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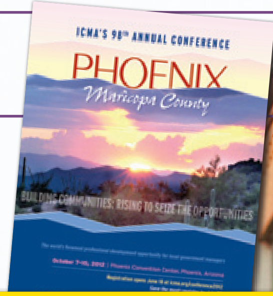

2012 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

★ LESSONS OF ★

LOCAL ECONOMIES: WHAT'S OBVIOUS MAY NOT BE

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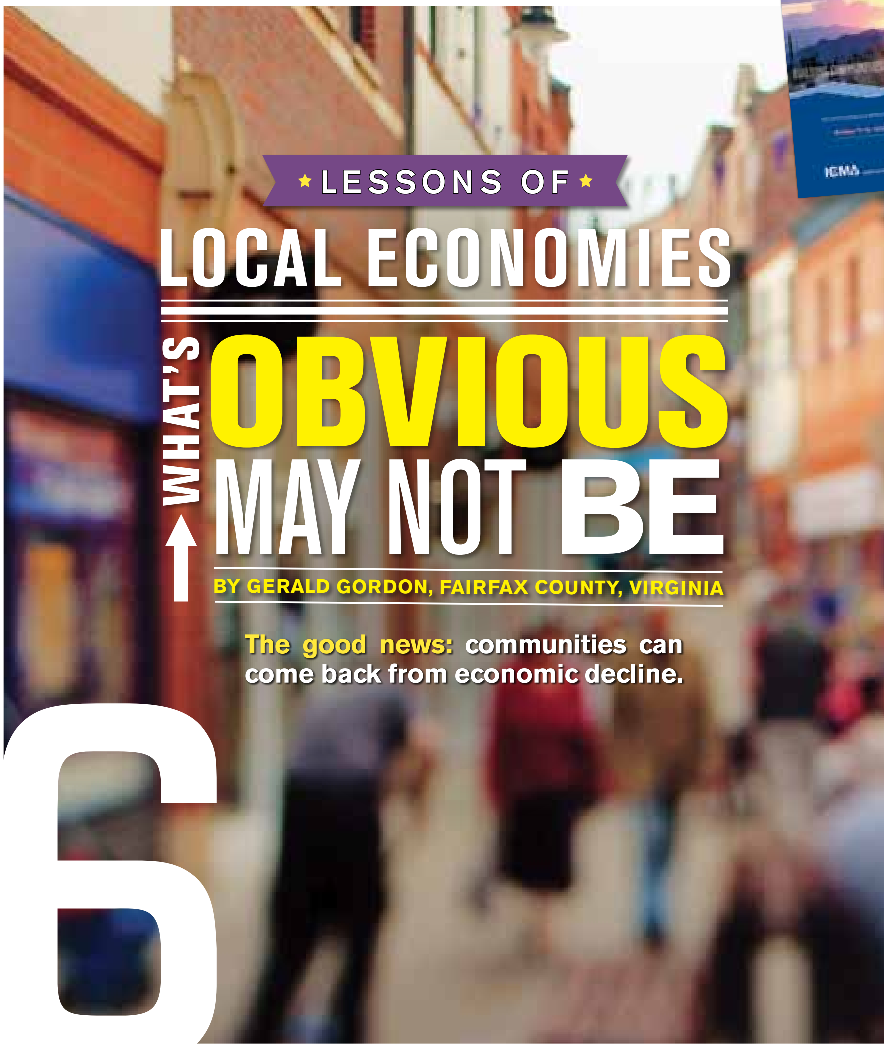

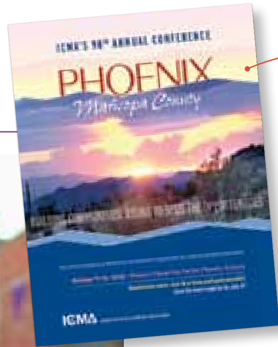

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Flip over the magazine to see the conference preliminary program

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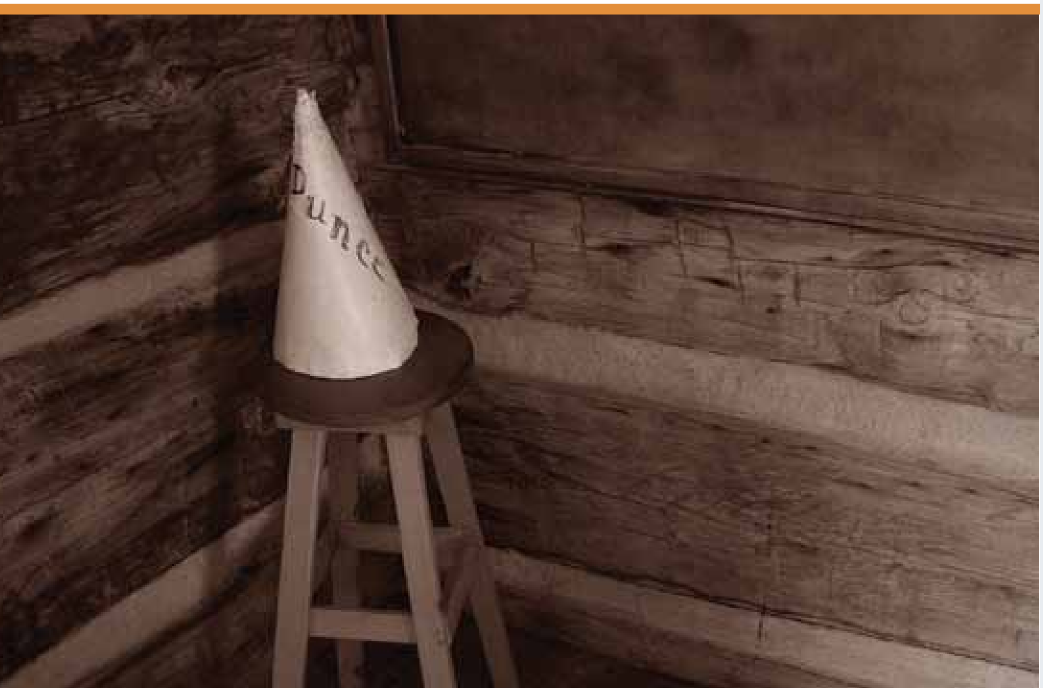

BY MARTHA PEREGO

THEY DID WHAT???

True stories of bad conduct remind us why we all need Ethics 101

The stories of unethical conduct in public sector organizations this year have been audacious and unrelenting. One after another, they tell the tale of highly trained and educated, dare we say "professional" people, who either have no sense of good judgment or were just corrupt. It's a shame because those stories add to public cynicism about government and harm the reputation of others working in public service.

But mostly it's a shame because it is largely avoidable. Many types of misconduct are actually preventable. You can remove the opportunity for someone to do something wrong, like embezzling funds.

Where it can't be eliminated, the infrastructure should be in place for early detection so that you can contain the damage. Add to the strategy creating a culture that does not encourage or support unethical conduct. It's the giant triplets of ethics management: values, rules, and compliance.

Basic Systems and Compliance Work

The story of the Illinois town treasurer who allegedly stole $30 million in six years is a textbook case of what can go wrong when systems, structures, and compliance are absent. Error No. 1 was allowing the treasurer to serve the dual and incompatible role of comptroller.

This gave her total access to the money. From there, she created off-the-book bank accounts that she was able to conceal in part because she had a relative collect the city's mail from the post office.

The theft was uncovered not by the annual audit but by an employee who was filling in when the treasurer was on vacation. That employee was smart enough to order the bank statements directly from the banks and discovered many six-figure transactions.

For a city with an annual budget of $8 million, the transactions were the alarm that set off the formal investiga-

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tion. About the only standard compliance measure in place here was the taking of vacations. Whether that was mandatory or just her choice is not clear.

The embezzlement was entirely avoidable had appropriate systems been in place. Sadly, this is not an isolated case. A tax manager for the District of Columbia stole $48 million by distributing fraudulent property tax refunds.

The manager approved and issued the refunds made out to real and fictitious entities. One big structural gap allowed the scam to go on for years. The employee was allowed to pick up the checks. Instead of mailing them to the payee, the individual gave them to employees and friends to deposit on her behalf.

Culture Drives Conduct

The media had a field day with the news that a contingent of Secret Service ment on the part of individuals who were most likely influenced by the organization's culture.

Back to Ethics 101

Although they don't make the national headlines, there are numerous other incidents of questionable conduct by local government professionals. One city manager used the city credit card repeatedly to make personal purchases. Even if repayment is made immediately, this is not an acceptable practice.

Several individuals had questionable travel practices ranging from expensing meals that were covered by the event registration; extending their stay and charging it back to the organization; upgrading flights; charging spouse travel back to the organization; and unwarranted, costly charges for incidentals. On the purchasing front, more than one

ADD TO THE STRATEGY CREATING A CULTURE THAT DOES NOT ENCOURAGE OR SUPPORT UNETHICAL CONDUCT.

agents, while on a presidential detail in Cartagena, Columbia, partied with and then hired prostitutes. Was this an aberration? Or was this type of conduct common practice? Did this violate any rules? Why didn't they receive any training telling them not to do this?

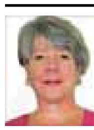
Secret Service agents actually do get ethics training. Do you wonder what the role play exercise was like for the hypothetical question: "Can I hire a prostitute and bring her back to my room?"

On a serious note, most agents aren't on protective detail. As part of the U.S. Treasury Department, they work on complex financial investigations that can generate serious ethical dilemmas. Whether the previous training touched on appropriate personal conduct or not, it will now.

All that said, Cartagena was not the result of poor ethics training. It resulted from a serious lack of judgorganization had to respond to headlines after it was disclosed that staff split projects into phases in order to evade the formal bid process.

Unethical conduct harms the reputation of the individual, the organization, and the profession. It's avoidable if leaders heed the fundamentals of Ethics 101. Focus first on organizational culture. Inspiring people to live up to the values of public service is critical.

The optimists among us hope that values would be sufficient to guide people to do what's right. But setting clear boundaries with rules and structure is needed as well. Lastly, values and rules are meaningless without compliance and accountability. PM



MARTHA PEREGO
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WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL SURVIVAL TIPS FOR A MANAGER DURING THE FIRST 100 DAYS ON THE JOB?

DONNA GAYDEN
Village Administrator
Glenwood, Illinois
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Here are the 10 tips I recommend:

1. Meet with every department head for a minimum of a half day to better understand individual roles.
2. Meet with the staff of each department to introduce yourself and to learn about needs and desires to perform their jobs better.
3. Review union contracts.
4. Begin reading ordinances that the elected officials and the department directors deem necessary.
5. Review the current budget.
6. Review audits from the past three years.
7. Meet bi-monthly with the top elected official to interpret the mission of the current local government.
8. Meet with each member of committees, homeowners associations, and the school board.
9. Review such manuals as personnel, accounting, and procurement to ensure compliance with current government regulations and practices.
10. Ride along with police officers and building department inspectors to learn local regulations and boundaries.

TIMOTHY HACKER, ICMA-CM
City Manager
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Focus on communication. Be an active listener with community leaders, especially when they share past approaches and future expectations. Reach out to leadership of labor groups to learn what perspective they bring to the employer-employee relationship and the expectations they have for the future.

Blend this information with your own experiences and your "read" on community challenges and opportunities. Begin to share your vision, tone, and culture with leadership and staff. It is crucial for a new manager to be able to differentiate between what people think you want to hear and the actual facts and truth. Change brings uncertainty, and staff will not necessarily come forward to expose past failures as they fear they may be perceived as current failures.

Find opportunities to reinforce the vision so employees become comfortable with and support your efforts. Find ways to include the community in the evaluation and development of plans, in a way that will produce meaningful and measurable results.

TONY SEARS
City Manager
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One of the first things you need to learn is how your particular organization operates. Although there can be numerous key employees, finding those people who have the knowledge to help you navigate the ins and outs of the organization will be critical.

You also need to understand the relationship between the previous manager and the elected officials. Building on the positives of that relationship and making adjustments for your own personal management style are important.

A new manager also has to remember that as essential as it is to adjust to a new organization, it is equally important to allow time for the organization's employees to adjust to you and your expectations. And as with any new position, find where the most efficient place is to put your pens and pencils on your new desk!

STEVEN WEAVER
City Administrator
Riverton, Wyoming
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When starting as a new administrator, here are the survival steps I recommend:

1. Get to know the elected officials.
2. Get to know the people on your management team.
3. Familiarize yourself with the culture of the organization by listening and not making drastic changes.
4. Have a 90-day work plan that can help change the organization and lead it in a positive direction.
5. Get involved in the community.
6. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the elected officials and the administrator.
7. Get out and work one day in each of the local government departments.
8. Make a good first impression (both professional and personal) to the staff and to the elected officials.
9. Start before you even start.
10. Visit with staff, the departing administrator, or the interim administrator if possible.
11. Personalize your work space so employees know you are planning to stay! PM

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AGENDA PROCESS

South Sioux City, Nebraska, has prepared a guide to help with procedures for its city council meetings, resolutions, and scheduling.

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RUSSIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

ICMA and the Local Government Research Center in Russia will collaborate on a study of the roles and responsibilities of the professional local government manager—a position that now exists in that country.

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LESSONS OF

LOCAL ECONOMIES

WHAT'S OBVIOUS MAY NOT BE

BY GERALD GORDON

TAKEAWAYS

› Communities often either fail to recognize key strategic opportunities or fail to act on them.

› Cities and counties can recover from economic decline through coordinated, collaborative processes.

› Businesses can be important allies in growing and diversifying local economies if the proper business case is made.

America's cities and regions are beginning to emerge from the worst recession in more than 75 years. Impacts from the macroeconomic forces of recent years have been different in every community across the country.

Why have some been able to sustain—or even grow—their local economies while others have experienced significant loss of jobs, disappointing reductions in the tax revenues that enable the provision of public services, and unheard of out-migration? What lessons can also be learned from places that fared well and can be translated to other communities and their leaders?

Observations

From observations made over time on local economic development, not only from nearly 30 years spent in Fairfax County, Virginia, but in nearly 20 other locations throughout the United States and around the world, I culled lessons learned from urban, suburban, and rural cities and from those on the ascendancy as well as those that were in decline. The most useful lessons seemed to come from those communities that had experienced economic decline and then rebuilt.

I tested those observations against the realities of major metropolitan areas throughout the country, interviewing those individuals who lived through the situations and had leadership roles in the process. I spoke with more than 70 men and women who had served as elected officials, city managers, university presidents, hospital administrators, chamber presidents, and more.

The same lessons were applied to America's "micropolitan" cities (i.e., cities with populations of 10,000 to 50,000); interviews with 100 mayors are being conducted. Are the lessons the same? And what is the future of micropolitan-sized cities? In the future, will they be able to compete with larger cities for finite economic development?

One of the most curious conclusions thus far has been that many of the lessons seem obvious. This doesn't mean, however, that they are universally understood or in practice. One discovery made, for example, was that many cities conduct strategic planning exercises for economic development and also regularly produce plans for land use, utility and infrastructure development, budgeting, and other critical local functions.

To the casual observer, it may seem self-evident that such plans are coordinated, interwoven, and mutually supportive. Surprisingly, that is not always the case.

Another example is the significant number of communities in which land use planning is conducted in isolation. Adjoining or proximate military bases or federal installations, colleges and universities, and neighboring counties are not always included in the discussions.

Lessons

Despite the seemingly evident nature of some of the critical lessons, here are lessons that can be instructive to local governments:

- Some economic development does just happen, but I have yet to find an economy that grew to its fullest potential in the absence of serious, sustained, and aggressive effort. In fact, most unplanned situations ultimately devolve into precipitous declines that might have been minimized.
- The most successful communities are those that identified their best industry targets, created an environment conducive to their growth, and developed a strategic approach to pursuing the businesses that were most appropriate for their communities.
- Cities absolutely need to conduct regular, intense, and all-inclusive strategic planning sessions for their futures. These exercises should include industry analyses, asset gap analyses, defined steps with assigned responsibilities for the research and outreach components, and measurable objectives for individual and collective performance.
- The most effective such plans incorporate some form of return-on-investment calculations and a translation of those returns into expenses the ordinary resident can appreciate. An incremental addition to the tax base, for instance, may be better received by those who had to forgo other programs to fund the economic development effort if it is reported not as $200,000 but rather as three new schoolteachers.

Invariably, local leaders anticipate the value of strategic planning exercises for economic development. What is not always as apparent to them is the inherent value in the *process* as opposed to only the final product. The process of strategic *thinking* with others in various institutions and at various levels throughout the community is not always fully appreciated until after the process has been concluded.

Suffice it to say at this point that a strategic planning exercise that has neither the full blessing nor the participation of the elected officials and the manager is doomed, if not to failure, then at least to diminished results.

Communities need to advance their economic development outreach during the best of times rather than wait for situations of serious economic decline before they consider how best to recover. Promotion and the preparation of infrastructure, business parks, and other assets must begin before difficult times take hold, in order to create a community's or a region's economic sustainability. This includes the preparation of the local workforce for the types of jobs that are being pursued.

Local economies can never remain static. Although it may sound nice to say that a city wants neither to grow nor to contract, the fact is that it cannot happen; there are simply too many uncontrollable external forces that impact a city's economic performance. And, as long as other competitive localities are growing or contracting, improving or slipping, all others are growing or contracting by comparison.

The importance of recognizing the impossibility of stasis is that it encourages local leaders to plan and take the long-term view of economic development. And, once the targets are identified and a plan put into motion, the city's leadership must then focus on managing the expectations of the residents whose tax revenues have been invested in economic development marketing in lieu of other competing needs.

SOME ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DOES JUST HAPPEN, BUT I HAVE YET TO FIND AN ECONOMY **THAT GREW TO ITS FULLEST POTENTIAL IN THE ABSENCE OF SERIOUS, SUSTAINED, AND AGGRESSIVE EFFORT.**

The Micropolitan Considerations

The strongest local economies owe much of their success to strong and collaborative local leadership, both public and private. While these lessons have value for smaller communities too, the early returns from the next iteration of research (25 mayoral interviews out of 100 planned) suggest these other considerations:

- Micropolitan cities seem to be one of three types: those that are subsets of major metropolitan areas; those that are relatively isolated and therefore serve as regional hubs for retail outlets, entertainment, and medical services; and those that are greatly isolated and have to be much more self-sufficient.
- Regardless of the type of micropolitan community in question, how local budgets are constituted to provide public services is key. If real estate taxes are important, for example, the micropolitan city's economic development plan focuses on the specific location of offices, plants, and facilities.
- If a key consideration is the income tax base, a focus might be on residential development in proximity to employers. Similarly, areas that attract a lot of tourists and generate much of their revenue from hotel taxes focus on that element of promotion and build up the occupancy levels and raise the transient occupancy tax rates.
- Isolated micropolitan cities tend to be highly sensitive to macroeconomic forces. When the recession began, many rural residents moved into these cities to seek employment at a time when the cities may not have been prepared for the influx. Similarly, a micropolitan city can be disproportionately hard hit (relative to major cities) by the loss of a single major employer or industry. Similarly, it can also be dramatically assisted by the attraction of a major employer.

How to Improve Your Situation

Are there answers to these situations? Certainly there are. That is why some cities and regions have managed to live through the current recession relatively unscathed. Can these lessons be translated to other local governments? They can indeed, but it must be acknowledged that economic development outreach does not produce overnight successes.

Site location decision makers, for example, must be sold on a city. They must know something about it, hear from its representatives, and be able to envision an environment that is conducive to business growth. Over time, given enough contact and good news, the city will possibly receive consideration when a decision by that business needs to be made.

Cities will never have full control over their economic futures. There are simply too many external variables and too many moves being made by their competitors. Many lessons, however, can be applied and can maximize the potential for economic success.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of all is that it can be done. Local governments can come back from economic decline; it has been done elsewhere. As cities and regions begin their journeys back to economic health and vitality, they are not alone.

Professional organizations and colleagues have demonstrated that success can be achieved over time, and they have a collective wisdom to impart. Although formulas for success do not exist, cities and regions will ignore these lessons at their peril. PM

GERALD GORDON, Ph.D., is president and CEO, Fairfax County Economic Development Authority, Fairfax, Virginia (ggordon@fceda.org).

To address economic development issues, Gordon researched and wrote three books for the American Society for Public Administration: *The Formula for Economic Growth on Main Street America* (2009, CRC Press, New York), *Reinventing Local and Regional Economies* (2011), and *The Economic Viability of Micropolitan America* (2013). Research compiled for the books is shared in this article. For ICMA, Gordon wrote *Strategic Planning for Local Government, Second Edition* (item 43306), which is available at http://bookstore.icma.org/. **Gordon will be a presenter at ICMA's 2012 Annual Conference, Phoenix/Maricopa County, Arizona, October 7–10.**

BUILD THAT B

The story of constructing a vital bridge without any local, state, or federal money. **–By William Harrell, ICMA-CM, and Mary Ann Saunders**

TAKEAWAYS

› Difficult decisions only get harder with delays; decisiveness and willingness to take on risk more often than not improves outcomes.

› Closing an old bridge opens up opportunities for private capital and public benefits.

› New river crossing conveys bright future for two communities by returning to original 80-year-old private ownership model.

› Globally, private infrastructure remains a viable option in light of scarce public funding for transportation.

RIDGE!

Up until 2008, Chesapeake was home to the oldest movable span bridge in the Commonwealth of Virginia—the Jordan Bridge—over the southern branch of the Elizabeth River. First authorized by Congress in 1926, the Jordan Bridge was built in 1928 by the Norfolk-Portsmouth Bridge Corporation initially as a private toll venture.

PHOTOS OPPOSITE PAGE:
LEFT: The original Jordan Bridge–a lift bridge–was closed in 2008 because of structural deficiencies after 80 years of service.
RIGHT: The new South Norfolk Jordan Bridge when it was under construction, with the main span taking shape over the Elizabeth River. (Photo taken from webcam on March 19, 2012.)

Another corporation acquired the bridge in 1933, and in 1944 a nonprofit public service corporation was created to operate it. The bridge was "gifted" to Chesapeake, and it was operated for 30 years as a municipal toll bridge with operating costs covered by the toll revenue.

Regional Importance

With a population of more than 1.5 million, Hampton Roads is home to the world's largest naval base, a busy commercial port complex, and numerous maritime-related industries. The Jordan Bridge served as a vital, non-tunnel route between the cities of Chesapeake and Portsmouth and provided access to key military facilities and job centers.

Prior to the imposition of weight restrictions, the bridge also permitted first responders to quickly reach neighboring cities in times of emergency. In such hurricane-prone coastal areas as this, bridges play a critical role for evacuation since tunnels are closed in advance of storms to avert damage from flooding.

So, after 10,000 openings per year for 80 years, this bridge had exceeded its projected operating life. The need for major capital repairs periodically required borrowing from the city's general fund, along with increased toll rates.

In response to the bridge's ailing physical condition, the city sought funds from the commonwealth and from the federal government for a replacement bridge. Despite the attempts by Chesapeake, the Jordan Bridge was never accepted into the commonwealth's bridge inventory, which made it ineligible for maintenance funding. While at the time refusal to accept the bridge was frustrating, this fact ultimately proved fortuitous.

When the city accepted the bridge from the Jordan Bridge Commission in 1977, then Mayor Marion Whitehurst proved visionary. Her words at that time were, "I don't think we can go into it thinking it [acceptance of the bridge] is all beauty, because I feel in years to come there will be some expenses that future councils may have to face. I think we are receiving a tremendous liability at the same time we are receiving the bridge."

Thirty years later, in 2008, her wisdom and prophetic words helped bolster the city council's decision.

In the summer of 2008, the city and its engineering firm determined that the bridge had to be closed because of structural deficiencies. Using a sufficiency rating scale of 1–100 to measure a bridge's condition, the Jordan Bridge had dropped from a rating of 3 in 2007 to a rating of zero in 2008. Chesapeake's public works director described the structure as a "fracture-critical bridge" and warned that a catastrophic collapse similar to what occurred with the old I-35W bridge in Minnesota in 2007 was a good possibility.

Upon learning of the dire condition of the bridge, Chesapeake's management team, along with legal, communications, and government relations staff, convened to prepare for the bridge's decommissioning in the interest of public safety. Immediately after announcing the impending closure to councilmembers, the city encountered a barrage of opposition by residents accusing the city of poor bridge maintenance. Neighboring communities pushed hard for the city to make interim repairs.

City staff responded quickly with community outreach meetings and media tours by boat to help the public understand the bridge's deteriorated condition, which was visually apparent, while pressing on to its scheduled emergency closure on November 8, 2008.

Direct outreach at local and regional gatherings highlighted options to mitigate bridge closure effects; however, city staff continued to convey the essential message that this bridge was unsafe, a "band-aid repair" would be unwise, and funding was not available for replacement in the near term as it was estimated that a four-lane replacement bridge would cost $200 million. The bridge was closed on schedule.

Miracle Shot Gives Bridge New Life

Shortly after the closure, Chesapeake Mayor Alan Krasnoff was approached by former Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) Commissioner Philip Shucet and Linda Figg, president and CEO of Figg Bridge Developers (FIGG), with a proposal to acquire the now-dormant bridge and underlying real property. FIGG was part of the team that rebuilt the I-35W replacement bridge in Minnesota.

Chesapeake entered into a development agreement with FIGG in January 2009. Under the agreement, in exchange for the city conveying the existing bridge and all real property interests, FIGG was to design, build, own, operate, and maintain a new South Norfolk Jordan Bridge. The bridge would be returned to private ownership and operated using toll revenues.

Mayor Krasnoff championed council's approval of the agreement while city staff simultaneously pursued general assembly legislation clarifying the city's authority

LEFT: The bridge construction used local materials and local labor, and it enhanced the local economy. Precast segments used to fabricate the bridge were cast at a precasting site adjacent to the bridge by Atlantic Metrocast. (Photo taken June 2011, courtesy of FIGG.)

RIGHT: During construction of the new South Norfolk Jordan Bridge, residents of Chesapeake, Virginia, were invited to come out on Saturday mornings to the adjacent city park and learn about the bridge from project leaders. (Photo taken February 18, 2012, courtesy of FIGG.)

to enter into the contract with FIGG. (Note that Virginia abides by the Dillon's Rule, which construes grants of power to localities narrowly, and if there is a question about a local government's power or authority, then the local government does not receive the benefit of the doubt.)

The council adopted an ordinance creating a toll advisory commission to seek public input and advise council on both public and private tolled facilities. Chesapeake waived building permit fees valued at some $13 million, as well as instituted a partial tax exemption program for renovation and replacement of older commercial structures as a further incentive. The commonwealth's long-standing relationship with Chesapeake in expedited project delivery and VDOT's confidence in the city as a transportation innovator helped fuel the success of the new bridge.

Unprecedented unanimous support from every locality galvanized Hampton Road's Congressional and General Assembly delegations, as well as the Governor. These forces in combination with strong business community backing, helped shepherd the project through the Coast Guard permitting process. When disagreement emerged from the maritime community late in the process, the city effectively used an online survey tool during the Coast Guard permit comment period, which generated a record number of resident comments in support of the crucial permit.

Both the declaration of emergency closure and municipal ownership of the Jordan Bridge helped streamline the permitting and approval processes. FIGG's creativity, including voluntarily assisting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in its efforts to help contain century-old river contamination, further expedited the project.

FIGG began demolition of the old bridge immediately, saving the city some $3.2 million in demolition costs. Soon thereafter, final environmental approvals were secured. The focus then shifted to constructing the new 5,375-foot-long bridge that provides mariners with the same vertical clearance over the channel and improved horizontal clearance.

Construction of the new South Norfolk Jordan Bridge began quickly, and the high-level, fixed-span structure is expected to open later this summer, just four years after closure of the old bridge. The Jordan Bridge will soon come full circle, returning to life as a privately owned, vital, and welcome infrastructure link for Chesapeake and all of Hampton Roads.

Value Packed

Clearly, the decisive policy leadership of Chesapeake's elected officials and their confidence in Chesapeake's management were essential to the project's success. City leaders also showed a willingness to move forward with a new idea for achieving infrastructure by harnessing the private sector to use its resources to

CITY LEADERS DEMONSTRATED A WILLINGNESS TO MOVE FORWARD WITH A MEANS FOR ACHIEVING INFRASTRUCTURE **BY ALLOWING PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT TO USE ITS RESOURCES TO ACCELERATE CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE DECADES SOONER THAN WOULD HAVE OCCURRED OTHERWISE.**

advance a public priority decades sooner than would have occurred otherwise.

Although deficient bridges like the Jordan Bridge exist in many communities, these same unique circumstances may not. The lessons learned, however, included recognizing an opportunity for infrastructure replacement and avoiding becoming mired in an often unproductive debate of public versus private development.

Convening an interdisciplinary team of city staff, plus having an abundance of transparency, effective government relations, and constant communication with the public combined to further both the goal of protecting the public's safety in closing the old bridge and the mission to restore a vital transportation link.

The new—and newly named—South Norfolk Jordan Bridge is privately developed by American Infrastructure MLP Funds, FIGG, and Lane Construction Corporation (LANE). Here are eight major benefits of the bridge:

- Restores fire and emergency medical services that had been missing since 1986 due to weight restrictions.
- Reconnects two revitalizing communities that are already seeing development activity, including commercial and defense-related traffic.
- Improves access to local hospitals.
- Provides for hurricane evacuation traffic.
- Expands navigational clearances to serve future needs.
- Removes risk, operating costs, and liability from the city of Chesapeake.
- Provides user-friendly toll collection—100 percent E-ZPass electronic tolling.
- Creates more than 150 construction-related jobs.
- Unifies the region's residents and elected officials.
- Provides free pedestrian and bicycle crossings. PM


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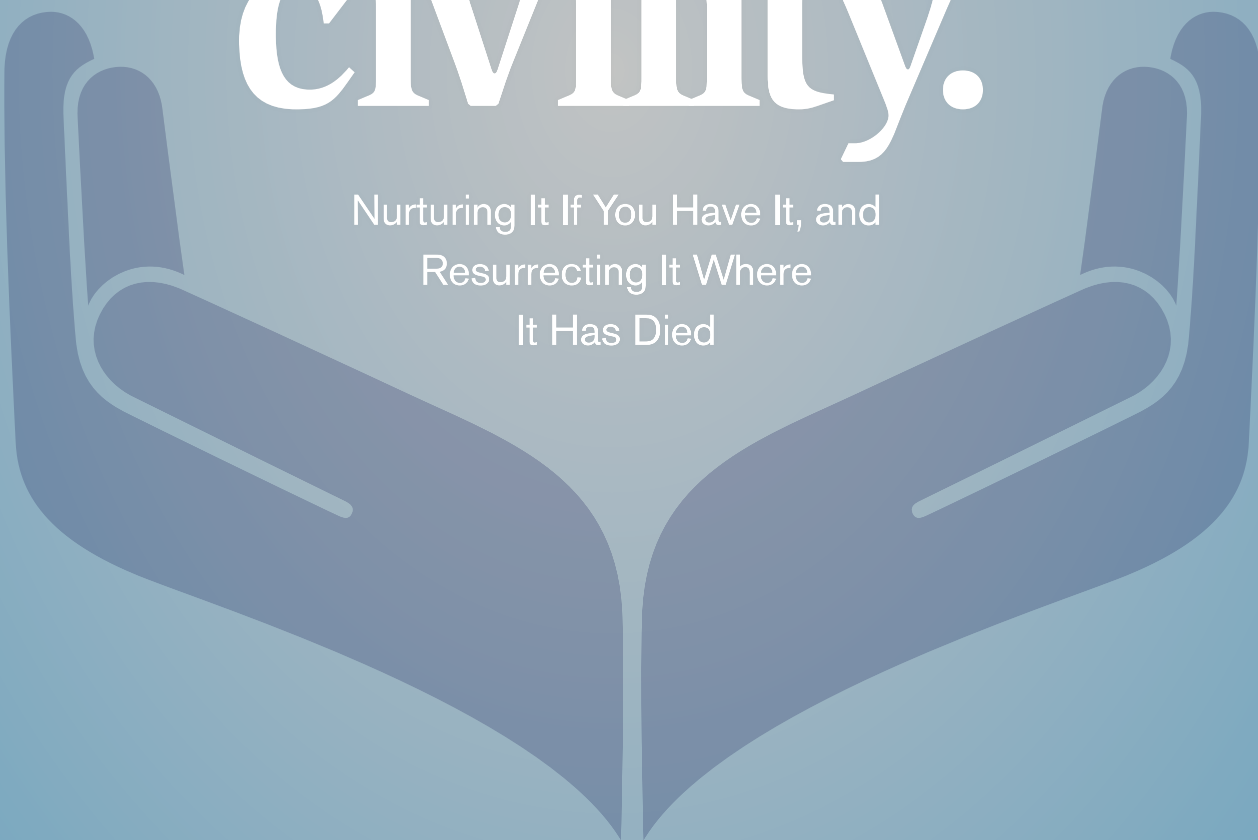
civility.

Nurturing It If You Have It, and Resurrecting It Where It Has Died



By Julia Novak, ICMA-CM

In 2010, I had the opportunity to be part of an ICMA International project in Baghdad, Iraq, that focused on an initiative of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Creating Civil Society. We can easily imagine why this war-torn country in one of the most divided regions of the world would need to focus on creating a civil society.

My experience in Baghdad made me realize how at risk we are right here in the United States—at risk of losing something we promote internationally as being a foundation of democratic society: civility.

Baghdad: Learning Democracy

Our job in Baghdad was to teach the community of Iraqi trainers the concepts of engagement, strategic planning, project management, and policy advocacy. Participation by residents does not exist outside of democracy, and we were to teach tools and techniques that could be applied to people who were, for the first time, taking advantage of the opportunity to speak about what was in their hearts and to advocate their desires for their community. The people we interacted with realized they had been given a gift—democracy—and they wanted to learn how to be effective in its implementation.

TAKEAWAYS

› The risk of incivility exists for communities and for our society if we don't do something to handle it.

› Unfortunately, incivility can be found in good, great, and horrific governance.

I kept a journal of my time in Baghdad and recall commenting on the dedication of the people who were coming to our sessions. We were working in a secure compound in the red zone of Baghdad and were unable to leave this secure area. The people we were training lived throughout the city, and they came to work each day at great personal risk and sacrifice.

On any given day, people might be late or could not make it at all, but their excuses were like none I had heard before: "An IED went off and most of the streets in the neighborhood were closed" or "No one could leave their house because there was a sweep going on searching for al Qaeda operatives." Comments like these provide perspective on traffic jams and neighborhood disturbances.

The working conditions at the compound were not what you would call optimal. Our training facility was a former private residence. The room was cramped, the acoustics were bad, the screen was small, the chairs were uncomfortable, and the electricity in Baghdad is (still) not reliable, so power would cut on and off every few hours. Then we would go from the grid to backup generators.

When conducting training sessions in the United States, I often get feedback on the creature comforts—room too cold, chairs too hard, or food is bad. Iraqi folks never complained about the environment. They were eager to learn how to create a civil society.

Harrisburg: A City at War with Itself

In 2011, Pennsylvania's capital city was trying to find a pathway for dealing with a crushing debt that was the result of a failed incinerator. In October, Reuters did an extensive article about the situation, and the headline said, "Harrisburg: A City at War with Itself." A crushing debt is a significant issue for the city, but it should not be insurmountable.

The article referenced the state takeover, which was in progress when the article was written, and said, "A last-ditch attempt at a compromise between the mayor and councilmembers days before the bankruptcy filing ended in a shouting match 10 minutes in. The paralysis isn't rooted in partisan politics, either: All of the city's top officials are Democrats. Welcome to Harrisburg, a city at war with itself."

And the entire world was watching. Civility in Harrisburg is disappearing. The city faces a severe financial crisis, and political gridlock prevents the elected officials from coming together to work on solving the problems. Has governance been replaced by politics?

So What?

Harrisburg may be an extreme example, but other communities all across the country have already lost, are losing, or are at risk of losing their way. It can begin with such a polarizing issue as controversial zoning decisions or neighborhood traffic patterns. People find their voices by taking positions on issues, and they learn how to use their influence to stop controversial initiatives.

Is that the risk? I've concluded otherwise. I believe that apathy is the risk. Disgust is the risk. Detachment from community is the risk. The world watches, and when civility vanishes and paralysis sets in, no one will locate a business in the community and no one will buy property. The future is held hostage by dysfunction. No one wants to invest in a place that cannot come together to solve its own problems.

Clearly, in democratic society we do not expect people to agree on everything. Unanimity is not what we are seeking, but we must find a way to disagree agreeably on policy issues so local governments can move forward. If all we discuss is what we oppose and if we use our power to block things rather than to find new pathways for progress, growth is stifled, economic development is hurt, and the fire of cynicism about government is fueled. Cynicism already permeates national politics.

Although trust-in-government surveys suggest that Americans are more inclined to trust local government—consider the rampant mistrust of the federal government—I'm not sure that's such a compliment! In 2011, KRC Research's nationwide study, Civility in America, indicated that 65 percent of Americans see civility as a major problem and 55 percent expect it to get worse in the coming years!

The Lucky Ones

Fortunately, not all local governments in the United States are falling into the trap of incivility. I can think of dozens of examples where civility is a norm; it's how these places do business; and it gives them a competitive advantage.

In the area of Salt Lake City, Utah, there are numerous communities with various forms of government and different personalities. Murray City is a suburb of Salt Lake that operates under the mayor-council form of government, with professional management provided by its chief of staff. Murray City is successful, and, after watching it in action, I would say the most important value we see is the mayor and administration collaborating with the city council to navigate community issues. In other communities like Lenexa, Kansas, and Clayton, Missouri, civility is an expectation and a tightly held community value.

Any official can point to charters, local ordinances, and job descriptions and claim authority and legitimacy. A successful community learns to work in the gray areas of the policy-administration dichotomy that Professor James Svara, professor and director, Center for Urban Innovation, Arizona State University, Phoenix, Arizona, has written on so extensively over the past 25 years.

Policy and administration overlap rather than collide, and because there is a basic platform of trust, there is space to work out differences because of the belief that each side has the community's interest at heart.

What Can Be Done?

Here are tools that managers can employ in communities in order to begin reclaiming civility where it has been lost or nurturing it where it exists.

Believing. In 1951, Edward R. Murrow began hosting *This I Believe*, a public radio series that was five years in the making. The challenge for listeners was to write an essay that used only a few hundred words to describe a core belief—something that person stood for.

NPR resurrected the concept in recent years with the stated goal of facilitating a higher standard of active

SAMPLE GOVERNING BODY NORMS

1. Place cooperation, trust, and respect at the heart of all we do.
2. Work for win-win situations instead of win-lose.
3. Honor discussion before decisions.
4. Focus policy making on important ends for our owners and customers.
5. Be honest and candid with each other.
6. Share information and avoid surprises.
7. Maintain a sense of humor.

public discourse, inspiring people to reflect, encouraging them to share, and engaging them in a conversation about personal values and beliefs that can shape life, community, and society.

Essays from the 1950s are timeless, and in 2006 they were reproduced, along with a new series of essays, in the book, *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women*. The book's format lends itself well to community engagement.

When a conversation, a retreat, or a meeting is started by talking about what people believe in versus what they don't like, there is a distinctly different tone. Individuals begin to see common ground, even with people they previously identified as the enemy. Ask yourself this question: What do you believe to be true about the future of your community?

Unanimity is not what we are seeking, but we must find a way to disagree agreeably on policy issues so local governments can move forward.

Ground rules. Groups of people need ground rules that they can willingly commit to in order to govern their behaviors. It is easy to get frustrated when the political discourse turns nasty. Local government professionals can be extremely helpful in running a community, but their skill is no substitute for governance, and a manager cannot "manage" the council.

John Nalbandian, professor of public administration at the University of Kansas and former city commissioner and mayor of Lawrence, Kansas, offers these observations on the work environment in which elected officials are forced to govern:

- There is no hierarchy. Not even a mayor or council president is the boss of the governing body. Members come to the governing body as equals.
- Task definition is vague. What does it mean to govern?
- Issues the governing body must decide on are value laden: Representation.
- Efficiency.
- Individual rights.
- Social equity.
- And sometimes the values conflict.

And, of course, all their work is done in public. This is a blessing in a democracy, but sometimes it makes it challenging to have meaningful discussions on value-laden controversial issues.

Just as communities self-govern by electing local officials, those elected officials must self-govern how they govern! They can choose to allow negative, disruptive behaviors to create the best reality TV show during prime time.

Or they can choose to commit to a set of rules and agree to be held accountable by each other. The true leading practice is for members of the governing body to agree that it is in the best interests of all to commit to norms and then routinely evaluate themselves on how they are doing.

Articulating expectations. One of the realities of group dynamics is that when we relate with people we have expectations—expectations about how the other person will behave and treat us. The irony is that we rarely share this basic information with the other person, opting instead for a game of relationship "Go Fish," where we reward or punish behavior that meets or doesn't meet our expectations.

Creating time for discussing some rather simple but profound questions can do wonders for relationships. Essentially, the questions are:

- What do I expect from you?
- What am I willing to give you?

These basic questions can be modified to address any number of relationships between and among elected and appointed officials:

- What does the mayor expect from the council?
- What is the mayor willing to give the council?
- What does the council expect from the mayor?
- What is the council willing to give the mayor?

Or these:

- What do I expect from my colleagues on the governing body?
- What am I willing to give my colleagues on the governing body?

Or these:

- What does the governing body expect from the staff?
- What is the governing body willing to give the staff?
- What does the staff expect from the governing body?
- What is the staff willing to give the governing body?

The conversations that result from brainstorming responses to these questions and exploring the answers—whether there is alignment or not—are incredibly powerful.

Good habits. Communities that nurture civility do so intentionally by dedicating time to it. As is the case in any relationship, there is no replacement for quality community. Study sessions, retreats, and goal-setting sessions, for example, create opportunities for dedicated dialogue.

Author Brian Tracy said, "Successful people are simply those with successful habits." I believe the same is true of organizations and of governing bodies. PM

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BY WES HARE, ICMA-CM

MAKING EVIDENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT A WORLDWIDE STANDARD

Consider taking a greater role in pushing for standards

ICMA's Code of Ethics must have seemed strange to those local government officials who first read it in the 1920s. Cities and counties at that time were places where you could finally put your brother-in-law to work if you were elected mayor or make some real money by investing in local real estate because you now had inside information.

The idea that government operations should be run by someone pledged to honest, professional management was naive to some and threatening to others. Today it's the commonly accepted standard in the United States and many countries around the world.

Ethics

Integrity is the core competency of local government managers, and, although integrity as we define it will never be universal, great progress has been made over the past century. Virtually all professional managers know that engaging in political activity and speculating in real estate within their jurisdictions are clear violations of a standard, which can lead to sanctions.

An example such as Bell, California, stands out as the exception to rules almost everyone understands. Similar progress needs to be made in promoting the growth of performance standards for local governments worldwide.

Several years ago I attended an ICMA International Committee meeting in Dublin, Ireland, where one of our colleagues from the United Kingdom made a presentation on all the problems associated with local government performance audits conducted by his national government. At the end of a lengthy series of complaints, I asked the UK manager whether he believed the audits made his government work better. He paused for a moment before answering that they did.

Transparency

Despite great new tools to promote transparency, there appear to be few standards for local governments to follow. The Sunshine Review (http://sunshinereview.org) is a nonprofit organization that rates the transparency of government websites, but most governments do not participate. Perhaps the best feature of this site is that it was developed by the customer and not by government.

I can now look at financial information on our city's public website that would have taken me days or weeks to get as a young city manager. Local governments in the developing world are lucky if they have a bulletin board for posting meeting notices, and I have visited jurisdictions where there is no space for members of the public to watch their government at work. I believe the gulf between emerging democracies and those with access to greater technology can be bridged with relatively simple standards and a commitment to observe them.

Transparency is a critical piece of the equation that allows the public to distinguish between opinion and fact. There is so much misinformation and so little understanding of local government that ICMA's role in promoting better access to accurate information is increasingly critical. Partnerships with such professional organizations as Udite (the European Federation of Local Government Executives) and other appropriate nongovernmental organizations will further this goal.

Finance

Independent financial audits are accepted practice in most developed nations, but even in the United States these standards are often limited in scope. Although bankruptcies are rare, too many cities and counties experience financial distress for failing to observe the most basic financial accounting and management standards. Honest and effective financial management remains among the highest priorities of our profession, yet great work in this area is often unobserved and unrewarded.

The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) awards for excellence in financial reporting and budget presentation are worthy standards that promote transparency, thoroughness, and accuracy, while ICMA's Financial Trend Monitoring System is an outstanding tool, with principles that can be applied to local governments everywhere. Smaller local governments may not have the resources to meet the comprehensive GFOA requirements, a fact that argues for scalable standards appropriate to governments of different sizes and levels of prosperity.

The ready availability of financial data on websites is improving the ability to compare the cost of services and should serve as a reminder that more citizens and organizations will be using this information to make judgments about local government performance. The closer our jurisdictions can come to achieving recognized standards for financial management, the better our ability to maintain trust with our citizens will be.

Emergency Services

Emergency services usually enjoy the

greatest support from the public, and in some cases this is true whether the support is deserved or not. There are extreme variations in what different communities spend on these services and relatively few commonly applied, unbiased performance standards.

Managers can usually predict that more than 90 percent of their citizens believe the fire department is doing a good job, while around 70 percent feel positively about the police department. Public works employees always seem to be at the bottom of the polls, along with planners and inspectors.

Public opinion surveys are one piece of evidence about the performance of local government, but they are heavily influenced by respondents' biases and emotions and the nature of emergency service employees' work.

ICMA's Center for Performance Measurement has standardized the collection and reporting of data to help communities compare performance against one another. These data are essentially free of political influence, and they allow managers to raise questions about variations from place to place. Good data may not provide immediate answers to problems, but possessing good data invariably raises questions that lead to solutions.

I recently looked at data from cities of a size comparable with mine, and I found at least one from outside of Oregon where the cost of emergency services is a fraction of what we pay. Unfortunately, there are no readily available data from the other city about how it measures the quality of its services. Despite this limitation, I believe important lessons can be learned from the comparable city, and I have plans to visit there in the near future.

Utilities and Public Works

Some people in Albany believe they pay the highest water and sewer rates in the world when, in fact, they don't pay the highest rates in our county. Investments during the last decade in new water and wastewater treatment plants have pushed rates into the highest quartile in our state and created some bad feelings between the city and a number of our citizens. Comparative information helps explain our circumstances, but this information is difficult to find and is often outdated.

Albany recently completed a public works accreditation program through the American Public Works Association, which certified that our policies and practices meet or exceed the standards of the organization. Accreditation is another tool to promote evidence-based management and spread the use of best practices.

The problem with most of these processes is that, in general, they seem to take a one-size-fits-all approach to organizations that have huge disparities in resources. Part of the evaluation process should be recognition of the resources that can reasonably be made available to meet accepted standards.

Gambella, a community of 40,000 residents in western Ethiopia, should obviously be held to different standards than the comparably sized city of Keizer in Oregon. I believe, however, that lack of money or staff should not be an excuse to ignore performance standards any more than these factors would exclude professional managers from observing the Code of Ethics.

Leisure Services

Parks, libraries, and recreation programs generate large volumes of useful data and provide many opportunities to improve performance. Albany's parks and recreation department has substantially decreased its reliance on tax subsidies over the past decade and now receives nearly half of its support from fees and sponsorships.

Tracking this information and acting on it have allowed the department to increase its services at a time when tax resources have been flat or decreasing.

The library system has also aggressively monitored the cost of its transactions and implemented measures to maintain service levels with fewer employees. Building an electronic checkout system into a new library allowed the department to increase its space by 25,000 square feet without adding new employees.

Internal Services

Information technology departments or specialists are among the most important resources for achieving evidence-based local government management. Data collection that formerly required significant employee time can now be automated to the point where almost no staff resources are routinely required.

I recently wanted to look at our state pension program costs over the past five years and was able to find the information through our publicly accessible website in less than five minutes, thanks to the good work of Albany's finance and IT departments. I was interested in comparing our city's information with that of a neighboring city, and as I am writing this, I am still waiting for that neighbor's number after more than a week.

Worldwide Improvements

ICMA is a recognized leader in promoting performance measurement and evidence-based management among its members around the world. The success of the Code of Ethics demonstrates that higher standards for local governments are both desirable and achievable.

We have the opportunity to improve the quality of local government worldwide by partnering with other organizations to improve the scope, scale, quality, and implementation of performance measurement and evidence-based management to deliver better services to citizens here and abroad. If we are not using reliable data and evidence to drive performance improvement in our communities, what are we using instead? PM

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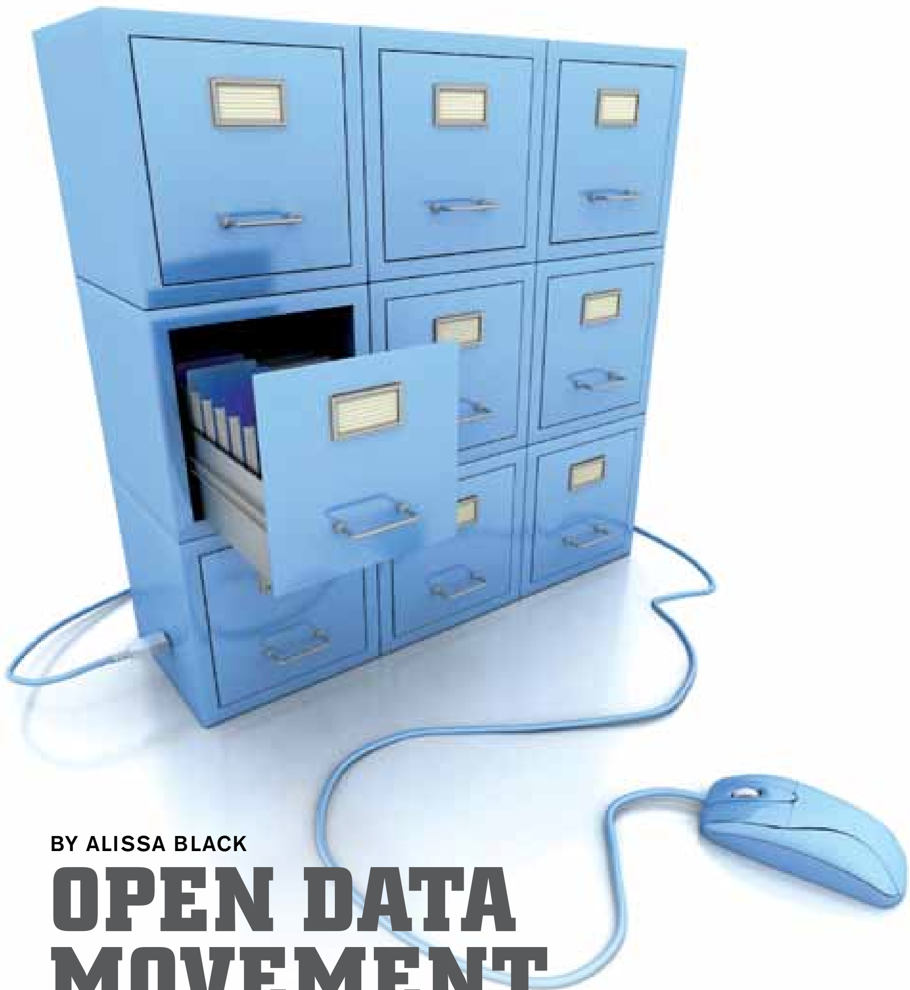

LOCAL OFFICIALS ALSO BENEFIT TREMENDOUSLY FROM OPEN DATA BECAUSE INFORMATION THAT WAS HISTORICALLY LOCKED AWAY IN DEPARTMENTS HAS BECOME AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE.

BY ALISSA BLACK

OPEN DATA MOVEMENT

Where it's been and where it appears to be going

The open data movement is taking root at the local level. Since President Barack Obama's 2009 memorandum on transparency and open government, datacatalogs.org has reported that more than 40 state, county, and local governments in the United States have put data catalogues online.

Open data policies typically define open data as structured standardized data in machine readable formats published for the public. This means that government data can be downloaded in such formats as CSV, KML, XML, and even XLS.

Sharing information is not new. The web has allowed billions of people to openly share information over the past 30 years. In Tim Berners-Lee's February 2009 TED Talk, "The Next Web of Open, Linked Data," he described his frustration with large amounts of information being locked away in numerous systems that require specialized knowledge to access.

That perpetual frustration spawned the World Wide Web in the late 20th century. Putting information in a standard format on the Internet for anyone to use was Berners-Lee's answer to making information usable and accessible.

Fast forward 20 years, and the social web transforms our society in profound ways. Haiti's earthquake in 2010, for example, caused the world to become acutely aware of the absence of geographical data available for emergency response teams on the ground.

An open, social-mapping platform called openstreetmap.org was used to crowdsource that data for the crises responders. In 48 hours, the map for Port au Prince and neighboring Carrefour changed dramatically. On-the-ground crisis responders used the open maps for rescues, emergency aid distribution, and eventually rebuilding efforts.

Knowing what we know now about the transformational change brought about by open information and sharing, we have an opportunity—and responsibility—to extend those possibilities to government through open data.

In an attempt to break down the silos that exist between our local governments and encourage sharing, the Civic Commons wiki, a website that is collaboratively created and curated, is a resource for the public and city leaders to use to research exactly how other local governments are opening data, setting open data policies, and participating in the open government movement.

Using other communities as models, you can connect with local leaders elsewhere who have successfully opened data and sharing strategies. This is one of the first ways to address the issues of privacy and availability that may be preventing you from opening data in your community.

What's the Meaning?

Why are these data meaningful to members of the public and what will they do with the data? The city and county of San Francisco believes the value in sharing open data is economic and improves access to government.

San Francisco's open data policy states: "The creation of an open data policy will provide benefits to the city that include creation of social and economic benefits based on innovation in how residents interact with government stemming from increased accessibility to city data sets."

It's worth noting that a common fear expressed by government officials when they consider greater transparency is the "gotcha moment," the exposé or investigation into misconduct or waste facilitated by greater openness. But as we've seen in San Francisco, this concern is often overblown.

The public is not seeking data to pull a gotcha on government; instead, people want access to data to help them make better decisions. SFPark provides drivers with real-time information on parking space and garage availability in downtown San Francisco.

The SweepDodger app alerts residents when they need to move their cars to avoid tickets. Mom Maps, by using various city data sets, helps parents find kid-friendly locations in San Francisco. This is just a short list of applications built off of the more than 150 San Francisco city data sets.

Who Benefits

The public is not the only beneficiary of open data. Local officials also benefit tremendously from open data because data that were historically locked away in departments have become available and accessible. You can think of open data as your platform for viewing the city more holistically and making more informed decisions based on more information.

As local governments begin to collaborate more and share strategies, the initial hurdles of data privacy and availability will become less prohibitive, and we will see the open data movement become as commonplace as other nationwide initiatives like 311 or 211.

We're already seeing the public create innovative, open ways for governments and residents to share and improve data through collaborative applications like DataCouch, a place to share and collaborate on open and public data sets.

Big problems plaguing our local governments won't be solved using siloed data from individual city or county departments. Instead, a complete picture is needed, and open data can provide a more complete picture of the landscape for local decision makers.

For a manager or elected official, open data can be a positive game changer. PM

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BY ANDREW SOBEL AND JEROLD PANAS

THE ART OF STARTING OVER: USE SEVEN SIMPLE WORDS

You can save a conversation gone wrong

Has this ever happened to you? You're talking to a resident or perhaps one of the department directors and realize the conversation has gotten off on absolutely the wrong foot.

You may have learned new and unexpected information from the other person that renders everything you've said irrelevant. You may have walked in with an assumption that was just not true. Or, you find you're not connecting, and tension and anger start to creep into the exchange.

It really doesn't matter. What does matter is that a potentially productive conversation has become awkward and stilted—or, even worse, superheated and combative. What do you do next?

You have these three options:

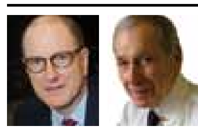
1. Continue trying to make your point. The tension and awkwardness will likely escalate, and you'll find that you and the other person are farther and farther apart.
2. Bring the conversation to an abrupt end and exit stage left. Both of you will be left with a bad taste in your mouth.
3. Salvage the situation with the judicious use of seven magic words: "Do you mind if we start over?"

Using this question is the Saint Bernard rescue dog that brings a warming barrel of brandy into the conversational arctic. People are forgiving. They want things to go well, and this question disarms them and eases the way to a new beginning.

The next time a conversation gets off on the wrong foot or veers off track, reset with this powerful question. Here are more pointers that can help:

- **If you're in the wrong, apologize.** Take responsibility for the conversation's derailment. You might say something like "I've gotten off on the wrong foot, and I'm really sorry. Do you mind if I begin again? I haven't done this justice." Or, "The reason I'd like to start over is that I put my foot in my mouth. Can I give it a second try?"
- **If you're not in the wrong,** and the conversation has simply strayed into unproductive territory, ask in a way that doesn't place blame. Try: "Can we step back from this? What should we be talking about?" Actually, even if the other party made the initial faux pas, it's still okay to say you're sorry the conversation went awry. You're not taking blame; you're just acknowledging regret that things took a bad turn and that the other person is upset.
- **Either way, smile.** It goes a long way toward smoothing any ruffled feathers. More than words alone, a genuine smile that reaches the eyes can evoke a powerful visceral response. It shows that your intentions are pure, and when people realize that, the vast majority are willing to give you another chance.
- **When you start over, *really* start over.** You don't have to actually leave the room and come back in, but draw a sharp dividing line between the bad conversation and the new one. A good way to reset is to ask the other person a question and draw them back into the conversation as an active participant. It could be something as simple as "Can I ask—how have you been thinking about this?" or "Let's step back for a second—can you share your view of the situation?"
- **Of course, starting over isn't just for the workplace.** It can work just as well to defuse a budding argument with your spouse or any family member or friend.

It's a bold, gutsy move to restart a conversation from scratch. Yes, it feels awkward. Most of us are not accustomed to swallowing our pride, admitting in real time that we screwed up, and asking if we can make it right. But the next time a conversation goes wrong, try it. Not only will it salvage the moment, it will pave the way for a more authentic and productive relationship in the future. PM



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Power Questions: Build Relationships, Win New Business, and Influence Others (Wiley, February 2012, ISBN: 978-11181196-3-1, $22.95), with an extensive list of 337 power questions, is available at bookstores and online booksellers.

BY SREEDHARI DESAI

CUTE OVERLOAD

Child power can lead to adult ethical behavior

Human resources managers rue the fact that employees spend so much time ogling dailycuteness.com and similar websites. But can those very sites be a key to promoting ethical behavior?

Bizarre as this idea may seem at first glance, my research collaborator, Francesca Gino, and I performed experiments to examine whether cute, childlike things such as animation videos and stuffed toys can bring about good behavior. Across several cultures, people have linked childhood to a state of innocence and moral purity. We reasoned that, if objects related to childhood can activate thoughts about purity, people might behave more ethically in the presence of music or colorful paint.

Think about it: people often check their behavior in the presence of children. They are less likely to swear and more likely to buy cookies to save the world. The twist in our studies comes from the fact that we used objects that hint at the idea of a child, and not real children; yet we found the same results.

In one experiment, people who watched an animated nursery rhyme cheated less on math puzzles than those in the control group. In another experiment, people who participated in a "product evaluation study" of a soft toy were less likely to deceive opponents in a deception game than those who evaluated a stylish paper clip.

Why Focus on Children?

So, why do people behave better in the presence of things that remind them of children? Our society has conditioned us to associate children with innocence. Look at how children are portrayed in literature and the fine arts.

Poets like William Blake and artists like William-Adolphe Bouguereau have used the construct of a child to symbolize moral purity and goodness. Movie companies have made millions by casting children in movies around the theme of innocent childhood.

The association between children and moral purity is quite strong. We found that when subjects played with a soft toy or drew with colored markers they were more likely to create moral words on word-completion tasks of the sort where an incomplete word such as V_RT_ _ can be completed as VIRTUE or VORTEX.

The effect of child-related cues may possibly be more deeply ingrained than just social conditioning. Primatologists have shown that certain kinds of primates, such as the Barbary macaques, often borrow an infant from its mother in order to use it to prompt positive social interaction with others, resulting in more grooming and friendly behavior in the group.

Likewise, neuroscientists have shown that viewing images of babies, puppies, and kittens releases the "moral hormone," oxytocin, which is a key biochemical associated with feelings of sympathy. So, perhaps, it is not altogether surprising that we found the results that we did.

Child-Related Cues Can Inspire Better Behavior

But would our results hold outside the lab? To answer this question, we examined a data set compiled by KLD, a Boston-based firm that evaluates firms on various dimensions of corporate social responsibility, including charitable giving. We investigated whether the presence of crude, child-related cues in the form of day-care centers, nurseries, and kindergartens within a two-mile radius of a firm's corporate headquarters would be correlated with its prosocial giving.

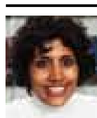
Even after controlling for such specific variables as organization age, size, stock volatility, performance, and population density, we found that where the number of child-related cues was greater, the organization's engagement in charitable giving was also greater. It is interesting that child-related cues seem to inspire better behavior at both individual and organizational levels, likely owing to the childhood-innocence connection.

Media pundits have probably known about this connection all along: look at the plethora of commercials that use baby images to advertise such unhealthy products as soft drinks and junk food. Or for that matter, think about the baby kissing that occurs right before election time.

How can organizations and policymakers cash in on the children-innocence connection? For starters, our research offers a novel reason for organizations to provide day-care facilities on their campuses. Not only will the presence of such facilities lead to a better work-life balance for employees, but it may also lead to a better ethical climate for the organization.

It also may be beneficial to have child art on the walls of meeting rooms. Organizations could also follow the example of Google and have offices that are playfully and colorfully designed. Or they could have fun, child-friendly music play in elevators once in a while.

Organizations may even want to encourage employees to put up pictures of their children in their workstations. And let's not forget the "daily cuteness" websites. PM



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BY MARY ELEANOR WICKERSHAM

THE DREADED MEETING: HOW TO ACHIEVE A POSITIVE DYNAMIC

Because meetings can make a decision-making difference

Committee and team meetings: we dread them. In many organizations, we simply move from one room to another, required to be there but disengaged from the action or lack of action. Everyone around the table is doing the BlackBerry prayer, thinking no one else is noticing.

We look up when a question comes our way, then return to our own thoughts or the e-mail and text streams that are ever constant. With attention divided, the meeting is painfully slow, and all the while we're thinking about the work backing up at our own desks. We'd rather be anywhere else.

Meetings do not have to be a waste of time, but the value of the meeting is completely related to the leader's ability to plan, focus, and command the attention of the participants. If you feel the pain of too many meetings or of unproductive work sessions, here are recommendations for changing the meeting dynamic.

Consider meeting logistics.

1. Plan the meeting from beginning to end. Create an agenda. Send the agenda out prior to the meeting with specific assignments for reporting listed on the agenda.

2. Set a timetable for the meeting and stick to it. When practical, set up time elements for each section of the meeting to ensure that the meeting begins and ends on time.

3. Ban cellphones and smartphones and tablets from the room, unless people are using them for reporting or for recording.

4. Make sure the room is big enough for the group but not so big that people can isolate themselves from others. The geography of the interaction can influence the dynamics of the meeting.

5. Record the minutes, including who was present and who was absent. Make people aware that their presence is important. If group members are supposed to interact, include a list of members with their contact information, including phone and e-mail.

6. Be sure that necessary materials are available so that group members are not running in and out to fetch needed items.

7. If the meeting is scheduled for more than 90 minutes, plan a break.

8. Take into consideration the acoustics of the room. If necessary, arrange for microphones to ensure that everyone can hear and can be heard.

9. Keep necessary meetings as brief as possible to get the job done. Thinking in one-hour increments is not essential.

Consider group dynamics.

1. Allow time for introductions if the group members do not know each other. If they are already acquainted, use this time to allow people to say hello or catch up. The social nature of meetings can make them more effective. People who are linked to each other usually work together more effectively.

2. Unless you're hosting a town hall meeting for some important announcement, keep the group as small as possible so that each person has a role. Meetings that engage each participant are more meaningful and productive. Make sure that each person in the room knows why he or she is a part of the group. This will help ensure that the members stay involved and will help build mutual respect among members.

3. Keep in mind people's different personalities and the fact that some participants never volunteer to speak up. Ensure that each person participates in the discussion by asking questions of those who have not spoken about their opinions. If one or two people are dominating the conversation, ask others what they think. Otherwise, the outcome of the meeting might not reflect the honest opinions of the group.

4. Give people time to speak. The leader should not fill every gap in the conversation. People need time to articulate their thoughts. If a minute goes by without anyone speaking, that could be a good thing. If the meeting is too quiet, participants are not prepared or the topic is not clear. Clarify the focus and start again.

5. Complete agreement on decision points is not essential. One of the values of meetings is to get input from people with different viewpoints, so ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute. While some people have great ideas and lead innovation, others are more skilled in figuring out what would not work or identifying potential problems. Both groups are equally important. By slowly eliminating ideas, you can lead the group to consensus, if not 100 percent agreement. This, in essence, is the value of teamwork.

6. Be aware of hidden agendas. Ask questions when you think a team member is trying to hijack or derail the process. Expect openness of the members and welcome polite disagreement as part of the decision-making process.

7. Be careful that members are not appointed solely by position. Some people work better in groups than others. Unless it is written in stone, consider creating committees and teams according to interest and talent, rather than position.

Set goals to ensure you are focused.

1. Figure out why you are meeting. If the meeting is held because you've always done it that way, rethink the process and the need. If, for example, your department heads are getting together weekly, determine whether you are seeing results from the meetings. Look at these regularly scheduled meetings to determine what is accomplished. Is this the time that announcements are made? Is this the most effective way to communicate? How much of the information could be sent electronically? Are the right people in the room? If you did not meet, would it matter?

2. Clarify for the participants the goals for each meeting. If the goal is to share information on outcomes or outputs, perhaps data could be sent out ahead of the meeting for better analysis. Getting a comprehensive data sheet at a meeting does not provide adequate time for review. If the goal of the meeting is to update others on the progress of some project, ensure that there is a project management plan in place with some visual components for review. Without a clear goal, there is no reason to meet.

3. Set the level of detail that is expected in reports. Without some clarification on this point, some committee members may have too much to say and others too little. Make clear what is expected.

4. Plan termination of the committee if it is based on a specific project. Set out a timeline for action. Although the dates might need adjustment, the timeline provides a greater sense of urgency and, when the project is done, a greater sense of accomplishment.

5. Always send out minutes of the prior meeting before the next meeting to help people stay engaged in the process. Keep minutes succinct. Bulleted minutes are often more easily followed. List decision points and questions yet unanswered. This can serve as a review between sessions and help the group stay on track toward the goal.

6. Be in touch during intervals between meetings to assess the work of individual group members and to encourage completion of responsibilities by the next meeting.

7. Add members when there is a deficit in talent.

8. Create a mission statement for the group that reminds members why they are there.

Take charge.

1. If the meeting relates to a project, the leader must know the limits within which the project can operate. Know the bottom line for time, resources, and scope. While some flexibility is positive and reflects the philosophy that employees should be involved in decision making, budget and resource allocation are in the administrative domain and ultimately limit the group's purview. By laying out parameters up front, less time is wasted and committees and teams are more productive.

2. Run the meeting. Don't let one person dominate. Do not let the meeting dissolve into a gripe session or a pat-on-the-back session. Keep the meeting on track.

3. If you and the members do not know something, find the answer. Get expertise, whether it is technical, scientific, legal, or professional. Committees have great value but not always the expertise they need to make decisions.

4. Remember that leading does not mean dominating. The point of a team or committee is to bring ideas to the table, sort through them, and leave with something accomplished. Even the ideas of a great leader may not be the best ideas. Respect the opinions of others even when you do not agree, and demand the same from other group members.

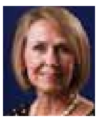
5. Remove the fear factor. Ensure that people can feel comfortable in expressing their own opinions. If employees are at different levels in the organization, make the effort to ensure equality in their roles.

6. Ensure civil discussion. Lay out the ground rules from day one.

Unfortunately, group assignments are often seen as a make-work requirement without real purpose or opportunity for meaningful outcomes. The late comedian Milton Berle once said that "a committee is a group that keeps minutes and loses hours." Too often, that has been true.

Strong leadership, an understanding of group dynamics, goal setting, and careful attention to logistical issues can change the traditional and much-maligned group dynamic. In small groups, members can learn to feel freer to share, to debate, and to actively participate in decision making on behalf of the organization.

The confidence that can come from participation can result in more productive and engaged employees and, ultimately, a stronger organization. PM



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BY JULIE AYERS

LEARN FROM THE CHICKEN LADY

Four traits that relate to the management profession

At a joint meeting of the board of supervisors and planning and zoning commission this past spring, the subject of urban chickens was on the agenda. We are in a relatively rural part of Arizona, but even so, what happened next took everyone by surprise.

Sitting in the back of the room was a woman who had brought an exhibit to help her make her point at the meeting—a real, live, full-grown chicken. She had been hiding it under her jacket for the first hour of the meeting!

In recounting this story and describing how it relates to me—I explain later why I've used the chicken lady as a model—I have to note that, although I dislike stereotypes and resist being labeled, it is a fact that our profession of local government management comprises more men than women. And I would be lying if I said that being a female county administrator doesn't impact the way I conduct business and interact with others, because of course it does.

Individuality Counts

Each of us comes to this profession with our own experiences, quirks, and personality traits that impact the way we perform our jobs. I believe it would be fair to say that managers come in as many different varieties as local governments do!

With that being said, I think that women who want to work in this profession can learn from the chicken lady. After all, she was passionate about an issue, took a risk, made an impression, and executed her plan seamlessly.

Here's how I see these four traits being related to my service as a manager:

Passion. Local government management isn't just a job—it's a lifestyle. Past articles in this space have talked about the fishbowl that managers live in. This effect is amplified in small communities, and we are not able to shop at the grocery store or attend church without the job following us.

Because I'm a mom, my job accompanies me to my children's sporting events and parent-teacher conferences. Sometimes it is cool to have a mom whom their civics teacher talks about and sometimes extremely not cool when I fail to watch the game because I am talking about the latest budget issues with a concerned resident.

Risk. It is generally accepted that women are less risk tolerant than men. I do believe this plays some part in why fewer women are serving as managers. After all, what could be riskier than directly reporting to three elected officials and being responsible for supporting an additional 24 of them? This is my reality in Arizona county government.

Before accepting my current position, I was human resources director for Yavapai County and had some sense of security in that role. The largest question for me when I was deciding whether to accept the move to county administrator was whether I was willing to risk my family's well-being to do so. Although my predecessor held the position for a long time, the reality is that most of us will not leave our management positions voluntarily.

Impression. When I was appointed administrator, I followed in the footsteps of a six-foot, five-inch man who had held the position for 20-plus years. And here I was, a five-foot woman, so I am not an immediately imposing figure.

I also was age 36 when I accepted the position, and I'm told I look younger than I am. My job title, county administrator, also sometimes complicated matters. All too frequently I arrived at public meetings to the confusion of the organizer who was attempting to figure out whose administrative assistant I was.

The other side of the coin is that I believe not being physically intimidating can sometimes give me an edge when dealing with conflict and negotiations.

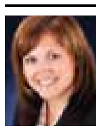
Execution. Of course having passion, taking the risk, and making a good impression don't matter if we can't execute. Just knowing the nuts and bolts of our management responsibilities is not enough to be successful. It is the relationships we forge with elected officials, constituents, and employees that make the difference between effectiveness and ineffectiveness.

And this is where I think the stereotypes give the edge to the women (finally!). Adapting communication style to the audience, interpreting body language, and active listening are all valuable skills. Your credibility as a local government manager is your lifeline: mean what you say, follow through, and hold true to your values.

Use the Chicken Lady's Qualities

I don't for a minute believe that being a female local government manager is any more or less difficult than being a male local government manager. The challenges and advantages may be different, but all good managers are nothing if they are not flexible and adaptable.

I think all managers can use the chicken lady's qualities as we navigate our careers in local government, regardless of our gender. PM



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