

Alberta Clarion

Society of Local Government Managers

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Future-Orientated Leadership: A Rare and Precious Capability

There are three types of leaders in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who ask, "What happened?"

Heaven help you if you are the last category. We live in an era of such rapid change that I've become convinced that forward oriented leadership is the most important career attribute executives must possess.

What do forward oriented leaders do? They help people make sense of what is happening around them, shake them out of their complacency, and give them a clear path for the future. They establish a sense of momentum to carry their organization forward. They get their people thinking about the future and acting on their observations. They do this by establishing an overall corporate culture that is forward thinking, innovative, adaptive, open-minded and focused on future success.

Sadly, far too many organizations, including many associations, seem to fail at establishing such a culture. They seem to firmly focus on dealing with the mundane problems and issues of the day, rather than seizing upon the opportunity of tomorrow. That's a fundamental error in a time in which their members are witnessing rapid industry change, an increasingly short half-life of critical knowledge, ever more rapid skills obsolescence, and countless other challenges.

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Characteristics of a Profession

A profession is distinguished by certain characteristics including:

- (a) mastery of a particular intellectual skill, acquired by training and education;
- (b) acceptance of duties to society as a whole in addition to duties to the Employer or Client;
- (c) an outlook which is essentially objective; and
- (d) a high standard in the conduct and performance of personal service.

People who use professional services usually find it difficult to assess the specialized knowledge and skills of professionals. That is why professional organizations lay down technical and ethical standards for their members. By enforcing these standards, professional organizations protect the public interest, and users can confidently rely on professionals.

Two important principles underlie this Code, as well as the rules and guidelines, and form a common thread throughout its provisions.

First, a Member must establish and maintain a reputation for integrity, the most basic attribute of a member of the accounting profession. Integrity includes trustworthiness, loyalty, fairness, honour and honesty.

Second, a Member must reject inappropriate conduct, both on a professional and personal level. A Member also has a duty to refrain from behaviour which, while legal, is inconsistent with the high standards of the profession, or calls into question the Member's fitness as a professional. A Member who violates either of these principles will lose the respect and confidence of the public and other accountants.

Through legislation, the local government management profession is self-governing. The privilege of self-governance carries with it special responsibilities. The rationale for the Code of Ethics must be to codify ethics respecting practice as a certified local government manager, to maintain the dignity and honour of the profession, and to protect the public interest. Members must strive for their observance of the Code both individually and collectively. The Code, rules and guidelines are not capable of stating every circumstance a Member may face. Members must therefore consider other ethical and moral considerations, as well as legislation relating to Members and laws of a more general nature, in deciding to pursue a course of action in a given situation.

All Members should follow both the spirit and the letter of the Code. The willingness and determination of the profession to achieve widespread compliance with the Code is a more powerful and basic enforcement mechanism than the imposition of sanctions. A Member must therefore be vigilant respecting his or her own behaviour as well as that of colleagues. It is improper to use any provision of the Code as an instrument of harassment without a genuine concern respecting the interests of an employer, client, the profession or the public. ☐

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Willful blindness

Consider this example: I remember speaking at a recent event in which I casually made the observation that medical knowledge now doubles every eight years, with the result that some estimates suggest that you get the most up to date treatment for any particular medical condition only about half the time. That's a pretty sad indication of the inability of medical professionals to keep up, and a potent indictment of the ability of the associations that represent them to keep an effective continuing medical education program in place.

Imagine my shock when subsequently, an association executive quietly observed to me that this would never happen with their members - "it simply could not be the case, because there are rules about this sort of thing!" I listened in awe, stunned at this naked, willful blindness, fully cognizant that both the medical and traditional media are full of stories about the challenges faced by medical professionals today.

What has gone wrong here? An executive who is not in tune with the rapid change that envelops the profession they represent - in essence, a leader who is not forward oriented. One can only imagine the systemic failure that is looming within this particular group as the fundamental challenges that they face today are not addressed.

What needs to be done? Leaders today must prepare their organizations for the future by defining direction, encouraging innovation and effecting change. They need to establish an overall organizational culture in which everyone is firmly focused on the future while managing the present. They need to ensure that learning becomes a fundamental and regular career responsibility, not an option to be pursued at leisure.

In this way, threat is turned into opportunity and agility becomes a cornerstone for success. Through the years I've seen many such leaders, and have observed that they have several common characteristics. They possess:

- the ability to link the organizational mission of today to the major trends and developments that will influence the organization through the coming years;
- a leadership style that encourages a culture of agility and allows for a rapid response to sudden change in products, markets, skill sets, career responsibilities, competitive challenges and other business, technological and workplace trends;
- the ability to establish and encourage an organization wide "trends radar" in which all staff and members keep a keen eye on the developments that will affect the organization in the future;
- the skill to create a culture of collaboration in which everyone is prepared to share their insight, observations and recommendations with respect to future trends, threats and opportunities;
- the ability to form a corporate culture in which staff are encouraged to not only deal with the unique and ongoing challenges of today, but are open and responsive to the new challenges yet to come;
- a performance-oriented focus in which people are encouraged to turn future challenges into opportunities, rather than viewing change as a threat to be feared.

Self-assessment

Listing these attributes of a forward-thinking leader is one thing, but how do you go about deciding if you are where you should be in becoming a forward-thinking leader? One of the first things you must do is to assess the readiness of you and your organization to deal with the challenges of the future.

To help you do this there are a number of careful, probing questions you must ask of yourself and of your organization:

- **Shifting you and your organization's culture from one of threat to one of opportunity** - do you have an attitude toward the future that is focused more on defining opportunity than avoiding threat?
- **Defining a vision and desired outcomes** - have you established a great vision of where you want to be in the future, given the rapid rate of change?
- **Communicating and embracing the vision** - have you shared the future with the people in your organization? Do they know where they are going and how they are going to get there? More importantly, do they buy into the future, and embrace it with the same sense of passion that you carry?
- **Promote innovation, flexibility and adaptability** - are you open to new ideas and ways of doing things? Do you feel you have an open and forward-thinking corporate or association culture?
- **Develop communication feedback loops** - do you listen to and encourage others to listen to each other in terms of the trends they see? Do you have a means to collect, review, and communicate the ideas generated?
- **Reward innovation-based success** - does everyone have a stake in achieving these opportunities, and are they rewarded for future thinking?

These questions form the foundation of an innovative, forward-thinking leader. The key is to translate the results into specific directions and actions.

A real, forward-oriented leader

Forward-oriented leadership is a rare and precious capability; it takes time and effort to develop this unique skill. And as with all things, one of the best ways to further understand the skill is by looking around you, and thinking about those you have encountered who have mastered the capability.

In my own case, I was quite lucky, in that I worked for a leader who I now recognize as being one who was a forward oriented leader long before the rate of change of today had encompassed our world. Twenty years ago, I was invited to join a unique project team in the major organization in which I worked. Our goal was to define the parameters for the future - how would our company be impacted by the rapid, relentless change that would occur through global connectivity?

The fascinating thing is that this fellow had identified the emergence of massive connectivity as a pretty "big thing" some twelve years before the rest of the corporate world caught on. Talk about insight!

As the team came together, this fellow presented us with some very unique challenges to address. How would the skills and knowledge required of us as professionals be affected? How would our marketplace change?

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Temporary Solutions

At times a business may face having to recruit specialized talent on short notice.

When a key person has to take an extended leave, a middle management talent suddenly departs or the company wins a bid for a project that requires additional expertise, should you rush to fill that position with full-time personnel? Hiring a temporary contract worker may be a better strategy for handling unexpected staffing needs.

Temporary staffing was once primarily used to cover administrative and clerical duties. However, today companies are increasingly recruiting professional, management and highly skilled staff on a temporary basis to handle more complex responsibilities for:

- Short and long-term projects;
- Peak business cycles;
- Staff vacations or medical or parental leaves; and
- Projects requiring specialized skills.

While temporary staffing is not recommended as a long-term human resources strategy, it can offer valuable assistance when your company has short-term needs. Rather than stretching the resources of permanent employees and decreasing productivity, you can have the right personnel in place in a timely manner.

For senior staff levels, filling an open position with temporary talent will give the company more time to re-assess the vacated position before beginning the search process for the permanent hire. As the search process can be long and drawn-out, the temporary employee can keep things running smoothly while the company finds the right person to fill the position. In the long run, this interim solution may save the company significant money.

Some argue that temporary staffing is more expensive than hiring full-time employees. Although this may be true in certain situations, temporary staffing eliminates the additional costs of carrying these individuals on the payroll year-round and providing benefits. Employee benefits can amount to as much as 20 to 25% of a company's salary budget.

In addition to the cost-benefit, the temporary's specialized skills, real-world knowledge and experience will shorten the learning process. Since the person may have worked at a number of different organizations, consider also that the temporary may bring fresh ideas and new ways of doing things that can enhance productivity.

Communicate with Staff

Bringing a temporary employee on your team may create issues relating to supervising and motivating your employees and keeping up morale. Some employees may feel disgruntled by the decision to fill the position with a temporary person so communication is important.

Handling any misperceptions or discomfort before the person starts will help ensure that the contract worker has a good start, the project is not stalled and unhappy staff members do not thwart the temporary person's effectiveness.

To deal with these issues, consider:

- Letting staff know early in the process that you will be hiring a person on a temporary basis.
- Explaining why the temporary is being hired. That is, the need for specialized skills and knowledge, etc.
- Describing the temporary's responsibilities and the length of the contract.
- Indicating which employees will be reporting to the temporary and ask for full cooperation.
- Assigning an employee to the temporary in the role of an apprentice. This is an opportunity for the employee to gain valuable knowledge and experience and could potentially groom a successor if the position is to become full-time.

The Contract

Whether you contract with the temporary employee directly or through an agency, make sure the details of the contract arrangement are finalized before the person starts. Generally, the contract should:

- Detail such issues as the term of the contract, fee arrangements, payment schedule, confidentiality, performance expectations and termination issues such as "acting in a manner unbecoming to the good name of the company".
- Specifically indicate that the temporary person is not an employee and is personally responsible for income tax, CPP, GST and other regulatory payments.
- Describe the environment where the temporary person will be working and the nature of the work and, where applicable, any tools, equipment or specific software programs that will be used.
- Set out to whom the temporary is to report. This is imperative to avoid internal upheaval, delays, misunderstandings and accidental confidentiality breaches.

On the first day, take time to introduce the temporary employee to your staff and express the confidence you have that everyone will support the individual and his or her work.

Just-in-time Staffing

The concept of hiring temporary specialists to help you get through tough times or to assist with a special project is a relatively new development. With many boomers choosing a part-time career over early retirement your company has access to a large pool of experienced and qualified candidates who can help you meet short-term staffing needs.



Changes in your Career?

Waiver Policy

Membership Fee Waiver Policy

In case of ill health, misfortune or such other circumstances as the Board considers appropriate, the Board may extend the time for payment of, or waive in whole or in part and for any period of time the payment of, any fees, dues and levies, and any arrears thereof, otherwise payable or to become payable under these by-laws (*Section 5.4 (a) Society of Local Government Managers By-laws*)

The Society realizes from time to time members may find themselves between jobs with their professional fees unpaid and as that may prove to be a financial hardship to the member, the Board will invoke its power to waive in part for a period of time the member's fees.

Over the number of years the Board has reduced fees members who have found themselves "in transition". In transition means: out of work and actively looking for work in local government management.

The Society of Local Government Managers recognizes two categories of certified membership: *active* and *retired*.

A retired certified member who has left the practice in the local government field and is eligible to be the recipient of the Local Authorities Pension Plan benefit or another pension benefit and elects to be pensionable will pay no dues.

A number of guidelines and procedures have been developed by the Board to assist active members in making application for a reduction of their membership fees while in transition

A member must make application to the Board requesting to be considered for "in transition" status stating they are not employed or working in practice of local government management and are actively looking for work in that field.

If the member becomes employed in the practice of local government management during the year the waiver was granted, the member will pay the balance of outstanding fees for that year.

Active certified members pay full dues with the following waiver provisions:

- Unemployed for six months or more: *one-quarter of full dues*.
- Family leave, interruption (minimum six months) of career due to parental considerations: *one-quarter of full dues for maximum of five years, consecutively of in total*.
- Long-term illness or disability (medically unable to work): *full dues waived upon receipt of a medical certificate*.
- Engaged in full-time study at a post-secondary institution: *one-quarter of full dues*.
- Employment income less than \$20,000 per year, not eligible for any other waiver and not engaged in exclusive local government management practice *one quarter of full dues*.

Members meeting these requirements should contact the

Registrar requesting an application form from the Society specifying which waiver provision you wish to apply for. The member must complete and return the waiver application promptly to the Registrar at the Society's Office. Payment of reduced dues, if applicable, must accompany all applications.

Contact:

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These requests will be presented to the Board for ratification.

The Positive Side of Life

Living on Earth is expensive but it does include a free trip around the sun every year

Happiness comes through doors you didn't even know you left open

Birthdays are good for you; the more you have, the longer you live.

Ever notice that the people who are late are often much jollier than the people who have to wait for them?

Most of us go to the grave with our music still inside of us

Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once.

Don't cry because it's over; smile because it happened

You may be only one person in the world, but you may also be the world to one person

We could learn a lot from crayons some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different colours . . . but they all exist very nicely in the same box.

A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery on a detour.

Have an awesome day, and know that someone who thinks you're great has thought about you today!

The Last Word

Congratulations to:

Certified Members: Aleta Neufeld CLGM, Linda Reynolds CLGM, Kathy Chan CLGM and Dean Screpnek CLGM and Associate member Murray Millard.

Reminders : Professional Education Affidavit for 2008 are due July 15, 2009.

If you are retiring, please let us know to avoid a bill.

When you are through reading this newsletter, why not pass it on to another colleague to enjoy?

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