

# PM

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

100th  
ANNIVERSARY  
★ 1919-2019 ★

# Making Work-Life Balance A Priority



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# Surviving Election Season

Practical ways to avoid missteps

BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

**In any election season**, the probability that the campaign trail will lead to the steps of your county courthouse or city hall is high. Although broader in its original context, the old adage that “all politics is local” has never been truer.

Today, we have no shortage of issues to motivate, galvanize, and polarize a community and the candidates for elected office who want to represent that community. In the middle of this stands local government staff. These smart, committed people have their personal position on the issues and candidates.

They also have a critical job to do in the public domain. Their job is to serve all the residents in a fair and equitable manner. They provide impartial service and recommendations based on professional expertise.

To succeed, they need to be unbiased in both appearance and in fact. One effective way to achieve this is to be politically neutral; that is, to stay out of the process of electing any candidates to any public office.

To be clear, staff share with their fellow residents the right and responsibility to vote for the candidate of choice in local, state, and national races. Staff also have the legal right to engage during nonwork hours in political activity to support a candidate for publicly elected office.

## A Balanced Approach

The legal right to be politically active should be balanced with the obligation to ensure that personal political engagement does not interfere with the local government's operations or reflect negatively on the organization's reputation. The higher up in the organization chart, the greater the exposure, risk, and impact.

Consider sharing this advice to address common challenges with your staff:

**Campaign research.** What if a candidate asks staff for information, data, and research about local government operations to use in the campaign? Context and how the information is being used matters.

Residents have the right to obtain information from the locality. Governing body members have a business reason to request research from the staff; however, there is a distinction in responding to these requests versus one from a publicly announced candidate.

Responsibility for gathering information to run a campaign rests with the candidate. Public resources should not be used to assist an individual candidate.

Staff should decline the request and direct the candidate to publicly available information on the website. The candidate also has the option to submit a public records request and pay the associated fees for the documents.



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# ICMA

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**Public Management (PM)** aims to inspire innovation, inform decision making, connect leading-edge thinking to everyday challenges, and serve ICMA members and local governments in creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world.



**Dealing with the media.** What if the media calls to “fact check” a candidate’s campaign statement or to ask about his or her accomplishments and qualifications for office? All media requests should be directed to a central point of contact in the organization. That contact should decline to comment, referencing the staff’s commitment to political neutrality.

**Fake news and bad facts.** What if the facts are totally wrong and reflect poorly on the organization? The manager will want to carefully consider whether to issue a public statement to correct the candidate’s statement.

Part of the risk assessment will be the potential for staff to be drawn into the campaign. Remember the other old adage: It is easier to stay out than to get out.

It is important to remember that candidates bear sole responsibility for doing their homework to ensure that they present accurate and correct information.

**Attendance and networking at events.** Decline any invitation from organizations or community groups to attend an event during the campaign season when the guest speaker is a candidate for political office. It is totally acceptable and even often expected that staff will be out in the community attending civic functions to

provide information on community matters, to represent the organization, and to network.

Being present with a candidate during the campaign season, however, can inadvertently draw staff into the campaign.

**Political debates.** Forums or debates sponsored by independent organizations provide everyone with the opportunity to learn more about the candidates and their positions. For that reason, staff may want to attend as either a private citizen or a staff member.

What’s important is to keep a low profile and be prepared to respond if someone tries to draw you into the debate. An effective response: “I am just here to learn more about the issues and have no comment.”

**Donations, lawn signs, bumper stickers, and “behind the scenes” efforts.** As noted above, staff have the legal right to engage in campaign activity after work hours. Weigh the likelihood that what you consider to be “private and personal” will be publicly known. Here are a few notable issues:

- Campaign donations are not private. If your name is on the check, that is what will be on the publicly accessible website.
- Are you known in the community because of your work with the city or county? Are you a resident? If yes, then that yard sign is a pretty visible statement of support.
- If the car with the bumper sticker is the one you commute to work in, skip the bumper sticker.
- There may be opportunities to contribute to a campaign in the background and out of public view. The concern with this approach is the reality that if you are engaged with others, news of your involvement will leak out.

If you have encountered other challenges, don’t hesitate to share. **PM**

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# How to Create a Performance-Driven Workforce

*“I stare at my computer for hours, so it looks like I’m busy”*  
— Peter, in the film, *Office Space*

• • • •

Managing Employee Performance is a Process, not an Event! | BY PATRICK IBARRA

**The workplace continues** to grow more complex. Ensuring employees are being led in a way that continues to move your organization forward in an ever changing, noisier ecosystem has never been more challenging. From recruiting, hiring, and developing skill sets of the future to leading multiple generations in the workforce, accommodating changing employees’ expectations, and managing remote talent, work teams are constantly being pressed to be agile, flexible, and on top of their technology game.

In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that it is critically important for leaders to learn how to build organizations that are simultaneously purpose-driven, performance-focused, and principles-led. At a time when the pace of change is faster than ever, building organizations with these three characteristics is no longer a choice. Being performance-driven is clearly essential to success. You want to succeed by choice, not by chance!

## Performance Mindsets

Organizational cultures vary on many dimensions, one of which is the emphasis on performance. Some cultures are based on entitlement, meaning that adequate performance and stability dominate the organization. Employee rewards vary little from person to person and are not based on individual performance differences. As a result, performance appraisal activities are viewed as being primarily a “bureaucratic exercise.” Many public sector organizations suffer from an entitlement mindset, to their detriment.

In many organizations, the current performance appraisal/evaluation process has mixed credibility, depending mainly on the supervisor who administers it. While the process is not the sole responsibility of the human resources department, supervisors assume they are accountable for its effectiveness. Actually, it is a shared responsibility among all departments.

Today’s conventional wisdom asserts that performance management is no longer a luxury for only the most advanced organizations but is a

necessity for governments to function at an optimal level. Moreover, the dated practice of an annual performance appraisal being the single component of performance management must be replaced with a comprehensive and systematic approach comprised of competency models, leadership development, performance plans, goal setting, coaching, performance appraisals, and recognition.

Successful organizations and their managers approach the idea of providing performance feedback to an employee as a means for that employee to calibrate his or her performance; they use feedback and its regular delivery like a dashboard in an automobile. Each dashboard indicator reflects a vital measurement and together they paint a picture for how a vehicle is performing. Similarly, in order for employees and their managers to recognize and take corrective action about the employee’s performance, performance indicators must also be created and communicated regularly.

## Overreliance on Technology

Frequently, department and line managers presume, often with the endorsement of the HR department, that once a new performance appraisal form is implemented, the issues they have struggled with in improving an employee’s performance will magically be solved. Often, little attention is paid to helping managers improve their skills and their confidence in delivering feedback to employees. In actuality, it is precisely those feedback discussions where performance should be addressed to continually leverage strengths and bolster areas for improvement.

While modifying the appraisal instrument may be necessary, organizations might want to focus more on the forces driving performance: clarity of goals, alignment of goals with the agency’s overall objectives, frequency and effectiveness of feedback being delivered by supervisors and managers, and building managers’ skills in delivering that feedback.

## Steps You Can Take

High-performing organizations have a well-developed performance management process that features several components that function interdependently:



### PATRICK IBARRA

is a former city manager and co-founder and partner, The Mejorando Group, Glendale, Arizona, an organizational effectiveness consulting practice (patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com).



1. Educate both management and employees on the rationale and value of implementing successful employee performance management as the linchpin to department effectiveness.
2. Focus people on doing the right things that drive value for the organization and deliver results that support key strategic priorities. Identify what employees “must do” exceptionally well to be successful.
3. Consistent with the practice of “what gets talked about gets done strongly encourage supervisors and managers to regularly provide feedback to their employees.
4. Revise the performance appraisal instrument with a focus on values, principles, behaviors, and results instead of tasks.
5. Train both managers and employees to ensure everyone adopts, understands, and embraces the principles and intent behind the performance management system. Reconsider the numbering system as a rating scale – no member of your workforce is striving to be a 3.4 on a 5-point performance scale. Rating scales create unnecessary complexity.
6. Create, fund, and implement a learning/training and development plan; employees and managers work together in co-creating a specific plan designed to accelerate employees’ capabilities.
7. Increase accountability for performance at all levels of the organization. Let me repeat that: Increase accountability for performance at all levels. Those in supervisory, management, and leadership roles should be accountable for how well their direct reports (i.e.



**Today's conventional wisdom asserts that performance management is no longer a luxury for only the most advanced organizations but is a necessity for governments to function at an optimal level.**

- subordinates) are performing and how ready they are to assume new responsibilities.
8. “Whatever you tolerate, you advocate.” When performance evaluations are not completed on time, the message to employees is they’re not valued by their manager and thus, by the organization.
  9. Discard the unwritten practice of no employee receiving the top level of performance, over your concerns these employees might stop trying. It’s been my experience, this approach has the opposite effect and drains people who are intrinsically motivated to achieve.

Improving an organization’s performance management approach is about doing 100 things 1% better instead of one thing 100% better. No silver bullet exists to remedy an organization’s performance deficiencies. However, significant progress can be realized by implementing these nine recommendations to move an organization towards a performance management approach that aligns employee behavior and performance with organizational goals and desired outcomes.

Successful organizations hold their leaders accountable for the identification, growth, and retention of key talent. In short, in order to build a 21st century workforce, your organization needs a 21st century approach.

Please email your questions and comments to me at [patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com](mailto:patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com). **PM**



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## Introducing ICMA's new online member community – ICMA Connect!

As a benefit of ICMA membership, the **member-only** ICMA Connect community provides a **safe platform for connecting, networking and discussion** – all with the peace of mind in knowing your fellow community members understand the **decorum and sensitivity** required to serve in the local government profession.

In the ICMA Connect community, members are **drivers of community engagement** as they share successes, ask questions, lend advice and expertise, share community projects and programs, help each other advance in the profession, and much more!

### FEATURES

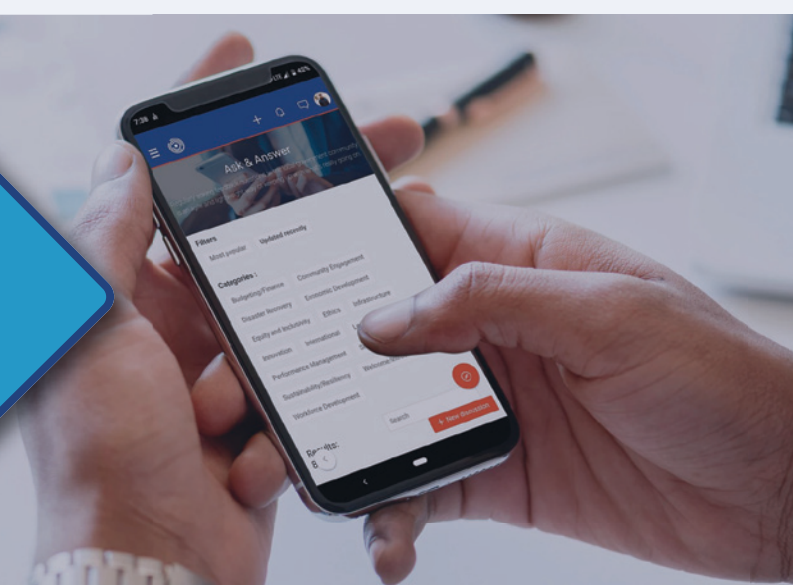
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# ★ PM ★

## 1919 – 2019

### PM in July 1955

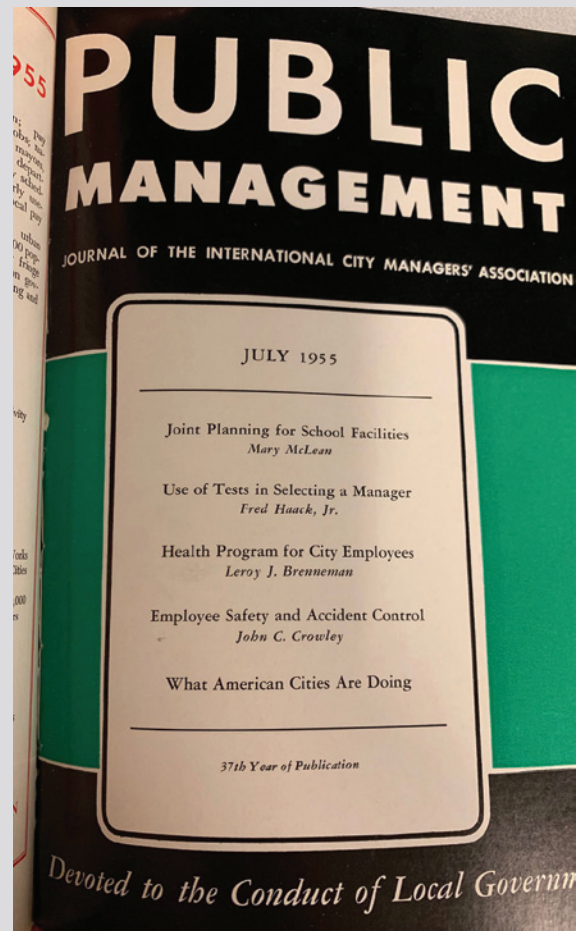
In 1955, Public Management magazine was in its 37th year of publication. The July issue's green-and-black cover was simple yet eye-catching. It listed features and sections including "Health Program for City Employees" by Leroy J. Brenneman, "Joint Planning for School Facilities" by Mary McLean, and "What American Cities Are Doing," to name a few. The PM cover also noted its mission, "Devoted to the Conduct of Local Government."

It is interesting to look back and see what PM's contributors and editor deemed crucial to include on these early covers to get their message across to readers. The "What American Cities Are Doing" section informed readers about city priorities in the 1950s. For example, under "Envelope Advertising," the author writes, "More cities are making use of the message-carrying potential of the outside of envelopes in which they mail letters, bills, and general announcements. Most of the messages are intended for local viewing and vary from 'You Separate – We Incarcerate' on Hartford, Connecticut, envelopes to Fort Smith, Arkansas, 'City Business is Your Business – Have You Seen About It?'"

Under "Federal Aid to Clear Slum Area," the author writes about federal funds approved to aid Danville, Virginia, in clearing a downtown slum area to

accommodate the expansion of the city's central business district. The author writes, "The action allocates a loan of \$478,277 and a capital grant of \$95,277 to aid in the clearing and preparing for redevelopment of a blighted 10-acre residential area." The most interesting part of this story is that the estimated net cost of this project was \$152,127, which represented the difference between the cost of acquiring and preparing the land for redevelopment and the return from resale of the improved land for redevelopment.

The July 1955 issue makes it clear that the content in PM has remained consistent throughout the years. The goal was, and continues to be, providing quick and informative reading curated for local government professionals. **PM**

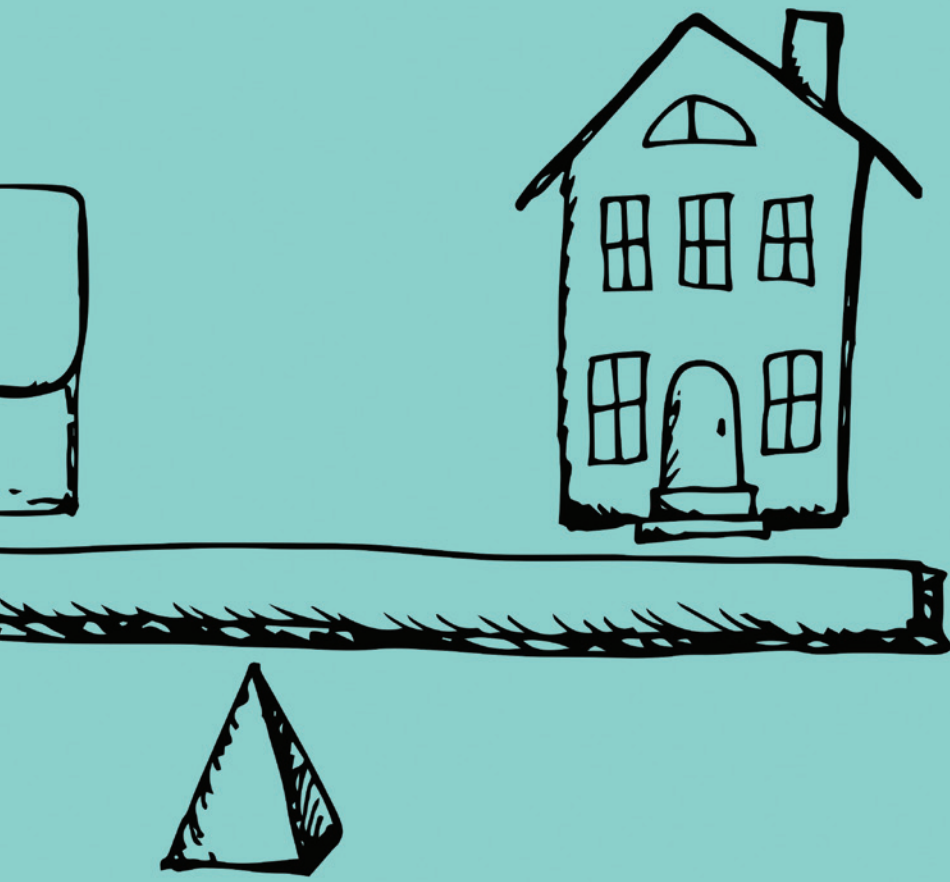


Celebrating 100 years



*Leaning in while*  
**FINDING**  
**BALANCE**

**THE ROLE OF GENDER IN FINDING**



During last year's annual budget cycle, I found myself in a position of reorganizing the community development department I lead in order to better manage day-to-day plan review activities while still supporting long-term city planning efforts.

For this reorganization, I identified a longtime staff member on the zoning team for a promotion to take the lead in making improvements to workflow activities and processes. When I discussed these potential changes with her, she expressed trepidation about the move and the additional work it might involve and requested greater detail on the expectations of the position.

I was taken aback: I had identified a path for promotion for her, and I was coaching her to “lean in.” Why was this so hard, and why would she not jump at this opportunity? She was smart, hardworking, and passionate about her work—all the attributes of a promotion-worthy employee. What possible reason would someone have for questioning this opportunity?

As we continued the discussion for many months, I came to recognize that she was very much interested in advancing her career and was prepared to work even harder. At the same time, she was cognizant of her work/life balance and how the choices she made professionally would affect her life outside of work, especially her responsibilities to her family. Our discussion opened my eyes a bit more to the challenges many women face when balancing work and career-growth opportunities and a life that often includes sometimes inflexible family obligations.

#### **Navigating Work and Home**

As a mother of two small children and a relatively new director of a city department, I am still navigating my own work/life issues. My job is exciting and engaging professionally. Evanston, Illinois, >>

## **WORK/LIFE BALANCE**

**BY JOHANNA N. LEONARD, AICP**



the community I serve, is an inner-ring suburb of Chicago that has strong development activity, a need for more affordable housing, an active business community addressing changing consumer habits in the age of the internet, and a robust multi-modal transportation system that includes rapid transit, rail, and bus but also is growing to include transportation network providers that offer shared bicycles, scooters, and cars. This all makes for ongoing, significant demands for long-term planning.

My time outside of work includes spending time with my husband—a stay-at-home dad to our two young children—keeping up with daily household chores, planning and preparing meals, and making sure we’re doing all the right things for our toddlers to promote happiness and health in their lives. Despite the support from my husband, I feel regular pressure to be present for my children and to be every inch a good mother. Whether it is reading many

(many!) books before bedtime, teaching my son to bake, or carting my daughter to a music class, I do it.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics noted in 2018 in the *American Time Use Survey* that the average mother spent two-and-one-half hours per day in 2017 caring for children in the household if they are under six; this number declines to about an hour-and-a-half as the children grow older and fall between the ages of 6 and 18.<sup>1</sup> Add this to the time at work and then a few hours spared for true “me time” to read, watch a show, or enjoy a workout, and I’m short on time. The footnote to all this is that being a director in a city like mine means that I am almost always “on call” for work; I regularly answer my cellphone or respond to email as long as I’m awake and my phone is accessible.

My ability to have both a demanding work-intensive job and be a mother to two small children is in part because I have a partner and an extended family that supports and

enables this. After my son was born, we found that the flexibility of having one parent at home added stability to our family—both in supporting our small children and my position as breadwinner for the family by enabling me to work. Subsequently, this arrangement has enabled me to be successful in my job because my life has space for work to expand, and caregiving that might conflict with work obligations falls within my husband’s duties. Among the most significant barriers to women advancing their careers are the responsibilities that come with caregiving—whether to small children or to other family members.

### The Changing Nature of Work

My family’s experience is consistent with a noted trend: Work is expanding into all parts of our lives with the result that one member of a couple may need to be “on-call” for work activities while the other is “on-call” for home

activities. Claire Cain Miller wrote an article in *The New York Times* titled “Women Did Everything Right. Then Work Got ‘Greedy.’”<sup>2</sup> How America’s obsession with long hours has widened the gender gap.” It summarizes an ever-present and significant barrier in gender equality in the workplace—the expectation that a worker can devote unlimited hours to the job—something that is seldom possible for women who have responsibilities outside the workplace.

The article notes that increasingly women with advanced degrees and access to professional opportunities that will yield significant earning potential find themselves unable to take advantage of these opportunities because of family responsibilities. The reason is the changing nature of work. “This is not about educated women opting out of work (they are the least likely to stop working after having children, even if they move to less demanding jobs). It’s about how the nature of work

has changed in ways that push couples who have equal career potential to take on unequal roles.”

“How the nature of work has changed”: This observation particularly resonated with me. I am an exception to this trend of women with advanced degrees taking jobs that require less work and allow for more flexibility for a family; I have “leaned in” and taken on more work.

One could therefore understand my surprise in the case of the staff member who did not jump at the professional opportunity I offered her. I projected my own ability to take on more work responsibilities and my desire for professional growth to this staff member, while not acknowledging the structure I have built outside of work to make it possible for me.

What I see now is that she was managing the boundaries of her career with an eye to her family obligations. Her success and ability to do good work was the result of maintaining that balance. This recognition has made me consider how we manage the work/life balance for our employees, and also how local government operations may affect the residents of the communities we serve.

### Why It Matters to Local Government

So why does work/life balance matter to local government? First, it matters because if we want to encourage *anyone* to be a leader in an organization, we have to find ways (both big and small) to support those who want to take on the challenges of professional growth and not just those who have the ability to assume longer working hours.

Second, it matters because those we serve in

## BETWEEN EVENING MEETINGS, WEEKEND ACTIVITIES, AND INCREASING EXPECTATIONS TO UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT AND DELIVER SERVICES, THERE ARE FEW MOMENTS WHEN WE ARE DISCONNECTED FROM THE WORK WE DO.

our communities likely face similar challenges in managing their work/life balance. In addition to the increases in time required to fulfill parenting or work duties, other responsibilities are ever present—pressure to engage in professional development outside of the regular workday, caring for an aging parent or partner, self-care activities, or expectation for “extra-curricular” interests that consume precious time. Between evening meetings, weekend activities, and increasing expectations to utilize technology to connect and deliver services (all accessible from a smartphone we carry at all times), there are few moments when we are disconnected from the work we do.

### Helpful Strategies

Considering these realities, it is a given that local government needs to address work/life balance to help both employees and residents. Here are a few ways that Evanston is doing this.

- **Rethinking public involvement and engagement.** Not everyone can attend a public meeting,

and not all staff will be able to regularly meet outside of the workday. Could pop-up events at family-friendly places like the farmer’s market, the local library, the commuter rail station, or a school event be used to gather feedback on projects or ideas in lieu of a formal committee meeting to discuss a topic? In the coming months we’re going to test pop-up events to gather feedback on transportation and mobility issues instead of bringing these to a formal evening committee meeting. Pop-ups have the benefits of being able to occur during the regular workday, solicit a potentially broader range of feedback, and engage new voices in local government processes.

- **Setting the right tone for what constitutes a workday.** I have reminded managers and staff that we need to stick to working hours for the workday and determine when it’s appropriate to extend that day beyond the set time. Additionally, people often boast how they “worked nonstop” or “worked through lunch.” Lunch can be a good time to take a break or catch up on non-work tasks. Reminding workers to take that lunch and leading by example are important in setting a tone. It’s important that the culture not imply that working late or through lunch defines a hard worker.
- **Reducing the reasons to visit local government offices.** Evanston’s civic center is not centrally located and cannot be easily linked with another trip

or errand without the use of a car. To reduce the need for in-person transactions, we accept building permit payments online, and we’ve started to allow customers to print building permits at home. We’re identifying other technological improvements that will reduce the need for a special trip to the civic center.

- **Thanking employees and customers.** As our city manager regularly reminds us, “thank you” is the simplest and often underrated way of expressing gratitude to workers and those we serve. It’s highly likely that the people you work with have other constraints on their lives on that particular day or at that moment. Reminding them that you’re grateful or acknowledging their service (however small) is just one way to maintain civility and remind ourselves that we are all in “this” together.

And, for the record, the staff member did accept the promotion, and we continue to work together to find the best balance of work and life for ourselves and encourage others to do the same. **PM**

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### ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, June 28, 2018, American Time Use Survey – 2017 Results “Average hours per day parents spent caring for and helping household children as their main activity” <https://www.bls.gov/charts/american-time-use/activity-by-parent.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/26/upshot/women-long-hours-greedy-professions.html>.

# Intentional Simplicity

BY TAMARA LETOURNEAU, ICMA-CM  
AND PAUL LETOURNEAU



# KEY PRACTICES CAN HELP YOU ACHIEVE **WORK/LIFE BALANCE**



**FINDING A BALANCE** between our work and our family life is something that we talk about repeatedly in our offices and with our friends and colleagues. It's something we all try to achieve and wonder if it's possible.

It's daunting to think about how we can have successful personal relationships, raise a family, and manage successful careers. Our local government careers are 24/7 jobs that require us to be present for both late-night and early morning meetings, weekend events, and emergencies that can go on for days.

In the words of Emily Ley (designer and creator of the Simplified® Planner), *“balance isn't something that's achieved or found. Instead, balance is a carefully choreographed dance: a constant shift from foot to foot. And even in the moments where balance doesn't exist, joy - founded on grace and intentional simplicity - can.”* We couldn't agree more.

The question is, can we have both a happy personal and family life and the local government career that we dream of? The answer is yes we can, as long as we choose intentional simplicity over perfection because doing so gives us grace in our lives. »

## ANOTHER ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE WE PUT IN PLACE IS HAVING OUR CHILDREN ORGANIZE THEIR CLOTHES FOR THE WEEK ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS.

Here's our story. Tamara (Tammy) is currently the acting city manager and assistant city manager of Costa Mesa, California, and Paul is a manager for a Trader Joe's in southern California. We've been married for almost 14 years, and we have two young children. Our work/life balance is not perfect, but over the years, we've incorporated the following six practices into our lives to help achieve the balance. In return, we've developed a beautiful life at home and fulfilling careers—with grace!

### SIX POSITIVE PRACTICES

**1 Work with your partner and build a supportive team.** We could not accomplish the things we do without the support of the other person. We're a great team! We both know what needs to be done, and we take care of it operating as a team.

Yet, having a wonderful spouse and a two-career household with children doesn't mean having a life free from challenges. For example, Tammy's role as a local government leader requires her to attend late-night city council meetings, early morning meetings, and weekend events. Paul has a challenging schedule that also requires him to work some nights and weekends. We work together to coordinate our family schedules.

Technology helps with scheduling. We coordinate by using calendar apps and Outlook invitations so both of us know the kids' schedules, doctors' appointments, and other obligations. In addition,

we have weekly "calendar meetings" to ensure that we know the plan for the week ahead. A calendar meeting with a glass of wine can be fun too!

Even with all that, we sometimes have to involve other people in our support system—neighbors and family members—to jump in and help by picking up the kids or taking them to an activity. For a single parent, it's critical to have a backup team ready to jump in as needed.

**2 Live, love, laugh.** Find time to enjoy life's special moments. Regular date nights are important. It doesn't have to be elaborate or fancy—sometimes even having coffee or a glass of wine at the kitchen table is special, and it doesn't require getting a babysitter.

Scheduling time to connect with friends and family is equally important. We both make it a priority to spend time with the people who

are important in our lives and who bring us joy. Family time is deeply important to us. This means putting away the phone to have meaningful conversations and truly connect with people. For example, we have a "no electronics" rule at dinner so we can connect with each other.

**3 Stay organized.** Having an organized home is important to us. In our minds, household organization helps keep things running so we can focus on even more important things. When the schedule for the week seems impossible, we're always thankful for the household systems that we put in place. For example, on Sunday we make lunches for the kids for the entire week. We know this sounds crazy, but peanut butter and jelly and other lunch makings have a long shelf life if stored properly in the refrigerator. Each lunch is labeled for the day of the week

so the kids can grab it and go in the mornings when we're trying to get everyone out the door on time.

Our lunch plan is also a huge time saver at night. Not having to worry about making the next day's lunches when we're trying to make dinner and provide guidance on homework is huge. Another organizational practice we put in place is having our children organize their clothes for the week on Sunday afternoons. This saves any morning clothing drama and has been a huge time saver allowing everyone to leave in the morning much happier at the start of the day.

The first few hours when we all come home at the end of a long day we refer to as "the bewitching hours." We try to plan our meals in advance, so we have healthy and easy-to-prepare dinners that take less than 30 minutes to get on the table. Not having to stress about dinner makes for a peaceful







## SCHEDULING TIME TO CONNECT WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT.

evening and might add to extra free time during the week.

**4 Plan ahead.** We try to plan ahead at work and at home as much as possible. At work, we're constantly addressing our "to do" lists and making sure we're staying ahead of deadlines. Although all of us do that, having a family makes it even more important. If our child unexpectedly gets sick, it takes some of the pressure off if that presentation is already completed. Waiting until the last minute causes more stress.

Sometimes, despite the best plans, things still happen unexpectedly that require our attention. That's where that supportive partner and helpful support team that we

mentioned earlier come into play.

**5 Stay focused.** Whether at work or at home, it's important to devote your attention to the place you are at that moment. We all have challenges in life. We work hard to focus on our work when we're at work and vice versa. Of course, things happen where one challenge creeps into the other, but if we focus on working hard to be present in the moment, we will feel better when we switch roles from home to work or work to home each day.

**6 Schedule "me time."** We all know that when we try to give everything we have to our families, employers, and friends, we usually have nothing left at the end of the day for ourselves. However, the first person we should be taking care of is ourselves if we want to have the energy to be there for others. That's much easier to say than to do. Still, we need to give ourselves

permission to take time to exercise or to recharge our batteries. For Paul, that might be meeting a friend for lunch or breakfast once a month. For Tammy, every couple of months, it's a Friday off to run errands without the children. It's pure bliss to have a few hours to get all those errands done. We each need to have some down time so we can be better spouses, parents, and employees.

### The Leadership Lesson

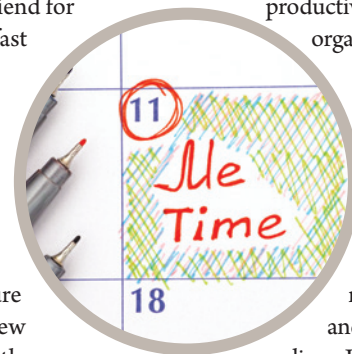
As leaders in our organizations, we need to set the example and model work/life balancer for our staff as well. We need to give our employees the grace and freedom to work remotely when possible or flex their schedule to attend a baseball game or a ballet lesson, because in reality those things really matter. This form of leadership

shows our employees that we truly care and, in return, helps keep morale and productivity high in our organizations.

We have to give ourselves, our partners, and our colleagues grace as we navigate our robust work and personal

lives. Just know that

it is not going to be perfect every minute of every day, but we can achieve work/life balance if we encourage and are willing to help each other. **PM**



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# NO SILVER BULLET...

BY ANN MARIE TOWNSHEND, AICP

... but many options exist to help you achieve a better balance

**W**ork/life balance ... We all strive for it, but can we really achieve it. For those of us who choose a career in local government management, work/life balance may be a struggle from the very beginning, when we try to prove ourselves and demonstrate our skills. The struggle continues, often becoming increasingly challenging with each step up the ladder.

**As city managers, assistant managers, and department directors, we have signed up for jobs that have demands 24/7. Advances in technology have made it increasingly difficult to disconnect. Is there a way to achieve balance between work and the rest of our lives?**

## Defining Work/Life Balance

What exactly is work/life balance? The answer is likely to be different for each person and may vary with one's stage in life and career. But we can identify a few common themes. Work/life balance involves splitting time among work/career, family, and self. It involves attending to mental and physical well-being and recognizing the physical and mental health risks that come when things are out of balance.

Given the importance of work/life balance to success in career and family and to mental and physical health, what can we do to achieve that balance? There's no silver bullet, but this article will share some strategies we can use to create balance in our lives and to nurture workplace cultures that promote balance as well.

## Effects of Stress on Physical and Mental Health

Local government management can be stressful as we strive to meet the expectations of multiple bosses as well as manage the day-to-day priorities of running the city or county. The breakdown of a trash truck can set back service delivery and be a budget buster. A downed tree knocking out power to a neighborhood may require the manager to come to work in the middle of the night on a Saturday. Tension between elected



officials may have the manager playing referee. Each of these situations may cause stress, and none of them is an anomaly in local government.

While stress is part of life, chronic or prolonged stress is linked to health problems and burnout. According to the American Psychological Association, the longer stress lasts, the more dangerous it is for your mind and body.<sup>1</sup> Chronic stress can directly affect health or lead to unhealthy behaviors such as overeating, smoking, and misuse of alcohol or drugs. The Mayo Clinic website includes a table of common effects of stress, noting that, if unchecked, stress can contribute to many health problems, including high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Shawn VanVessen, a licensed clinical social worker with a private practice, frequently sees clients who are struggling to maintain a work/life balance.<sup>2</sup> She says that many of her clients feel pressure because it's difficult to get everything done and to feel that they're successful in all facets of their lives.

**Table 1. Common Effects of Stress**

ON YOUR BODY	ON YOUR MOOD	ON YOUR BEHAVIOR
Headache	Anxiety	Overeating or undereating
Muscle tension or pain	Restlessness	Angry outbursts
Chest pain	Lack of motivation or focus	Drug or alcohol misuse
Fatigue	Feeling overwhelmed	Tobacco use
Change in sex drive	Irritability or anger	Social withdrawal
Stomach upset	Sadness or depression	Exercising less often
Sleep problems		

Source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-symptoms/art-20050987>

Devoting time to oneself is an essential component of balance, and VanVessen notes the importance of self-care. She stresses the need for eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep, and carving out time to spend with people who are important to you. It's particularly important to carve out time to spend with your significant other and to make that relationship a priority.

### Changing Dynamics

As noted above, there's no "one-size-fits-all" approach to work/life balance, and a person's balance may change over time. As a young mother, having a job close to home was a key strategy for me. Geographic proximity allowed me to stop in at daycare, volunteer at school during my lunch hour, and stop at home to see my husband and >>

sons before going to an evening meeting. Now my children are older, and I work for a municipality that is about 40 miles from home. It's less important for me to be close, but it is important for me to leave early to get to my son's golf matches.

Colleagues and friends have shared their experiences with achieving balance. One colleague has a demanding job that requires frequent travel. In her case, her husband left the workforce to stay home with their children. Another cut back to part time when her children were young to accommodate her husband's work travel demands. Just as the family has changed over the decades, the ways in which families work to balance competing demands has changed as well.

Kyle Gay is a 33-year-old law associate working to grow her municipal law practice. She is a mother to two young children, ages two-and-a-half and six months. She says that for her, balance is when she's happy in her work life and her home life.

While Gay can't pinpoint anything specific, she says she can feel when things are out of balance. She typically works from home for a couple of hours every night after she puts her children to bed. Gay believes this is critical because it allows her flexibility during the day to take the kids to the doctor or have lunch with a friend. Other colleagues keep a firm line between work and home, not bringing any work home, and in some

cases going back into the office after things wind down at home to get work done.

### Strategies for Achieving and Maintaining Balance

So, if achieving balance is important to our health, our family, and our career, what strategies can we use to achieve and maintain balance?

**Prioritize.** For many years, we've heard the message that we can do it all. Not only has this been shown to be untrue, but it places undue pressure on all of us to achieve career and financial success, have a perfect home, and be perfect parents to perfect children. Trying to live up to all of these expectations sets us up for failure.

In their book *The ONE Thing*, Gary Keller and Jay Papasan argue that we can't do it all and that we need to find and focus on the one thing that is most important and will have the most impact.<sup>3</sup> While their book doesn't focus on work/life balance, and even argues that it is a myth, Keller and Papasan focus on the importance of prioritization. They argue that success is not achieved by doing everything or by working more or longer hours, but by prioritizing that "one thing."

Local government management imposes many after-hours demands on our time. Board, commission, and council meetings are most often in the evening. Community engagement activities are also scheduled for

evenings and weekends for the convenience of residents. To maintain family as a priority with these work demands, a manager may need to leave the office early to attend children's sporting events, art shows, and other important activities.

Similarly important is prioritizing at work. To-do lists will always be long, but without prioritization, managers find themselves extremely busy while getting little done. Create short to-do lists that are manageable and address priorities. Developing a system of prioritization that works for you will help with both stress reduction and work/life balance.

Communicate at home and at work. Kyle Gay, the law associate, notes the importance of communication to achieving and maintaining balance. She communicates with her associates and partners about her schedule limitations. She and her husband sit down every Sunday and preview the week ahead so that each knows what the other has planned. This way, if they need to ask a family member for help with the children, they can provide adequate notice.

Keeping a family calendar is also a good communication tool. While some use apps on smart phones or tablets, my family relies heavily on a calendar hanging on the kitchen wall. We use it only for events and appointments that are important for all of us to know about, and we refer to it daily. We plan meals, carpools, and everything else based on the calendar.

Communication also means listening to family members, including a spouse or significant other. I can count on my husband to tell me when things are out of whack, and I have often responded in a defensive manner. As I mature, I have tried to be mindful of my reaction and realize that my husband's feedback is necessary to keeping a healthy balance.

**Ask for help.** Managers can ask for help by asking a friend or family member to pick up the kids or asking colleagues to chip in to help meet a priority in the office. So often we feel we need to do it all on our own. If we simply ask for help, we often find that others are more than willing to step in.

Asking for help can also mean knowing when you need more significant assistance in managing stress. Most organizations offer employee assistance programs (EAPs) at no cost to employees. These programs provide a variety of confidential services, including short-term counseling and referrals for





employees who are experiencing personal and/or work-related problems. Perhaps short-term counseling services could provide you with strategies you need to get through a particularly stressful and challenging time. If needed, the EAP can provide referrals to longer-term counseling services.

**Unplug.** While technology has helped provide flexibility in how we work, it has also made it increasingly challenging to separate work life from home life. While completely disconnecting during “non-work” hours is likely impractical for municipal managers, it’s possible to unplug for certain periods of time.

In my household we implemented a rule that phones were not allowed at the dinner table. If a phone rang, the call would wait until dinner was done. This ensured that the time we spent together as a family every day was not interrupted by other distractions, whether work or social. Another strategy that works for some people is to disconnect prior to bedtime. Even if you must keep your phone close at hand in case of emergency, perhaps committing to no e-mail or social media after 10:00 p.m. will help. Whatever the strategy, designating a time to disconnect allows us to live in the moment and focus on family and self.

**Attend to your health.** Stay active, exercise, eat right, and get rest. Regular exercise is known to reduce stress and boost your immune system. While it can be a challenge to fit exercise into a busy schedule, developing healthy habits can mitigate stress. Habits are difficult to develop, but once in place they become second nature. Many managers have developed an exercise habit—a morning jog, regular gym time, or a lunch-time walk.

Similarly, while it’s easy to fall into the bad habit of skipping meals or grabbing meals on the go, planning ahead for meals or keeping nutritious foods on hand can ensure that a healthy diet doesn’t fall by the wayside. As an example, I try to keep tuna pouches, vegetables for salad, nuts, and fruit on hand so that no matter how unpredictable the day is, I can avoid eating junk food because it’s the only thing available.

Proper sleep is also vital to personal health and professional productivity. So if that city council meeting keeps you at work until midnight, find time in that week to rest and rejuvenate. Build your calendar around this and stick to it.

**Avoid making too many commitments.** When asked about the hardest part of balancing work and non-work priorities, several colleagues responded that the hardest part is saying no. Often, when we set priorities, it means saying no to the things that aren’t in this category.

Eric Norenberg, city manager in Milford, Delaware, says “while saying no is the hardest part of achieving balance, it gets easier over time.” Both Norenberg and Sharon Lynn, city manager in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, note that saying no is particularly challenging early on in a job.

In addition to saying no, we need to communicate to our elected officials that if new projects and requests need to be prioritized, others may need to be deferred. An annual retreat to prioritize projects, plus periodic updates, can help with this, but managers also need to speak up when a request cannot be fulfilled.

**Be the example.** Norenberg points to the importance of setting an example for others in the organization. As a manager, if he tells his staff they should make family a priority, then he needs to walk the talk. Employees are going to pay more attention to the example he sets than to the words he speaks.

Norenberg has also created opportunities for city employees and their families to volunteer on service projects, providing a stronger connection to the community. This initiative also allowed employees to meet each other’s families and interact in a more relaxed environment than the typical workplace.

Because we’re managers, employees look to us to set the tone for the workplace. If we skip meals and work countless hours, those who want to move up in the organization will believe that is what it takes.

## A Final Word

If I said that I’ve found the key to work/life balance and integrated it seamlessly into my career, that would be a lie. However, when I look back, I see how my family’s definition of balance has shifted over time and how we have adapted.

Each career move has included a family discussion about what the change will mean in terms of night meetings and other commitments. In my most recent move, I told my employer at the interview stage that I had promised my family that we would not move until the kids finished high school. This has meant a 40-mile commute, and it was important for me to know that both my family and my employer were on board.

At times, I’ve felt headed toward burnout because I was trying to do it all. The strategies suggested earlier have been important in pulling things back into balance. One final strategy for finding harmony in work and personal life is knowing when it’s time to move on. As many managers have learned, there are times when politics (at times directed toward the manager) become toxic and undermine a manager’s efforts to maintain balance. At these times, moving on may be the best option.

Remember, you’re more productive, healthier, and happier when you maintain a balance among all facets of your life. While sometimes this may feel like a lost cause, you can achieve it with prioritization, communication, attention to your personal needs, and openness to asking for help. **PMI**

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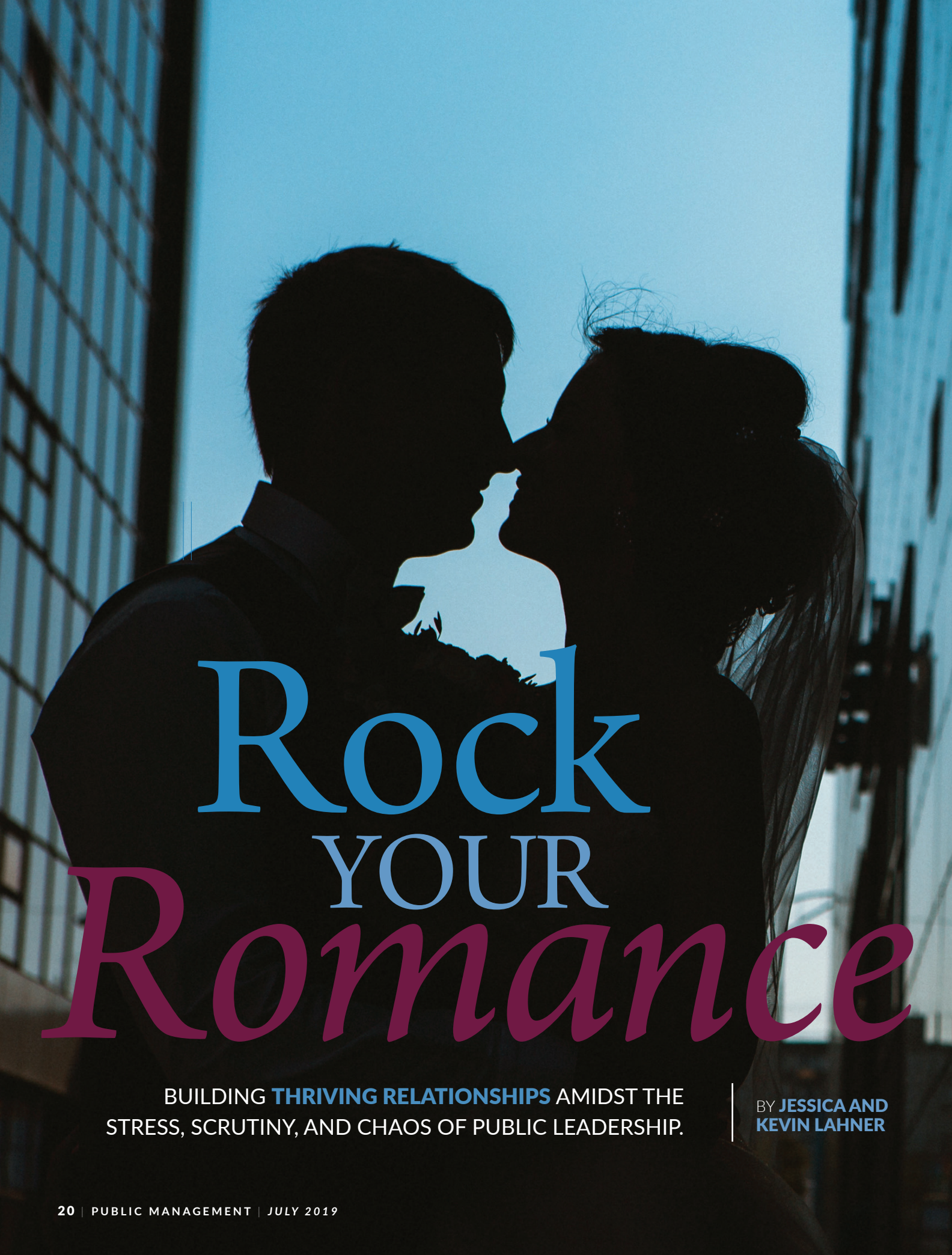


## ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress>.

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview with the author.

<sup>3</sup> Gary Keller and Jay Papasan, *The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results* (Austin, Texas: Bard Press); copyright 2012 Rellek Publishing Partners Ltd.



# Rock YOUR *Romance*

BUILDING **THRIVING RELATIONSHIPS** AMIDST THE  
STRESS, SCRUTINY, AND CHAOS OF PUBLIC LEADERSHIP.

BY **JESSICA AND  
KEVIN LAHNER**

**COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS** are not always rainbows and roses. Being the chief executive in a city or county places stresses on romantic partnerships. Late-night meetings, public scrutiny, and the “always on” feeling that comes with living in a fishbowl are just a few of the pressures.

Married for 20 years, we’ve experienced all of these stressors and more. Kevin has spent 14 years in local government executive positions. Jessica, a psychologist at Carroll University, has ridden the roller coaster that accompanies the role of partner of the chief executive. As in all relationships, we’ve had highs and lows. Many of the lows resulted from the unique stressors of the local government management profession and had the potential to damage, even ruin, our marriage.

Fortunately, putting empirically validated psychological research into practice has allowed our relationship to thrive through tough times. These are practices that could benefit any marriage. However, we believe that they can especially protect the committed relationships of local government management professionals, as people in that line of work face unique vulnerabilities.

Psychologist and renowned relationship expert John Gottman spent four decades studying the ingredients of successful relationships. In fact, his research allows him to accurately predict divorce more than 90 percent of the time.<sup>1</sup> By using the tools informed by Gottman’s research, we can work on our relationships as hard as we work on managing the city’s budget.

### **Tips for Handling Unique Stressors**

Relationships in the local government management profession come with unique risks. According to Gottman’s research, job stressors (which can include job changes, relocations, and shifts in financial status) pose significant threats to marriages<sup>2</sup> —and all of these are common in local government management. Mix in the high visibility of our roles that often have an impact on our partners, and you wonder how we manage to stay married! We know that approximately 50 percent of couples in the United States divorce

(although millennial divorce rates seem to be trending lower).<sup>3</sup> Given this perfect combination of stressors, we suspect the rate in city administration is even higher.

**Potential relocations.** The average tenure of a local government chief administrative officer in any single position is seven years. Add residency requirements to the equation, and a job switch often means a move to a new community.

To reduce the liabilities this stressor can place on marriage, have conversations early about career priorities and potential moves. For example, we made the decision that Kevin’s higher earning potential meant we would prioritize his career. The frequent moves we predicted would accompany this choice meant that Jessica wasn’t able to pursue her goal of establishing a stable psychology practice. Instead, she pursued more flexible work that allows her career to roll with the changes that accompany Kevin’s city management positions.

Scot Simpson, city administrator in River Falls, Wisconsin, can relate to the sacrifices that spouses of city managers often make. “With all the things that my spouse has done for my profession, and her forgoing professional opportunities for herself, I’ve got to be a help to her with whatever I can,” Simpson said.

**Involuntary termination.** The risk of being fired is also higher than in many professions. Have discussions with your family about this possibility. Preparing children is especially important. Kids will be navigating the firing of a parent on a personal level and may even read about it online or be asked about it at school.

**Navigating social and professional boundaries.** Drawing a line between social and professional relationships poses another unique stressor, often for both the manager and the family. We spend considerable time with elected officials and members of the local business community. Conscious decisions about whom we interact with socially are critical.

Ask yourself whether the professional and personal relationships will conflict at some point during your tenure, and if the relationship is worth that risk. >



Likewise, spouses should consider their personal relationships—developing a friendship with the spouse of a council member, for example, can be challenging during times of manager-council conflict.

Especially when we live in the communities we manage, we often feel forced to put on our “manager hat” when we prefer to be off the clock. Many managers who are out with their families are approached by residents about city-related issues. Unfortunately, residents may approach spouses as well. Jessica is often confronted with complaints about snow plowing while she’s grocery shopping. She’s become adept at passing along Kevin’s contact information after clearly stating that she doesn’t involve herself in city-related issues!

**Pressures on the manager’s children.** In the worst cases, these social pressures extend to managers’ children. We’ll never forget when our 10-year-old twins were questioned by a teacher about a contentious issue reported in our local paper. It’s helpful to prepare yourself and your family for these situations and develop specific strategies for coping. We learned, for example, that role-playing responses helped our kids feel confident when adults in our community put them in these unfortunate situations.

### Signs of Trouble and Their Remedies

How can we tell if we’re managing our relationship for long-term success? What can we do if we recognize problems in our marriage? Gottman’s research<sup>4</sup> uncovered common red-flag behaviors that result in divorce nearly 80 percent of the time. The good news is that this research also outlines alternative proactive behaviors couples can use to help their relationships thrive.

**Criticism versus complaints.** The first red flag is criticism, or attacking our partners personally instead of

confronting the behavior that’s frustrating us. For example, because we prioritized Kevin’s career, there was a point in our marriage when Jessica believed Kevin was consistently disregarding her plans to accommodate his work commitments. Kevin’s frequent, “I just found out I have a meeting tonight; can you cancel your book club plans to stay with the kids?” requests were starting to sound selfish. Jessica was also creating stories in her head that assumed Kevin didn’t care about her needs and didn’t perceive them as important.

The remedy to this situation, according to Gottman, is to neutrally “state complaints” while sharing feelings. For example, Jessica could have attacked Kevin personally: “You never prioritize my commitments. It’s like you don’t care about what I need just because we decided that your career will be the priority.”

See how this personal attack assumed that the story in Jessica’s head was true? Most of us would react defensively to

this criticism—it’s the perfect invitation to unhealthy conflict. Managers experience frequent public criticism, so personal attacks that continue at home can be especially exhausting.

Instead, Jessica could have stated her complaints and accompanying feelings neutrally: “I’m frustrated when you ask me to give up something that’s important to me. I’d like us to find a way to fit my plans and your work commitments into our calendar.” This allows Kevin to see the impact on Jessica and invites collaboration toward a workable solution.

**Defensiveness versus responsibility.** The second red flag Gottman identified is defensiveness—the natural response to criticism. A sure sign of defensiveness is when you continually repeat yourself in an argument to get your point across, or you respond to your partner’s point with “yes, but.” Take this interaction, for example:  
*Jessica:* “I need you to prioritize my commitments. It’s like you don’t care about my needs.”  
*Kevin:* “**Yes, but** my career is important. I don’t think it’s that big a deal if some of your social events have to be rescheduled.”

Using “yes, but” makes it sound like Kevin is listening and agreeing, but really he’s disagreeing and restating his case. An effective alternative is acknowledging responsibility. Here’s a healthier exchange:  
*Jessica:* “I understand that it’s difficult to handle all the competing commitments of your job. I’ll try to plan my activities so that they’re known in advance, and you can schedule around them.”

*Kevin:* “I appreciate your need to have a social life. I’ll work



on drawing clear boundaries at work as to when I'm available."

Instead of striking back defensively, both parties acknowledge their responsibility in the situation while responding to their partner's needs.

**Contempt versus appreciation.** A third red flag is contempt—expressing superiority through insults, mockery, hostile humor, or eye rolling in hopes of hurting your partner. This is the most dangerous and strongest predictor of divorce. Contempt can build if unaddressed issues stew over time.

Regularly demonstrating authentic appreciation for your spouse can prevent the buildup of contempt. The most effective method of expressing appreciation involves doing small things often. Little gestures like bringing your spouse morning coffee or sending quick "love" texts, will help couples weather the storm of inevitable conflict and stress. Gottman's research indicates that the most stable marriages have a 5:1 ratio—five positive interactions for every negative one.<sup>5</sup>

constructively provides the most protection from relationship stress. Constructive conflict resolution often involves reframing the root of the problem. The issue in contention (e.g., Kevin's meetings that conflict with Jessica's commitments) is generally not the "problem." Rather, the problem is how we handle the conflict.

**Maintain your friendship.** The second key is maintaining your friendship and continuing to get to know your partner as he or she changes over time. Regular date nights, for example, provide meaningful opportunities for emotional intimacy. Prioritizing time for connection can be a struggle. "With the stress of the city and the issues of the day, you try to leave that behind for your spouse," said Jeremy Smith, city administrator in Sussex, Wisconsin. "We try to have a date night here and there, but with all the responsibilities of the job, it can be a challenge."

Gottman advises that you make this connection time non-negotiable. Morning coffee, leisurely walks, or long talks on the couch after putting the kids

- What are the top 3 things on your personal bucket list you'd like to accomplish in the next decade?
- If there were no limitations, what would be your next career move and why?

These conversation starters are similar to those suggested in Gottman's latest book, *Eight Dates: Essential conversations for a lifetime of love*.<sup>6</sup> Gottman's latest research suggests that tackling eight specific topics will add depth and longevity to your romantic partnership.

**Turn toward your partner.** The final protective factor is "turning toward" your partner when he or she makes a bid for your attention. For example, if your partner says: "Look at that beautiful sunset," you have a choice. You can say something dismissive like, "That's nice" with a quick glance. Or you can say something like, "Wow! Those colors are beautiful."

Each time you turn toward your partner, you're making a deposit in your "relationship piggy bank." This is the bank that we draw from in tough

we're leading right now, it's about the relationship we want in the future. When the stress of the profession threatens to seep into your partnership (because it will!) remember the goal—filling your relationship piggy bank for today and tomorrow. **PM**

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<sup>3</sup> Kennedy, S. & Ruggles, S. (2014). *Breaking Up is Hard to Count: The rise of divorce in the United States, 1980-2010*, (51), 587-598.; DePaulo, P. (Feb. 2017). What is the Divorce Rate Really? Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/living->

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## WHEN WE LIVE IN THE COMMUNITIES WE MANAGE, WE OFTEN FEEL FORCED TO PUT ON OUR "MANAGER HAT" WHEN WE PREFER TO BE OFF THE CLOCK.

### Keys to a Thriving Relationship

Gottman's 45 years of accumulated research suggest key behaviors in thriving relationships: Think of these as protective factors. They protect our relationship from the stress, scrutiny, and uncertainty that often accompany public sector careers.

**Handle conflict constructively.** Handling conflict

to bed all count. Ask each other open-ended questions that lead to meaningful conversation. Don't know where to start? Try questions like these:

- What was your favorite part of today?
- How have things turned out differently for us than you predicted when we first got together?
- What do you enjoy most about our relationship?

times. Gottman's research shows that happy couples turn toward each other 85 percent of the time, while unsatisfied couples do so only 36 times out of 100.

In our experience, healthy relationships at home nurture successful careers—whatever the profession. But maintaining a committed relationship is hard work. The effort we put in is not just about the life

# Finding *Balance* as a Single Professional

Be there for the team and **for yourself** | BY LINDSEY LUFT

**There's a lot of discussion** about how to balance family and work. But the conversation is a little different when you're a family of one. Being a single professional presents its own challenges in finding a work/life balance.

Single professionals may feel they're less entitled to their time off than their counterparts who have "more going on at home." Or they may feel they have no reason not to work long hours and on weekends to get things accomplished. Everyone deals with the issue of working late or on weekends, but single professionals don't always have someone urging them to spend more time away from the office. So working extra hours really is a personal decision.

It's easy to feel pressure to be the person who reliably covers the office while coworkers with families take time off. I've been the single professional in that situation. I feel

people, and I was eager to establish myself in the new job. I found myself waking up, going to work, coming home, and really not doing much else. Sometimes, I felt that everyone around me had so much going on in their lives while I was focused on reestablishing mine.

I was working for a small municipality where it was often all hands on deck at the public counter, and those of us who sat near the public area often pitched in to help. Two of the full-time individuals who were out front had unique family situations. One worked on an accommodated schedule, while the other often had home-based pressures but felt she needed to be at work. My colleagues and I, and the village manager, were respectful and supportive of these individuals' needs, and they were appreciative of our help.

Although I was happy to help out, the situation was emotionally challenging for me to deal with as I was trying

» **Taking a day off to mentally recover can go a long way toward improving your outlook, but it's also important to monitor yourself so you avoid reaching that point.**

it's important to fill in for these coworkers, but it's also important to protect your own time off. Covering for an employee who is attending to a family matter fosters a positive professional relationship between individuals and a sense of teamwork. However, if things are getting one-sided, it can have the opposite effect.

If you're the individual who is filling in, it's important to check in with yourself. Do you feel like a reliable coworker for what you're doing, or are you growing resentful? If you're starting to feel resentful, it may be time to discuss taking a personal day with your supervisor. Taking a day off to mentally recover can go a long way toward improving your outlook, but it's also important to monitor yourself so you avoid reaching that point. Plan time off, even if it's leaving early on a Friday.

to reestablish my life—not so successfully initially. I had to find a way to cope with being a single individual living in a new area and working in a small office with coworkers who had unique family situations.

My undergraduate studies in health education had made me aware of the stress factors that affect health, and eventually I realized that I needed to make a more conscious effort to establish healthy habits, such as long weekends in Rochester, meeting new people, and taking an exercise class. When I took time off, I was comforted by the support I received from my coworkers and the village manager. I felt rejuvenated when it was time to return to work.

## Recommendations for Growth

My suggestions to the overwhelmed single professional are to establish hobbies and be courageous enough to speak up about office situations. Hobbies are self-rewarding and encourage you to take time for yourself. Speaking up by initiating a conversation with the manager/administrator about taking time off is important so that he or she is aware of how you're feeling.



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## Special Challenges

I recently moved from my home in Rochester to Westchester County, New York, to advance my career. It was very challenging at first. I was five hours away from my previous home, living by myself; I knew very few



Another situation unique to the single professional is dating. A woman I met was working for a small municipality on a somewhat controversial project. She had a date who asked, “Aren’t you that woman who has been on the news?”

I’m sure many managers are accustomed to this type of reaction, but it’s different in the dating world because you’re potentially developing a long-term relationship. It’s important to be proud of your line of work, and anyone who becomes a long-term partner will have to be aware of what you do and how you feel about it. Transparency is essential.

Additionally, I find it important to establish friendships outside the office. This can be difficult when coworkers know you’re single and maybe also new to the area, and they want to help you make friends or become your friends. It’s enjoyable to be on a friendly basis with your coworkers, but it’s also important to establish your personal boundaries for making friends at work while maintaining the necessary level of professionalism. Hobbies and exercise classes are two ways to expand your circle of potential friends, even if you need to step out of your comfort zone.

As a single professional, be aware that you aren’t necessarily doomed to be the one constantly filling in for other staff at the office or that you’ll never meet someone or make new friends. The most important thing is to be patient with yourself, be aware of your attitude, and focus on where you want to go. **PM**

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# Manage This

| BY SAMANTHA WAGNER

## How to Promote Work-Life Balance in Your Organization

**It's time to recognize** that the workforce is changing. The quest for personal satisfaction as well as job flexibility is now at or near the top of an employee's list of job expectations. Employees recognize the "muscle" they enjoy in today's work environment. They want to be treated like adults and are ready to disassemble the work conventions of the past. They want to be involved in decision making and to participate in, perhaps even control, the design of their jobs.

Given this perspective, local government managers need to begin to develop mechanisms to ensure that employees can participate in processes that in the past were exclusive to management. Adapted from the ICMA IQ Service Report, "Work-Life Balance: Integrating Benefits With Expectation," here are five ways local government managers can promote work-life balance in their organizations:

**1. Offer work flextime.** Flextime refers to the policy of allowing employees to work a traditional eight-hour shift, but on a schedule of their choosing, within limits. Some people want early morning schedules while others prefer afternoon times for work. Flextime is appropriate when it does not matter at what hours the particular employee is in the workplace. The employer's need for consistency and for coverage during particular times of the day demands some limits on flexibility. Usually in flextime scheduling, the employee agrees to a

given set of hours and must provide notice for changing the schedule.

**2. Provide customized career paths.** To align employees' personal or professional goals with the mission of the organization, some employers help them determine where they want to go in their careers and then provide resources to help them reach their goals. Career development policies benefit the employer organization by building greater capacity in the workforce and greater loyalty to the organization. Employee skills as well as organizational effectiveness are enhanced.

The key component is a career development plan developed by the employee, usually in consultation with the employer. Components of career development can include working with different units or positions within the organization, shadowing other employees, and training and professional development.

**3. Allow for telecommuting.** Employers increasingly allow employees to work out of their homes or other locations with computer equipment and on-line capability provided by the employer. Some organizations also develop satellite work-sites with all the technology needed to get the work done. Telecommuting and work-at-home arrangements are very attractive to people with long commutes, and also allow employers to employ individuals who do not wish to relocate. Some employees are more productive working at home.

**4. Offer wellness programs.** More and more employers provide on-site fitness facilities and locker rooms and showers for employees who exercise at lunch time or who bike to work. Dakota County, Minnesota, for example, set aside approximately 3,000 square feet of space for a wellness facility, including showers. Many employers encourage employees to participate in wellness programs by offering some incentive. King County, Washington, for instance, provides Healthy Incentives (<https://kingcounty.gov/healthy-incentives>), a lifestyle program that offers financial incentives and follow-up coaching for those who sign on to the program.

**5. Encourage participation in the community.** Many employers also recognize that the quality of the organizational culture is related to the quality of community life. Thus, they provide time off for participation in community events or actually sponsor such activities. Employees often are encouraged to participate in community organizations and activities on the employer's time. The employer becomes known as a good citizen and builds much good will through such policies.

For more information about the report, "Work-Life Balance: Integrating Benefits With Expectation," visit [icma.org/publications](http://icma.org/publications) and search for Work-Life Balance. **PM**



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# Hired, **Fired**, Restored

An experienced manager tells how to avoid his **rookie mistakes**

BY BRAD TOWNSEND, ICMA-CM

**When they want you**, it's a wonderful feeling. When they decide you've overstayed your welcome, it can be crushing.

This is especially true when the job is at city hall or the county courthouse and has a relatively high profile in the community. Local government managers know that elected officials should be the real high-profile leaders while the manager works on plans and operations for them to help the community.

Whether you perform brilliantly in that role or stumble with a blunder, there's no guarantee that the governing board will continue to support you. As manager, you are a fiduciary of your community, but must also carefully look out for No. 1: You. What you do about that fact of life will define your career now and going forward.

## Background

I've served as a manager and consultant for local governments for more than 35 years. I've worked for cities and villages of varying sizes and for a variety of school districts. I've also had experience in a courthouse and a state capital.

The mayor or president and governing body decide policy. The manager and staff provide input, but their job is to implement policy direction. I learned over the years that in some communities there is tension between the mayor or president and the governing board. In other cases, there is tension between the elected officials and the manager over who should run daily operations. State law and local ordinances define the respective roles, but that alone does not settle everything.

## My Story

My first chief administrative post was with a county. I worked with an elected governing board and numerous elected department heads. Simultaneously, I earned my M.P.A. degree at nearby Northern Illinois University. But my very next municipal manager job gave me my first taste of forced termination.

Municipal officials had conducted their own employee search without the assistance of an executive recruiter. I didn't know it at the time, but using a professional executive recruiting firm can indicate elected officials' respect for the manager position.

Another thing I didn't know was the importance of securing an employment agreement. Fortunately, in this case, the elected officials offered a three-year agreement—my first.

Over the next three years, I helped produce the village's first strategic plan, promote and start multimillion-dollar capital projects, and negotiate major land development deals. The governing board reviewed my performance with high ratings.

Fast-forward to the election season in my third year. The term of my agreement was about to end, and I offered to renew or extend it. The elected officials said that would be fine, but they wanted to defer action until after the election.

Voters reelected the incumbents plus a few of their allies to all offices that were open. A couple of weeks later, I was told that the board would not renew my agreement. On top of that, the mayor said they would not honor the severance clause in the agreement.

I consulted an attorney who advised that my severance demand was valid due to their failure to formally notify me of non-renewal. Then, on impulse, I went to the municipal building. The mayor and others were in my former office. I yelled at the mayor, demanding my severance. We got way too close for comfort. I wanted to hit him. Thankfully, the >>





police chief was present and squeezed between us. I departed. A week later, on the advice of corporation counsel, the village sent a check for the full amount of severance.

I was hired by another municipality and began work there a few months later.

**Take-Aways**

I made some rookie mistakes. I should have:

- Recognized that the absence of a professional recruiter, while not necessarily a red flag, meant that I needed to be especially diligent in looking after my own interests during the recruitment and hiring process. (Fortunately, the village did offer me an employment agreement with, among other things, a severance clause.)
- Raised the question of extending my employment agreement earlier. (Perhaps I was naïve to assume that my positive performance ratings meant that extension was a sure thing.)
- Realized that my situation might be precarious when the elected officials wanted to postpone action on my agreement until after the election. (At that early point in my career, I didn't have the experience to "read the tea leaves.")
- Thought twice about almost coming to blows with the mayor. (That's not the impression a professional manager wants to make.)
- Started a job search immediately.

A major take-away is to avoid aligning a professional services agreement with the election cycle if at all possible.



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**AS MANAGER, YOU ARE A FIDUCIARY OF YOUR COMMUNITY, BUT MUST ALSO CAREFULLY LOOK OUT FOR NO. 1: YOU.**

**Aftermath**

I did move ahead with networking and job searching. My career advanced, and I continued to enjoy public service, directly as an employee and later as a consultant to local governments.

Several years later, I was contacted by a state investigator. Some members of that governing board had approved a land purchase contrary to Illinois statutes, and they were in legal jeopardy. Around that time, I had a chance conversation with the mayor at a municipal conference. He told me they regretted letting me go. So, he admitted to a mistake as well.

In retrospect, I know that I would not have participated in the illegal land purchase because of my commitment to adhere to the ICMA Code of Ethics. If the board knew that the Code of Ethics would prevent me from being involved, that could explain why my services were no longer needed. Sometimes it's okay to be fired! **PM**

# Fighting Climate Change

Local governments follow an ambitious pathway to **transform urban life**

BY SADHU AUFOCHS JOHNSTON

**More and more local** governments around the world are rising to the climate change challenge. Many are pushing to decarbonize their energy, building, transport, and waste systems and developing their resilience to the rise in sea levels and extreme precipitation and heat.

For the past 17 years, I have been deeply involved in the efforts of two cities—now, as city manager for Vancouver, British Columbia, and before that, as Chicago’s chief environmental officer. These cities are both global leaders in addressing climate change. More importantly, they are using their innovative efforts to make themselves into better places to live, work, and play.

Early in 2019, our newly elected council joined hundreds of other cities from around the world to declare a Climate Emergency. In April of this year, it unanimously approved an ambitious set of next steps intended to align Vancouver’s work with efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees. That call to action is a recommitment to taking steps to be a global leader, as well as confirmation that we must act now to protect our communities from the rapidly changing climate.

In Vancouver, we have used the commitment to taking action to help drive our economic growth. We have partnered with entrepreneurs to develop a fast-growing, job-creating “green economy” business sector, and we are home to 20 percent of Canada’s cleantech companies. Jobs and population in our community have each grown by more than a third since 1990, while our carbon emissions have decreased in that same time by about 7 percent.

Vancouver has successfully branded itself as a highly desirable place for young, innovative talent to find work and build companies. A 2015 study by Brand Finance, based in Toronto, found that Vancouver has one of the strongest brands, valued at \$31 billion, and that the city is uniquely associated with being clean, green, and environmentally sustainable.<sup>1</sup>

## Three Lessons for Local Governments

In my close work with mayors and councils, city departments, business community leaders, environmental activists, community-based leaders, universities, philanthropies, urban planners, architects, engineers, and residents, I’ve learned three lessons about how local governments can take action and have a significant impact in addressing climate change.

### 1. Innovate, innovate, innovate.

When local governments began to tackle climate change, no one knew how much they could do. It was assumed that national governments would have the greatest impact. But it turns out that cities and counties can do, and have done, much more than anyone imagined possible. The Global Covenant of Mayors has carbon-reducing commitments from more than 9,000 local governments with 800 million residents. More than 600 cities around the world measured and reported their emissions to CDP ([www.cdp.net/en](http://www.cdp.net/en)) and disclosed more than 8,000 urban sustainability actions.

In Vancouver, we are working toward achieving our goal to be 100 percent renewably powered before 2050 by reducing our energy usage and switching from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydropower. The largest source of carbon pollution is burning natural gas for space and water heating in buildings, so with strong support of council and the community, we have put in place a world-pioneering Zero Emission Building Plan for all new construction to ensure that new buildings are energy efficient and use no fossil fuel by 2030.

We struggled with the fact that we don’t control the sources of that energy, so we built Canada’s first sewer heat recovery system that harvests heat from a significant sewer line to provide heat to a neighborhood, thereby enabling residents and businesses to reduce their carbon emissions by 70 percent. To produce our own renewable energy, we are harvesting methane from the landfill and partnering with FortisBC, our gas utility, to clean the gas and put it into the fossil gas distribution system. Each of these solutions required taking an innovative approach to our challenges. >>



## 2. Connect, connect, connect.

Back in 2008, while in Chicago, I was charged with addressing the rising summer heat using green technologies, but I didn't know which cities and counties I could learn from, so I helped to start a peer-to-peer network, the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN, [www.usdn.org](http://www.usdn.org)) to find out what people in other cities were doing—to get the inside scoop, the questions and failures, not just the messages for public consumption.

And it worked: USDN now has more than 200 city and county members in North America. The city-to-city information sharing and collaboration have been extraordinarily robust and inspiring, and in 2018 the network members identified 14 high-impact “must do” practices for local governments.<sup>2</sup> I was learning so much from that network of North American cities that five years ago I helped to start another peer-cities network, the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA, [carbonneutralcities.org](http://carbonneutralcities.org)), of 20 vanguard cities in 10 countries that are global leaders in decarbonization.

CNCA had the same purpose: Share inside information about innovations and collaborate on research and experiments. Many other city-based networks, such as C40<sup>3</sup> and 100 Resilient Cities<sup>4</sup> have been started in just the past decade. All of them demonstrate the great value that is created when cities exchange information and insights and band together to learn, collaborate, and advocate. In the twenty-first century, no city alone can fully address the challenges of decarbonization and strengthening climate resilience.

## 3. Embrace bold, transformational ideas and vision.

It's critical for cities to have a clear vision about where they want to go. These visions are built on ideas about what cities can and should be. As mentioned earlier, Vancouver's city council has declared that we will be 100 percent renewably powered by 2050. It's hard to imagine a city without the noise and pollution that comes from burning gas and diesel, but we are more than 30 percent of the way there already, and our plan will get us there.

In the process, we are using demonstration projects, neighborhood working groups, clean-energy conferences, and social-media campaigns to inspire our residents and businesses. The big ideas underpinning this vision—a green city, a competitive city, a renewable-energy city, an equitable city—are bold because they are quite



different from the ideas on which most modern cities have been built. They represent a radical change in our thinking about what Vancouver and other cities can become—and these ideas for urban transformation are taking hold across the globe. Of course, this work must be done with a strong lens on equity to ensure that everyone, especially low-income people and traditionally under-represented people, are involved with and can benefit from these changes.



## IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, NO CITY ALONE CAN FULLY ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF DECARBONIZATION AND STRENGTHENING CLIMATE RESILIENCE.

### Life After Carbon

Vancouver is not alone in following this ambitious pathway. Cities large and small, wealthy and poor, on every continent are innovating and connecting in response to climate change. The vigor, impact, and transformational direction of this urban movement has been fully documented in a book, *Life After Carbon: The Next Global Transformation of Cities* by Peter Plastrik and John Cleveland (Island Press, 2018).

The authors look closely at 25 cities worldwide—including Austin, San Francisco, Copenhagen, London, Shanghai, Melbourne, Cape Town, Mexico City, and, yes, Vancouver—and explain how they have become “climate innovation laboratories” at the leading edge of systemic urban change. These cities “have come to understand themselves, their place in the world, in a new way and act boldly on their changed awareness.”

The book describes the rise and impact of a global urban “Rebel Alliance.” It's a network of networks; a new urban capacity of countless city officials, community activists, professionals, corporate leaders, scholars, and others—“a self-organizing, tireless swarm with no commander-in-chief, following the ‘North Star’ of climate action.”

Most usefully, *Life After Carbon* identifies four big transformative ideas that are at the heart of the many climate innovations cities have developed—and shows how these ideas are being applied worldwide. In this set of new ideas, cities are understood to be primary drivers of:



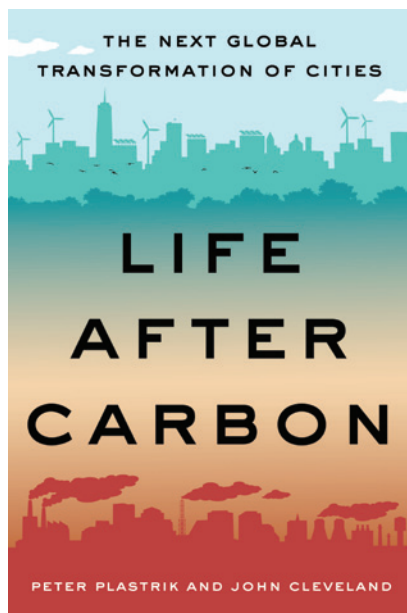
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- Economic innovation and growth, meaning they can turn the world's emerging renewable-energy economy into business and jobs.
- Environmental quality, human health, and social inclusion—values that reach beyond an economic standard of living.
- Restoration of nature inside and outside of cities; turning back to nature to provide environmental, social, health, and economic benefits.
- Preparation for and adaptation to uncertainties and risks in ways that build civic capacity and social cohesion.

“Gradually,” note the authors, “transformational ideas are becoming a new standard for cities—not just a toolbox of innovations but a radically different way of thinking about, a model for, city development and urban achievement around the world.”

Plastrik and Cleveland know what they are talking about—having worked in and alongside many cities. They helped to build the USDN and CNCA networks



and have written insightful reports about cities' climate innovations. *Life After Carbon* presents an inspiring account of actual urban change that could not have been written just 10 years ago; there simply wasn't enough going on then.

But today, the story of cities' transformative journeys makes compelling reading for local government leaders everywhere. My experiences in Vancouver and Chicago and in various city-based networks have taught me that, as *Life After Carbon* puts it, “The successor to the modern city is busy being born.”

If your council is considering declaring a climate emergency and getting in on this action, I urge you to pick up a copy of this book to see what other cities are doing and how they're doing it. **PM**

#### ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup> <https://vancouver.ca/news-calendar/brand.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usdn.org/public/page/137/USDN-High-Impact-Practices>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.c40.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.100resilientcities.org/>



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We would like to welcome the new ICMA members who have joined our association from January 2019 through April 2019. You are now able to take advantage of all your membership has to offer, including PM magazine! Be sure to explore this and all your member benefits at [icma.org/benefits!](http://icma.org/benefits!)

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Roger Kemp's background and professional skills are highlighted on his website. Dr. Kemp was a city manager in politically, economically, socially, and ethnically diverse communities.

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# PUBLIC SECTOR WORKFORCE 2030 SUMMIT:

Planning for the Next Generation of State  
and Local Government Employees



The Center for State and Local Government Excellence (**SLGE**), the National League of Cities (**NLC**) and ICMA Retirement Corporation (**ICMA-RC**) will be hosting a reception on September 26, and a full day summit on September 27, 2019, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida that will center around the theme of planning for the public sector workforce of the future.

## SUMMIT CONTENT

### Rethinking Retirement

- Restructuring retirement plans to prepare for the “workforce of the future”
- Applying models from other settings—private/nonprofit sectors, international or other levels of government
- Using behavioral economics to encourage better saving habits among workers, especially those that may undersave

### Workforce Trends

- Shaping the future workforce through recruitment and development
- Responding to generational differences and demographic shifts
- Identifying public sector positions showing the greatest growth, position types being reduced or eliminated, positions most difficult to fill
- Examining the role of technological advancements on the changing workforce
- Adapting education systems and technical training to meet anticipated needs
- Prioritizing equity and inclusion

### Health and Wellness Benefits

- Addressing the issue of work-life balance (e.g., family leave, elder care and other needs through different life stages)
- Innovating around schedule flexibility, succession planning and advancement opportunities
- Fostering a healthier workforce in a cost-effective manner

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- Keynote presentations, expert panels, and small group discussions
- Issues explored from a wide range of perspectives:
  - Government agency managers
  - Retirement/benefits administrators
  - Human resource professionals
  - Union representatives
  - Members of the academic and research communities
- **Summit Welcoming Reception, September 26, 2019, 5:00pm**  
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