

Greater Portland Council of Governments  
Municipal Leaders Training

## The Basics

Prepared by Craig Freshley, January, 2018

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### Why it pays to be a good leader

High functioning municipal leaders, boards, and committees aren't that way by accident, they work at it. They invest in themselves. They are continually looking at their behaviors and attitudes and deliberately making improvements. And the investments pay off.

Here are just some of the rewards that come from professional, competent, deliberate leadership.

#### Attract and keep good people

Good leaders attract good people. Highly competent leaders attract good thinkers and doers. Good leaders and high functioning groups attract good staff and have low staff turnover. Dysfunctional leaders and committees repel good people and attract people with, well, nothing better to do.

#### Get stuff done efficiently

One reason good leaders attract good people is because they don't waste people's time. "Want something done? Ask a busy person." Busy people who get stuff done hate inefficiency and don't have time for it. Leaders and groups who invest in self improvement don't waste time and money, or cause frustration.

#### Valued and praised by constituents

It's fun when you are getting positive encouragement. When people seeing you trying hard – trying to implement best practices for the good of the community – they are not so inclined to throw stones "from outside the circle." Good leaders and competent boards and committees are not always "in battle" with constituents and defending their actions.

#### Fun and rewarding to be part of

When a team gets good stuff done – when a team is winning – it's a fun team to be on. Participating or "having to go to meetings" is not a burden, a dread, a source of tension,

#### Make good decisions that serve their people well over time

Isn't this really why we are serving? To help our communities? We want to make good decisions that will work well over the long run. Decisions aren't always being revisited when they are made well in the first place. Good decisions reduce conflict and increase efficiency.

## Serve as a good example for other groups

Good leadership is contagious. People in the community are watching community leaders; and copying their behaviors and attitudes. High functioning leaders and groups are not modeling, promoting, condoning unhelpful behaviors and attitudes. Rather they are modeling good behaviors and attitudes.

## What good municipal leaders do

There are books and books about leadership and group dynamics. Here are a few basics from experience with Maine municipalities.

### Clear roles and responsibilities

High functioning leaders and groups establish well defined roles and clear responsibilities. Each person knows what they are supposed to do and what not to do, who the got-to person is for each topic, and the next step in every process. The best way to ensure shared understanding of roles and responsibilities is to 1. Write them down, and 2. Enforce them. Enforcing them means paying attention, calling things out, and when things are out of alignment: either correct the behavior or amend the role or responsibility.

### Do what you say

The most effective way to build trust is to say that we will do something and then do it. The most effective way to erode trust is to act in ways that are out of alignment with our words. For policies to have any effect, they need to be acted on. All talk and no action is just talk. Good leaders can be counted on to keep their word. And they are extremely careful about the commitments they make; what words they use.

### Transparency

In a high functioning organization each participant knows how things work. Each person has access to information. Knowledge and information is not used to have power over you but rather used to empower you to be more effective at helping the group. Things are written down and available. When information can't be available, an explanation is provided.

### Group first attitude

Good leaders are more interested in success of the group than in personal success. My job as a good team member is to help my teammates look good. A simple test for integrity? Is my behavior or attitude good for the group or is it good for me? If I act in self serving ways I am likely acting without integrity. Good leaders are not so concerned with credit or blame, only with what's best for the group or community. And it is the special leader who goes beyond assuming that "because I think it's good, it must be good for my community."

### Respect

Good leaders demonstrate a basic amount of respect for every person in every situation, no matter how strong the disagreement or the dislike. When I show respect I get respect. And

without a basic level of respect, we can't work together. And just because I disagree with you on one thing doesn't mean I won't work with on another thing.

### Humility

Good leaders are not afraid to call out a good idea when they see it; even if it's not theirs. Good leaders are not afraid to say "I don't know" rather than fudge an answer with what they do know or sort-of know. Good leaders are not afraid to admit mistakes and/or apologize. It's rarely the mistake that gets a leader in trouble, it's the cover up.

### Think strategically and regionally

Good leaders, boards, and committees get stuff done day-to-day but they also take time to think long term and big picture. They recognize that their community is part of a larger community and so although it takes time, they meet and make collaborative plans with other leaders and other communities. They also recognize their role as "stewards" in a long line of stewards who came before them and who will come after them.

### Development

Good leaders, boards, and committees take time to invest in their own development. They take time to do strategic planning. They take time to learn new things about the economy, the environment, demographics, and social trends. They take time to learn new techniques for meetings, conflict resolution, and communication. They ask their constituents about how they can do better, and they pay attention to the answers.

### The board acts as a whole

Members of high-functioning boards recognize the limits of their individual authority and recognize that true authority lies with the board as a whole; the corporate board. Members give individual opinions but do not speak for or decide for the board as a whole. Town and city managers and administrators report to boards, not individuals.

For Videos, Tips, and Handouts on all aspects of group dynamics, visit:

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