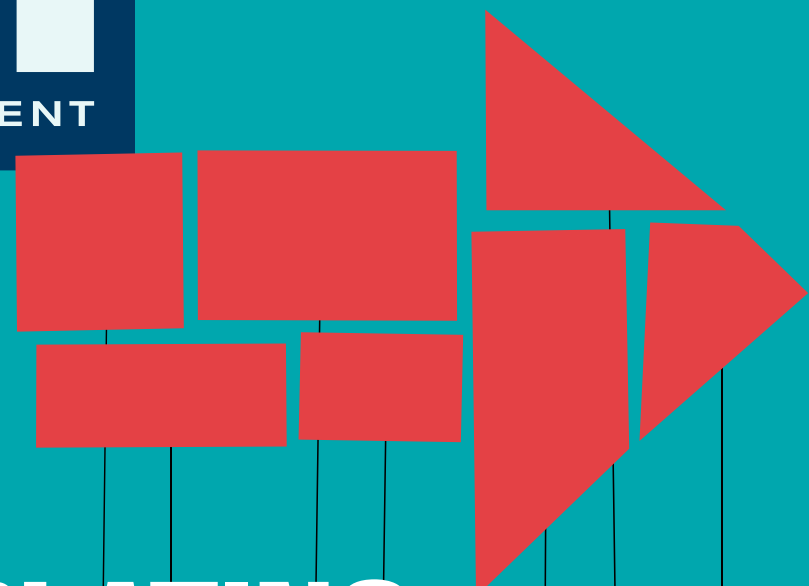


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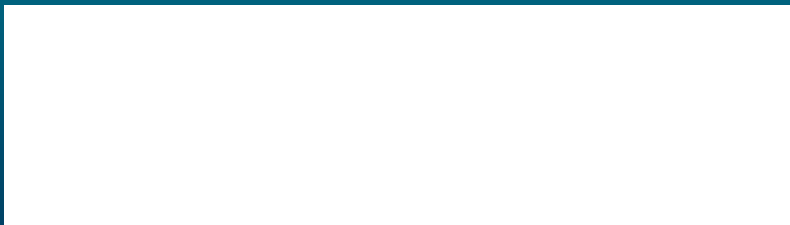
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CONTEMPLATING COLLABORATION

Find out how to make collaboration successful with the challenges facing local governments today.

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This issue of PM is available online and mobile at icma.org/pm July 27, 2014.

BY MARTHA PEREGO

NAVIGATING THE CAMPAIGN SEASON

Managers have options to remain neutral

The spring primary season and the run-up to the fall elections generated interesting ethical challenges for ICMA members. Here is advice on questions posed recently to ICMA's ethics adviser.

Q: The contest for city council is pretty fierce. A resident contacted the city manager after receiving several mailers regarding one of the candidates. The mailers referenced a pending investigation into the candidate's alleged violation of several city ordinances.

The resident, who notes that she is undecided and neutral so far, wants the city manager to provide her with the facts: Is there an investigation by the city? Did this candidate occupy a home without a permit? Was this candidate cited for violating city zoning laws?

What's the most ethical course of action for the manager in this situation?

A: Part of any local government manager's job is to respond to questions and provide information about the locality's business. But it is not a staff function to research and analyze information generated by a third party—especially by candidates or political campaigns in the midst of an election—to determine if the information is factual.

While it's nice that the resident has confidence in the manager's objectivity, the manager should decline the request kindly noting that it is not an appropriate use of public resources (i.e., time) and suggest that the information may be available under a public records request for any resident to review and to draw conclusions.

Q: The director of the local chamber of commerce e-mailed the town manager to inform her that the governor was coming

to town and asked if the town manager would please forward an attached invitation to a "meet and greet" sponsored by the chamber to the mayor and council. The message also asked the manager to please RSVP so that the chamber will know whom to expect.

The town manager replied that she would be happy to assist. It's nothing out of the norm for the manager's office to be the conduit for invitations extended to the governing body by various community or civic groups.

When the manager opened the invitation, however, she realized that this event, while held in a public venue, was advertised as an opportunity to support the governor's reelection effort. The manager was uncomfortable even forwarding the e-mail, let alone asking who was planning on attending.

Is she right to be concerned about the propriety of this request?

A: Yes. The town manager should respectfully decline the chamber director's request. Public resources should not be used to invite anyone to a political campaign event. And given the manager's commitment to remain politically neutral, even the small act of sending along the invite could be construed as engaging in political activity.

Q: A local business owner is hosting one of the candidates for state legislature at an open house at his office. The invitation extended over the phone to the city manager promises that no donations will



Public Management (PM) aims to inspire innovation, inform decision making, connect leading-edge thinking to everyday challenges, and serve ICMA members and local governments worldwide in the pursuit of excellence in local governance.

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*ICMA Credentialed Manager (ICMA-CM)

be asked for or accepted. It is purely an opportunity to meet the candidate and talk about issues.

Should the manager attend?

A: Since the event is for a candidate running for elected public office, the manager should decline the invitation. Even if it is not a fundraiser, this is a tactic in a larger effort designed to get that person elected.

Even appearing at a private meeting can create the appearance that the manager endorses or supports this

IN EACH CASE, MEMBERS SHOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER WHETHER VOICING THEIR OPINION WILL EITHER CONFLICT WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF OFFICIAL DUTIES OR MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO DO SO.

candidate. Better to adopt a policy to attend only those events that are truly open to the public, do not require any donations, and/or are debates designed to inform.

Q: The local government has two critical bond measures on the ballot. One is to support additional funding for new schools and the other is for a new light-rail system to bolster economic development.

It is unfortunate timing because the debt imposed on taxpayers if both measures are approved would be pretty stiff. Hence, each measure has a fairly well-financed, vocal, and entrenched constituency. Plus, there are candidates running in the next election whose platform is based on their issue-centric position.

As the issues worked their way through the long process of development and public vetting, the county manager has reflected on more than one occasion that this is the quintessential ethical situation of “right versus

right.” Each project aligns to the county’s values and strategic plan.

Each has merit, benefits a segment of the community, and is a valid use of local public funding. In advance of the voting, the county manager is seriously considering joining the advocacy effort on behalf of the light-rail project.

Would doing so violate his ethical commitment to the profession’s ethics?

A: Local government professionals do not lose their right to voice their opinion by virtue of the job. During the debate

last year on the boundaries of political neutrality as expressed by Tenet 7 of the ICMA Code of Ethics, a guideline was added to clarify this point.

Tenet 7 calls members to refrain from all political activities that undermine public confidence in professional administrators. But on issues either related to their local government or of personal concern, members may voice their opinion and engage in advocacy efforts, including making a financial contribution to an issue-oriented political action committee or putting a bumper sticker on their personal vehicles.

In each case, members should seriously consider whether voicing their opinion will either conflict with the performance of official duties or make it difficult to do so. In the latter, it is not a reason to necessarily stand down but a valid point to consider. **RM**



MARTHA PEREGÓ
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WHEN YOUR ENTHUSIASM GETS LOST IN THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THE JOB, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO "GET YOUR MOJO BACK"?



CYNTHIA JOHNSON,
ICMA-CM
City Manager
Richland, Washington
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I'm actually trying to get my mojo back now. First, I had to come to terms with the fact that I had lost it. Then, I gave myself some time to mourn the loss—seriously, I did this—and then I had to admit that I had a hand in losing it or at least misplacing it.

Exposing my frailty was difficult but I confided to a colleague and my greatest supporter, who reminded me in detail of progress made and how it wasn't easy but was worth it. He encouraged me to reread kind notes that I so carefully preserve at the corner of my desk and also challenged me to be thankful for the opportunity to serve in a community.

Here's where I am now: I remembered my purpose and that I am exactly where I need to be. I can't let the negativity drag me down when I know the good that comes from this profession. This is who I am...all of me.



AARON OTTO
City Administrator
Roeland Park, Kansas
aotto@roelandpark.org

Depending on the situation, there are a number of strategies that have helped me through difficult times. Often, I literally would look to change my physical view, which can provide a new way of looking at a challenge.

Or perhaps a change in attitude from stressing about what can't work to how a goal can actually be accomplished and what the steps are to make it happen. I also address stress by removing distractions as much as possible.

Last, but certainly not least, be gracious, kind, and giving when you interact with people. It is hard to go wrong when you love your neighbors as yourself, and it is then returned back to you in kind.



HELGA REIDEL
Chief Administrative Officer
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Serving as a senior leader or CAO certainly has its ups and downs. Administrators are looked to for advice, often in times of crisis or controversy. It's a job, but we take it personally because we care about our communities, the residents we serve, and the people we work with.

During times of trial or tribulation, I find that words of recognition, appreciation and encouragement, especially from the mayor, city council, and colleagues can go a long way to restore my enthusiasm and get me back on track.

Failing that, the support from my husband, my adult sons, and my talented friends help to keep me grounded and recharged to face another day of challenge and success.

After all is said and done, inspiration must come from me, and I remind myself to appreciate my good fortune in the job I have and the great people I work with. **PM**



RESOURCES FOR VETERANS

ICMA stands ready to help its members better serve the needs of returning veterans with resource information on employment, housing, and other assistance programs.

▶ icma.org/veterans



2 APPROACHES TO GANG REDUCTION

Building on a partnership created by ICMA, two municipalities in El Salvador adapted a school-based gang reduction program initiated in California—and conducted a successful pilot in three schools. ICMA's program is Municipal Partnerships for Violence Prevention in Central America.

▶ icma.org/GRIP

icma anniversary

MOMENT IN HISTORY



Upper Westmount and Westmount Summit seen from King George Park, Westmount, Quebec, Canada.

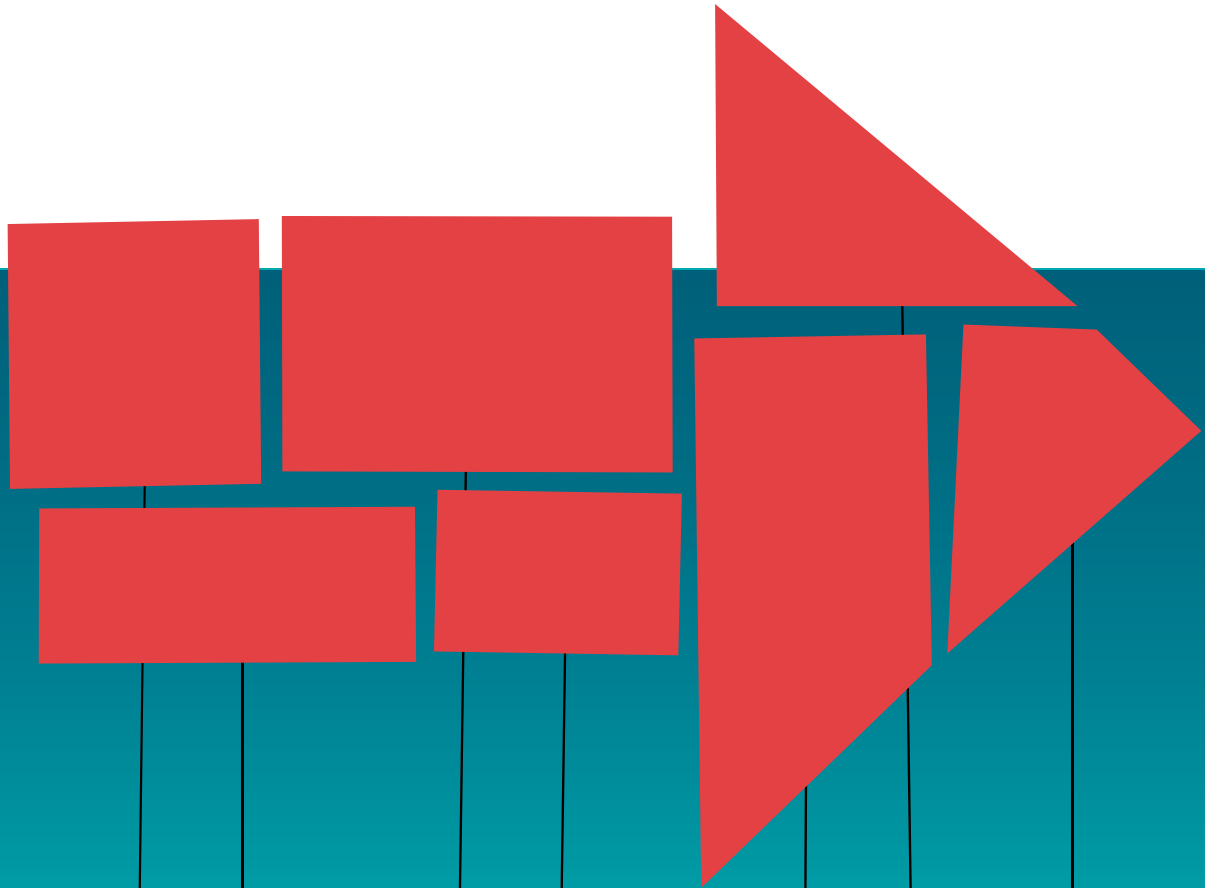
Not everyone in Westmount, Quebec, Canada, was enamored initially by the idea of appointing a city manager, according to an article published recently in the *Westmount Independent*. One alderman, in fact, suggested that the city's affairs could be managed perfectly well by a board of directors. That idea, however, never gained any traction among city leaders.

Instead, on March 17, 1913, the Westmount City Council adopted a resolution to appoint an acting general manager. Just prior to the resolution's adoption, the Westmount governing body ran an advertisement for the position, and it eventually appointed George W. Thompson as the first chief administrative officer. The experiment was an absolute success; Mr. Thompson died in office in 1930, after 17 years of service.

Duncan Campbell, current Westmount director general (as the position is now called), longtime ICMA member, and 2014 Annual Conference Planning Committee Chairman, recently recounted the history of professional management in the city during a presentation before the Westmount Historical Association on the 101th anniversary of the solicitation for city manager—the first in Canada.

To learn more about the history of professional management in Westmount, watch for the "International Tie" department in the October 2014 issue of *PM*. To learn more about the many milestones in the history of ICMA, its members, and the professionalism of local government management, visit icma.org/anniversary and scroll through the anniversary timeline on the home page. Then, click on "The ICMA Experience" tab at the top of the anniversary home page, and add your personal experiences or reminiscences.





CONTEMPLATING COLLABOR



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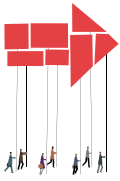
TAKEAWAYS

- › Gain an understanding of the appropriateness of collaboration.
- › Learn the environment in which it will occur.
- › Find the right form to ensure its success.

ICMA partnership develops practical assessment tools

By David Swindell and Cheryl Hilvert

To address today's challenges of decreased budgets and increased workloads, both local government managers and elected officials are embracing the concept of collaboration in new and innovative ways. Collaboration has proven to be an effective tool for jurisdictions to join with others—including other local governments, private sector organizations, and nonprofits—to achieve goals and deliver services that they may not have been able to accomplish on their own.



CONTEMPLATING COLLABORATION

While there has been a general push by residents, elected officials, consultants, and academics toward the use of collaboration as a key solution to governments' problems, these proponents sometimes fail to recognize that collaborations do not always achieve the goals for which they were established.

While collaboration is appropriately viewed as an option for local governments, the real issue surrounding collaboration is that often the costs and benefits associated with it are not fully realized, nor are strategies effectively evaluated that will motivate the collaborative effort.

The concepts to do so can be complex and confusing, and there have been few tools that give managers the ability to fully "talk through" a collaboration concept and ask such fundamental questions as: Should we engage in a collaboration? If so, what form of collaboration will have the highest likelihood of success?

Defining the Concept

Collaboration is "the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations to achieve an outcome that could not be achieved by the organizations separately."¹ Collaboration refers to arrangements in which all partners to the arrangement incur costs and share benefits related to their efforts.

These efforts are different from outsourcing or contracting where a separate entity handles certain aspects of service delivery. Because of resident/stakeholder expectations and interactions, local governments may find that those service delivery options in which they create a "partnership" allow an alternative approach to service delivery, yet maintain a level of responsibility between the local government and its constituents.

Is Collaboration Right for Us?

Working through a unique collaboration of its own, ICMA's Center for Management Strategies has teamed up with the Alliance for Innovation (AFI) and Arizona State University's (ASU) Center for Urban Innovation (ICMA-AFI-ASU) to determine the factors associated with both successful and unsuccessful collaborations.

Its findings suggest that having a discussion with all stakeholders as to the costs and benefits expected from collaboration—beyond finances alone—as well as a thorough understanding of the environment within which the collaboration will be situated, will do much to contribute to a successful evaluation of a collaboration opportunity.

These conversations can help to identify the "soft costs and benefits" that might be realized in a collaboration. Soft costs include the governance and the monitoring costs. If a collaboration might lead to reduced cost but involve staff cuts, there may be morale and political costs that must be explicitly evaluated as part of a cost-benefit approach.

ICMA's recent survey of more than 1,000 managers highlights some of the most important soft benefits associated with collaborations.² Bringing staff from your unit together with those from other units in a collaborative environment can improve the problem-solving process not only for the problem at hand but also for other problems on which the collaborative could work in the future.

Furthermore, these types of conversations can build relationships as well as trust and credibility in overcoming barriers to working on other issues. While cost savings or revenue enhancements might also be benefits, these soft costs must also be explicitly identified as part of the determination of whether a jurisdiction should invest the resources in such a collaborative effort.

Begin the Conversation: Know Thy Service

The ICMA-AFI-ASU research project identified a consistent set of factors that tend to be associated with success and others associated with failure in collaborative arrangements. These factors should be part of any conversation about entering a collaboration and fall into two main categories: service-oriented factors and community-oriented factors.

A discussion should begin with a full understanding of exactly what service/project the community is targeting for collaboration. Communities, for example, may want to explore a collaboration on "public safety," but that encompasses a vast array of specific services.

Is the community interested in sharing building, operating, and maintenance responsibilities of a shared forensics crime lab? Patrol officers? Shared purchasing arrangement for capital equipment like patrol cars? In order to begin the discussion, the community needs to be clear about exactly what service is the focus.

Seven characteristics associated with the service/project type can determine whether or not a collaborative arrangement is likely to help achieve desired goals:

1. Asset specificity. This represents the degree to which the service relies on investment in specialized infrastructure (e.g., fire trucks, water pipes, treatment plants) or technical expertise (e.g., legal, economic, environmental), which can make collaboration difficult due to a lack of suppliers to compete at the quality level needed by the community.

In these situations, collaboration opportunities may be limited, but other alternative service delivery options may still be appropriate or viable. Higher asset specificity also suggests that it

is difficult to adapt the investments to produce another service.³

2. Contract specification and monitoring. There needs to be clearly specified expectations among the partners as to which costs, benefits, and management services are to be shared and which entity is responsible for which activity. Services that are harder to specify in a contract or agreement, more difficult to supervise, or require greater performance management expertise are less likely to be successfully produced through collaboration.⁴

3. Labor intensity. Generally, services that are more labor intensive in their delivery and that replicate similar services in other jurisdictions represent the best opportunities for collaboration. An example of this concept is seen in a collaborative effort involving 18 municipalities in Cook County and Lake County, Illinois.

These local governments, motivated by the national economic downturn, believed that they might realize some cost saving by relying on the practice of bulk purchasing. The effort has led to savings of approximately \$500,000 after the first year for the combined group and involved labor intensive purchasing work that was similarly provided in all of the 18 jurisdictions.

4. Capital intensity. Generally, services that are more capital intensive, yet offer wider benefits than could be realized by a single jurisdiction alone are more amenable to collaborative approaches. In an example of this concept, Westlake, Texas (population 1,065), and Keller, Texas (population 41,923), were facing water shortages in the late 1990s. To grow both financially and physically, these two communities needed to construct water storage tanks.

They began a plan to develop their water system and together constructed an elevated joint-use water tank. The combined tank allows each city to maintain its separate water system

operations and represented the first time that a joint-use tank was designed and installed in Texas.

Each community shared in the \$3.1 million cost, saving each city more than \$1 million in construction costs. Each also experienced reduced costs for maintenance through an interlocal agreement for maintenance of the tank while maintaining their independent control over their share of the joint tank.

5. Costs. Service/project costs can drive the interest in collaboration by a local government. Costs can also limit the pool of potential partner organizations that may be able to participate in the delivery of more expensive services. When considering available partners, managers must be cognizant of the other participants' financial position, as each must be able to contribute meaningfully to the success of the effort.

6. Management competencies. When discussing costs and benefits of potential collaborative arrangements, communities must be sensitive to the expertise—or lack thereof—for manag-

ing the various aspects of a service/project. The greater the managerial expertise on staff related to a service, the more likely a collaborative arrangement can achieve success. A lack of expertise will increase the costs of the collaboration perhaps to the point of exceeding the value of the benefits.

7. Administrative stability. The importance of stability among team members should not be underestimated. High staff turnover creates uncertainties, changes in policy directions, and undermines previously established levels of trust. Turnover is to be expected, and managers should be aware of the trend and likelihood of additional changes in the short- and long-term future, and they should ensure that succession planning is addressed in any collaboration plan.

Discussing and understanding these seven characteristics can influence the likelihood of success in achieving goals when a community delivers a service through collaboration. Fully understanding the service, however, is only one

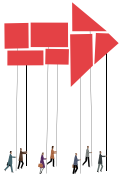
NEW COLLABORATION RESOURCES

ICMA's Center for Management Strategies has partnered with the Alliance for Innovation and Arizona State University's Center for Urban Innovation to develop a program designed to assist local government managers in navigating the complex work of understanding and analyzing the concept of collaboration.

Underwritten with the support of ICMA Strategic Partner CH2M HILL, this work will provide a set of practical assessment tools that will allow managers to engage their staff, elected officials, and community in the dialogue described in this article on whether collaboration is an appropriate approach and what type of collaborative efforts are most likely to be successful.

Also available will be a set of recommended articles and documents designed to enhance knowledge of collaboration; a compilation of case studies on both successful and unsuccessful public uses of collaborative efforts; and, technical assistance to local governments by identified and vetted practice leaders.

For more information or to take advantage of this program beginning this fall, visit www.icma.org/strategies.



CONTEMPLATING COLLABORATION

aspect of informing a decision. The other involves explicit awareness of the environment within which the community operates.

Understand the Environment

Communities create strategic plans after an environmental scan identifies factors that can impact a community from both an internal and external perspective. Similarly, understanding these environmental context factors can assist a management team in determining if collaboration is even possible, much less destined for success:

1. Possible public partners. Before considering collaboration, a manager should fully understand the number and capacity of potential public partners in the area and identify which can be legitimate partners in a collaborative service delivery effort.

2. Possible private partners. In addition to possible public sector partners, managers should be aware of private sector firms that may be viable partners. As with potential public sector partners, private partners may be limited to the extent that the community or region is home to enough competent firms to support a competitive marketplace.

3. Possible nonprofit partners. Nonprofit groups are highly capable of partnering in a service delivery collaborative. As with private partners, the size of the local supply of nonprofits will also be driven by the type of service under consideration, as well as the size of the region in which the community is located.

4. Political environment. Managers should recognize the support or obstacles that exist among elected officials of the community. Elected officials may

be supportive of the concept generally but cautious or even opposed to collaboration on a specific service.

5. Fiscal/economic health. The community's fiscal condition may be a motivating factor in wanting to pursue collaboration. Those that are financially challenged may find it more difficult to identify partners with which to collaborate.

Communities in a better fiscal position are more likely to be successful in collaborative arrangements. Decisions on whether to collaborate need to take a community's fiscal health into account, as well as the fiscal condition of any partners, be they public, private, or nonprofit.

6. Employee/labor relations. Different communities face different

kinds of labor and employee relationships that can create pressure on collaborative discussions. There may be resistance to any service alternatives that could impact public sector employment levels.

In these situations, the costs of pursuing collaborative service delivery can increase significantly or decision making be made more

difficult. Involving employees in these discussions and seeking their input can be productive.

7. Public interest. Some services are naturally more likely to attract the attention of residents than others. Changes to those services for which residents are particularly connected are more likely to meet resistance. Involving stakeholders in these discussions can help ensure that all points of view are heard and accurate information is shared.

Collaboration Sounds Good, Now What?

If the dialogue described previously identifies supportive information about the service being considered and a receptive environment in which the collaboration could occur, the

While collaboration is appropriately viewed as an option for local governments, the real issue surrounding collaboration is that often the costs and benefits associated with it are not fully realized, nor are strategies effectively evaluated that will motivate the collaborative effort.

community will then need to decide which type of arrangement makes the most sense for it. Here are the most common forms of collaborative service delivery:

Public-private partnerships. The form that has received the most attention in the past decade is collaboration that involves a public agency working with

CENTENNIAL COLLABORATES FOR SUCCESS

LEADERS OF CENTENNIAL, COLORADO, incorporated in 2001, envisioned an “intentional” city—lean, efficient, and with an eye toward outsourcing key services whenever possible. In slightly more than a decade, the city of more than 100,000 has emerged as a model of collaborative service delivery.

Centennial delivers services with its 154 employees in certain areas that make the most sense, including finance, accounting, communications, planning, and engineering management. For other services, the city partners with an array of government, nonprofit, and private organizations to deliver efficient, cost-effective services in keeping with its spirit of right-sized, fiscally responsible government.

Centennial’s largest partner is Arapahoe County, which provides a variety of services that include law enforcement, schools, and libraries. For animal services, Centennial partners with the Humane Society of the Pikes’ Peak Region, a nonprofit located in nearby Colorado Springs. Other outsourced functions include legal services, contractor licensing, sales and use tax administration, and audit functions.

Partnering for Public Works

Arapahoe County initially provided public works services for Centennial. In early 2008, city leaders took a closer look at needs that revealed gaps in service levels and decided to launch the city’s own public works department through a public-private partnership with CH2M HILL, a global consulting and program management firm based in Englewood, Colorado.

CH2M HILL instituted a variety of innovative approaches to service delivery, including updating an old snowplow routing solution, applying updated algorithms, and using consumer-grade GPS units to reduce snowplowing time of city streets by as much as 40 percent.

Within this partnership, even the partner has partners. CH2M HILL collaborates with a number of other private sector companies reaping benefits for Centennial. SAFE-built—an ICMA Strategic Partner that offers customized full-service building department programs—introduced process and customer service improvements to the plan review and inspection processes. These include the establishment of two-hour inspection appointment windows, electronic plan review, online permits, and “Rapid Review

Thursdays” where customers seeking permits that do not require detailed zoning review—signs, fences, and simple structures—can receive expedited service.

CH2M HILL also established a consolidated customer service center, which serves as a single point of contact for all resident concerns, not just public works. Residents can call the center 24/7 or submit requests online. Information is entered into a work-order tracking system along with the requesters’ contact information, so a representative can update them on the progress of work through completion.

It’s Working!

“Our public-private partnerships allow us to provide on-demand services at the best value for our taxpayers,” says Centennial’s Mayor Cathy Noon. “We contract for a base level of service, and any time we have a spike in demand, we can bring in extra resources very quickly.”

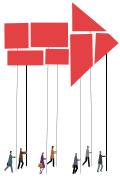
That flexibility is built into Centennial’s various partnership contracts. A value-based system allows the city to adjust service quantities based on changing priorities and demand. If a mild winter requires less snow plowing, for example, the city might decide to use those dollars for additional road striping.

Pre-determined costs of service allow the city to effectively plan its budget over the contract’s lifetime, while performance standards enable it to control the timing and amount of service performed, and pass the risk of quality and deadline commitments to the contractor.

In 2012, 79 percent of respondents to a National Citizen Survey™ rated the overall quality of public works services as “excellent” or “good.” City leaders also liked the results, voting to extend the public-private partnership with CH2M HILL.

City Manager John Danielson is well acquainted with collaborative service delivery. His 25-year local government management career has included helping create two new cities from their inception, based on the public-private partnership model. He believes the scalability of resources and predictability of costs associated with collaboration can truly benefit local governments.

—Bill Doughty, APR, communications director, CH2M HILL, Englewood, Colorado (Bill.doughty@ch2m.com).



CONTEMPLATING COLLABORATION

a private firm. In truth, this is not as common as one might be led to believe.

While contracting services out to private firms is common, such contracting is not the same arrangement as collaboration. Public-private partnerships, in which a public jurisdiction and a private firm jointly share in the costs and benefits of a service arrangement, are truly collaborations.

These arrangements can be challenging because without the right partner or clearly defined purpose and responsibilities, different motivations can be pursued by the partners (service versus profit) and can impact the viability of the partnership.

Public-nonprofit partnerships. While public-private partnerships receive more attention, local officials should be aware of the potential advantages nonprofit partners might afford for certain kinds of services. One aspect that increases the likelihood of successful collaboration is that, like their public sector counterparts, nonprofits do not work on a profit motive.

On the other hand, while there are a number of potential nonprofits in a community, the number of them capable of being a partner may be more limited, depending on the type of service under consideration. A nonprofit with the expertise to manage a waste incinerator facility, for example, may be difficult to find, but one that has deep talent at operating a community homeless shelter may be an easily identifiable partner with which to address a community need.

Public-public partnerships. Collaboration between units of government is by far the most common form of partnership involving public services. Many may be informal arrangements

between abutting local governments, while some are represented by more formalized agreements.

The arrangements involve at least two units of government, but can include more. The earlier example

of the 18 municipalities in Lake and Cook counties highlights one type of public-public arrangement known as a “horizontal partnership” between governments at the same level.

There are also examples of vertical partnerships in which two or more units of government at different levels collaborate. Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, for example, have an extensive system of intergovernmental agreements for a wide range of services.

In the area of public safety, the city police department provides basic patrol services for the city and any other parts of the county not patrolled by another municipal police department. At the same time, the county provides jail services for the entire county, including all jail services for Charlotte.

While much has been written that suggests collaboration is the answer to problems and issues facing local governments today, managers must understand what collaboration is and what it is not. While significantly different from privatization or contracting,

collaboration can offer excellent alternatives for service delivery if the service is right and the community environment will support the concept.

Understanding the appropriateness of a collaborative effort as well as the environ-

While public-private partnerships receive more attention, local officials should be aware of the potential advantages nonprofit partners might afford for certain kinds of services.

ment in which it will occur, and selecting the right form will help ensure that the effort can be a successful and viable solution to the issues and challenges facing local governments today. **PM**

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Dealing

By Patrick Malone

Narcissists are the selfies of the work world. And while we know that a certain amount of healthy narcissism is requisite for good leadership, the sad fact is there are many out there possessing the more destructive brand—the leaders who make life almost unbearable.

Readers probably have heard the term ‘narcissist’ or ‘narcissistic behavior’ and have used these words to describe leaders known for their grandiose self-image and lack of concern for others. The emotional drain and fatigue from these people can seem almost overwhelming.

What fuels this self-absorption in leaders? Can it have positive effects? What is the impact on how work is conducted? Most importantly, how do local government managers deal with it?

Narcissism Defined

Vignette 1: *“Oh yeah, the new county commissioner is just amazing, but not in a good way. Every policy option we present seems to always turn out to be about him, how it will affect him, and how he will look to others. I swear he must have “It’s all about me” tattooed somewhere on his body. He has no visible concern or interest in those of us actually doing the work. It’s almost like we’re simply a means to his end. To make matters*

TAKEAWAYS

- › Managers will be able to recognize the classic signs of narcissists in their workplace.
- › Managers will understand the impact of narcissistic behavior on staff members.
- › Managers will learn strategies for dealing with self-absorbed leaders.

NARCISSISTS AND THE PUBLIC MANAGER

With Selfies

worse, he's not afraid to take credit for anything we do well, whether he had anything to do with it or not."

Narcissism is about overly inflated self-image, arrogance, and lack of compassion. Author W. Keith Campbell¹ and his colleagues, in their 2011 comprehensive examination of narcissism, provide an excellent framework in which to view this type of self-absorbed behavior. They suggest we think of narcissism as containing three important parts: the self, interpersonal relationships, and self-regulatory strategies.

The self. Narcissists are focused on self. In the example above, the county commissioner is characterized by a sense of vanity. Certainly his world revolves around him. His overt concern about how he looks to others is a clear indication of his desire for power and prestige.

Interpersonal relationships. Narcissists are not capable of authentic, meaningful work relationships. An employee's complaints about the commissioner suggest he has low emotional intelligence, especially in the areas of empathy and concern for others.

One can easily imagine the ruined careers in his wake as he clawed his way into his current position. The relationships he's established are most likely exploitative in nature.

Self-regulatory strategies. Narcissists are strategic. The commissioner knows what he's doing. Based on the behavior we see described above, he places himself in the spotlight as often as he can in order to garner attention. He's likely to behave in any way that will get him what he wants.

In this first vignette, the commissioner clearly behaves in a narcissistic manner. Self-focused leaders exhibit a cold, dispassionate attitude toward others. Their devaluation, exploitation, arrogance, criticism, micromanagement, and failure to fulfill their responsibilities to individuals cloaks them in a veil of competence.

To make matters more complicated, narcissists excel at organizational politics. They can adeptly work a room with charm, fostering a positive first impression. The superficial nature of the relationships they form, especially with those in power, often yield an undeserved admiration from others they meet.

Contributing Factors

Vignette 2: *"I would say 'cutthroat' is a good way to describe our bureau. If it can't be measured here, no one seems to care. Anything remotely related to morale, teamwork, or realistic evaluations is scoffed at as 'soft and squishy.' The only reasons people stick around are the benefits."*

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Granted, unhealthy narcissism can be a result of complex psychosocial or genetic factors, but organizational cultures can also encourage such behavior. Cultures that are created and maintained to support political goals instead of public good can be a veritable petri dish of narcissists. A few syndromes present in organizations at risk include:

Metric-mania. Intense pressure by residents forces agencies to become over-reliant on demonstrable metrics to prove organizational effectiveness. Narcissists who are able to meet productivity goals may be praised for their success even at the expense of such other dynamics important to government as building effective teams, maintaining office morale, and recruiting and developing new talent.

It's not my problem. Self-absorbed individuals often are allowed to climb the career ladder in organizations. Why? Narcissists excel at exhibiting a mix of poise and self-assurance that can be extremely attractive.

Fear of the 360. Many organizations either do not employ the 360-degree feedback mechanism or do not make significant use of it in promotion and compensation decisions. Such tools allow senior leaders to reach down in the organization to find the untold story. Sometimes, this is a story they may not want to hear.

Covering the tracks. When all else fails, self-focused leaders have a way of disappearing into the woodwork and organizations may be letting this happen. The mystique of the overly self-confident individual contributes to this organizational acquiescence, as does the skill of the narcissist at credit claiming and rewriting his or her performance history.

Toxic culture. Some organizations foster self-absorbed behavior. Author Jarl Jorstad² notes that typical characteristics include an unwelcome attitude toward new collaborators, an

BY IDENTIFYING THE PATH TO THE NARCISSIST'S NEEDS, IT'S MUCH EASIER TO STAY IN HIS OR HER GOOD GRACES AND OUT OF THE DOGHOUSE.

unwillingness to permit inspection or research from the outside, and intolerance of criticism.

The Selfie Approach

Vignette 3: *"I can't say I like dealing with Councilman Gordon. In fact, I try to avoid it at all costs. When I have to, and I mean have to, I try to smile a lot, compliment him on his successes with the city, and try to help him understand that aiding me actually serves him as well. When I'm successful at this dance, good things sometimes happen. Still waiting for the other shoe to drop though. It's exhausting!"*

Many would argue there is little hope in dealing with individuals who have inflated self-importance. But by recognizing these individuals for what they are, selfies, managers can take steps that bring some measure of relief.

Surface. The first and most effective way to deal with self-absorbed leaders is to recognize them. Busy managers may write off observed behavior as a one-time event without recognizing consistent damaging effects.

It is important for leaders to keep an eye out for the signs of destructively narcissistic behavior: defensiveness, exorbitant self-promotion, lack of concern for others, credit-claiming, and, of course, sucking-up to those in power.

Engage. Engaging a narcissist is advisable only after carefully weighing the

consequences. Does the narcissist, for example, have direct oversight of you or your staff? Does the person control your resource stream? If so, tread lightly. As a reminder, you are the ends to his or her means.

Direct confrontation will typically lead to frustration and depending on your position relative to the person, worse. Be specific about the reason for your engagement and always communicate in writing if possible. E-mail strings can provide important documentation against future retribution from an encounter gone awry.

Listen. Self-centered individuals demand an audience. Listening attentively and empathetically can help shore up their fragile self-image. The added benefit is, of course, insight into what the narcissist is thinking, feeling, and planning.

Keep in mind, poor listening is the common cold of leadership. You may as well practice as often as you can. The narcissist will most definitely provide an excellent test-bed for this skill.

Frame. Frame things in a way that will appeal to the egotism so prominent in the narcissist. Find some way to validate her value to the organization. Entreat him to assist you in understanding a new program. Ask her to offer some guidance in how to tackle a tricky policy dilemma.

Before encountering the narcissist, ponder the question, "what's in it for him or her?" By identifying the path to

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the narcissist's needs, it's much easier to stay in his or her good graces and out of the doghouse.

Isolate. It's always a good idea to simply avoid interaction if you are able. Do yourself a favor and limit your exposure. Narcissists are masters of disappointment and you are useful to them only so long as you are useful to them. A polite smile and a nod can go a long way in avoiding both flat-out confrontation and inauthentic adulation.

Extricate. When all else fails, removing oneself from the situation may be the best strategy. Simply stepping out of a meeting for a moment, gathering your emotions, and taking a few deep breaths are the best strategy. Re-engage when your emotions and responses are under control.

Some Positive Aspects

Vignette 4: *"I knew it would be a challenge to step into the new job when it was advertised. It requires personality, presence, technical knowledge, and an ability to build teams. But I knew I could do it. I've always supported those I lead. Been knocked down a time or two, but that's okay. I'm psyched about where we're going from here, and I'm ready for the challenge!"*

It's worth a brief discussion here about the positive aspects of narcissism. The fact is, we all exhibit narcissistic behavior. Michael Maccoby's³ groundbreaking *Harvard Business Review* article, "Narcissistic Leaders—The Incredible Pros and Cons," described narcissists as "gifted and creative strategists who see the big picture and find meaning in the risky challenge of changing the world and leaving behind a legacy. Productive narcissists are not only risk takers willing to get the job done but also charmers who can convert the masses with their rhetoric."

Indeed, good leaders at all levels exhibit healthy narcissism. It allows us to maintain a secure self-esteem, permits us

NARCISSISTS ARE MASTERS OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND YOU ARE USEFUL TO THEM ONLY SO LONG AS YOU ARE USEFUL TO THEM.

to deal constructively with failure, and it keeps us centered.

Good narcissism gives us the strength to maintain a healthy self-image. We see ourselves as worthwhile, valuable people. Constructive and positive narcissism allows us to enjoy power but not abuse it, and seek admiration but not relish it.

Have a Look in the Mirror

Vignette 5: *"Stephanie sure seems to have changed since her promotion to lead city planner. All of a sudden she seems far more interested in looking over my shoulder as we're conversing to see who's coming in the room. It's like if there's someone more important out there she'll make a beeline directly to them."*

"In meetings she begins most of her sentences with 'I.' Always thought that was a dead giveaway. I know she's the focus right now, but there were a lot of people whose hard work she depended upon to get where she is."

What responsibility do city managers have for avoiding the perilous trap of self-absorbed behavior? Truth be told, we're all at risk for allowing ourselves to develop bad habits and destructive narcissistic behavior.

The answer lies in embracing the tenets of emotional intelligence and self-reflection. Taking the time to meditate, reflect, and assess where we are as leaders helps provide the necessary pause needed to keep a busy life in perspective. Practice the selfie method described

above, but also take the time to look in the mirror on occasion and appraise what you see.

Author Zauderer⁴ notes that "one of the highest accomplishments of an organization is to build a community where people feel included and welcomed and work together with mutual respect to enhance individual and organizational productivity." This is the kind of environment that will build a synergistic, collective vigor that attracts and retains quality talent.

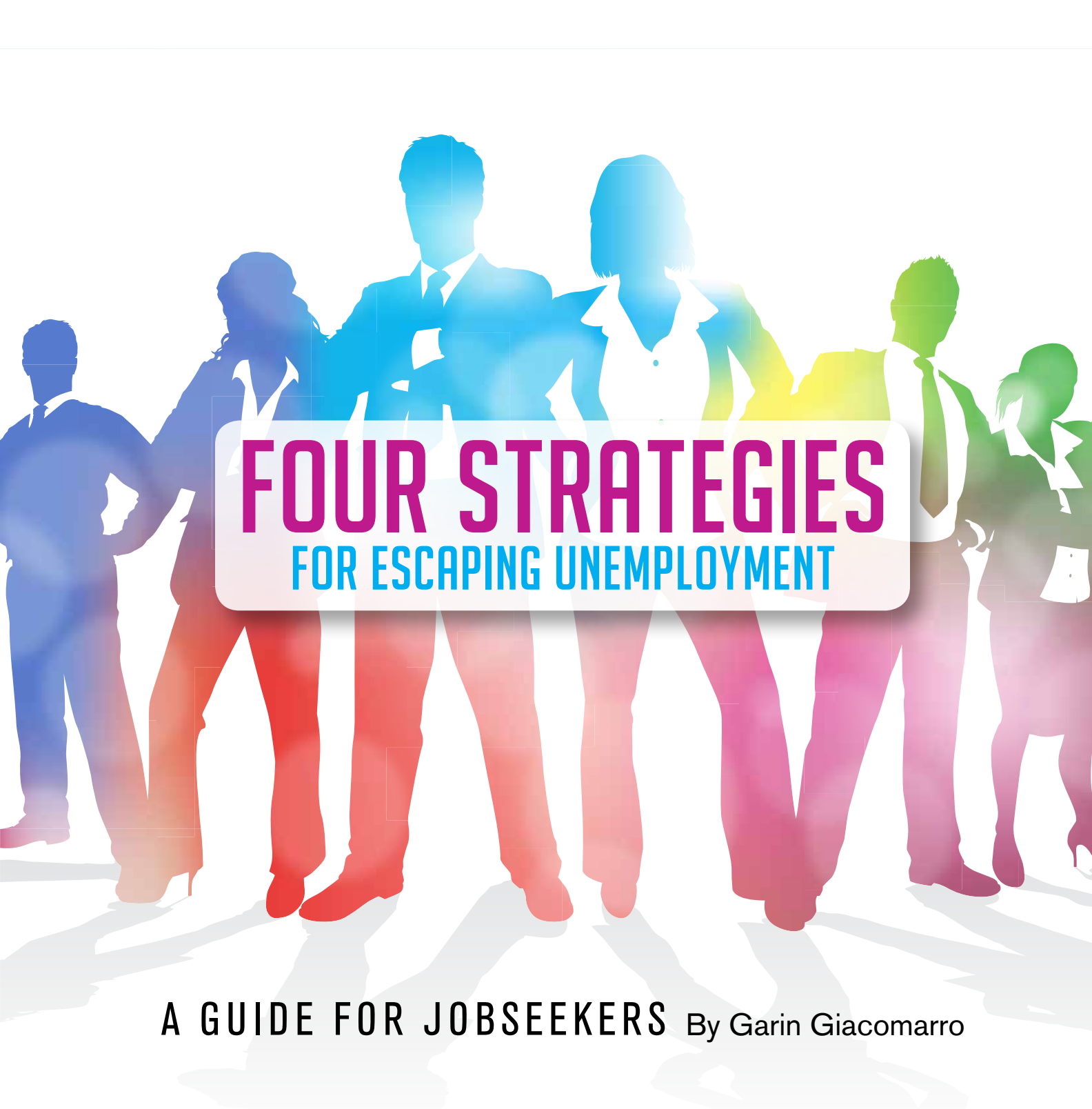
By recognizing and dealing with selfies we encounter as well as monitoring our own self-absorption tendencies, we take one step closer to better public service for all. **PM**

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FOUR STRATEGIES FOR ESCAPING UNEMPLOYMENT

A GUIDE FOR JOBSEEKERS By Garin Giacomarro

The exact conversion rate of normal time to unemployed time has still yet to be precisely determined, though it's known intimately by the throngs of the not-employed-as-of-yet. Hours feel like days. Days feel like weeks.

Phrases like, "We'll get back to you soon," almost always mean a time that exceeds all expectations of human

decency. Being unemployed is miserable. It means nights devoid of sleep and full of worry.

It means slowly declining savings and trying to figure out health care. It leads to anxiety, stress, frustration, and even depression. It's possible to get stuck in this situation. Don't let this happen to you.

Here are four specific methods I've learned and applied during a recent

period of unemployment. They aren't things I heard about or thought of in the shower. They are strategies I've actively used and have found to be useful. I wish someone had told me about them much earlier in my career.

1. Maintain a Routine

One of the most important tools to have in place during your job search is a regu-

lar and unvarying routine. The impetus is on you to find the job you want and so it's going to be on you to put in more effort and more time than any one job will require. You're fishing in a large sea, and your nets have to be broad.

For me, searching the public sector, it was a bookmarked folder on my laptop where I continually added different human resources pages. Job-posting aggregation sites are great but aren't always 100 percent reliable.

Most important, no matter what the status of your job search, do a standard search at regular intervals. Finding the right job might be as easy as checking the right site at the right time.

At one point, it was the accepted norm to go door-to-door with a resume in hand. You might hear this remark from people giving you job search advice, and I urge you to realize: Things have changed.

You need appointments and you need to go through the proper channels because all of the advantage rests with employers. They have an enormous pool of candidates to choose from and can afford to take their time. The most effective way to combat your inherent disadvantage is to routinely and efficiently check your long list of job sources.

2. Network, Network, Network

The art of networking is invaluable in the public sector. Many new prospective employees, myself once included, are under the impression that following the rules, applying for a position, and meeting all the requirements is the surest way to eventually get placed. The truth is extremely different.

Every viable job interview I've ever had is because I knew somebody in the organization. Even if it's purely through e-mail or phone contact, it puts you miles ahead of the competition. Because human resources departments are made up of people just like



One of the most important tools to have in place during your job search is a regular and unvarying routine.

Be stubborn to the point of ridiculousness, and then keep pushing.

the rest of us, having a coworker vouch for you will give you a huge psychological advantage.

Forming this network will put many new job seekers outside of their comfort zone, but those who do will have something else distinguishing them from the crowd. For me, it was a lot of cold e-mails and invitations to what I called "informational lunches."

These work to their best effect when you're currently employed as the people you're contacting aren't

instinctively suspicious that you're simply trying to get something out of them for yourself.

Even if you are unemployed, however, I'd highly recommend scheduling these lunches. Inviting prominent members of your professional arena out to lunch to talk about their opinions opens up opportunities for future contact and added benefit.

Always offer and be prepared to pay for the lunch, even though you rarely will. Local government officials



remember starting out and often want to help. Make sure to be as flexible and accommodating as possible as these meetings are often completely benevolent and charitable on their part.

3. Ace the Application

This is your knock on your future employer's door. To me, more than anything, it means making sure every detail is right. In my experience, people rarely get hired because of their application, but many are disqualified because of it.

Ensure that you make it to the next step by not giving them a reason to “red flag” you. I've heard people suggest various creative and attention-grabbing methods to get an employer to notice you. I do not recommend this strategy.

You want to impress them with your professionalism and relevant experience and then wow them with your intangibles in the interview.

Make sure you meet the minimum requirements (or are close enough that you can argue stretching it) and focus your argument around the job description. They've told you what they're looking for in a candidate; show them why that's you.

Do not overreach if you decide to apply for multiple positions at one organization. You may be tempted to apply for anything you think you can talk your way into, but taking a shotgun approach to applying just shows that employer you're willing to take anything and are therefore not that concerned with the actual details of the position. This is the last thing employers want in someone they're going to hire.

Applying for a position is a lot like dating. Someone who has low standards

Applying for a position is a lot like dating. Someone who has low standards and who will date anyone will often not be seen as a high-quality match.

and who will date anyone will often not be seen as a high-quality match. Those who hold themselves to be of higher quality and who are selective about where they'll work attract those looking for high-quality employees.

4. Shine in the Interview

I'm not going to tell you that one specific approach will guarantee you a job offer. Do what feels natural to you and let your personality shine through. Distinguish yourself.

The interviewers have most likely had the exact same interview with others and having another vanilla experience will quickly lead to your fading into the background. You want to stand out in the best way possible.

One piece of advice that I've found to be useful is to always find a way to turn your negatives into positives. Try to never answer a “Do you know how to X?” question with, “No, I don't, but...”

Your entire answer is now framed by the fact that you fail to know a skill that's required. Instead, think of everything you've done that relates to what they're talking about and tie it in. Never simply say, “No, I don't.”

Never, ever, under any circumstances, should you not have questions to ask the employer at the end of the interview. The employer should have the lead for the first 75 percent of the interview, while you take the final 25 percent.

The interviewers have been through several applicants and have asked all of the same questions. This is your chance to stand out and be remembered for your

thoughtful questions and research. Three questions in particular that I've found to be useful are:

- Why is this particular position open?
- If offered this position, what would my first six months look like? What projects would I get to work on right away?
- What's one quality that this position absolutely has to have and what's one quality that it absolutely cannot have?

These particular questions open up the interviewer to talk about their opinions. They also show that you also care about what you're getting back from the organization. Ask the questions that show you're not just another job-post clicker who thought, “Hey, I could probably do this for that amount of money.”

Interviewers do not want to hire that person. Do not come across as that person.

From experience, I know these four methods work and are helpful. I know they can help you, too. Implement them and add them to your skill set.

While writing this article, after six months of frustration and disappointment, I was offered a job that is everything I could have hoped for. You, too, will see this day happen.

Be stubborn to the point of ridiculousness, and then keep pushing. It can be done. **PM**



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BY KAREN THORESON AND SALLIE ANN BURNETT

INNOVATION IS ALLOWED

How five cities inspired employees to achieve innovative goals

Over the past six years, the Alliance for Innovation and the Arizona State University have studied the characteristics that distinguish innovative, high-performing local governments. A key question has been: How can we promote these qualities to local governments that want to enhance their organizational culture and sustain innovation over the long term?

Six key qualities have been identified and curriculum has been developed to help organizations develop these qualities in local government organizations (http://transformgov.org/wiki/six_qualities_linked_to_innovation). The most frequently asked question by local government professionals has been: “If we can only focus on one characteristic or element that is within our control, what should that be?”

Focus on Internal Collaboration

Without a doubt, the answer is to increase internal collaboration within a manager’s staff team. This small step can take many paths and many forms, but almost always will produce effective results that a manager wouldn’t otherwise be able to achieve following the old school “silo” mentality of problem solving.

Around the globe, Alliance staff sees cross-functional teams, solution-based teams, and process-improvement teams continuing to enhance organizational cultures that inspire employees. These work groups create a more holistic and engaged environment throughout the organization and community.

Here are examples of these teams and some of the results they have achieved.

PALM COAST, FL

In Palm Coast, Florida, City Manager Jim Landon started a cross-disciplinary initiative during a time of budget constraints. The Leadership Intern Training Experience (LITE) provided front-line employees with an opportunity to work with the city manager and other city leaders. During the course of a single year, seven LITE teams were created.

They were challenged to develop skills beyond their primary roles through a mentoring approach and to work on citywide topics outside the area of their job-related expertise, including 1) high-performance culture, 2) employee academy and training, and 3) city hall feasibility.

Palm Coast teams focused on the talent model where employees experienced skill development by undertaking and even embracing challenges outside their normal realm of knowledge and expertise. The Florida City and County Management Association recognized the positive and significant impacts of these teams by awarding a Career Excellence Award.

**SUCCESSFUL
CROSS-FUNCTIONAL
TEAMS BENEFIT
FROM THE DIVERSE
IDEAS THAT PEOPLE
FROM DIFFERENT
DISCIPLINES BRING
TO A GROUP.**

DURHAM, NC

In Durham, North Carolina, City Manager Tom Bonfield wanted to see deeper employee engagement and an organizational renewal. Toward this end, he and his staff developed an overarching program called Culture of Service, which fosters innovation and creativity by focusing on the city’s core values: service to self, service to coworkers, and service to the community.

For the service-to-self component, Durham created the Culture of Service Values Certification Program as a training program for employees to promote discussions and interactive activities that foster self-awareness and organizational values. For service to coworkers, 24 department strategy teams initiated a walking program, ropes course, and health and wellness activities.

Their collective mission made it possible to respect and celebrate their coworkers through team building, roundtable discussions, and department leadership. Away from the workplace, the service-to-community activities encourage staff to volunteer with such nonprofits as Durham United for Habitat.

Durham now provides 48 hours of volunteer leave to all employees to work on a designated Habitat for Humanity house. The cooperation between the city, county, Habitat, and the citizens is an excellent example of shared service and direct cooperation.

OLATHE, KS

In Olathe, Kansas, the staff of City Manager J. Michael Wilkes uses tools, assessments, and behavior-based interviews to ensure new hires are “the right people on the bus” in the organization. The Balanced Leadership Development Program (BLDP) seeks to develop and grow employees’ workplace skills by engaging them in monthly competency discussions.

Olathe uses numerous methods to achieve role management during an

employee's career. A prime example is the "Employee Sandbox," which is an online forum that employees use to contribute new ideas or to expand on already existing ideas. This forum fosters an innovative culture where ideas can be freely shared throughout the organization.

Once these ideas have been implemented, it is important to recognize employees for their hard work and dedication. Awards and celebrations emphasize values of customer service, teamwork, and leadership through service. Motivation is a powerful tool, and it is being used in positive ways to build organizational culture.

NAVAHO COUNTY, AZ

A cross-functional team in Navaho County, Arizona, began as a group appointed by County Manager Jimmy Jayne to work on the county's strategic planning team. The team enrolled in the Alliance's Innovation Academy, which provided team members with new and innovative tools to move the county toward its goals.

Members were selected across departments and functions, including elected officials, thereby bringing a range of skills and experience to the table, although no hierarchy exists within the group. Team accomplishments include development of a leadership academy, an employee recognition program, strategic plan implementation, and other projects.

ALBERT LEA, MN

"PIT" crews in local government? Why not, especially the crews developed by the city of Albert Lea, Minnesota, under the direction of City Manager Chad Adams. PIT is the acronym for process improvement team. In an effort to provide improved customer service to residents, teams were created to enhance efficiency, reduce waste, and avoid duplication.

The city relied on citizen surveys and LEAN (Six Sigma) process improvement to help identify possible service

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improvements. The city's leadership also engaged a broad cross-section of employees to help decide which actions to take. Empowering employees in this manner made them feel like they truly had a voice and that they helped create and own the process. Their sense of pride motivates even more innovation and creativity.

Albert Lea's achievements include improved customer service, development review, and employee recognition; fewer insurance claims filed against the city; better records retention; improved city hall maintenance, and enhanced police department internal processes.

Lessons Learned

Here is what can be learned from the five examples.

1. **Any local government can do this.** Every organization has employees, but only a few deliberately organize their staff across stovepipe departments to take on projects outside of the domain to which they were assigned.
2. While anyone can do it, these examples show that **strong leadership**

and support from the top empowers teams in a way that results in real changes for the organization.

3. **Providing some structure and resources** will help teams move forward more quickly. Having facilitators, a place to meet, background or ongoing training, for example, helps team members focus and increase their cohesion.

4. **Early team projects often focus on internal processes rather than external issues.** Each of our five example communities began with trying to improve a process inside the organization but as the team process matured, they were able to also focus on broader community concerns.

5. **Measure success.** Even though the work feels really good, the results need to prove its worth.

Successful cross-functional teams benefit from the diverse ideas that people from different disciplines bring to a group. They leverage that diversity to invent new ways of undertaking routine tasks and to motivate other employees to get involved.

These teams need the freedom to make mistakes and the encouragement to try again, which is at the root of innovation. Through this innovation, we see our local governments evolving toward more enhanced levels of service for residents.

Is not being good stewards of community resources what public service is all about? ICMA Executive Director Bob O'Neill has said that "citizen trust is the working capital of innovation." When service providers see the end result is the trust of the public, local governments are empowered to find even more paths of innovation. **PM**



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BY ALEXANDRA LEVIT

HOW NOT TO BURN YOUR BRIDGES

10 tips to exit a job like a professional

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the average young American has more than seven different employers before the age of 26; the typical 20-something changes jobs every 16 months.

Millennials are eager to succeed. But in order to move on—and up—they need to make sure they leave a job the right way. Here are 10 tips to fireproof your bridges when exiting a job, no matter what your age.

- 1. Tell your supervisor first.** You want the boss to hear the news from you, not from someone else in the organization.
- 2. Give two weeks' notice.** Stay for the entire two weeks, or whatever the amount of time you have agreed on with the human relations department, unless the company requests that you leave sooner.
- 3. Be modest.** Don't alienate staff members by bragging or chattering incessantly about your awesome new gig.
- 4. Don't insult anyone or anything.** Whether it's true or not, show that you regret leaving such wonderful people and such amazing work behind.
- 5. Stay on top of your responsibilities.** Remember that you're accountable for your work until 5 p.m. on your last day.
- 6. Continue to adhere to office protocol.** You worked hard for that professional persona, so leave the organization with the right impression.
- 7. Review the employee handbook or employment agreement.** Understand what you're entitled to in regard to benefits and compensation for unused sick or vacation days.
- 8. Organize your files.** Make it easy for your colleagues to find materials, so that they can transition your workload seamlessly and won't need to call you at your new position.
- 9. Do a great job training your replacement.** Your current organization has paid your salary for a year or more. You owe it to them to leave your job in good hands.
- 10. Don't take anything that doesn't belong to you.** This includes office supplies and work products that were not developed by you personally. **PM**



ALEXANDRA LEVIT is the author of *They Don't Teach Corporate in College: A Twenty-Something's Guide to the Business World* (Career Press, February 2014; <http://www.alexandralevit.com>), Chicago, Illinois.

BY RUTH CROCKER

BEING THERE

How to respond when someone you know experiences a traumatic event



How best can we meet the challenge of being helpful and supportive to friends, coworkers, and employees who may have experienced deep and lasting wounds from traumatic experiences?

In fact, old emotional wounds can cause numbness, rage, and anxiety, and may be invisible to the rest of the world. When 1st Sergeant Louis McShane received his honorable discharge from the U.S. Army in 1947 after World War II, for example, he remembers throwing his duffel bag over his shoulder, walking out into the sunshine, receiving a handshake, and hearing the words: “Go home and get a job.”

Fifty years later, after his wife’s death, Louis broke down. He began to speak about the horrors he had experienced on the beaches of Nor-

**REMINDE THE PERSON
THAT TALKING MAY
BE DIFFICULT, BUT
IT’S OKAY, ESPECIALLY
IF YOU ARE SURE
THAT YOU’RE READY
TO LISTEN.**

mandy where he witnessed comrades killed and others drowning during the Allied landing.

For years, Louis kept the burden of what he had seen to himself. His employers, family, and even his close friends knew only that he had been in the Army and that he was a workaholic when he returned.

No one except Louis knew that he woke most nights in a cold sweat. Working long hours was his way of coping with obsessive thoughts and nightmares.

Effects of Post-Traumatic Stress

Direct experience with traumatizing events has the potential to evoke a lasting stress reaction. Besides war, such experiences as motor vehicle accidents, plane crashes, environmental disasters, and sexual abuse can shatter a sense of

security and make the world feel like a hostile environment.

Witnessing a death through murder, combat, or disaster seems to permeate personal stability and have the most lingering emotional and physical effects that may be accompanied by a prolonged silence, even guilt, about the event.

Unrecognized and untreated post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is known to disturb physical health; emotional status; and relationships with friends, family members, and coworkers. Symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, or constant fear.

If a friend or coworker appears fearful, fatigued, depressed, easily provoked, and/or prone to negative or reactive behavior over a prolonged period of time, he or she may be suffering from an unrecognized and untreated reaction to a traumatic event. The person may choose to remain silent about the experience or may suddenly decide to speak.

Appropriate Ways to Respond

If you happen to be the one a traumatized person opens up to, here are some appropriate ways to respond. Keep in mind that we are not so far away from a time when people were reluctant to seek help because of the stigma attached to psychological treatment and the fear that it could have a damaging impact on a career.

- Recognize that people react differently to disasters and traumatic events. It may be challenging for you to hear about the events that terrified another person, but remember that this is his or her story and you cannot gauge another's reaction by how you might have behaved.

Avoid telling someone what they should be thinking, feeling, or doing by responding with such statements as: "You shouldn't feel like that." If you are lost for words, it's better to

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say something like: “It sounds like you did the best that you possibly could.”

If you can’t think of something to say, just offer eye contact and a squeeze of the hand if it’s appropriate.

- Listen with unconditional regard if someone begins to share a past experience. Many people are fearful of how they might be judged by others. You can’t harm someone with kindness, but criticism given at a vulnerable moment can be devastating and unproductive.
- Remind the person that talking may be difficult, but it’s okay, especially if you are sure that you’re ready to listen.
- Provide reassurance that you respect his or her privacy and will not share personal information with others. (The exception to this is when the individual shares suicidal thoughts or ideas about committing violent acts. In these cases, you may be obligated to report what you’ve learned to a higher authority.)
- Avoid such patronizing and distracting behavior as recounting your own experience of traumatic events as if you understand exactly what the person is feeling. If you have gone through a similar experience, it is appropriate to share but don’t claim to “know” what the person is experiencing.
- Acquaint yourself with grief counselors and professionals who deal with PTSD. Be prepared to make a recommendation or referral, especially if thoughts of suicide are alluded to or mentioned. If possible, have names and contact information available. Treatment today of war-related PTSD includes group sessions, art therapy, and combat-stress counseling. Participants say that being with people who have been through the same experience makes them feel more “normal.”
- Believe in the power of listening and the importance of simple connection between people. Offer comfort and reassurance without minimizing the experience.

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Finding a Way Forward

Back to the story at the beginning of this article: When Louis McShane finally began to speak about what he had experienced 50 years earlier, he discovered that others had been there, too, and he began to sleep at night.

In spite of the many ways we have to communicate in today’s world, it is still possible for people to feel that they should hold on to difficult emotions in isolation. When people exhibit the signs of invisible emotional scars, there may be a story that needs to be told to a compassionate and concerned listener. **PM**



RUTH CROCKER, PH.D., is an author, writing consultant, and expert on recovery from trauma and personal tragedy. She is author of the book *Those Who Remain: Remembrance and Reunion* and writer-in-residence at Riverlight Wellness Center, Stonington, Connecticut (www.ruthcrocker.com).



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BY KENNETH WILLIAMS

WHEN CHANGE IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

Make the most of council turnovers

One of the most unsettling occurrences for a city or county manager is a change in the majority of elected officials. This is particularly true when that change represents a political shift from those who originally hired the current manager. There are concerns—real or perceived—that the new group of elected officials will want to make significant changes or that they ran for their seats to get rid of the current manager.

Such a scenario caused great consternation in my life as a manager. My stress level increased as I anticipated how to effectively work with the new councilmembers. A huge unknown was why they really chose to participate in local government, although I had asked them this question before the election.

While there can be times when residents have ulterior motives in making a change at city hall, which is typically known before an election or appointment is made, more often than not the manager is not the target in residents seeking office. Frequently, new councilmembers are running because they have a hot-button issue that needs attention, or they simply want to serve the public.

Managers are typically aware when there is change desired in the political and administrative landscape; therefore, it is prudent when that fact is known for the manager to think about or explore beneficial career options.

Focus on Opportunities

While it is natural to think the worse—and that is not always so bad in the public administration field—there is

often opportunity when a council's makeup changes for the manager to put his or her best foot forward. Most councilmembers are new at the business of policy making in government and have a limited idea of what is required in the position.

There is also the misconception that the local government has been operating inefficiently and new officials are coming in to cut out budgetary excess. A commonly voiced message is that the newly elected want to run government more effectively, a.k.a., "like the private sector," when, in fact, local governments are operated more productively than the private sector.

It is a real eye-opener for a newly elected official to find out that this is not the case. In fact, he or she is often amazed to discover the community is operating on a scant amount of resources.

Show Them the Ropes

Such scenarios as this provide opportunities for a manager to build trust and provide unity within the organization. I was the professional in the local government equation and provided an avenue of quick learning for new officials. For me, this opportunity provided the opening needed to instill a positive opinion of my ability to successfully supervise the functions of local government.

I had learned to take advantage of this skill and become a willing teacher to newly elected officials, who will appreciate being taught the ropes with sincerity. And these officials will often subsequently become staunch allies of the manager, which happened in my situation.

Here are five lessons I learned to make council transitions easier:

1. Have an open mind about new members serving on your community's governing board.
2. Think of ways to make this service a positive experience.
3. Help elected officials who sought office to solve local issues get their problems resolved.
4. Educate them by correcting any misconceptions they have about the organization and help them become familiar with its activities.
5. Develop trust with the elected officials and with staff by showing competence and doing what you say you will accomplish.

Positive Results

In my case, having a new council led to positive results. In most cases, including mine, the new councilmembers and the manager can operate at a higher level than the council that initially did the hiring, as they do not have to operate under the same constraints or economic forces that were in place perhaps only a few years earlier.

Those individuals who came into office to reduce budgets are often those who actually end up increasing the budget, therefore providing more freedom for the manager to implement much needed services and programs. This, in turn, can prove the manager more productive and increase her or his worth.

In fact, I received a better compensation package after a turnover in council when it realized that substandard pay was being provided to the city's top administrative official.

Although there are no perfect scenarios in the changes that occur when the majority of the council that hired the manager is no longer around, this situation may also represent a great opportunity to engage in new policies and procedures. **PM**



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