

# PM

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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Addressing the Mental Health Crisis  
In Emergency Services



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BY MARTHA PEREGO

## DEALING WITH EVERYDAY ETHICAL ISSUES

A training session I conducted recently on building effective supervisory skills generated interesting ethical dilemmas. Here are three that were discussed at the session:

### Unethical Conduct at the Top

**Dilemma:** “I saw a new department director do something that I thought was definitely unethical. I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want a confrontation. Nor did I want to do anything that might derail what looks like the beginning of a pretty good working relationship. That said, I can’t ignore the issue. I just have no idea how to start the conversation.”

**Response:** Regardless of how bad the conduct appears, resist the urge to rush to judgment. Did you witness the whole episode? Do you have all the relevant facts? Do you know precisely what the other person was thinking and what motivated the behavior?

Assume positive intent. Begin the conversation assuming that the individual did not do anything wrong. Ask for an opportunity to talk about your concerns with an emphasis on understanding the context and getting the facts.

If you haven’t had “the talk” with the department director—the one about ethical values and expectations—this might actually be a good, albeit awkward, way to start a critical conversation. You can’t really build an authentic working relationship if you don’t know the other person’s values.

You may be dealing with a misunderstanding, a difference of opinion on where to draw the ethical line in the sand, a willful unethical act, or an

unintentional mistake. What you learn will guide your next steps.

In the end, it’s better to be clear about ethical standards than to guess. And when, as a leader, one of your direct reports approaches you with a concern about your behavior, you will appreciate just how much courage that takes. Drop the defenses, don’t shoot the messenger, and be kind!

### Supervising the Ethically Clueless

**Dilemma:** “What if there’s a pattern of behavior that is unethical and the employee just doesn’t exercise good judgment? The person’s intentions seem to be good, but she doesn’t exercise adequate boundaries and doesn’t realize or feel her action(s) are unethical. Is this something a person is born with or is it a learned skill?”

**Response:** To be blunt, if you have hired someone who doesn’t know right from wrong—lies, cheats, steals, or is abusive—cut your losses now. For all others, consider that the ability to identify and make ethical choices in the workplace is not hard wired.

It’s a skill that can be learned. And regular reinforcement of appropriate behavior does produce desired results.

Some employees don’t see their conduct as unethical because they have really never given it much consideration. They may be good, technically competent people. They just don’t think about the values that should direct their conduct in the workplace.

And if their employer is silent on the subject, where is the impetus for them to start thinking about ethics?



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

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**"IN THE END, IT'S BETTER TO BE CLEAR ABOUT ETHICAL STANDARDS THAN TO GUESS. AND WHEN, AS A LEADER, ONE OF YOUR DIRECT REPORTS APPROACHES YOU WITH A CONCERN ABOUT YOUR BEHAVIOR, YOU WILL APPRECIATE JUST HOW MUCH COURAGE THAT TAKES. DROP THE DEFENSES, DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER, AND BE KIND!"**

Employers have to set clear standards, have regular conversations about values, and set boundaries based on real work situations. When you have done that, then you are best positioned to hold employees accountable for their conduct.

What to do then with the employee who just doesn't seem to get it?

Get all the available facts to clearly define the problem or issue. Consider the person's level of responsibility. Anyone in a supervisory capacity should be held to a higher standard.

After all, they are supposed to model good behavior for their direct reports.

What is the nature and severity of the violation? Has the employee been down this very road before?

If not, perhaps coaching is an appropriate intervention. If you have tried all of this and still get the same unethical conduct, work on the individual's exit strategy.

### **BFFs in the Workplace**

**Dilemma:** "Since getting promoted, I now supervise someone who is actually a friend. We started working for a county government at the same time as equals. We don't hang out together socially but are friends and confidants. Is this unethical? How do I deal with this situation?"

**Response:** This one has elements of ethics and HR. On the ethics front, it is not unethical to supervise this staff member/

friend as long as you can be impartial, objective, and fair in all of your actions and decisions. But you need to do some soul searching.

Think carefully about whether or not you can rise above the relationship. Will you be able to deliver both positive and negative feedback? Can you set aside your personal feelings in order to objectively evaluate work performance? What criteria will you use to self-assess or evaluate your ability to do so?

One option is to just lay the issue on the table with the team. Acknowledge that having been around for a while, you are closer to some staff than others. Address the reality that while you will strive to treat everyone fairly and impartially, perceptions may differ.

Offer the opportunity to talk with any staff member who thinks your actions may not be living up to your commitment. By being candid, you may actually end up building trust with the new team.

If you can't be impartial, you have both an ethics and a management problem. Actual or perceived favoritism is a morale killer. **PM**



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# WHAT'S THE HARDEST THING YOU'VE EVER DONE AS A MANAGER?



## KIMBALL PAYNE, ICMA-CM

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The hardest thing that I have ever done as a manager was to go to the home of an employee, inform his wife that he had been in a serious accident, and escort her to the hospital.

Although I had been told to expect the worst, I held out hope for a different result.

At the hospital we met the chaplain and other staff members who confirmed the tragedy. The next few days were spent supporting the widow, other family members, and fellow employees.

Understanding and fulfilling your responsibilities in response to sudden tragedies or community crises can be one of the biggest challenges that managers face.



## CAROLYN LEHR

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The toughest thing that I as a manager must do is make the commitment to develop strong and well-functioning organizations. This inevitably involves the not-so-pleasant and time-consuming task of addressing employee performance issues.

Managers need to step away from our emotions and perform our duty no matter how difficult the task or level of resistance. Experience reinforces the fact that employees are our most critical investment, and I decided long ago that the effort required to activate performance improvement can pay off in dividends.

When I need inspiration, a quick review of Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* sets the course for me:

1. Be proactive.
2. Begin with the end in mind.
3. Put first things first.
4. Think win/win.
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
6. Synergize.
7. Sharpen the saw!



## GRAYSON PATH

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I'm only in my third year of local government administration since getting my graduate degree, so I can't say I have experienced it all. Perhaps the hardest thing I have done, however, is simply learn how to be an administrator.

I started my career as the first administrator for a small-sized town in rural Kansas. I learned a lot in those two years, thanks largely to a great administrator network, but had to plow a feral field.

From depleted reserves to a 30-year-old personnel manual to an aging utility infrastructure to replacing a power plant, we tackled a lot of tough and locally important issues head on and got the town on a good track.

Ultimately, I believe we built an atmosphere of successful administration that will hopefully endure for that community. **PM**

1



# NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ZIKA?

Knowledge on this virus can save lives. Check out these fact sheets and other resources.

► [icma.org/zika](http://icma.org/zika)

2

## KEY RESOURCES ON PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

Puzzled about parental leave policies? The Knowledge Network has information to share, including local government policy examples.

► [http://icma.org/Paid\\_Parental\\_Leave](http://icma.org/Paid_Parental_Leave)

3

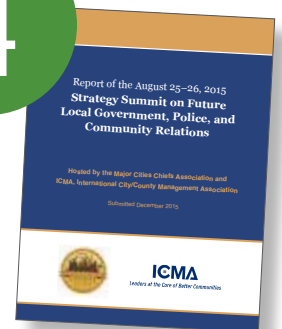
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## STRATEGY SUMMIT

Managers, mayors, and police chiefs discuss implementing recommendations of The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing and identifying community-based approaches that can improve trust in public institutions.

► [icma.org/strategy\\_summit](http://icma.org/strategy_summit)



# TRAUMA TAKES ITS TOLL

Addressing the mental health crisis  
in emergency services

By Jay Fitch and Jim Marshall





**A**midst growing concern about the mental health of emergency medical service (EMS) professionals, a Fitch & Associates' Ambulance Service Manager Program project team surveyed more than 4,000 EMS and fire professionals in 2015 about critical stress, suicide, and available support and resources.<sup>1</sup>

The results were stark.

Among survey respondents, 37 percent reported contemplating suicide—nearly 10 times the overall rate among American adults.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, 6.6 percent of survey respondents had attempted suicide, compared to just 0.5 percent of adults nationally.

Mental health issues are not limited to the EMS workforce. According to the Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance, at least 759 firefighters have committed suicide since 2012.<sup>3</sup> In law enforcement, estimates suggest between 125 and 300 police officers commit suicide every year.<sup>4,5</sup>

These numbers should be a wake-up call, not only for every emergency medical technician (EMT), paramedic, firefighter, police officer, and emergency telecommunicator (sometimes called dispatchers or call-takers), but also for agency leaders and county and city officials who work with them.

## TAKEAWAYS

- › Emergency responders are at heightened risk for post-traumatic stress disorders, acute and chronic stress, depression, and suicide.
- › Local officials and public safety agency leaders have a responsibility to ensure that all emergency responders are appropriately trained in how to manage stress and are offered educational materials, resources, and support to care for their mental health and well-being.

Let's take a moment to pause here. How many brave and talented people are in your community—from those who answer the 911 calls to the EMTs, firefighters, and police who respond to them? Perhaps 20? 50? 500?

Now do the math. With these numbers, the survey findings would suggest that perhaps 7, or 18, or even 185 people on your team have thought about suicide.

One or more of them may have already attempted suicide or could in the future. Do you know who they are? Do you know how to help?

To address this mental health crisis in emergency services, industry leaders must join together to further define the problem, explore its causes, and pursue strategic planning to protect and equip the workforce.

## The Traumatic Stress Factor

There is almost certainly a correlation between the impact of traumatic stress and the extraordinary statistics on suicide seen in our survey and other research. When a responder experiences intense fear, horror, or helplessness in response to a scene at which someone experienced serious injury or death, he or she has been exposed to a traumatic event.

Some of the common reactions to traumatic events include anxiety, irritability, sleep disorders and fatigue, appetite changes, and withdrawal from friends and family.<sup>6</sup>

Acute stress disorder describes cases in which some or all of these symptoms are experienced for more than two days after the event, but not for longer than one month. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is diagnosed when these symptoms persist for more than one month.<sup>7</sup>

On-the-job stress among emergency responders can also trigger the release of cortisol and other stress hormones. This stress response is normal—and helpful—but when it occurs too frequently without

adequate rebalancing, it ups the risk for chronic stress response, which can lead to physical and mental disorders.<sup>8</sup>

Each person's response may differ. Leaders need to be vigilant in watching for signs of acute and post-traumatic stress disorders among their public safety personnel.

### **Emergency Dispatchers Also at Risk**

Although many people both inside and outside of the EMS, fire, and law enforcement fields understand the inherent stress of responding to emergency scenes, often the stress on 911 dispatchers is greatly underestimated.

One study found that between 17 percent and 24 percent of telecommunicators reported symptoms consistent with PTSD; 24 percent reported symptoms consistent with major depression.<sup>9</sup>

Another study reported that more than 16 percent of telecommunicators experience symptoms of compassion fatigue—a combination of post-traumatic stress symptoms and burnout.<sup>10</sup>

Emergency dispatchers may experience some stressors unique to their position. They receive, for example, no warning before crisis calls and seldom have closure afterwards.

They engage in a far greater number of contacts with residents than field responders and need to visualize the worst possible scenario to optimize the response. As a result, emergency dispatchers are also on scene—psychologically.<sup>11</sup>

### **Need for a Culture Shift**

Many first responders share what is called an emotional code, defined as what they believe they should do with what they feel. Emergency responders have historically lacked understanding of how to cope with their extraordinary stress.

As a traditionally male-dominated profession, emergency responders often associate job-related stress or seeking professional mental health care with personal weakness. To avoid psychic pain they didn't know how to face, the default became to adopt a "just suck it up" emotional code.

This emotional code, which still prevails today, precludes asking for help and can greatly increase the risk of PTSD, depression, and suicide.

Saving lives and ensuring the emotional health of emergency service professionals must start with a culture shift, guided by leaders advocating for a healthier emotional code.

This effort must be part of a larger strategic initiative by local elected and administrative officials to create policies that support the mental well-being of emergency service personnel and educate agency leaders about work-related stress risks.

Front-line emergency responders need access to training in stress management and to evidence-based treatment for stress-related conditions

running 24-hour or longer shifts, it is at even higher risk for fatigue, burnout, and other stress-related problems.

The 911 telecommunicators and responders aren't the only ones at risk; when EMS, fire, and law enforcement personnel are under greater stress, their performance may be affected. They may make a mistake on the road or a medical error when caring for a patient, which presents a danger to the public and to patients.

Historically, when a public safety worker handles a call poorly, especially if the media covers the case, there is a demand that he or she be reprimanded or fired. Local officials should respect that emergency responders are human beings who work under enormously stressful conditions.

## **MANAGERS SHOULD KEEP A CLOSE WATCH ON LEAVE USE, WHICH CAN BE A SYMPTOM OF A DEPARTMENT THAT NEEDS HELP.**

as well as supportive, emotionally open work cultures.

City and county leaders should invest in protecting medical first responders' mental health because it is our civic duty to care for the people who care for our communities when a crisis hits. Not providing appropriate support and care for emergency responders also has wide-reaching implications.

An agency that has not yet addressed employees' stress-related conditions will struggle with lower morale, higher leave use, and more turnover. Managers should keep a close watch on leave use, which can be a symptom of a department that needs help.

Given the time and cost of hiring and training new personnel, it is well worth the investment in stress management programs and other structures to support public safety personnel.

Managers should also review scheduling patterns. When a team is

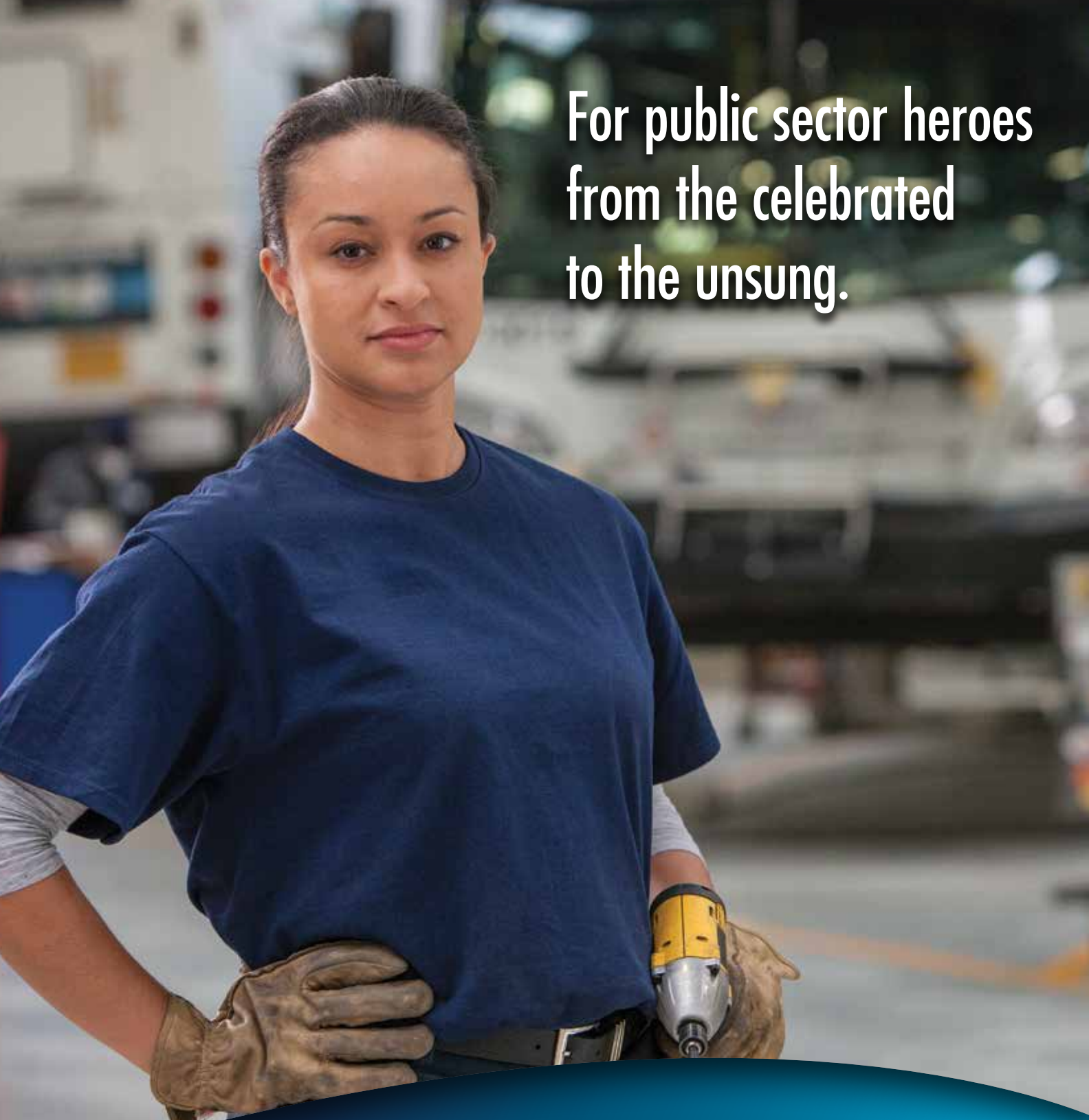
### **Providing Support**

Local leaders, communities, agency leaders, and the media all have a responsibility to help support emergency responders' well-being through research, intervention, policy, and education.

Although developed for 911 telecommunicators, the National Emergency Number Association's 9-1-1 Standard on Acute/Traumatic and Chronic Stress Management provides guidance that can be used by local officials to support all emergency services employees and volunteers.<sup>12</sup>

The standard describes Comprehensive Stress Management Plans with these elements:

**Offer stress management training** that is at least eight hours in length and covers such topics as stress disorders and the impacts of unmanaged stress, the negative effects of the "just suck it up" culture, and specific coping skills and strategies.



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# EMERGENCY RESPONDERS HAVE HISTORICALLY LACKED UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO COPE WITH THEIR EXTRAORDINARY STRESS.

**Provide all personnel with on-site educational materials**, including information about local and online resources, and how exercise, nutrition, and sleep can affect stress levels.

**Ensure that all EMS personnel can participate in critical incident stress management (CISM) activities.** CISM support services can be helpful for EMS professionals. According to the Fitch & Associates survey, of the 86 percent of respondents who experienced critical stress, only 18 percent attended a critical incident stress management-type debriefing, but the majority of those who did, found the sessions very helpful or extremely helpful.

Those at risk of suicide, however, should only participate in debriefing sessions with a group after careful individual assessment to ensure such experiences will be safe and helpful.

**Create or promote an employee assistance program (EAP)** to offer free confidential counseling with clinicians who understand the public safety community and specialize in traumatic stress disorders. In our survey, 11 percent of respondents attended employee assistance program sessions, and 53 percent found them very or extremely helpful.

**Identify local therapists** specializing in treatment of stress and traumatic stress disorders with public safety personnel and who use such evidence-based therapies as exposure therapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), and stress inoculation therapy (SIT). Evidence-based treatments for PTSD, including EMDR, can completely cure PTSD and bring tremendous relief for depression in many cases.

## RESOURCES

Other helpful resources can be found at:

**911 Wellness Foundation:**

911wellness.com

**International Critical Incident Stress Foundation:** icisf.org

**Code Green Campaign:**  
codegreencampaign.org

**Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance:** ffbha.org

**Develop peer-support programs.** These programs offer confidential emotional support without providing advice or attempting to solve the problem and can help alleviate stress and staff conflicts.

**Adopt programs that incentivize** 911 telecommunications professionals to make lifestyle changes to protect their mental and physical well-being.

Emergency services professionals are currently experiencing an epidemic of mental health crises and suicides among their ranks. This is a problem that communities cannot afford to ignore. These professionals risk their lives and well-being, including their mental health, caring for others.

It is the responsibility of elected officials, local administrators, and public-safety leaders to support and fund programs that train managers and supervisors in ways to protect their employees, that teach responders how to better manage stress, and that help individual employees and crews recognize dangerous signs in themselves and in their colleagues. **PM**

## ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

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# Losing Experienced Workers Is Costly

Strategies to increase their engagement

By Howard Risher



## TAKEAWAYS

- › Public employers can develop a strategy to benefit from the knowledge that older workers have developed.
- › Older workers may need more than just early retirement incentives as they continue contributing to the workplace.

**It was not too long ago that employers were offering financial incentives for older workers to retire early.** The aging government workforce has been a topic of interest for more than a decade, with reports showing that government employers have more workers over age 45 than nongovernment employers. Emerging skill gaps suggest replacing that talent will be increasingly difficult. »

The demographic trends mean that organizations will lose their most experienced talent as workers retire or move into part-time employment as they age. The loss of job knowledge will be difficult to replace as the supply of qualified Generation Xers is limited. Young workers also may not be ready to fill their shoes.

Instead of early retirement incentives, it could be that incentives to continue working will be needed.

## The Demographic Facts

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2014 the U.S. workforce was roughly 144 million, including almost 8.7 million working in elementary and secondary schools and 6.7 million working in public administration. An additional 1.3 million work in government hospitals.

In the nongovernment workforce, 44 percent are over age 45. In education the percentage jumps to 51 percent; in “public administration” it is 52 percent. When the groups are combined, the total over age 45 includes a total of 7.9 million workers.

The youngest workers are in “justice, public order, and safety activities,” which accounts for 42 percent of the public administration workforce.

In some jurisdictions, the workforce is dominated by older workers. In nongovernment sectors, only 15 percent of the workforce is older than 55; the comparable percentage working in government is 26 percent and a high percentage will soon be eligible to retire.

Those are national totals and as always, individual jurisdictions will be above and below the averages.

## Increasing Engagement of Older Workers

Retirement at some point is inevitable for everyone. Employers have years invested in its experienced workers, but as they approach their earliest retirement date, if they do not feel valued, their level of commitment will begin to decline.

Rather than planning simply to replace older workers, which is traditional thinking, public employers

can develop a strategy to take continued advantage of the knowledge older workers have developed.

Each employee’s decision to retire depends on circumstances that include their sense of how they are valued and their ongoing work experience. Looking to the future, the demographic facts suggest public employers will need to retain employees as long as they remain productive.

While the focus here is on older workers, it is important to keep in mind the needs and expectations of all workers. It’s possible that your workforce includes three generations of workers born anytime between the late 1940s and the early 1990s—roughly a 45-year period—each with their own values and career plans.

Here are steps that can be considered for this range of employees:

**Commit to creating a culture of knowledge sharing.** Executive team members need to make a visible effort to regularly meet with internal experts on key

## Update job descriptions to remove any statements that suggest employee age. Delete statements related to experience or education requirements that have not been validated.

practices to understand newer methods and work practices. They should agree to attend group discussions of new technology and also agree to attend discussions of feedback from clients and customers.

**Engage older (possibly those over age 50) employees in discussions of how their work experience can be enhanced.** Two important themes are how their job-related knowledge can be better used and any policies or practices that undermine their ability to perform at their best.

**Recognize and reward.** A common weakness in employee management

practices is employee dissatisfaction with recognition-and-reward practices. In contrast to the private sector, where there are frequent reasons to celebrate accomplishments, public agencies and the critics of them tend to focus more often on situations involving poor performance.

People at all ages want to be valued and recognized for their accomplishments. Those years-of-service awards are nice, but it would be more powerful to recognize true achievements and expand the reasons to recognize employees.

## Update job descriptions to remove any statements that suggest employee age.

Delete statements related to experience or education requirements that have not been validated.

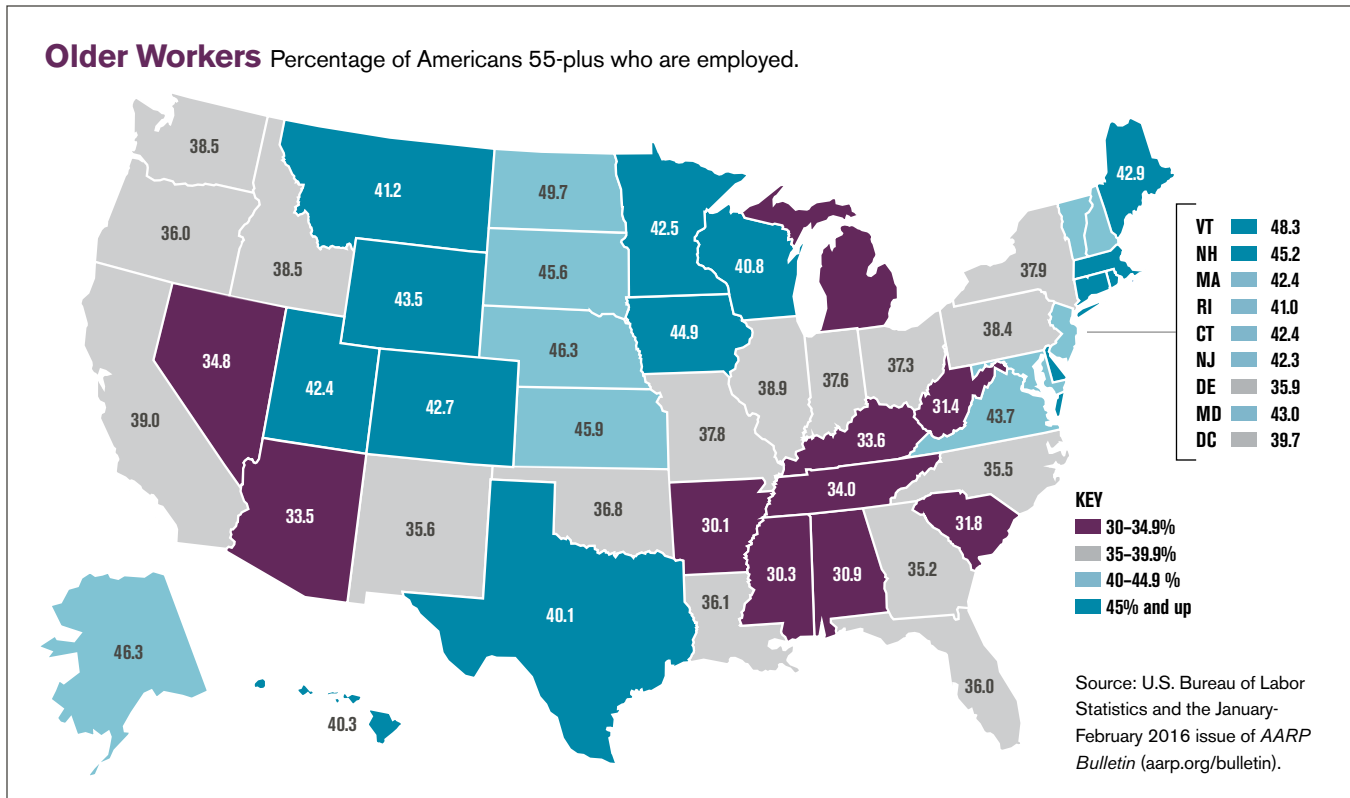
Offer older workers opportunities to use a portion of their work hours to develop ideas to improve the results of their organization. Require proposals for their planned projects with estimates of the time, needed resources, and the expected results.

**Permit employees to retire, start pension benefits, and then return to work** with a part-time schedule that fits their organization’s operation to ensure continued access to the expertise of older workers.

The part-time role can be a way to transition to retirement but also keep employee knowledge available for a longer period. State laws governing pensions vary, but demographic facts suggest greater flexibility will be needed.

**Offer a deferred retirement option plan (DROP),** which is a related alternative that is especially attractive to employees with credited service at the pension

## Older Workers Percentage of Americans 55-plus who are employed.



plan max. In the planning stage, DROP provisions should be assessed by an actuary for costs, but it defers the benefit payments for a few years. Note: In the past, these plans were typically limited to law enforcement personnel.

**Review the performance management system** to confirm that the focus is on results and competencies specific to a job family. All workers should agree their performance has been rated on criteria intuitively relevant to their job, and there should be no reason for claims of age discrimination.

**Analyze recent personnel actions**—ratings, promotions, pay increases, bonus awards, layoffs, and disciplinary actions—for evidence of discrimination. Complete a similar analysis at least annually.

**Provide training for managers and supervisors in dealing with the issues related to an aging workforce.** The sessions can give managers an opportunity to share experience and seek advice. A proven strategy is to confer with and seek the input of older workers in planning efforts.

**Define formal mentoring and coaching roles that give older workers a reason to share their knowledge with younger workers.** Communicate the initiative as recognition of the expertise demonstrated by highly regarded older workers and the learning opportunities for younger workers.

**Create groups that include both older and young employees to discuss and collaborate in addressing problems and future operating plans.** Working together provides opportunities for knowledge transfer as well as occasions for older workers to demonstrate their expertise.

**Consider developing a wellness program,** which would benefit all employees but could be especially valuable to older workers. Providing for health screenings, health-risk appraisals, smoking cessation programs, weight-loss programs, or counseling, for example, would represent a valued benefit.

**Offer caregiver support for workers struggling with caregiving responsibilities** for younger dependents, older loved

ones, or both. Caregiving responsibilities are cited as one of the primary reasons why mature workers need work schedule flexibility.

**Consider modifications to job duties and working environment** if an older worker has a disability to enable them to remain productive. It is highly probable that this will become increasingly important as workers grow older.

**Create a group of retired employees with recognized expertise and treat them as consultants who are available to tackle problems.** They can be paid on a basis that recognizes their value and the market for comparable expertise. They can also fill in for employees on leave or vacation. **PM**



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# LOCAL GOVERNMENT THAT CLICKS

FREE APPS + SKILLED CIVIC  
TECH VOLUNTEERS

By John Stephens

**M**ost local governments depend on an array of databases, applications, and devices to meet the needs of their internal operations along with their external services to residents. Information technology (IT) is a constantly changing part of government operations.

So, I'm sure *Public Management* readers are skeptical about any claim that has to do with "free apps." It sounds like a come-on with a hidden agenda.

Yes, nothing is truly free; however, even for smaller jurisdictions, civic technology, including volunteer assistance, is one part of the rapidly developing IT world. This article focuses on efforts that use the services of volunteers and local government-nonprofit fellowships.

Volunteer assistance, with its pros and cons, can provide a starting point, especially for jurisdictions with limited internal IT expertise.

## Assessing Assistance Needs

I write as both a researcher on public participation and government IT and as a member of a local volunteer IT "brigade." Brigades are local groups of IT specialists and interested residents working to convert open data into useful information, customized to community needs.

Here are three touchstones for assessing how less expensive or free skilled IT assistance can fit some local government needs.

### ► App Bank

Since 2010, the national nonprofit Code for America has seeded a variety of ways to help bring government into the 21st century with technology that fits the times.

From projects begun in larger cities using open source, nonproprietary software, the resulting applications (apps) are available for wider use. Some apps are controlled by the local jurisdiction and may be repurposed.

Other apps have become part of civic tech start-up firms, often created by former Code for America fellows as

they complete their one-year fellowships working with a particular local government. Some apps have an acquisition cost, and all require skilled IT assistance to ensure a careful fit with backend data and management systems.

Since late 2015, Code for America prioritized work on government services in health, economic development, safety and justice, and communications and engagement (<http://www.codeforamerica.org/why-government/focus-areas>).

Earlier apps are grouped by education, maps and transit, as well as the categories above. The array is impressive and growing (<http://tinyurl.com/zo6ole2>). Here are a few examples:

**Reaching residents on mobile devices – Textizen and Citygram.** In 2012, the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Code for America fellows developed Textizen ([www.textizen.com](http://www.textizen.com)), an SMS survey platform to better reach young people and mobile-device users. Getting and sharing good information from and about residents, while protecting confidentiality, will be an important part of building a more participative local government.

Currently, Textizen is used by Boston, Massachusetts; Palo Alto, California; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and it is available for adoption by other communities.

A similar application, aimed at getting community feedback about neighborhood issues, was developed in South Bend, Indiana ([www.cityvoiceapp.com](http://www.cityvoiceapp.com)).

Citygram is Charlotte, North Carolina's homegrown way to provide alerts to residents who choose which areas of the city are important to them: where they live, work, or have other connections.

Designed especially for mobile devices ([www.citygram.org](http://www.citygram.org)), it was created in 2014 and is managed by the Code for Charlotte local brigade, in coordination with city government. It has been adapted to Lexington, Kentucky ([www.citygram.org/lexington](http://www.citygram.org/lexington)) and New York City ([www.citygram.nyc](http://www.citygram.nyc)).

**Improving procurement.** In 2015, Pittsburgh developed Beacon (<https://procurement.pittsburghpa.gov/beacon>) a platform to improve outreach to vendors. The purpose is to expand the pool of potential vendors, and to improve contracting relationships for more effective procurement. The application has received high marks, with more than 300 businesses signing up shortly after the app was launched.

**Where's My School Bus?** is a location information app allowing parents to track their child's bus in real time ([www.codeforamerica.org/products/wheres-my-school-bus](http://www.codeforamerica.org/products/wheres-my-school-bus)).

**CyclePhilly** is a freely available smartphone app for recording bicycle trips. Beyond individual interest, the data from the app can be used by regional transportation planners for safety and traffic management work. Atlanta, Georgia; Austin, Texas; Knoxville, Tennessee; San Francisco, California; and two German cities have deployed the app <http://datalook.io/cycle-philly>.

### Child care and pre-school options.

Day care and pre-school providers are organized and mapped, with information about licensing, before and after school or full-day options, and ages served. Developed by the Oakland brigade (<http://earlyoakland.org>), it is also in use in Indianapolis (<https://codeforamerica.github.io/earlyindy>).

### Greenways, Trails – a high-tech mapping and navigation tool.

Begun as a Code for America project, OpenTrails ([www.codeforamerica.org/specifications/trails](http://www.codeforamerica.org/specifications/trails)) is a data standard that is integrated into various civic tech companies.

Trailhead Labs, for example ([www.trailheadlabs.com](http://www.trailheadlabs.com)), has worked with more than 225 local, state, and federal agencies and nonprofits in California, Colorado, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, and Tennessee, covering 19,000 miles of trails with another 12,000 miles in develop-

ment for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Boulder, Colorado, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, adopted OpenTrails and are engaging the civic tech community to build trail prototype maps and apps.

**OpenCiRM.** A final example goes back a few years when Miami-Dade, Florida, IT staff developed OpenCiRM, which is a customer relations management and 311 system. It is fully free online (<https://github.com/sharegov/opencirm>). A demo is available at <http://tinyurl.com/hffyrx2> and there is question-and-answer support through sharegov at Google docs (<http://tinyurl.com/jxuqy3u>).

Beyond particular applications, Code for America offers an online guide for assessing the basic websites of cities, towns, and counties. Called Digital Front Door, it addresses design, user experience, and assessment ([www.codeforamerica.org/our-work/initiatives/digitalfrontdoor](http://www.codeforamerica.org/our-work/initiatives/digitalfrontdoor)).

Also, for free download are tools for data analytics (i.e., the website's traffic) (<http://tinyurl.com/zkueals>) and a residents survey to assist when a website redesign is anticipated (<http://tinyurl.com/h5l6z5x>).

### ► **Civic Tech Volunteers—Local Brigades**

Only since 2012 has Code for America supported grass-roots efforts for long-term civic tech assistance through organizing skilled IT professionals to contribute to their community. The “brigades” are volunteer groups seeking open data—mainly from state and local government, but also using U.S. Census and other sources—to create applications for the public good.

There are some 130 brigades, covering major cities like New York City (<https://beta.nyc>) and Chicago, Illinois (<http://chihacknight.org>), as well as Birmingham, Alabama ([www.codeforbirmingham.org](http://www.codeforbirmingham.org)); Tulsa, Oklahoma (<http://codefortulsa.org>); Grand Rapids,

Michigan ([www.meetup.com/friendlycode](http://www.meetup.com/friendlycode)); and Code for New Hampshire (<http://www.codefornh.org>).

Code for America reports more than 45,000 people worldwide have been or are involved in brigades (<http://tinyurl.com/z87sbhs>). A map at [www.codeforamerica.org/brigade](http://www.codeforamerica.org/brigade) can help you find out if a brigade is in your metro area.

An example is Code for Hampton Roads-Norfolk-Virginia Beach (<http://code4hr.org>). Its website lists regular meetings, projects, and supporters.



Volunteer assistance, with its pros and cons, can provide a starting point, especially for jurisdictions with limited internal IT expertise.

Each brigade is connected via “GitHub,” which is a tool that allows multiple IT experts to contribute to the same application in development.

I am a member of the Durham, North Carolina, brigade called Code for Durham, which has made food inspection grades available by mobile device, and helped guide the June 2015 launch of the open data by Durham County and the city of Durham—a shared portal at <https://opendurham.nc.gov/page/home>.

An active government partner is a required component of each brigade. The person may have IT expertise, but it is not essential. He or she simply needs to be willing to help think with volunteers about how public information and services can be enhanced by marshalling open data and online or mobile-device technology.

In some instances, including Asheville and Charlotte, North Carolina, government workers—innovation specialists or IT staff—helped to launch and support a brigade.

Code for America provides guidance and tools for brigades forming and working with government, including “Brigade Organizer’s Playbook”

([www.codeforamerica.org/brigade/organize/playbook](http://www.codeforamerica.org/brigade/organize/playbook)) and “Ten Ways to Collaborate with Government” (<http://tinyurl.com/gwacel4>).

At the same time, brigades are independent, which brings advantages and limitations.

In summer 2015, I studied four brigades across Virginia and North Carolina by interviewing 36 local government officials. The officials identified several advantages of the brigades: volunteers’ energy, expertise, innovation, and free

assistance. Each brigade had one or more successes with the creation of a particular application of public value.

One drawback is that volunteers cannot be held accountable for particular projects. Another concern is that most volunteers have day jobs. Thus, their volunteer time and desire to interact with government IT and other staff occurs after hours for most government employees.

One place has managed noontime meetings or teleconferences as ways to better match the work schedules of government workers and brigade volunteers.

Charlotte is trying to bridge the tension between volunteer-flexibility and government-reliability factors. For 2015, the city government experimented with “Skilled Volunteer Engagements,” which are two small contracts with Code for Charlotte to maintain and update the OpenBudget ([www.codeforcharlotte.org/projects/open\\_budget](http://www.codeforcharlotte.org/projects/open_budget)) and Citygram ([www.citygram.org/charlotte](http://www.citygram.org/charlotte)).

### ► **Short-Term Events**

Even without a critical mass for a brigade, communities may benefit through IT businesses, universities, and other



## THE ROAD TO A MORE CONNECTED GWINNETT COUNTY

**A MAJOR SUBURBAN COUNTY** in the Atlanta, Georgia, metro region, Gwinnett County has a population of some 900,000 people, spread out over a vast area. Cars are the dominant form of transportation and other options for getting around are limited. Long commutes and heavy traffic are a daily standard for some residents, leaving many wishing for alternatives.

In 2015, the Gwinnett Village ([www.gwinnettville.com](http://www.gwinnettville.com)) and Gwinnett Place ([www.gwinnettplacecid.com](http://www.gwinnettplacecid.com)) community improvement districts (CIDs) collaborated with area leaders to host an exchange of ideas on the future of transportation in the region, titled "The Great Exchange on Transportation."

They enlisted the help of a design and strategy collaborative—Aha! Strategy—to design a massive outreach campaign, with a Textizen survey at its center.

Somewhat unusually, the effort was not designed to inform a specific project or proposal but to get

the entire community to paint a vision of the future of Gwinnett County. It was one of the most ambitious outreach efforts the region has seen, and it resulted in tens of thousands of conversations, 1,400 Web survey responses, and more than 2,700 text survey responses in one week.

The Great Exchange was a non-agenda-driven initiative to get people to take a step back, provide broad feedback, and build the framework for a future transportation plan. They used this as an opportunity to let the people be aspirational, and it exceeded all of our expectations.

### Joel Wascher

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Gwinnett Village Community Improvement District  
Gwinnett County, Georgia  
<http://www.gwinnettville.com>

groups conducting a short-term event or a 90-day contest to show an "alpha" version of an application to test civic or business viability.

The highest visibility effort is the National Day of Civic Hacking (<http://hackforchange.org/events>). Hacking in this context is organized work to turn an idea into a prototype by writing computer code and demonstrating the result.

In 2015, there were 100 unique events. It is easy to scan general social good hacking via <http://hackforchange.org/events>, including more targeted hacking events, such as 2015 Fishackathons at Long Beach, California (<http://tinyurl.com/zmov9ra>) and other communities.

First started in Chicago, CityCamp is a network of local events focused on innovation for government and community organizations. These events bring together government officials, programmers, designers, citizens, and journalists to share perspectives about the communities in which they live.

CityCamp (<http://citycamp.com>) grew out of activists valuing government transparency and exploring how the Web and open data can support more effective local governance.

CityCamp has reached some small population communities, including Juneau, Alaska; Jackson, Mississippi; and Pierre, South Dakota.

Of particular interest is the use of social and participatory media, mobile devices, and the idea of the "Web as a platform" for government and community work (<http://citycampnc.org/about>).

My experience at the June 2015 CityCampNC was extremely valuable. I learned about a variety of projects and heard from IT industry, government, and other leaders about trends, opportunities, and pitfalls. It was a great introduction for a "non-coder" like myself, as I am IT literate but do not write computer code.

For CityCampNC, datasets from local and state resources were gathered at one website for convenience and are still available online and organized into categories, including public safety, neighborhoods, and health (<http://tinyurl.com/j43wene>).

For the Norfolk-Virginia Beach area, hackathons have been sponsored by libraries and tech-friendly businesses. One held in October 2015 was sponsored by Dominion Enterprises (<http://tinyurl.com/glwom7j>).

### Toward Openness

Enterprise software for critical financial systems and other core IT efforts will not be replaced by the civic tech presented here.

Local government leaders, however, can benefit from tapping various avenues for civic tech to supplement core assets and demonstrate openness to the innovation of their residents using public data in a relatively low-risk manner.

Smaller jurisdictions, in particular, have the possibility of sharing data through a metropolitan open data portal and by enlisting skilled IT volunteers.

As IT continues to change, how each local government sees its public data as an asset for re-use and ripe for analysis to improve services will be one hallmark of the trend for more openness, transparency, and collaboration with skilled volunteers. **PM**



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BY MATT KRIDLER

# ON THE LEADERSHIP PATH

Commit to the journey

**M**anagement and leadership must go hand-in-hand for a local government manager to be truly effective. Yet, management doesn't automatically develop into leadership. In my opinion, and as a former manager, I believe people are not born leaders. It is a skill that is learned and takes continuous effort to sustain.

Football coach Urban Meyer led both Ohio State University and the University of Florida to national championships. He is one of only two coaches to win a national championship at two different universities. He wrote the book *Beyond the Line*, which focuses on leadership in both coaching and life.

Meyer is direct about what makes a leader and the importance of that status. He writes that "Leadership is not about you. It's about making other people better. It's about the trust you have earned rather than earned through authority you've been granted. You must earn the right for other people to follow you." This is often true about local government leadership and management as well.

## A Strong Foundation

Local government management begins with doing the fundamentals—the basics—well. Managers realize that most residents don't care or pay attention to the extensive or technical operations of their local governments that can involve planning, budgeting, and other management responsibilities. That is, until it affects them directly or their neighborhoods. They are busy and more concerned about work and taking care of their families.

They expect streets to be paved and cleared of snow and debris and trash to be picked up on time. Public safety is and always will be their paramount

concern. They want to feel safe and expect a quick response to medical or other emergencies.

As President Teddy Roosevelt put it best: "In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."

In the course of making decisions, mistakes are inevitable. It's important that we acknowledge those mistakes, correct them, and then move on.

**WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT LEADERSHIP IS NOT A PERFECT ART. IT IS LEARNED OVER TIME AND NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED OVER TIME.**

## Learning about Leadership

Over the years, I have read books and articles on development and growth in leadership skills and have been most influenced by the writings of author Tom Roberts, who has worked extensively with successful corporations. He developed several premises about leadership:

**Vision is the latest emphasis that is important to have for yourself and your organization; however, vision without implementation becomes meaningless.** Such an approach causes confusion for employees, department and division managers, and elected officials. It appears annually in budgets, websites, and sometimes just sits on the shelf. Sustainable excellence comes from employing great managers who see that daily work is done in a complete and timely fashion.

**Great managers create and guide the employees who power an organization.** Trust them and let them do their jobs. General Patton did it that way, following his philosophy that you should tell people what you want done and let them decide how to do it. Managers can often be pleasantly surprised at the outcome and ingenuity used by staff in their work.

## Leaders succeed through logistics and not doing the technical work.

They ensure that the budget finances a project, needed equipment is provided, and then they support the employees who know how to get the job done.

This reminds me of snow removal when I was a manager. My community

was constantly criticized for the poor job that was done clearing streets during snowstorms. The employees knew how to do it well, but the equipment was not adequate and was always breaking down.

It took years to acquire and repair the equipment that was needed. After that, snow removal was praised, and employees were proud of it. The public works director and the skilled operators laid out a revised route system, then asked what I expected.

We agreed that handling a light snow would take two to three hours to complete. When plowing was necessary, maybe four to five hours to complete.

That was it. That was our goal, and the standard we tried to meet. They knew how to do it best—not me. We were partners. Councilmembers appreciated it since they could tell their constituents when to expect the service.

**When leaders operate with unlimited energy, the organization becomes energetic and creative.** We create enthusiasm so all become motivated.

**Leaders embrace technology, which is especially crucial in today's world.** Things are moving quicker than ever, and no one wants to be left behind. Managers know the importance of technology. They don't necessarily need to be an expert in this field but they can hire knowledgeable people. Respect the generations who are more accustomed to using technology and acknowledge their skills.

**Leaders are expected to surround themselves with people who are smarter than they.** You are expected to recruit and hire qualified employees. They make you and the local government look great. Don't worry about losing your management position.

You know the elected officials of your community better than anyone in your

organization and spend considerable time with them. And they believe in you. They showed their confidence when they hired you.

We all have to be careful not to revel in our own successes. Sometimes the press gets praiseworthy and builds up our ego. Such confidence leads to a sense of infallibility. As observed by motivational speaker Jules Ormont: "Make yourself indispensable and you'll be moved up. Act as if you're indispensable and you'll be moved out." We probably all know managers who saw their careers change or end that way.

**Trust your instincts.** Managers can be forced to operate or make decisions in the "gray area." Things can change quickly as council compositions change, and, unlike engineering or mathematics, there sometimes is no absolute correct answer.

Direction isn't always definitive or clear. A number of great leaders through-

out time have relied on their instincts and made good decisions in the end.

**Managers know when it's time to leave.** We can't afford to retire on the job, and we will know it is time to do so when we think an idea won't work before it is tried. We become the status quo. Long-serving managers sometimes find themselves going from offense to defense. Maybe because they made the change or improvement and don't want it to change.

We need to remember that leadership is not a perfect art. It is learned over time and needs to be improved over time. Make decisions, learn to accept mistakes, and keep working to become better. This takes commitment, courage, and patience. **PM**



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BY IZABEL CHRISTINA COTTA MATTE

# PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL, PRIORITIZES CITIZENSHIP

Transparency encourages social responsibility

**P**orto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul's capital city in southern Brazil, has a consolidated culture of popular participation in its administration.

Founded in 1772, this city of more than 1 million people is a cosmopolitan and multicultural region recognized as one of participatory democracy, which means that information and decisions need to be available to everyone.

The ideas of participation and social control are closely related. Residents must participate and contribute to decision making, directing the government to adopt measures that truly meet collective interest.

The need for efficient public service is another determining factor to measure and to report results and expenses. Thus, the population has the right not only to choose their representatives, but also to monitor meticulously, throughout the term, how this delegated power is exercised.

## Participatory Budget

Participation, in a more structured manner, occurred in Porto Alegre with the implementation of the participatory budget (PB) in 1989. Since that time, the population decided the application of resources will be run by the municipal administration.

Every year, this process begins with preparatory meetings, when the previous year's accounts and the investment plan for the coming year are presented. During 17 regional assemblies and 6 thematic<sup>1</sup> meetings, the population elects priorities, chooses its directors, and determines the number of representatives for regional forums and thematic discussion groups.

In 2015, these 23 meetings had more than 20,000 attendees, the most impressive number of people in the past

26 years since PB's implementation.

In 2015, the conferences could also be watched live through the Internet, which has become an important tool to connect government and communities.

## A Spirit of Cooperation

This society involvement was boosted even more when the concept of strong local governance was added to the consolidated PB as a way to establish social responsibility, participation, and co-management for sustainable development. It represents the appreciation of the local power and the social and human capital, strengthening the spirit of cooperation and association around a common project.

Governance, therefore, is one of the premises that integrate Porto Alegre's management model adopted in 2005. An agreement was signed with the State Quality and Productivity Program and the Movement for a Competitive Brazil, in order to apply quality principles and to use such methods and modern tools as balanced scorecard, identifying objectives, indicators, and goals.

Other elements of this management model include transparency, which allows citizens to access information on key projects and initiatives as well as execution of public policies in an integrative and cross-functional manner, considering local differences between city zones, and ensuring the leadership's empowerment of public servants in their respective fields of expertise.

To operationalize policy integration and qualify decision making, internal governance in the form of collective management structures was adopted, including cross-functional meetings involving leaders to discuss various issues and to promote strategic alignment.

Depending on format and needs, this process can include all levels of the administration, involving operational, tactical, or strategic representatives, with their decisions being taken to the highest level of representativeness, the mayor.

As this model evolved, management contracts aimed at expanding transparency were adopted in 2013. These contracts established goals and evaluation criteria for all municipal departments, a commitment to the whole Porto Alegre society.

Each year, the mayor, deputy mayor, heads of departments, and technical managers attend an event at which the previous year's results and the coming year's targets are publicly announced. Awards also are given to the teams with best performance as a way to recognize and value civil servants' performance.

## Transparent Processes

In recent years, there has been an effort to promote transparency of government and management processes, both for internal stakeholders and for society. This has led to the development of accountability, strategic planning support, and participatory democracy tools.

The **transparency portal**<sup>2</sup>, for example, offers online information to citizens in a clear and objective language about the origins and applications of municipal resources. Since implementation of the 2011 Access to Public Information Law, new actions and social control instruments are available to the population in a constant improvement process.

The **management portal**<sup>3</sup> is a Web tool that assists in managing the 12 strategic programs of the municipal government. This is another instrument



that ensures transparency of public policies and their results.

This portal was created to maintain continuous internal communication and to provide appropriate information through the media to citizens. Its integration into the budgeting system and schedules increases physical and financial monitoring of programs and several projects simultaneously by city hall and by society.

Integrated into the management portal, the website related to the strategic programs' performance evolution analyzes and disseminates how programs and projects have performed regarding leadership questions, indicators, budget execution, complexity, and detailed schedules in the project and portfolio management system called the enterprise project management (EPM). The evaluation criteria and the results can be accessed internally 24/7.

EPM works as a complementary tool to the management portal, which purposes to qualify planning process, activity programming, and graphic representation of prioritized projects, contributing to decision making through monitoring reports and indicators in a centralized and collaborative environment available on the Internet for civil servants.

Currently, Porto Alegre's city hall has some 1,200 registered and active projects on EPM, shared by a network of more than 800 people. By using this system, it is possible to control planning and execution of all tasks of provided works and services.

Another instrument is #DataPoa,<sup>4</sup> Porto Alegre's open data portal, which aims to invite the community to participate in the development of intelligent solutions for the city. Data can be raw material for students, professionals, journalists, researchers, and entrepreneurs who are interested in creating community services collaboratively.

With specific data and a high level of detail on such areas as mobility, health, education, tourism, and urban cleaning, #DataPoa allows developers to create

and build Web platforms, applications, and software that can help the city and its residents as a whole, making collaborative ties between local government, businesses, and residents.

### An Involved Citizenry

From this context, Porto Alegre has established public management that prioritizes citizenship and consolidates information for future governments in order to encourage continuity. We envision a city for the next generation, in which city dwellers will be protagonists of change, committed and informed about their responsibilities.

Porto Alegre of the future must provide sustainable development and citizens' emancipation with coordination between government, private initiative, and civil society. It is necessary, therefore, to increase everyone's participation systematically.

Knowledge and information are fundamental to continuous improve-

ment, and now quality concepts are prevalent to build a new culture of public administration.

For more information on transparency and strategy planning in Porto Alegre, download the free ASQ Report: *The Future of Quality: Quality Throughput* at <http://asq.org/future-of-quality>. **PM**

### ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

- 1 Themes: Education, Sport and Recreation; Circulation, Transport and Urban Mobility; Housing, City Organization, Urban and Environment Development; Economic Development, Taxation, Tourism and Employment; Culture; Health and Social Care.
- 2 Transparency Portal (Portal Transparência e Acesso à Informação): <http://www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/transparencia>.
- 3 Management Portal (Portal de Gestão): <https://portalgestao.procempa.com.br>.
- 4 Porto Alegre's Open Data Portal (#DataPoa): <http://www.datapoa.com.br>.



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BY RAY GOSACK, ICMA-CM

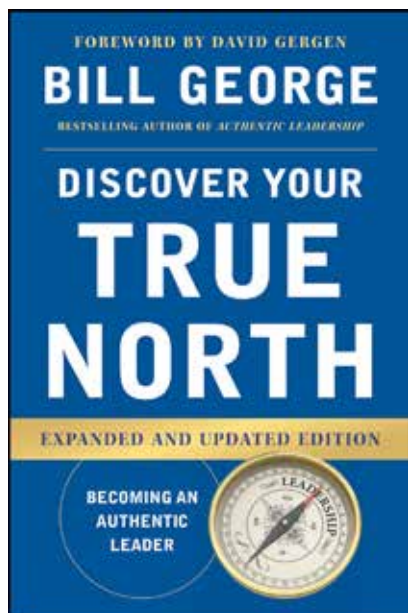
# PROMOTING AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

## Why values matter

All of us know genuine leaders and probably a few phony ones. As managers, we aspire to be trustworthy leaders, and to be respected in our organizations and communities. So how do we ensure our leadership style is on the right path?

Harvard Business School professor and former Medtronic CEO Bill George has captured the essence of authentic leadership—that being a leader doesn't guarantee one's actions will be based on what's best for an organization. In the book *Discover Your True North* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015), George identifies what it takes to be a values-based leader.

The author begins by discussing a person's journey to leadership, then



**NONE OF US CAN BE SUCCESSFUL ON OUR OWN. WE SHOULD KNOW HOW TO EMPOWER OTHERS TO STEP UP AND LEAD. THIS LEADERSHIP TRAIT IS NECESSARY IF WE'RE TO LEAVE A LEGACY.**

moves into how a person can develop as a trustworthy leader, and concludes with how our true north meets the world. He uses familiar, real-world experiences of actual leaders to demonstrate how it's done and in some cases, how it shouldn't be done.

### A Personal Journey

George begins with the significance of knowing our own life story and how it shapes our values and moral compass. Experiences beginning in early childhood and continuing throughout our lives influence how we behave. The author goes on to identify the mistakes that can cause us to abandon our values.

Learning from tragedy and trauma—the crucibles—that occur in our lives strengthens our leadership ability. The book discusses how these crucibles can hold us back and the ways to overcome them.

Perhaps the most critical element of authentic leadership is self-awareness. It's important to identify our vulnerabilities and to acknowledge them to others. We also need to be aware of our blind spots. Recognizing the emotional makeup of other people and relating to their needs heightens our awareness of others.

Knowing our own values, including ranking the most important ones, is essential for performing well under fire. This lets people know the values that guide our decisions as leaders.

An important aspect of self-awareness is knowing your sweet spot, which is the intersection of your motivations and your greatest capabilities and strengths.

Every successful leader needs a support team. This includes identifying the most important personal and professional relationships in your life, developing a network of mentors, and relying on a personal support group that will hold you accountable.

### The Power of “We”

Authentic leaders need an integrated life. Their family and personal lives must be kept in balance with their professional lives. The authentic leader's core values will help him or her make these trade-offs.

George emphasizes the importance of the journey from “I” to “we.” None of us can be successful on our own. We should know how to empower others to step up and lead. This leadership trait is necessary if we're to leave a legacy.

Leaders who are aligned with their true north must identify their purpose in life. You have to know what you're passionate about, and how that passion is connected to your life story.

Authentic leadership is more important now than ever before. It is essential for sustainable enterprises, maintaining public trust, and operating in unfamiliar environments.

*Discover Your True North* is a must read for all leaders regardless of whether they are new to the role or seasoned veterans. The book demonstrates the importance of values-based leadership and how to align your internal leadership compass. **PM**



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BY MIKE CONDUFF, ICMA-CM

## A FRESH START

### Promoting good governance from the get-go

**A** young manager taking his first chief administrator job after a series of increasingly responsible positions in excellent communities called me to seek advice on how to use good governance principles with the council.

He, of course, had that bond of “hiring council and hired manager” we call the honeymoon to build upon, and he wanted to use it to create a platform of reinforcing the underlying principles of local government management: ethical achievement of long-term council outcomes free from interference in the daily activities of the organization.

My colleague was indeed starting from a position of strength. He was extraordinarily well prepared having worked for a number of the best in our business. His council had selected him from an exceptionally strong pool of candidates.

The community was financially strong. There had been appropriate retirements during the interim manager’s tenure that allowed room for hiring or promoting the new manager’s own senior team.

With the exception of the rocky retirement of the previous manager and an impending council election with a couple of the incumbents likely not running, it was almost a textbook example of the way a good handoff should go.

With so many assets we agreed that starting out with the behaviors that he wanted to inculcate in the council and in the staff made great sense. As we talked, these five key themes emerged:

**1. Communicate relentlessly.** In this age of instantaneous communication methodologies and tech-savvy councilmembers, it clearly behooves the manager to use multiple techniques to

keep the council “in the know.” This steady stream of timely information feeds the elected officials’ need to be in the loop, while by no means inviting them into staff business.

At the same time, I advised the manager not to over rely on the technology. Voice-to-voice and face-to-face time plays to his personal strengths of eloquence and charisma. Trust is built in person.

**2. Set a high standard with both council and staff.** Again, my colleague was fortunate in that the council had previously adopted a council process manual but was, in some instances, not following it as faithfully as one would hope.

I encouraged him to either convene the group to review and rededicate or to have a series of individual conversations with the elected officials to remind them of their agreements and get their commitment to behaving appropriately. The concomitant assurance that he could offer was that he would in turn hold staff to a similar standard.

Obviously, only the council can control its own behaviors so it is especially important for the manager to allow no tolerance for misbehavior within the staff ranks. Especially in his early tenure the manager must set and enforce the tone.

**3. Inculcate long-term processes immediately.** In the face of council elections so soon after being appointed, the temptation might be to lay low during the process. Instead, I encouraged the manager to behave in the first one just as he would over time.

We discussed: calling each candidate within 24 hours of their filing to introduce himself and offer fact-checking assistance, conducting a candidate orientation after filing closed to reinforce the council-manager plan, facilitating a council orientation shortly after the election to shorten the learning curve and reinforce good behaviors for the new electeds, and arranging for a council retreat within sixty days of the election to discuss long-term priorities and outcomes.

**4. Be visible and engaged.** While not so much a governance issue, I also encouraged the manager to capitalize on his personal strengths and showcase his commitment to the community, the organization, and the profession by being appropriately involved in the life of the town.

Civic clubs, chamber of commerce, and nonprofit leadership are all ways to be seen and appreciated without usurping or upstaging elected officials. The goal is to demonstrate the manager’s genuine desire for the community to be healthy in all aspects, not just at the community office building, and the ancillary benefit is that the manager’s—and the organization’s—reputation is enhanced in the process.

**5. Seek and develop a mastermind group.** Again, this colleague is exceptionally well connected in the profession and has a cadre of mentors to lean on for advice on city management, and didn’t need any networking assistance from me.

I did, however, encourage the active seeking of similar types of individuals from within the community who could advise him on issues and personalities unique to that environment. The ancillary benefit of this kitchen-cabinet group is that it can be a great source of moral support during any difficulties that almost inevitably arise.

If, like our young colleague, you find yourself just starting out in a community these themes may resonate with you as well. If, on the other hand, you find yourself struggling in any of these areas, it is never too late to see your situation with the same new eyes you had when you started and to begin using these five themes appropriately. **PM**



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BY RATNA OKHAI

# FLORIDA ASSOCIATION PRIORITIZES THE NEXT GENERATION

Annual conference, June 1–4, 2016

As baby boomer managers continue to retire, there are fewer Generation X professionals (those born between 1964 and 1977) prepared to fill their positions. Research suggests that millennials (younger than 36 years old) know very little about the services of local government and even less about local government management.

Frank Benest, former city manager of Palo Alto, California, suggested in the landmark 2003 ICMA report *Preparing the Next Generation: A Guide for Current and Future Local Government Managers* that this lack of ready-and-willing young people to replace retiring managers was causing a “quiet crisis.” Today, as ICMA liaison for Next Generation Initiatives, he calls the replacement gap a “silver tsunami.”

## What’s Planned

In order to ensure a successful transition of leadership from one generation to the next, the Florida City and County Management Association (FCCMA) is devoting its entire 2015 annual conference to this important issue.

Conference planners are using the 2003 ICMA report as the basis for the content and signature events. The goal is simple: to develop talent from the younger generations for the sustainability of local government management.

FCCMA President-Elect and Chairman of the Conference Planning Committee Robert (Bobby) Green observed that the interactive sessions and all keynote speakers will present a number of themes based on “Preparing the Next Generation.”

Benest has been invited to open the conference with the keynote address, A



Call to Action. He will also participate in a breakout session entitled 39 Best Practices for Preparing the Next Generation.

## Program Specifics

Sessions geared to help make current professionals more aware of this critical issue and help governments understand how to attract young talent and retain it include:

- **What Executive Recruiters Say about Landing That First Manager or Assistant Manager Job.** Recruiters see their chief responsibility as bringing forward only those candidates who—without question—possess the full range of skills needed for the position.
- **Self-Development Strategies for Aspiring Managers.** Preparing to become a city or county manager is a serious undertaking; it requires both ability and ambition.
- **Sharing Personal Journeys.** Managers need to use the art of storytelling to offer the next generation their personal stories: what drew them to the profession, why they stay, and—most important—their passion for their chosen profession.
- **ICMA Next Generation Initiatives.** Rob Carty, ICMA director of career services and Next Generation

Initiatives, is part of a panel that will discuss the efforts created to attract a wide and diverse group of people into the local government management profession. This includes students, early and mid-career professionals, and individuals from other fields.

- **The Ethics of Diversity.** FCCMA is committed to working with its members, and the communities they serve, to honor the fundamental value and dignity of all individuals, and to help organizations manage and create communities that respect diversity and promote inclusiveness.

Seventy free, one-day registrations will be offered by FCCMA to emerging professionals, ICMA Student Chapter members, and department directors to join seasoned managers and assistants at this year’s exciting conference. FCCMA Executive Director Lynn Tipton said, “We are excited to partner with ICMA this year to work on best practices for getting the next generation of local public managers ready! The hands-on learning and takeaways that will be offered at the conference will help our members and the profession for years to come.”

The council-manager form of government is the most prevalent form in Florida’s 67 counties and 411 cities. The Florida City and County Management Association Annual Conference will be held June 1–4, 2016, at the Hilton Orlando in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. **PM**



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BY JAMES TOSCANO

# TURNAROUND TACTICS

Special strategies for troubled times

**W**hen public organizations are in crisis, the ailments are predictable: budget problems, compliance issues, communications failures, and broken public trust. These problems can persist despite changes in management.

Here are five observations I learned from working with “public sector turnaround guy” Philip Shucet, as dubbed by Senator Mark Warner, while at Hampton Roads Transit in southeast Virginia, that highlight the principles of a successful public turnaround. They focus on the first 36 months of a turnaround, which require tactics that might not be suitable for long-term organizational sustainability.

## The First 36 Months

**1. Wear it on your sleeve.** Once an organization has been dragged through the mud, it won’t be easy to shake the nasty labels. It doesn’t matter how much of a whiz-bang is hired, how much overt controversy recedes, or how different you feel on the inside. Accept it: People on the outside still believe there’s a mess just beneath.

If a situation is bad, say so. Successful public organizations talk openly about their problems because they know hiding won’t solve them. Shucet says that when leaders air out problems, “You can see the organizational culture begin to change. As their courage grows, the risk of not hearing the truth from your employees goes down. Fewer surprises.”

Employ highly visible performance dashboards on websites to display exactly where the organization stands on the important stuff. The advantage of the dashboard is three-fold: 1) if the only way is up, then spotlight your ascent; 2) dashboards level the playing field in terms of access to information;

and 3) the dashboard creates internal focus—a clarion call—on the main issues.

On the dashboard, sometimes things looked good, other times not; but in Shucet’s experience, no one could claim they weren’t forthcoming. He insisted administrators responsible for a particular dashboard metric list their e-mail address next to it, so the public would know who was accountable and who to contact with inquiries.

Dashboards let the public look inside your organization’s closet. And when your employees know the public is poking around, it can have the effect of making you keep your closet tidy.

When problems are uncovered, announce your plans to fix them. When you’ve made progress or a reform, no matter how incremental, tell people. Remind the public you are not exactly who you were before the turnaround began.

At Hampton Roads Transit, we announced Mission 31/90—a public commitment to act on 31 audit findings in 90 days. We posted the findings on our homepage and marked checkboxes as progress was made.

*Point is: Eschewing the comforts of a private rehab and instead doing it out in the open, allows the public to evolve along with you.*

**2. Avail yourself to the public.** It is counterproductive when troubled organizations hunker down to fix their problems complete with “no comment” responses to the media or gag rules on certain officials. No matter what kind of internal progress you might be making toward your turnaround, this leaves the impression you are closed off to hard questions, feedback, or critiques.

Successful public organizations have a culture of openness. Don’t allow valuable internal confidantes, board members, or elected officials to become exclusive gatekeepers and reject policies and other practices that serve to bottle up information.

A manager’s personal rapport and availability with journalists and reporters builds a better relationship, even if they have critically reported on the organization previously, and can result in more balanced reporting when things get tough in the press. When the only media access is through a public information officer, it sends the signal to employees and the public that information needs crafting.

Using social media can put an organization closer to people and ideas. Hold sessions with local bloggers to open valves of communication with influencers outside the traditional press. In these sessions, you might want to declare that “nothing is off limits” and allow bloggers to video record and post interviews.

Be sure to use accessible language. It’s not good if public communications are bulked up with run-on sentences and techno-speak, resulting in a citizenry that doesn’t have the faintest idea what is being said.

*Point is: Use shorter sentences and normal words to benefit the audience.*

**3. Make audits your friends.** Most organizations—troubled or not—fear audits or independent inquiries. The notion of an outside organization scrutinizing what you do is enough to keep public managers up at night.

Despite these tendencies, the use of public audits is an excellent tool to help drive your turnaround. Those appointed to bring about a turnaround generally know what mistakes not to repeat, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they know how not to repeat them. A sense of clear direction can be further distorted as emotions run high, jeopardizing the turnaround. Results from an independent inquiry give you a good place to start.

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***Point is:** With reports and any problems in plain sight, the emotion can be taken out of a situation and can hasten the team's return to business.*

**4. Tolerate wrong decisions, punish indecision.** Troubled public sector organizations are rife with fear of decision making. Managers can debate a decision to death, and sometimes such debate is used as a tactic to avoid making a decision outright.

It's particularly tricky when indecision is cloaked in positive terms like "collaboration," "buy-in," or "collegiality." But the result can be the same: organizational paralysis.

Successful organizations embrace accountability in decision making. Employees ought to be encouraged to make data-driven, well-reasoned decisions within their scope.

Shucet says the beauty of a wrong decision is that you usually know it immediately. People have more information and can pivot. He also says that when you delay a decision many times, the options don't become any clearer, and, often, you've lost time or money or both.

***Point is:** Don't avoid making a decision.*

**5. Keep your eye on the ball.** Don't be distracted from your main task. If your organization's mission is to run buses or build a highway, then run buses or build highways with laser-like focus.

According to Shucet, this could mean disbanding an employee-relations group that plans social activities: How could any time at all be spent planning and hosting organizational cookouts while its reputation was up in flames?

He doesn't believe there's anything necessarily wrong with these activities, but says organizations in crisis don't have the luxury of such nonessentials. Reducing distractions in a troubled organization can help it refocus on its core mission or service.

There's enough distractions already, with all the regulations and pressure

from residents and policymakers facing public organizations. Keeping these pressures at bay and staying focused is difficult and requires courage.

In a successful turnaround, be prepared to be unpopular sometimes with some people. Whether it's that disbanded employee-relations group, keeping the heat on senior staffers, or keeping an arm's length from an elected official's pet project, enduring temporary discomfort may build you respect in the long run.

***Point is:** Keeping your eye on the ball will help you avoid the same traps that lured others before you and have stood in the way of success.*

### **Not a Glamorous Undertaking**

The hard work of an organizational turnaround is unglamorous. Responsible public management, including being on-budget, isn't sexy stuff. Have you ever read investigative journalism or a screaming headline about an agency that simply does what it is supposed to? You'll need to steel yourself for not being lavished with praise as your turnaround bears fruit.

When one of his teams met a major milestone Shucet would said, "Now, give yourself 10 seconds to pat yourself on the back." They would. Then he would remind them of all the other challenges they faced.

It's not that he was ungrateful for their efforts. "I wanted everyone to be clear, we're in the public business. And as good as we feel about ourselves at this moment—and we should—the public demands even more."

***Point is:** What is accomplished at the outset of a turnaround—the bedrock foundation of transparency, focus of mission, and fiscal responsibility—will pave the way for all long-term successes. **PM***



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BY GEORGIE BISHOP

# PUBLIC LEADERSHIP: THE PROFESSION WE ALL DEPEND ON



## Essential practices to see you through

**O**n a day-to-day basis, public leaders are skilled at providing services to other public organizations and to the residents they serve. Most importantly, they understand their jobs, not in terms of titles or position descriptions, but in terms of “who depends on me.”

Public leaders are also adept at getting others to understand who depends on them and for what. They work with numerous stakeholder groups to continuously innovate in the delivery of public services and meet challenges.

Also essential for any leader is the ability to engender trust—particularly public leaders. How they meet commitments and follow through even when things are difficult or uncomfortable is paramount to their ability to lead.

Here are other practices essential to public leadership:

1. Leaders don't rely on hearsay or anecdotal evidence. They base their decisions on the collection and analysis of hard data gathered from end users or customers and front-line workers to get a clear and honest picture of the current reality before they begin constructing a plan for what is needed. When leaders make decisions they also take into account both the intended and unintended consequences and make plans to manage both.

2. When leaders analyze the shortcomings of a current situation, they not

only give people time to tell their war stories, but also know how to move the individuals quickly to a point where they are describing what they want and how they are going to get there.

3. Leaders rely on systems thinking and mapping to help their teams figure out where and how to leverage their investment of limited resources. Systems mapping is a drawing of an existing system that helps people see the complex cause-and-effect relationships that are part of every organization. In one local government, systems mapping helped public leaders understand how to combine areas of service that improved their financial reporting and saved the city money.

4. When conflict stands in the way of getting the job done, leaders resolve issues among staffers and with the public in ways that protect the relationships. Leaders ask questions and listen until they get to a point where the warring parties have exhausted their venting and can then move on to working with the upset party or resistor to solve the problems at hand.

5. Leaders evaluate individual performance in terms of the overall strategic goals of the organization. They help their teams align with where the organization is striving to go and make sure that everyone is on board and rowing in the same direction.

6. Leaders see their job as the development of the next generation of leaders. They identify and mentor those individuals who really want to learn the skills and competencies that are essential to great public leadership, and they help future leaders through training, work experiences, and rotational assignments.

7. Leaders set high standards and think in terms of not only achieving the mission but doing so in sustainable ways that preserve and protect the human, financial, and natural resources upon which society depends. When it comes to natural resources, leaders can take into account the fact that all people benefit from clean air, water, and other resources that are sometimes referred to as *the commons*.

8. When a crisis occurs, we often credit the public official who superbly handles the event by being up-front with the media and citizens as a great leader. True leaders, however, reward staffers who anticipate and plan for contingencies to eliminate a reactive workplace environment and avoid crises in the first place. **PM**



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