it does maintain its own collection of journals (Journal of Conflict Resolution, Conflict Resolution Quarterly, Journal of Dispute Resolution, and others.). If not attended to in the most popular topic of personnel and human resource, the specific focus on conflict resolution is found elsewhere.

Naturally, NGOs are outside the preview of government managers although given the growth in nonprofit organizations/nongovernmental sector, and that most are in fact funded by governments, it was surprising to see it not receive more attention during this time frame. As this area of interest has grown, accompanied by more outsourcing, privatization, and general blurring of the lines between the private and the public sector, it will certainly continue to garner greater attention from all public administrators.

While this study is descriptive in nature, it does suggest that practitioner journals do in fact reflect the interests of their respective target audiences. Although *The Public Manager* and *Public Management (PM)* speak to the legal and moral responsibilities of all public administrators to serve the public regardless of their position, they are also important barometers of the unique environments in which federal, state, and local practitioners must operate in order to meet high expectations.

The field as a whole is defined, cultivated, and judged by the performance of professionals at all levels of government. The pages of these journals chronicle the commitment of practitioners at each of these levels to explore, learn, and enhance their unique contributions to service far more complex and multifaceted than suggested by the all-encompassing term "government."

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3. Newland, Chester A. 1996. "Professional Public Management, Demolition Politics, & Trust in Government," *The Public Manager* 25(1): 2–8.
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# NEXT GENERATION PROFESSIONALS: AN INSIDE LOOK AT WHAT MATTERS TO THEM

By Cheryl Hilvert, Patrick Ibarra, David Swindell, and Karen Thoreson

Most residents are only barely familiar with the behind-the-scenes operation of the local government organization that keeps them safe, provides clean drinking water, takes the waste away, maintains the roads they drive on, and provides numerous other services they take for granted every day.

As individuals long wedded to the local government management profession, the four of us wondered how younger, relatively recently-employed local government workers viewed their roles, their employers, and their future. This article provides a glimpse into their perceptions of local government as a career choice and how these young professionals would choose to enhance their workplace.

Their perceptions highlight the opportunities and challenges for today's managers in response to significant changes in the workforce that are acutely felt in

the public sector. Such changes include demographic shifts in the workforce as well as evolutionary changes in the workplace (see Figure 1 at end of article).

Managers who want to build their twenty-first-century workforce need to discard the "we've always done it that way" approach in favor of progressive and practical strategies and tools to optimize talent.

Government leaders at all levels also need to adopt the mindset that government is an employer, thus competing with a variety of public, nonprofit, and private sector organizations for talent in the marketplace. In that regard, the human resources department should not go it alone on this quest. Instead, leaders need to make a strong commitment to ensuring that workforce-related issues and opportunities attract the best talent.

In an effort to capture preferences about the local government workplace and workforce, we developed

## WHAT MATTERS MOST

the 2015 *Local Government Workforce Survey (LGWS)* to collect information from a group of younger, next-generation staff members. Our team developed and validated the survey questions and administered it in February 2015. The team conducted the basic analysis in March.

Survey participants included graduates of the Leadership ICMA program, the Alliance for Innovation NextERA members, the Emerging Local Government Leaders (ELGL) devotees, and the current and former Arizona State University Marvin Andrews Fellows. The survey was sent to approximately 250 individuals, with 107 providing responses.

### Recruitment Practices

People today aren't simply looking for a job. They want careers with meaning and impact. Government service can provide that. Fully two-thirds of the respondents to the survey stated "making an impact on community/public service" as the top attraction to serving in local government" (see Figure 2).

This high percentage stands to reason considering those who responded to the survey are involved with public-oriented professional associations. Consider, however, what might be the response in your workforce if employees were asked the same question?

HR directors and managers might keep in mind that creating a qualified talent pool is no longer about sourcing specific candidates for specific jobs. Rather, it's about generating a pipeline of valuable skill sets in all staff members.

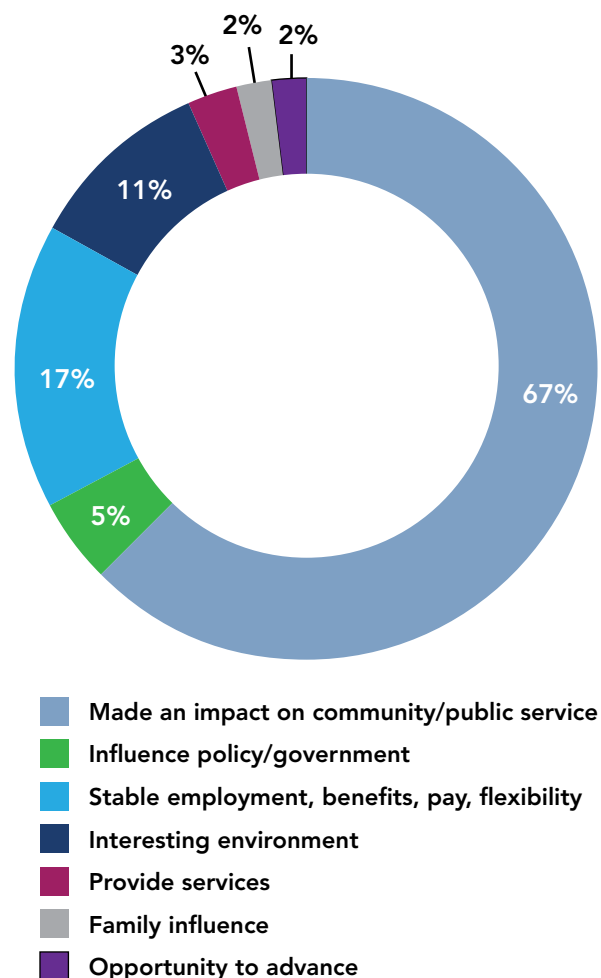
This allows your organization to recognize its skill gaps and then effectively find and reach the owners of those skills. Using social media channels and Web-based hiring sites have become common practice as powerful media for communicating an organization's brand that relates to attracting and hiring top candidates.

There also is an increasing emphasis on mobile recruiting. According to research conducted by Glassdoor.com, 82 percent of all job seekers are currently using smartphones to search for job openings.<sup>3</sup> Almost half of active candidates have applied for a job on their mobile device. The public sector will need to create mobile applications in order to appeal to the on-the-go job seeker.

### What does your hiring process say about your organization?

First impressions are a critical part of the hiring process. The world is full of smart, skilled, and passionate people who are blue-chip prospects. These people won't

**Figure 2.** What Attracts People to Work for Local Government



be interested in your organization, however, if the job announcement is a boring job description.

In hiring a new budget management analyst, for instance, the job description could state "ability to understand statistics and research data." Or it could say something more like this: "Want to make an impact on your community by helping to fund services that will benefit your neighbors and friends?" Or, "Bring your skills to bear in innovative ways to enhance the quality of life for residents in your community."

A second example is for a treatment plant operator position: "Conduct regularly scheduled tests of water quality to ensure compliance" (boring) or "Provide safe quality water for people to bathe their little ones" (exciting!).

Innovative local governments, including Sedgwick County, Kansas, and Decatur, Georgia, have created

effective job announcements and advertisements by moving away from the traditional “legal ad” format to appeal to those with an adventurous spirit who don’t just want a job, but who want to make a difference.

In addition to better appealing to a candidates’ sense of wanting to serve, local governments must also recognize that timeliness is important when recruiting. While public sector agencies may have a series of written exams and performance tests that are required as part of their hiring process, accelerating the speed in administering these processes is important in maintaining the interest of talented candidates.

Showing genuine interest in the candidate and being willing to modify the interview process to make it stimulating and interesting will set you apart as an employer of choice. This point was confirmed by LGWS respondents in Figure 6, citing the need to reform hiring processes as one aspect of the workplace that they feel needs to be changed.

Finally, remember that a candidate who is a proper fit with your organizational culture is the best way to ensure the new employee—and the organization—will succeed. One county human services department in California modified its interview process to allow multiple staff at all levels to participate in the questioning of candidates.

It went further by allowing staff and the candidate to interact during a two-hour session observing the work of the job for which the candidate had applied. The result was a much better educated candidate on what

the organizational mission is and a highly participatory workforce that helped to select the candidate who would best complement the team.

A big benefit of this approach is that it ultimately reduced turnover and influenced higher employee morale.

## Retention of Top Performers

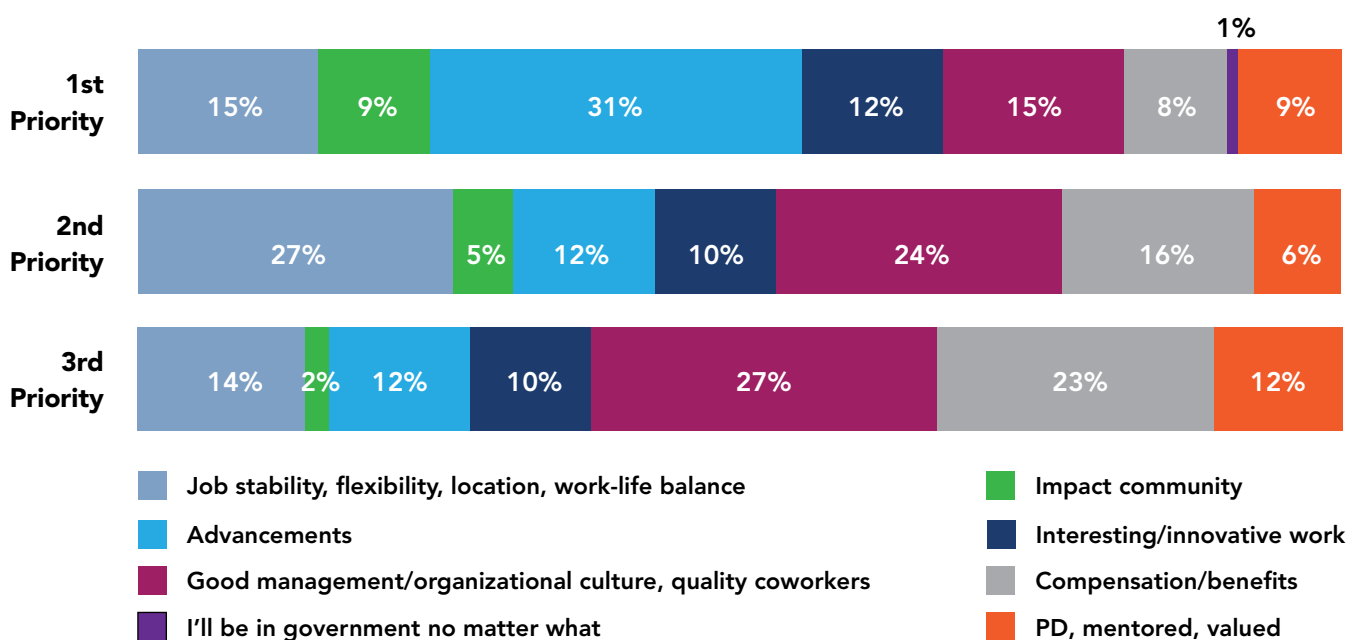
Conventional wisdom says that employees will depart if they are discontented but that money will make them stay. This is likely an oversimplification. People stay in a job—or leave it—for a variety of motives.

This theory was clearly seen from respondents’ answers to LGWS in Figure 3, where more than twice the number of respondents said that good management, culture, and quality of coworkers were more important to them than compensation and benefits.

It goes without saying that employees want to be well compensated, but savvy managers should recognize that staff members are searching for other kinds of satisfaction, primarily related to professional growth and opportunities to make a positive difference to the organization of which they are a part.

Managers must also recognize that younger employees are often undergoing a continuous job search and seeking potential opportunities that are a better fit for their lifestyle and career plans. According to Fortune, almost 90 percent of employees<sup>1</sup> are already looking for work outside their current occupations, and research from Career Builder shows nearly one-third of

**Figure 3.** Reasons to Continue Careers in Local Government



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employers expect workers to job hop on a much more extensive basis than they have historically.<sup>2</sup>

Another common management belief that must be reexamined is the general feeling that high employee turnover is bad and low turnover is good. In monitoring turnover in your organization, it is much more important to measure “regrettable” turnover—the number of departing employees whom you would desire to keep.

Exit interviews are important, but you also should do retention interviews. Meet with employees you consider as your top talent and ask them one question, “What more can we do as an organization to challenge you?” Most likely, you will discover that top performers value and seek several key organizational factors:

**Flexible work programs.** Such innovative organizational approaches as job sharing, flexible hours, and telecommuting can help your organization be more attractive to women, millennials, and older workers.

LGWS responses (Figure 3) underscore the importance young professionals place on a workplace that allows flexibility in work tasks, hours, and workplace location, the second highest organizational factor that would keep them in a career in local government.

**Relationships.** Based on a survey of 7,272 U.S. adults, Gallup’s State of the American Manager report concludes that people may go to work for an “organization,” but one in two left their job because of a failed relationship with their manager or supervisor.

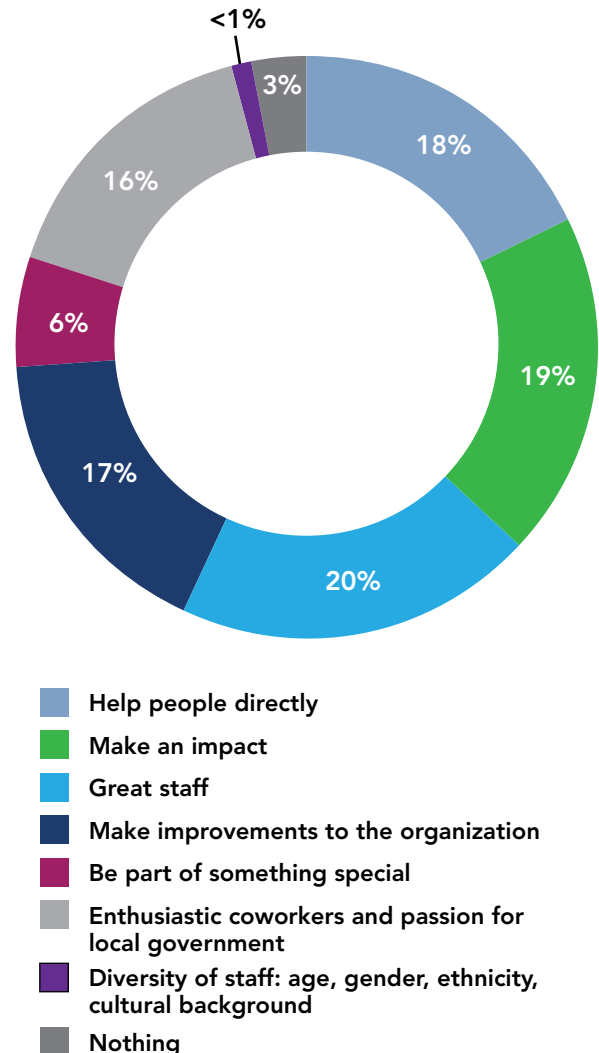
LGWS reinforces these Gallup results, highlighting the aspects of the workplace that inspire today’s younger local government workers. As Figure 4 demonstrates, 36 percent of respondents indicate that great staff or enthusiasm of coworkers is a huge motivator.

If employees report that their managers’ expectations are unclear or that their managers provide insufficient equipment, materials, or other resources, the likelihood of a regrettable turnover increases.

**Workplace culture.** A workplace culture based on an inspirational set of organizational values is key to retaining top employees, as are management practices that emphasize shared decision making. These values include an organizational commitment to trust, creativity, team work, and employee involvement in decision making, which can be powerful motivators if they are part of day-to-day workplace behaviors and not just words on a page in an employee handbook.

Managers must not underestimate the importance of a strong organizational culture, and they need to recognize their role in being vigilant about fostering a great workplace culture as a strategy to retain top-performing employees. Figure 6 shows that nearly one-

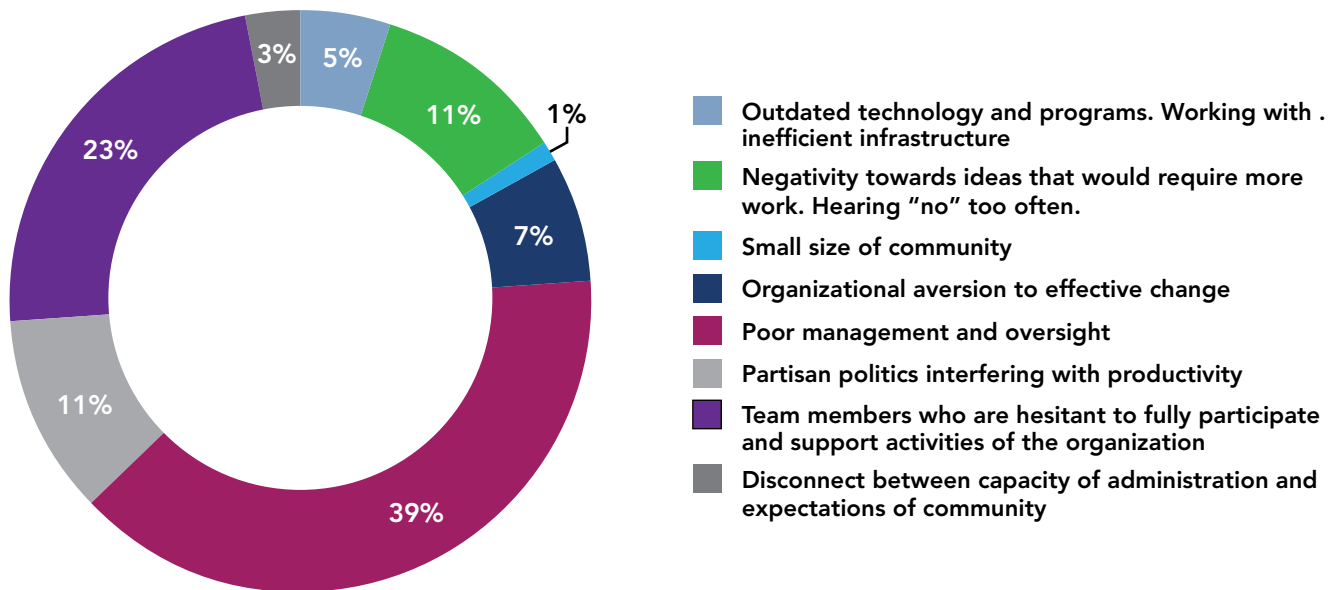
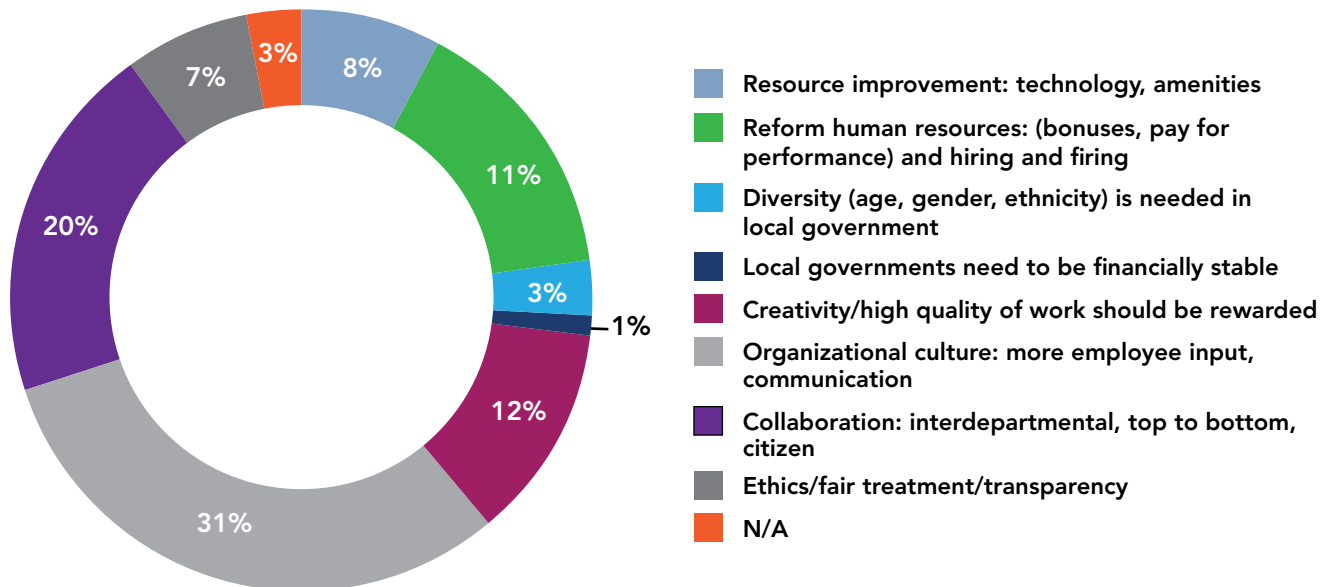
**Figure 4.** Workplace Inspiration Factors



third of LGWS respondents want to see an organizational culture that focuses more on employee input and communication throughout the organization.

Figure 5 illustrates the most commonly reported factor that demotivates younger employees is poor management and oversight of the organization. These are important calls to action for managers of the future in retaining quality employees in their organization.

**Professional development and growth.** LGWS respondents indicated that they value investment by the organization in them as employees. Openings for upward mobility are only a portion of the equation to retaining top performers. Equally important is the investment organizations make in professional development and growth opportunities for all employees (see Figure 7).

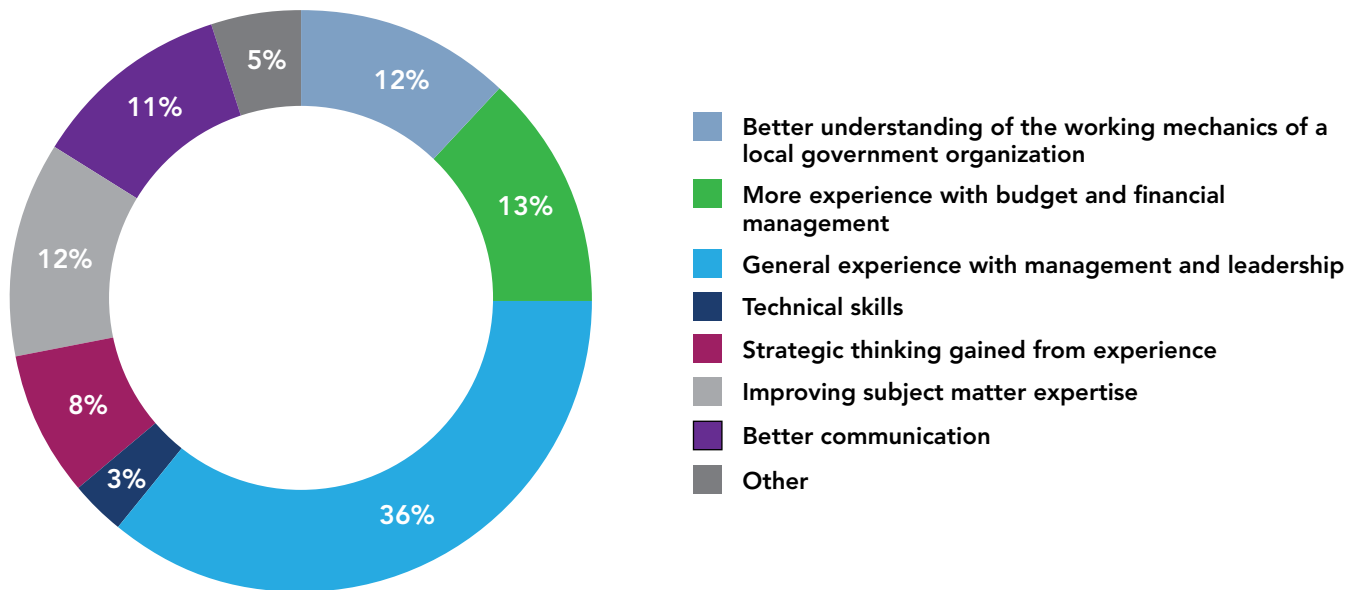
**Figure 5.** Workplace Demotivating Factors**Figure 6.** Workplace Changes Needed

Leadership and professional development and training were the top responses by 45 percent of the survey respondents to the question, "What could your workplace do in order to help you advance in your career." If not already in place, a local government might develop a series of educational courses that focus on equipping employees with the requisite leadership, management, and supervisory skills to better perform their jobs.

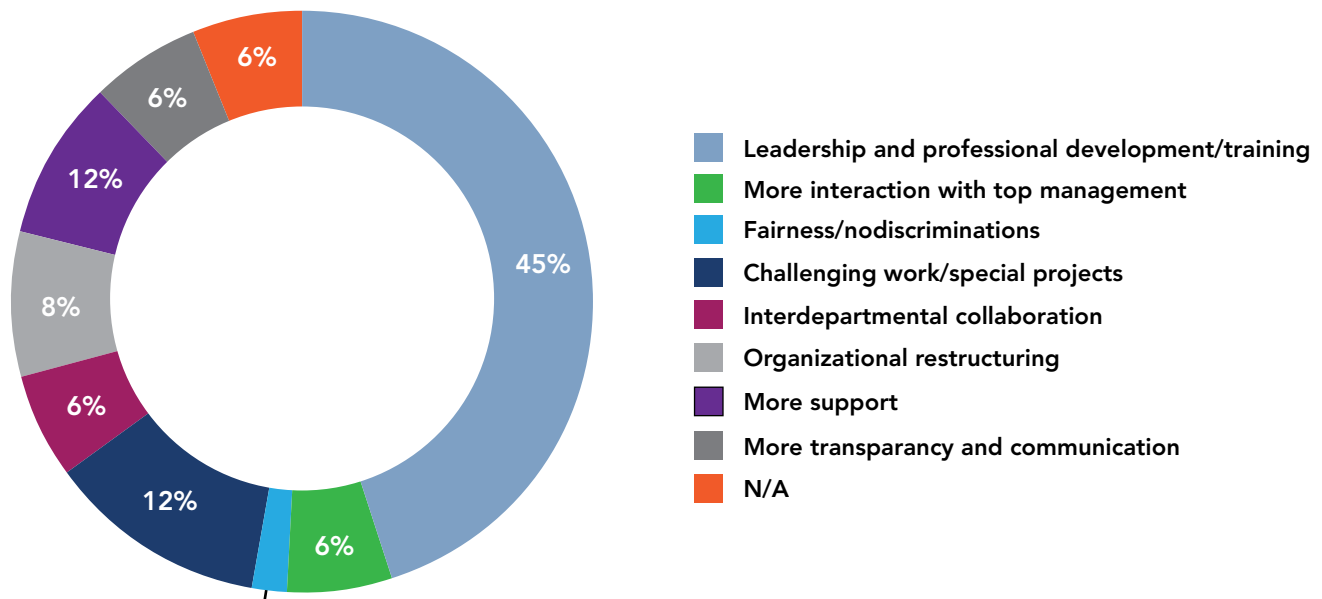
Many local governments now have in place leadership academies for their up-and-coming staff. These training activities focus on team building, emotional intelligence, and understanding the political and cultural influences of the organization and community.

They also enhance specific skills like facilitation, brainstorming, creative problem solving, public speaking, budgeting, project management, communications, and effective supervisory practices.

**Figure 7.** Skills Needed for Career Advancement



**Figure 8.** Workplace Assistance Needed for Job Advancement



**Experiential learning.** When asked about the skills they need to improve to advance in their careers, more than one-third of the respondents said “general experience with management and leadership” (see Figure 8).

Employees will increase their capabilities and position themselves for future opportunities, not just by learning new skills and actively engaging in a mentoring partnership, but also by participating in a series of targeted employee-learning activities. Rotating job assignments,

“acting” roles, and shadowing are attractive pursuits to top performers who want to stretch themselves.

### Anticipating Change

In addition to focusing on new strategies for recruitment and retention of younger staff, managers must also proactively work to prepare their workplaces for the future. Effective strategies include:

**Engage in proactive workforce planning.** Analyze the demographics of your workplace and estimate as best you can the projected attrition, not only among older workers but other age groups as well. Today's younger workers are mobile and good managers need to develop a plan to transfer the mission-critical tacit knowledge prior to employee departures, regardless of age or tenure.

**Partner with learning institutions.** Local governments should pursue the opportunity to partner with local educational organizations to provide staff development opportunities and contribute to the enhancement of local government services. Educational and training programs and certifications are only some of the benefits such partners can bring to your organization.

Local institutions also can provide inexpensive and enthusiastic talent through internship and apprenticeship programs that can help to develop a pipeline of future workers.

**Evaluate paid-time-off (PTO) policies.** These policies serve as the foundation on which flexible work arrangements can be built. A study of innovative local government organizations as well as the use of external evaluators can be particularly useful in these reviews and can help suggest appropriate adjustments for your organization that will increase the likelihood of attracting or keeping younger and mid-career workers.

**Provide cultural awareness training.** This type of training serves two purposes. First, it appeals to the desire among younger employees starting their government service for an open and diverse workplace.

Secondly, the training sends a signal to all employees that the workplace can serve as a platform for discussing such challenging issues as different cultural communication styles, how to give and receive feedback, and how different cultures review and assess employee performance.

## There's Good News

The LGWS results bring good news as well as direction for local government managers who heed the feedback from younger employees who will soon become tomorrow's leaders. Let's listen to their messages so that we can more effectively prepare our organizations for this next generation of public servants and the exceptional work they will do to provide service to our communities. Here are some ideas. Stress how the nature of local government work impacts our communities and

allows employees to engage in performing interesting and challenging work that benefits many people.

- Make a quality first impression on potential new employees through the job announcement and the interview process. Develop an effective onboarding procedure for new employees.
- Expect your mid-level managers to be quality trainers, mentors, and advisers to new recruits. Provide training if they are not proficient in these skills.
- Train and involve younger employees in broader organizational activities through professional development and experiential learning opportunities.
- Have senior management meet periodically with new employees and listen to—and act upon—their good suggestions.
- Rethink some of the more bureaucratic processes that are holdovers from bygone days. Where possible, simplify those that frustrate employees.
- Consider using newer employees to look with fresh eyes at ways to streamline those processes or better connect with and serve residents.
- Invest in your employees—both those who are new and those who are experienced. They will notice and appreciate it, and you will be the beneficiary.
- Cultivate a reputation for being “Best in Class” as a local government employer. Word will get around that your community is the place to be for future public leaders.

At a time when much of the rhetoric about local government work is vitriolic and portrayal of public servants on television shows reinforces false impressions of officials as corrupt or simply stupid, it can be easy for managers to overlook the many positive developments on the horizon as young professionals stand ready to assume the mantle of civic leadership.

Younger individuals are being drawn to public service to have a positive impact on their communities. The only barrier we face to realizing the benefits of this talented and motivated workforce is a blind adherence to doing business as usual.

## Endnotes

- 1 <http://fortune.com/2014/08/05/job-search-career-change>.
- 2 <http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?id=pr824&sd=5/15/2014&ed=05/15/2014>.
- 3 Survey data is based on a Glassdoor survey conducted online from August 14-22, 2013, among more than 1,100 employees and job seekers.

### Figure 1. Demographic Shifts and Evolution of the Workplace.

According to the Pew Research Center (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/16/this-year-millennials-will-overtake-baby-boomers>), for the first time, millennials now outnumber baby boomers in the workplace, 76 million to 75 million. As baby boomers continue to retire and millennials continue to enter the workforce, this gap will widen.

The millennial generation may have different work motivations and expectations for greater work/life balance.

The workforce will be more culturally and ethnically diverse and include more highly educated women, military veterans, and people with disabilities.

Expectations are likely to increase for customized benefits, mobility of benefits, and flexible work options.

According to the *State and Local Government Workforce 2014 Trends* research conducted by the Center for State and Local Government Excellence of members of the International Public Management Association for Human Resources and the National Association of State Personnel Executives, the local government workforce shows:

In 2014, 19 percent of the government workforce reached age 61, the current average retirement age. By 2018, this figure rises to 28 percent of those currently working.

There is a surge in public-sector retirements, referred to as the “silver tsunami”: 49 percent of local governments reported higher levels of retirement in 2013 compared with 2012.

The historical, long-term arrangement between employer and employee—sometimes referred to as “lifetime employment” where the employer provides steady employment, attractive benefits, and wages in exchange for an employee’s long-term effort and tenure—is changing to one more akin to the private sector.

The service economy is shifting to the knowledge economy, emphasizing the changing nature of work toward more scarce and highly skilled jobs rather than lower-skilled, transactional work.

The digital workplace and the rise in mobile technology is redefining the nature of work and the means of collaboration, and it is facilitating work in and from almost any location.

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## ABOUT ICMA

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government worldwide. The organization's mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional management to build sustainable communities that improve people's lives. ICMA provides member support; publications; data and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to 9,500 appointed city, town, and county leaders and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect millions of individuals living in thousands of communities throughout the world, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas.



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