

December 2020 » Inside APWA » Leadership is an ability

Leadership is an ability

Jonathan Gano, P.E., Director of Public Works, City of Des Moines, Iowa; Chair, APWA Leadership & Management Committee



Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

If you've ever sat through a class on leadership, you've probably encountered that classic exercise, the instructor's opening gambit: "Is leadership an art or a science?" A very long, often heated debate ensues amongst the members of the audience, examples abounding supporting one theory countered by examples of why they're wrong. Jocks on one side, nerds on the other.

That exercise is a trick question—leadership is neither an art nor a science. It is an ability. Leadership is the ability to influence and guide people to create positive change.

And, much like many of our other abilities, it can be learned, practiced, and improved. We all have abilities we've acquired either through life experience or formal education, like speaking a second language, shooting hoops, drawing inferences from statistical data, or how to dig with a back-hoe. It's important to realize that the ability to lead can be *learned*, just like all of your other abilities you've acquired throughout your life. Which means the nerds were right (*it's a science*).

The most common misconception about leadership is that people "are" leaders. It is something to "be." Our leaders all possess those ineffable qualities that we can't really pin down. It's kinda hazy, but they all have that special something that we all know when we see it. Real leaders just "are" leaders.

No, what you're thinking of is charisma. That's definitely an art that people are usually born with and can certainly help leaders but by itself is not necessary and, inartfully applied, can actually be counterproductive to the aims of the organization. We have all seen in our own personal experiences people with great personal charisma who have utterly stunk at actual leadership. Some people just fail upwards. When charisma alone is substituted for leadership it can generate intense personal loyalty to the charismatic individual while taking their eyes off the purpose of the organization—their reason for being there. Thinking they are serving the needs of the organization, service to the individual as the embodiment of the organization can easily create conflicts of interest quite quickly, creating negative change—the opposite of leadership.

We are all leaders, each in our own way, whether we bear a title formally bestowing “leadership” responsibilities or not.

The ability to lead is built on behaviors, not innate characteristics. It is what you *do*, not who you are.

Another misconception about leadership is that it's only the top boss who's the leader in the organization. As a result, leadership training is too often pointed at those who inhabit executive roles in the organization. We are all leaders, each in our own way, whether we bear a title formally bestowing “leadership” responsibilities or not. Even if you are on the bottom rung of a hierarchy ladder in your org chart, you can be an informal leader of your peers and even an example to those further up the chain. Positive change does not care who is doing it, just that it moves the organization or community forward.

We are not asking you to strain at the impossible, to change the fundamental nature of yourself—to *become* someone different than you already are in order to lead. If you're an introvert, we're not asking you to suddenly develop a keen affection for conversation. If you're not naturally a spontaneous person, we're not asking you to make off-the-cuff impassioned speeches to your team. If you do not have a social media presence, we're not asking you to become an Instagram influencer. It is not personality traits that will define your leadership success. You are just fine how you are and you can still learn the skills of leadership behaviors and build positive change in your organization.

In the rest of this issue of the *Reporter*, you will find an introduction to the leadership theory that will be shaping everything the Association teaches about leadership. In the coming years, it will work its way through every publication, every Public Works Institute, the Emerging Leaders Academy, and so on. This framework consists of five practices that are the essential behaviors of leaders. To emphasize that leadership is behavior-based, you'll notice that each of the practices begins with a verb, giving you something that must be done to demonstrate the behavior. It doesn't just happen; you have to *do* something.

First published in the 1987 book *The Leadership Challenge* by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are a research-based framework of observable behaviors:

Model The Way. You have to walk the talk.

Inspire A Shared Vision. Imagine what the future of your team could look like and build enthusiasm to get there.

Challenge The Process. Is your organization perfect? Find out what needs fixing and fix it.

Enable Others To Act. Build relationships of mutual trust and let your team go to work.

Encourage The Heart. Recognition and encouragement are essential to building around a common purpose.

Each issue for the next year will feature a deeper dive into each of those practices with key insights for you and your development of your leadership skills.

Each issue for the next year will feature a deeper dive into each of those practices with key insights for you and your development of your leadership skills. Though there's an infinite number of ways to implement each of the practices, the research conducted in the writing of *The Leadership Challenge* found two best ways for each practice to at least cover the baseline for each, described as Commitments. Each of the practices builds on those two Commitments that

help crystalize some of the most important elements of the practice and the most important to exercise. The Commitments are the highest payoff parts of each practice and are sure to inspire a positive response from the workgroup.

To take a deeper dive into what APWA has planned for leadership education over the next several years, feel free to check out the book from your local library free of charge. It is a classic and almost certainly on the shelf in most libraries across the continent. Barring that, you can keep an eye on these pages for the next year as the Leadership & Management Committee spends time each month in the upcoming year's worth of the *Reporter* to walk the membership through how to build our leadership skills and abilities.

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January 2021 » Columns » Effective Leadership in Action: Let your values guide you!

Effective Leadership in Action: Let your values guide you!

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LEARNING LEADERSHIP

A fundamental question that all public works leaders face: Why do people follow their leaders? Research shows they follow those they believe are credible and have values that they are willing to support (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). So, what is a leader? Leadership author Brown (2020) outlines this question as “anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes and has the courage to develop that potential.”

In the next ten months, various articles will outline and define a framework and leadership approach in public works. This article covers the initial step in the framework of how a significant public works leader is shaped. Being an effective public works leader is a combination of essential leadership characteristics, continued learning, and inspiring a problem-solving team environment.

Key Leadership Characteristics

“When people practice what they preach, people are more willing to entrust [their leaders] with their livelihood” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 43). The four key leadership characteristics discussed in this article are honesty, competency, ability to inspire, and forward vision. The first and foremost trait of a leader is honesty. A leader’s staff needs to know that agency policies and direction are based on demonstrated ethics and truth. Continued honesty lends integrity to leaders,

and this integrity matters to staff. Leaders must admit when they have made an error or mistake, then correct the ship's course. This type of admission and correction gives leaders credibility and respect from staff. Through building credibility, showing up with intention and focus, and exhibiting ethics, leaders will demonstrate their values and honesty to staff.

Consent-building leadership team in Florida county

The second characteristic of a leader is competency. A leader is not expected to know everything but should be aware of the shortcomings and vital areas of themselves and their group. With awareness, leaders can put more effort into operations that traditionally fall short of expectations or lean on others for those areas to help pick up the slack. Leaders should also not provide direction for resources when the leader has minimal knowledge of an issue being addressed without obtaining counsel from those who do know. Competence is not just technical. It is the ability to facilitate and collectively develop answers. For example, a leader should stop short of directing the installation of a traffic signal because of a citizen complaint and instead rely on the traffic engineering group to utilize their technical skills to help the leader determine the correct course of action.

Employees want a leader who inspires them. Inspiration, the third characteristic, can come in many forms, but leaders should have the ability to inspire their staff through different mediums. Some are keener to lead by example, while others are skilled at direct inspiration through conversation with employees or public speaking. The goal is for a leader to be able to inspire a team towards a successful solution. In 1961, President Kennedy announced the inspirational goal of sending an American safely to the moon before the end of the decade (NASA, 2020). He did not know how this was to be done, yet he outlined it with passion, with the outcome resulting in America's space dominance. Public works leaders are not taking us to the moon, but they need to inspire their team to help others and foster a better community.

A fourth leadership characteristic is a forward vision. Developing projects that have longevity often involves solving problems with long-term solutions and repairs. Being able to train the eye towards long-term solutions is an important character trait in the leaders of public works and takes time to cultivate.

Learning Never Stops

Credibility for public works leaders means continuing to learn new leadership techniques and business processes. This includes applying the latest principles while using technology to more effectively serve the public. Conferences and seminars tailored for public works offer unique opportunities to share and learn common problems across agencies. Public works policy is always changing; staying on top of new regulations is essential for a team. During COVID, more conferences are turning to online forums at discounted rates, making attending much easier.

Environment for Action

Demonstrating the credibility of being a team leader is shown by creating an environment that fosters creativity and problem-solving. Members of a team are gratified and encouraged when they can see their ideas put into action. Fostering this environment also makes the team committed to the project, resulting in less turnover and long-lasting work partnerships. Employees show acceptance of leaders' credibility when they feel part of the organization and believe it is related to their personal values. This is true when they think that they make a difference and accept ownership of the agency's direction.

Credibility Matters

A leader who knows what they believe and understands themselves while following these characteristics can create credibility. How does a leader know if they have credibility? One way to know is the level of pride that staff take in being a part of your organization. Also, employees have a strong sense of being part of a team and what the team is doing.

Employees show acceptance of a leader's credibility when they feel committed to the organization and believe it is related to their personal values. This is true when they think they can make a difference and accept ownership in the agency's direction. For example, at PWX, a young ELA project manager in a presentation enthusiastically talked about how they helped the community through a program that processes and recycles waste. She spoke passionately about what was occurring—it was her value; she was a part of the organization; she believed in the agency's direction.

Conversely, if an employee only works when watched, criticizes the organization privately, is continually looking to change their job, and has only motivation to make more money, they are not buying into the leader's direction.

Model the Way

An excellent public works leader is one who embodies honesty, competency, ability to inspire, and cultivates forward vision. They realize that learning is ongoing and that a problem-solving environment with long-term solutions is vital to the public works department. In the February issue, we will discuss the next step of how one can lead with either moral or positional authority. This discussion lets one know that first and foremost, a leader must know who they are and what they believe, and second, a leader must let others know that they genuinely believe in specific values and then attain buy-in of their followers.

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February 2021 » Columns » Moral Authority is Influence, and Influence is Leadership

Moral Authority is Influence, and Influence is Leadership

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LEARNING LEADERSHIP

"Moral authority takes years to acquire, but one unguarded moment to lose." – Andy Stanley, North Point Church, Leading Through Series, July 26, 2020

What do Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong, Matt Lauer, Kevin Spacey and Bill Cosby have in common (at least from my perspective)? They were all people of influence who were respected, trusted, and loved, but they lost their credibility, people's respect, people's trust, their careers, their lives because the spotlight shined on them and showed how their actions were not in alignment with who they portrayed themselves to be.

Modeling the way is the first practice in the way APWA defines leadership. Basic principles of modeling the way are to walk the talk, to be authentic with good personal character, to be an example to others, and to have and instill ethical conduct. These men listed above modeled the way for many that followed in their footsteps, or that admired them in their trade. However, with one unguarded moment, their moral authority was stripped from them instantly, and most of them will never get it back.

Image taken from minute 6:08 of Moral Authority sermon given by Andy Stanley on July 26, 2020

Moral authority extends beyond a position of leadership, such as a boss, teacher, parent and coach. Moral authority is about consistent actions taken to influence others. It is about doing what is right even if it is not popular or if it costs you. It is about leading with authenticity and good character. It is about what people associate with your name. It is about being a good example for others to follow. It is about holding yourself and others accountable.

People make mistakes, even those held in the highest regard. Trustworthy people make mistakes all the time, but trustworthy people handle their mistakes by accepting responsibility and moving in a direction to make it right. I listened to a really great interview with Lance Armstrong, and after listening to him, he seemed really sincere about regretting the mistakes he made and the negative impact he had to his followers, but more importantly, to his family. His breaking point was looking at his kids and telling them what he did. I really respect the way he took accountability for his actions and the path he has taken to move on. Will he ever regain that moral authority that he once had? Hard to say, but he is sure trying to regain trust and respect again with actions he has taken since his moral authority was stripped of him.

As a boss, teacher, parent and coach, you definitely have positional authority where you are a leader simply because you are a boss, teacher, parent and coach. But, to have moral authority with your followers, you have to lead by example, walk the talk, and model the way for them.

Lying in our house is one of the worst offences you could do. Our kids know and understand that if they lie or cheat, it loses our trust in them and we would question their every move until they re-earned that trust with their future actions. With this principle, we implemented a rule in our house to always tell the truth, no matter how bad it might be because we can always find ways to make it right (or better).

Well, one day, we went to the local zoo for our daughter's birthday. I previously "stretched the truth" with our zoo membership and added my niece and nephews as my "kids" to save a few bucks. That day I had to renew our family membership and was at the counter. Since it was my daughter's birthday, she invited her friend...and they were both standing there while I renewed our membership. When the lady asked if the membership was still to cover the five kids, my daughter instantly blurted out, "no, it's two kids"...and then the lady looked at me with a very puzzled look.

When you make a mistake, own it. I fessed up and said I had my niece and nephews added because I get them over the summer for a few weeks and we go to the zoo together (that part was very true). The lady said it was only intended for kids who live in our household (I knew that, but "stretched the truth" anyways). OOPS!! Needless to say, the number of kids on the membership went from five to two. I knew what I did was wrong and had to make it right with my daughter and her friend. When we left the counter, I took accountability for my actions, I apologized to my daughter and her friend for lying, and we talked about it in great detail later.

With this example, I did not follow the "model the way" basic principles of walking the talk, being authentic with good personal character, being an example to my daughter and her friend, and instilling ethical conduct. A white lie is still a lie and it went against one of the most important rules in the house. My actions afterwards made it better for my kids, and it did not tarnish our relationship, but always think twice about what you do.

We have all done these "white lies" to save a few bucks or to gain some sort of advantage, but in the end, check back to see if your actions will undermine your influence, and if what you are doing is in alignment with what you stand for.

Closing Thoughts

Without moral authority, you cannot maintain influence, and to not maintain influence translates to a leader who is not worth following. Do not do something that you would not want people to find out about. Moral authority takes years to acquire but could take one unguarded moment to lose it temporarily, or at the worst case, forever. Make sure you align your actions with what you say and do, because if you don't, your moral authority may be in jeopardy.

How have you impacted your influence to others and how did you recover from it? I would love to hear your stories. Contact me at etwigg@consoreng.com (<mailto:etwigg@consoreng.com>) to share.

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Andy Stanley, North Point Church, *Leading Through Series*, July 26, 2020 (northpoint.org/messages/leading-through/moral-authority,
(<https://northpoint.org/messages/leading-through/moral-authority>))

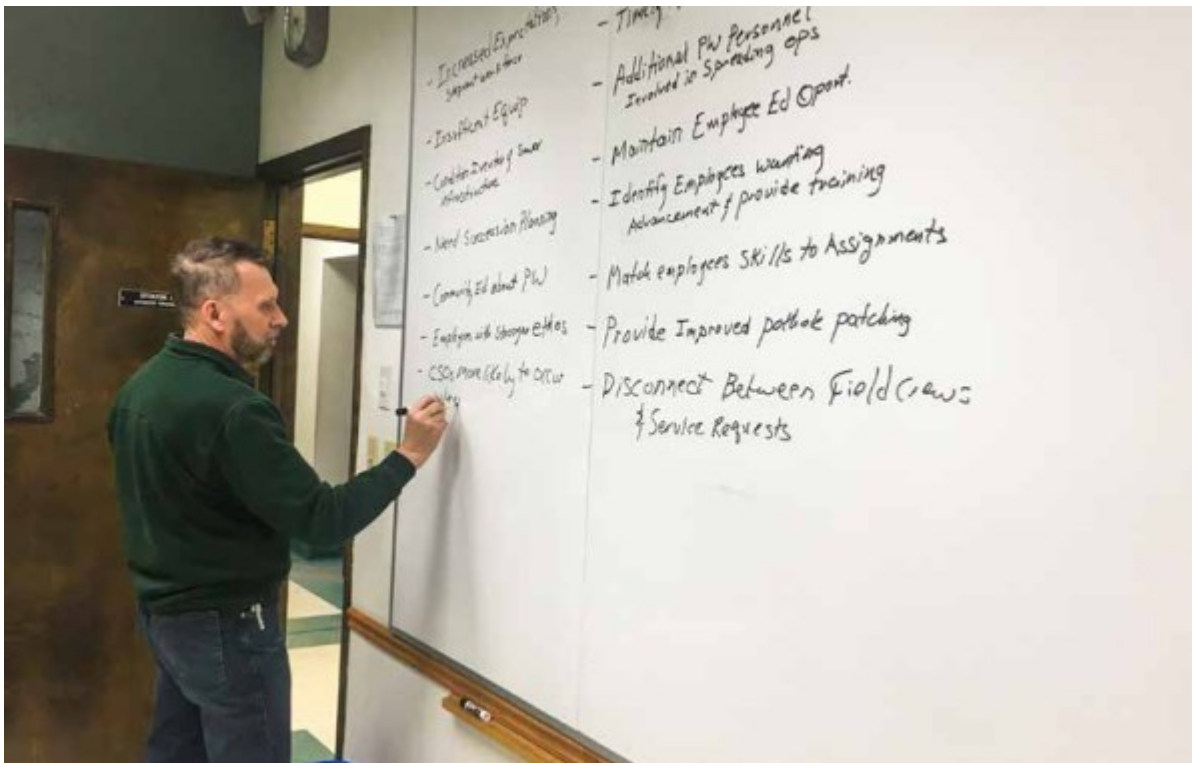


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March 2021 » Columns » Inspire a Shared Vision

Inspire a Shared Vision

Jonathan Gano, P.E., Director of Public Works, City of Des Moines, Iowa; Chair, APWA Leadership and Management Committee



A visioning exercise underway

In this series on Learning Leadership, we've been focused on the practical skills that let anyone *do* leadership. Leadership is an ability built on actions, not characteristics. Actions can be learned and practiced; skills can be improved.

Inspiring a shared vision is one of those practices of an effective leader that is easily overlooked but quintessential for building a high-performing organization. It is one of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership that's the leadership framework we'll be using to teach leadership in APWA for years to come.

Thinking about the future is one of the most important responsibilities of a leader. Conversely, it's also one of the easiest activities to undertake—all you have to do is *think*.

It is a leader's job to imagine what the future of the organization will look like and how it will withstand the challenges brought upon by today and tomorrow.

Amongst all leaders, though, the task of thinking about the future is dramatically underrepresented on their calendars. Most leaders report that forward-looking activities only take up about 3% of their time, on average. There is no one else more responsible for crafting a vision of the future of the organization than the leader, so put some time into it.

Whether it be next year, a period of 3-5 years, a decade, or 20-plus years, things *will* be different from how they are now and you need to prepare for it by crafting a vision of how the organization will respond. Granted, the time horizon may differ depending on one's scope of responsibility, but leaders of all stripes should dedicate some fair amount of time to seeing what's coming over the horizon.

Turns out we're hardwired for this. The human mind has been described as an anticipation machine. There's a longstanding debate about what's better—eating pizza pockets or the feeling you get when anticipating eating pizza pockets? See, it's debatable. Put that imagination to work dreaming up possibilities for your organization and the community you serve and mulling it all over.

When thinking of “leaders” and “vision statements,” we can easily default to that cheesy, pie-in-the-sky version of a vision where “we will be the best at everything” in just a few short years. Or we have that image of a leader emerging from on-high with the “vision” in a fuzzy, glowing haze of revelation. More often than not, it was just the by-product of locking themselves in the closet with pizza and Mountain Dew.

Take care not to attempt to do this all by yourself. It is easier to inspire a *shared* vision with your team when they have had a hand in crafting it.

Work with your team, throughout your organization, to find that common purpose. Most people in public works are here because it is interesting work that makes a difference to their community. This kind of work creates meaning, not just money. Put to work that already-present intrinsic motivation to make things better and let them help shape the future of the organization.

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Practice the art of listening deeply. Ask questions of your colleagues about what they think the future will hold. And wait for the full answer.

In small enough teams, a leader may be able to solicit and incorporate feedback from every single member of the team. In larger workgroups, it may require selecting focus groups, preferably volunteers. Be humble and ask questions, and not just from people in authority. Some of the most valuable input will work its way up from the very front lines of your team. You'll often find that those who understand the work the best are the ones actually doing it.

In my experience with my department, I lead the entire leadership team through a visioning exercise. More like facilitate, really, as the group breaks down into small teams, each tasked with identifying the challenges our community will face in the coming five years and what are we going to do about it. Given some time to work amongst themselves to build bullet points, we put every group's contributions up on the whiteboard. We then collaboratively and in real time wordsmith all of those separate contributions into a coherent three-sentence vision of the future of our department.

In the public sector, we are rarely blazing a new trail with a new organization from scratch. There's never a tabula rasa like an entrepreneur might have starting a new business. Almost always, we, as leaders in public works, find ourselves in shoes formerly inhabited by someone else in an organization that's been around for decades, if not longer. There's years and years of history and commitments already made, services that must continue unabated. The easy cop-out is to just keep on doing what we've always done. No vision required.

More often, the challenges of the future are not so much what you'll need to do, but the circumstances under which you'll need to do it. Budget cycles boom and bust, key staff leave or retire, policy priorities change at election time, technology advances relentlessly and resident expectations with it.

The best leaders are always thinking about what the future will bring. The demands of today never go away—each day brings new fires to put out—but an exemplary leader will always be thinking of tomorrow's challenges. And how to meet them. Sharing that passion for the future with your team will do the work of inspiring them, too.

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April 2021 » Columns » Inspire a Shared Vision

Inspire a Shared Vision

Nancy Cole, RA, Project Management Office, Pima County Public Works, Tucson, Arizona



An empty Development Services Lobby – everyone is online...

This month continues the series regarding the five practices of exemplary leadership in public works by focusing on the topic of *Inspiring a Shared Vision*. Last month Jonathan Gano discussed key skills within this framework practice including the importance of having a vision of the future, of involving others to create a shared vision, and provided practical tips on how to meet future challenges with this shared vision. This article will dig deeper into the topic, and provide some examples of how a changing environment requires a continuous evaluation of an organization's vision in order to ensure the organization is heading in the right direction.

The importance of having a vision for the future is never clearer than as stated by Kouzes & Posner (2017) in their book *The Leadership Challenge*: "You have to spend more of today thinking more about tomorrow if your future is going to be an improvement over the present." (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p.104). Although many businesses may dedicate time to think about how they will operate in the future it is typical for many public works agencies to spend most of their time responding to today. Often, in a government setting this works adequately—but occasionally significant change without any forward visionary planning can disrupt the organization. "[T]he fundamental mission of an organization is to survive. Most of the time, organizations survive by continuously fixing problems and trying to improve the way things are done. Sometimes, however, survival depends on an entirely new *raison d'être* with completely different products or services or both." (Burke, p.78). Using a shared vision is one effective way to meet change with eyes open and a service-oriented perspective.

External Change Driving Internal Vision

In 2007, Arizona was riding the top of a development high, and Pima County's Development Services Department was hard at work trying to meet the community needs for permit review. With approximately 183 full-time employees, discussions within the department focused on how to streamline the process, and be able to do more as permit requests reached record levels without increasing staff. While managers were looking closely at their processes the recession began abruptly; and practically overnight the construction industry in the Tucson metro area came to a near total stop. Predicting this major shift from boom to bust wasn't practicable, but the fact that the department was working to create a vision for a much more streamlined and effective process was, in the end, timely.

In the field, Contractor filming

The Development Services Department transformed their vision of the permit process to be both managed digitally and completed within new legislative deadlines during the recession. This fundamental change required all staff to be involved in understanding what the new department vision was, and to work together to achieve that shared vision. New software, processes and standards necessary for staff were implemented to manage within this new world. They used a transition period, as the region's construction industry also had to change from filing paper plan sets to using digital submissions. Since first implemented the County not only complies with legislation timelines, it has become a model for other agencies to follow their lead and go digital.

And then came the Pandemic

This process change drove the entire way the department implemented their operational model. It permeated all levels—not just development review or building permit applications but also how the building inspectors operate. A new option was provided in 2015 for remote inspections to ensure construction compliance with the approved permit. This required a whole new skillset for both inspectors and contractors, and new processes to be effective. Pre-inspection preparation is required, to ensure that the inspector's time is well used, and that the correct items will be finished and displayed for review. This relies on good technology (and cell connections) for the contractors, but was a great addition to the department's toolbox. Pima County is roughly the size of New Jersey— some inspections required significant drive time and effort prior to this option. Instead, using these new technologies, staff continued to meet that streamlined service and digital convenience vision. The results, particularly for projects physically distant, were very positive from the construction community.

In the office, Inspector reviewing

When the pandemic hit, the agility and sustainability of the Pima County Development Services operational vision were put to the test. Without much time to plan, the department had to evolve yet still maintain service to the development community in a safe environment. Staff assignments were evaluated daily to ensure that the department was strategically positioned to leverage resources and technology to the furthest extent. With a current staff of 51 full-time employees, they continue to manage decisions through their service model vision, allowing the response to a changed pandemic world as just business as usual. It's unlikely that most customers ever realize that nearly half of the staff is operating remotely.

A Fundamentally Changed Vision

Other Pima County departments were significantly impacted by the recession, even if that wasn't immediately apparent. The Department of Transportation was focused on delivering capital projects to increase capacity throughout the region up through the early 2000s. The department vision was focused for many years on necessary capacity improvements to the exclusion of long-term maintenance goals. By 2013 the impacts of this unbalanced vision were apparent, but constricted budgets and a slow recovery limited our ability to refocus long-term goals. In 2015, a proposed bond program would have begun to address deferred maintenance issues, but the region had lost trust in our vision and did not fund the initiative.

Ana Olivares, PC Transportation Director, presenting at the TAC public meeting

By 2019 the Transportation Department updated its vision significantly, refocusing on bringing all roads in our system back up to a good status as step one. This permeated throughout the organization, by changing staff roles and a new reporting structure. They utilized new software systems and tools to evaluate road condition ratings and determine a ten-year plan to reach all roads at an average 80 PCI rating (good). This plan encompassed nearly 2,000 miles of unincorporated County paved roads. A new citizen's committee was instituted to assist with this planning, ensuring that public voices were heard and included in the planning process. Having a clear vision of department goals resulted in a turnaround in both operation outcomes and in community support.

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With the maintenance program on track, the department is focused on the future. A new initiative to use smart technology and mobility on demand features is underway. The department is working with regional partners to maximize efficiencies on our existing infrastructure—reducing the need to continually increase capacity to instead direct traffic on demand within the existing system. Working with other jurisdictions to ensure that the system streamlines mobility so that the traveling public doesn't realize system borders are crossed is essential to a long-term solution. Implementing a vision that is forward-focused on future changes in transportation needs is impacting the work being done today.

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Inspiring a Shared Vision

The fundamental purpose behind a vision is for leadership to define the future of an organization in simple terms for everyone to see, touch and hear. A vision focuses an entire team in a single direction, where outcomes are understood and adjustments can be made along the way to ensure these are met. A Shared Vision takes that one step further—staff may have participated in creating the vision, but they have also embraced the vision, internalized it and adopted it. Each member of staff is truly empowered; they each have ownership in the shared vision and a thorough understanding of how their role, both individually and as a member of the team, are critical to the success of the organization. Once everyone on the team is on board with a shared vision, their decision-making process is guided by a results-focused approach. Public works leaders should recognize the importance of a shared vision, and how this can improve the important work we are challenged with every day.

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May 2021 » Columns » The Speed of Trust in Contracting

The Speed of Trust in Contracting

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Photo by Charles Deluvio on Unsplash

“Price is what you pay. Value is what you get.” – Warren Buffet

If you’ve spent much time working in design and construction, then you probably have mixed feelings about low bid contracting. Some of you may even go so far as to *loathe* it. There are many reasons why that could be, but the main reason I dislike low bid contracting? Because it’s a very untrusting and inefficient process that doesn’t necessarily produce the greatest value for our communities.

In his book *The Speed of Trust*, author Stephen M.R. Covey argues that when there are *high* levels of trust, cost goes down and speed goes up. When there are *low* levels of trust, cost goes up and speed goes down. A prominent example used in the book is how the American travel experience of getting through airport security changed in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11). Prior to 9/11, getting through security may have taken five minutes and the cost of a plane ticket was measurably cheaper. Post-9/11, trust in airline passengers had gone down.

The result? Getting through security can now take upwards of thirty minutes and the price of a ticket is higher to pay for all of the new security infrastructure and personnel. This is the measurable cost of mistrust in both time and money, or a “trust tax” as Stephen M.R. Covey refers to it.

Construction team meeting (photo by David Skuodas)

Similar to the post-9/11 travel experience, the traditional practice of low bid contracting is very untrusting, which results in higher costs and slower project delivery. As examples of mistrust in low bid contracting, consider how lengthy contracts are, how change order-proof we try to make our plan sets, and how much oversight we pay for during construction. To be good stewards of taxpayer dollars we should challenge any process that creates this much inefficiency.

If we wanted to transition away from the untrusting process of low bid contracting to a more trusting process, how might we go about that?

Let me explain how we accomplished this around ten years ago at the Mile High Flood District (District). The District facilitates the rhyme and reason to how our urban waterways are managed as they cross 40 city and county boundaries in the greater Denver metropolitan area. Some of our services include design and construction of flood mitigation projects, and long-term maintenance like trash and debris pickup and smaller restorations.

As a public agency that contracts with private designers, builders, and maintainers every year for similar types of work, we were feeling the pain of lost time and money caused by low bid contracting. At the time we were using low bid contracting for projects above \$100,000 in construction cost. For projects under \$100,000 we directly selected an oncall contractor to perform the work using a negotiated price.

This meant that for our most expensive, riskiest, highest profile projects we were hiring contractors we may have never worked with before. For our simpler and less expensive projects we were using contractors with whom we had built long-term relationships. Our on-call contractors brought real value to making even simple projects less expensive and more constructible. We wanted those same benefits for our higher profile projects.

We embarked on the transition away from low bid contracting. This led to our current project delivery process called Project Partners.

Project Partners is a relationship-based project delivery program that:

- Streamlines procurement by simplifying consultant and contractor selection processes.
- Engages with a contractor during design to get their input on constructibility, risk, and value engineering.
- Achieves efficiency and cost control through long-term working relationships with designers and builders.

Project Partners resembles a Construction Management/General Contractor (or CM/GC) style of project delivery, in that we contract separately with both the designer and the builder. We use pre-qualified selection processes for consultants and contractors. Project teams are assembled from our pre-qualified lists using direct selection for smaller projects, and a competitive interview process for larger projects. Accountability is achieved through vendor annual performance evaluations by our staff and by local government stakeholders. Each year new vendors have an opportunity to be added to our list during a request for qualifications process.

Project Partners is a far cry from traditional low bid contracting, so this wasn't a shift we were able to make overnight. It took years. Following are some of the basic steps we went through in this transition.

Look Outward

We researched alternative delivery options and inquired with consultants and contractors about models used by other public agencies. This research led us to Fort Collins, Colorado.

The City of Fort Collins uses a process called the Alternative Project Delivery System (APDS). The APDS uses a CM/GC style of project delivery that relies upon long-term trusting relationships with designers and builders. The APDS gave us a blueprint for how to structure Project Partners.

This gave us clarity around where we wanted to get to, but we still needed to get there.

Build Trust

District staff working on larger low bid capital projects started helping with smaller maintenance projects, exposing them to our on-call contractors. This built trusting relationships between our staff and on-call contractors. Through repeat work and relationship-building, our on-call contractors became like an extension of our own staff.

Generate Small Wins – and Document Them

We inched up our direct selection thresholds above the \$100,000 limit that I mentioned earlier. This allowed us to bite off larger projects to demonstrate that we were getting fair pricing, and that we were realizing tangible cost, quality, risk reduction, and innovation benefits. We documented our successes through project case studies. We also documented the contrast of low bid contracting failures through similar case studies.

Visit website (<http://www.apwa.net/SelfAssessmentEvent>)

Be Inclusive

Because we partner with local governments to fund and build projects, we needed their buy-in to this new project delivery process. Armed with our case studies we embarked on a yearlong outreach effort. Valuable input from this effort improved the structure of Project Partners and made it a more viable model for all of the 40 cities and counties we partner with.

We also met extensively with the consultants and contractors who did our work. We listened to fully understand the challenges and opportunities in their business models, and to create an approach that would benefit everyone.

Conclusion

Changing an entrenched organizational process like construction contracting was no small task. With a little strategy and a lot of persistence it's amazing what we accomplished in just a few years. By looking outward for guidance, by building trust with key stakeholders, by generating and documenting early wins, and by using a very inclusive process there are few limits to what can be accomplished. Project Partners has allowed us to attract more talented project teams, get more for our money, and build better projects. In the words of Stephen M.R. Covey, these are the "trust dividends" we've earned for our community.

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June 2021 » Columns » LEARNING LEADERSHIP: Great leaders know that challenging the process leads to positive change

LEARNING LEADERSHIP: Great leaders know that challenging the process leads to positive change

Jeffrey A. Kramer, P.E., PWLF, City Engineer, City of Yuma, Arizona, and member, APWA Leadership & Management Committee



Photo by Leon on Unsplash

As we continue our exploration of APWA's new leadership model, we come to the practice of Challenging the Process.

Doing so is critical to the growth and advancement of our organizations and communities. I've often told people there's no such thing as standing pat—you're either growing or going backwards. There's just one part of this concept that's hard. Challenging the process means change. British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli said, "Change is inevitable. Change is constant." So why does the mere word strike fear into the hearts of employees in all our organizations?

We've all experienced change throughout our lives and careers, sometimes good and sometimes not so much, but we know intuitively that Disraeli is right. So why the fear? Change can be scary for a variety of reasons, but it doesn't have to be, and that's where leadership comes in. Great leaders understand that change is good for their organization, for their team members, and for those they serve.

Change will either happen to you, or you can make it happen.

If you've been in government for a while, you've probably heard the phrase "good enough for government work." Confession time. I really, really dislike that saying. Good enough isn't bad in and of itself, but the saying really meant government work wasn't very good. Why was government work only good enough? Why couldn't it be great? The reason is comfort. We get comfortable with what we know, what we do, how we do it, and it's easier to just keep on keeping on. My dislike for that phrase fueled my drive to be a change agent, and constantly challenge process.

We all know change is going to happen, it always does, and comfort and change are not good bedfellows. This is where leadership is so important. Change will either happen to you, or you can make it happen, and good leaders know how to make it happen right. Properly planned and executed, challenging the process can move people and organizations forward in amazing ways. Therein lies the key, doing it right.

Status quo at its finest, may be our biggest impediment to innovation and improvement.

Question the Status Quo

Challenging the process begins with questioning the status quo. That comfort we have with what we know and do, and how we do it, might actually be holding us back from improvements that would provide significant benefit. Maybe good enough for government work really doesn't have to be. In the 1980s we experienced the Total Quality Management movement and the advent of process improvement teams, quality circles, Kaizen, and more. While the terminology has changed, the concepts are still with us and are the basis for challenging the process, which is simply looking for ways to improve.



Challenging the status quo means finding new ways of doing things.

Too often we find ourselves mired in good, thinking that's enough, because, well, we've always done it that way. Yeah, I went there. Because we've always done it that way. Einstein called it insanity, which he defined as "doing the same thing over and over but expecting different results." Status quo at its finest, and what may be our biggest impediment to innovation and improvement, is doing what we've always done. The truth is that we have to give up the good to get to the great, because good is the enemy of great.

Rear Admiral Grace Hopper knew this well. A pioneer of the computer world, Hopper is credited with developing the first programming language compiler and contributing to the creation of the UNIVAC computer and the COBOL programming language. Brilliant and insightful, the saying "The most dangerous phrase in the language is 'we've always done it this way'" is often credited to her. Great leaders know that the best way is the best way, not the one that's always been done. The button in the photo (shown on p. 32) hangs on the bulletin board in my office. For years I've told my teams, "I don't care if we've always done it that way, show me it's the best way or let's find a better one."

Cast a Vision of the Future State

Change isn't just uncomfortable; it can be scary. People are afraid of what they don't know and are afraid of losing what they are comfortable with. As a leader it is important to alleviate that fear, but how do you do that?

One of the most important things a leader can do is cast the vision (see Practice #2, Inspire a Shared Vision, *APWA Reporter*, March 2021, p. 30), and in the case of challenging the process and implementing change that becomes even more critical. When our people are afraid of losing, of disrupting their comfort zone or their way of doing things, that's what they are going to focus on. As their leader you have to show them what they stand to gain. Paint a picture of the future condition, identify the benefits of the change, and show how the change will positively impact them. When you make a personal connection between each person and the change, your chances of success are significantly increased.

Anticipate the fears and be prepared to answer the questions before they are asked.

Anticipate Resistance so you can Overcome it

No matter how well you encourage your team members to challenge the status quo, or how rosy a picture you paint of the future condition, we all know there will be resistance. It's natural that some people can't get past their fears or the feeling of loss.

As a leader we need to know this resistance is out there. Anticipate the fears and be prepared to answer the questions before they are asked. Understand that the fears are real to those experiencing them, and empathize with them. The more a leader can stand in the shoes of those who are going to resist the change, the better prepared you will be to provide the comfort and reassurance they need to drop the resistance and climb aboard.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

In any normal circumstance a leader must communicate clearly and frequently with their team. When change is involved, communication needs rise to an entirely new level. Clear and frequent isn't enough anymore. When it comes to change, a leader has to also become vulnerable, sharing your concerns, fears and anticipation for the outcomes. Connecting on an emotional level will improve the likelihood of success for the change—just make sure the emotional connection is authentic. Your people can smell phony from a mile away!

Celebrating success when implementing change may be the most important step.

When it comes to change, there's no such thing as overcommunicating. There's an old communication-related saying: I'm going to tell you what I'm going to tell you, then I'm going to tell you, then I'm going to tell you what I told you. When it comes to change, that simplifies down to communicate, communicate, communicate.

Celebrate Successes

Celebrating success when implementing change may be the most important step. When done, you've identified the change by challenging the status quo, cast the vision, overcome the resistance, and communicated all along the way. But why wait until then to party—don't!

Just like communication is ongoing, and covers every little thing, so should celebration. Each small step toward the future condition should be celebrated. Identify a process improvement—celebrate discovery. Run a pilot project—celebrate. Measure an incremental improvement—celebrate. You get the picture, celebrate often to build excitement, support and momentum for the change.

Are you ready to rise to the challenge?

Challenging the process is about change, and change requires leadership. Leaders who create an environment where people look for better ways of doing things, aren't afraid to take risks, and where failure is viewed as a mechanism for learning and improvement rather than a punishable offense. Leaders who want to make their people, organizations and communities better. These are leaders who have the courage to rise to the leadership challenge. If you are ready, the Leadership and Management Committee is ready to help.

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Good leaders create an environment where people look for better ways of doing things, aren't afraid to take risks and where failure is viewed as a mechanism for learning.



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July 2021 » Columns » Enable Others to Act: Foster Collaboration

Enable Others to Act: Foster Collaboration

Chris Anderson, ASCT, CPWP-M, Public Works Manager, City of West Kelowna, British Columbia; President, APWA British Columbia Chapter; member, Leadership and Management Knowledge Team



Roads and Drainage team collaborating on having a bit of fun.

As this leadership series continues along for 2021, the next Leadership and Management Committee's focus for July and August will be "Enable Others to Act." Here in July's article we will focus on Kouzes & Posner's ideas from *The Leadership Challenge* that were shared in chapter nine, "Foster Collaboration," and then August's article will take a closer look at chapter 10, "Strengthen Others."

Climate of Trust

You can't do it alone. How many times have you heard this in your career? As public works professionals, these words are about as truthful as you are ever going to hear. As a successful leader, you are only as good as the team that you are leading, and you certainly cannot do it alone without the help, support, experience and feedback of your critically important team. But how does one get this team aligned and moving in the same common direction? Trust. We must strive to create and nourish a climate of trust.

Collaboration and trust in this pre-entry safety tailgate with Scott and Josh.

That said though, creating this climate of trust is no easy feat! There can be so many barriers that will get put in your way which try to sidetrack your trust building efforts. As noted by Kouzes & Posner, “You have to make a conscious effort to create and sustain trust.” So, what are some of the tips and tricks that might help leaders build this climate of trust as a means to fostering collaboration?

Trusting Others

This is really where it all begins. We must trust each other. One of the lines from Kouzes & Posner that really sticks out for me is “be the first to trust.” As a leader in your role, there is no bigger first step in creating your climate of trust than by having the courage and confidence in the people who you are supporting. After all, they are the experts in their field, and it is our job as leaders to take that first step to implicitly trust what they are telling us about whatever their role of responsibility is. Sure, they may be looking to you for strategic or financial direction as an example, but it is our team members—the “boots on the ground”—that have the real power to get the job done.

I think back to when our public works department was going through a significant amount of change. We had the ability to promote from within to a few key roles. I’ll never forget one particular discussion that I had with one of the newly promoted employees; in fact, it’s a conversation that I’ve had with a bunch of our team members over the years. The gist of that conversation was that “I’m not the expert, you are, I trust you to tell me what you need or how you want to get there, and I’m going to do everything in my power to support that.” After we had that conversation, it was like a light went off for that individual, and for me as the leader too actually! Our conversations had been frequent, but with the understanding that I trusted this other person with their decision-making process and execution, the growth that I’ve come to see in these individuals, and their coworkers, accordingly, makes for a proud manager.

Must have trust by Tony and Mark at the water treatment plant.

Listen, Listen, Listen

In order to get that trust coming back your way as a leader, you also need to (maybe) learn to stop talking and listen. It’s amazing, after having been the first to trust, how the trust begins to shift and allows you to begin transitioning to listening. Be sure that you are listening actively, don’t be distracted; active listening will help you continue on the path to building the climate of trust and onwards to collaboration. Be sensitive and listen to your team’s needs and ask lots of questions while you are at it too. Of course, you will come across some requests and suggestions that are completely unreasonable that you won’t be able to support, but it’s amazing what you’ll learn about your people and the jobs that they (you) do when you start listening. Find out what it is that you can do to support your team by listening. What you’ll likely find here, when actively listening, is a deeper understanding and appreciation for where your team members “are at.” The more you listen, the more you’ll have to listen to. Listening will bring you an increased level of trust which will in turn lead to your team’s greater engagement, satisfaction, and ultimately collaboration.

When you are listening, you are also giving yourself the opportunity to take a deeper dive towards developing your critically important emotional intelligence as a leader. Emotional intelligence could be a topic unto itself, but while you are listening to your team, you also begin to get to know them on a different level as well. And as you get to know your team, you are also setting yourself up for greater success by understanding some of the other factors that may be impacting the success of the individual and your team. There are constantly going to be nonverbal cues that come from your team, and if you’ve done enough listening, you will be able to react and shift your resources, whatever those might be, in order to keep all of your group successful. Emotional intelligence is not easy, but work towards a greater sense of it by listening.

Utilities team showing a lot of trust at this nighttime emergency repair.

Support Face-to-Face Opportunities

Supporting face-to-face opportunities is so critical. It is yet another key aspect of building your climate of trust. Face-to-face opportunities allow you to listen, they allow for comradery as you link to the human network, and they are simply the best situation that supports collaboration. As noted by Kouzes & Posner in *The Leadership Challenge*, “People who expect durable and frequent face-to-face interactions in the future are more likely to cooperate in the present.”

But, COVID. Ugg, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the single most challenging thing that many individuals and organizations have ever had to deal with in our careers. In a time where physical distancing and staying apart have been the required focus of the last year or so, how many leaders have struggled with finding creative solutions to try and continue to support face-to-face opportunities? For me personally, I will be the first to admit that I have struggled significantly at times as a leader during the pandemic. Our team was split apart, we are all following rules that we didn't necessarily like, and morale has taken a hit. It has simply been one of the most challenging years of my professional career. For a leader who thrives on the face to face, COVID has come in and made things extremely challenging. But thankfully the light at the end of the tunnel is near, so start thinking about your postpandemic face to faces now! I am sure that we are all looking forward to doing this again as we look to rebuild, where necessary, with the important face-to-face opportunities.

Foster Collaboration

In summary, creating and nourishing your climate of trust by trusting others, listening, and finding ways to support face-to-face interactions are some of the best things that you can do as a leader to foster collaboration, and ultimately, the success of your team. By focusing on these traits and deliberate actions you will find that your team's collaboration will increase proportional to your dedicated effort accordingly as the leader.

Don't miss next month's second installment in “Enable Others To Act” as Carolyn Fackler takes a look at Kouzes & Posner's “Strengthen Others.”

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August 2021 » Columns » Enable Others to Act: Strengthen Others

Enable Others to Act: Strengthen Others

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This article continues on the themes identified in Kouzes & Posner's Practice 4: "Enable Others to Act." The practice is split into two parts. The concepts in "Foster Collaboration" were discussed in the July issue. This one will focus on "Strengthen Others."

Enhance Self-Determination

We're all human. In our daily activities, we naturally gravitate to preferred activities or ways of doing things. If your team is clear on the mission and vision of the organization, and expectations of outcomes, it is worthwhile to imbue a little self-determination into the mix. Besides, as Kouzes and Posner remind us, "You become more powerful when you give your power away." Allow staff the opportunity to achieve results the way that works best for them. Their methods will naturally draw on their strengths and allow them, and the organization, to put their best foot forward.

Provide Choices. High-performing organizations are ones where employees are willing to work effectively, and respectfully, across boundaries and beyond their job descriptions. This requires autonomy to act and make decisions, and an imbued expectation of high performance within the workplace culture. As Kouzes and Posner identify, "The only way to create an efficient and effective organization is to give people the chance to use their best judgement in applying their knowledge and skills."

Structure Jobs to Offer Latitude. Assuming that the mission, vision and performance expectations have been embedded into the workplace culture, offering latitude is an easy step to take in delegating work. Provide employees with "the rules of the game," cut unnecessary red-tape and allow the employees to determine the next step forward.

This allows employees to bring their knowledge, skills and abilities to the table and use them to solve the organization's issues—rather than acting like cogs. Unless the process is laid out by law, permit requirements or other legal reasons, allowing employees the latitude to determine how the work gets done brings them into the problem and increases accountability for a solution. By bringing employees into the problem, it also signals that leadership trusts the employees.

Foster Accountability. Accountability has two heads: responsibility and ownership. As Kouzes and Posner explain, people pay more attention and put more care into something that they own versus something that feels, or is, transient—whether a car or a project. Identifying an individual as the owner of an outcome will cause them to put more effort into, and feel personally responsible and accountable for, that outcome. This is especially true for outcomes that are complex with many actors or moving parts, as each part should have an identified owner and each actor needs to have a clear responsibility. Clearly defined ownership takes on new importance in virtual workgroups, as we all found out over the last year, as it helps sustain confidence throughout the team. The following are a few of the actions identified by Kouzes and Posner that would help foster accountability:

- No matter the task, everyone has a customer.
- Eliminate unnecessary approval steps.
- Broadly define jobs (as projects, not tasks).

Develop Competence and Confidence

There are a number of reasons why it is essential to develop competence and confidence throughout our public works teams. It doesn't matter if you are in an executive level position, a team member, or anywhere in between. These reasons change for the various positions. Here are a couple to consider:

In an executive level position, developing competence and confidence in your staff helps to imbue the necessary level of trust in your staff to be able to act. Executive leaders cannot do all of the work of an organization. Through building others up, and growing trust in the individual, work tasks can be delegated. Chris Anderson wrote on the concepts of building trust in the July issue.

Amongst the team members, working to develop one another's competence and confidence will help the overall organization weather personal absences, retirements, and other major work disruptions (COVID, for example). Building one another up at a staff level has the added bonus of fostering teamwork and collaboration. More on "Create a Spirit of Community" in the upcoming October issue.

In general, a person's best work is when they are tasked with something just beyond their current competence level. This provides a person with a skills "stretch," but doesn't cause them to shut down with unnecessary stress and anxiety. As leaders, one of our goals is to get everyone to a place where they are providing their best work.

Educate and Share Information. Providing latitude, ownership and responsibility only works if employees have the information to be effective. Staff need to understand how the whole organization functions, and their role within it, as well as technical skills. Identifying knowledge gaps and providing training opportunities is one of the "rocks" (a FranklinCovey term) that strategic executive leaders rectify within their teams.

Organize Work to Build Competence and Ownership. People like to know that their work is important and meaningful, that there is a good purpose for coming into work in the morning besides the paycheck. Organizing work tasks to align directly with the mission and vision of the organization aids in providing this meaning. Staff want to know how their role fits into the whole of the organization. As new opportunities come up, embed them with purpose and meaning as well. This will keep employees engaged and create energy.

Foster Self-Confidence. As Kouzes and Posner plainly state, "Self-confidence affects people's performance." If people have the knowledge, responsibility and latitude to complete a given task, but lack self-confidence, the result is a poorly completed or uncompleted task. Having confidence in your ability to complete a task is necessary to exhibit consistent

and sustainable results, and be able to preserve through future challenges. One of the ways to increase self-confidence in employees is to provide “stretch” assignments and support their efforts with coaching through to a successful outcome.

Coach. Coaching provides the vehicle to grow one another. It can be done as peer-to-peer or as a mentor/mentee relationship. Coaching is most effective when both parties remember that they are being operated on their own agenda. The coach is there to provide constructive feedback and ask questions. In this way, the power and accountability of the resulting actions are solely with the person being coached. It keeps them “in the problem” rather than shifting the responsibility of the problem onto the coach. Effective coaching can nurture knowledge sharing and grow confidence for both parties.

Summary

In order to make extraordinary things happen in your organization, it is necessary to build upon the trust of the team and continue to nurture it by instilling the practice of offering self-determination in work tasks and growing the competence and confidence of the individuals. Much of this can be summed up by the old adage, “You become more powerful by giving your power away.” Provide choices, offer latitude, and foster accountability. Develop your staff with knowledge sharing and training, defining ownership and bestowing responsibility, foster self-confidence, and provide coaching opportunities.

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September 2021 » Columns » Encourage the Heart

Encourage the Heart

Wendy Springborn, MBA, PWE, PWLF, Engineering Services Manager, City of Tempe, Arizona, and member, APWA Professional Development Committee



As we continue our journey through the “Learning Leadership” *APWA Reporter* series, it is time to recognize the how, when, and why we encourage and support our employee contributions through recognition. Are you a casual promoter of your employees, do you go out of your way to find things to recognize, or are you somewhere in-between? Do employees even need recognition? Shouldn't they know whether they have done a good job? This article will discuss why it is so important to recognize your employees who follow the agency's mission and vision and provide them a safe and healthy environment in which to excel. We will focus on five elements: frequency, approach, care, expectations, and feedback.

Let's start with frequency of recognition. Are you a supervisor who gives thought to recognizing employees on a regular basis, a supervisor who waits for an outstanding moment to recognize, or somewhere in-between? Recognition can be an important driver when motivating employees. I truly believe there is a balance of how and when you recognize your employees.

If you recognize employees too often, it can lessen the effectiveness of the recognition. It could raise a question: “Is the supervisor sincere or just going through the motions?”

Another key issue to frequency is when and/or where you give the recognition. It is important to conduct a one-on-one recognition interaction explaining why the accolades are important and how their work has impacted the work group as well as the organization. It is equally important to take the opportunity to recognize outstanding work in a group setting. This allows others to see the value of hard work and excelling in what you do to contribute to the success of the team.

What is your approach when working with employees? As a supervisor, is your approach to instill fear of failure into your employees or do you help employees learn how to plan without the fear of failure? There is a certain importance in giving your employees the tools to do their work and be successful, while also giving them the freedom of making decisions. Here is the way I have described it in the past: ...“Most decisions you make will not kill anyone. If after making a decision, we must change or correct something, we can do that. It might create some extra work, but the bottom line is—you thought it through and made a decision based upon the information you had at hand and determined it was the best course of action at the time.”

How do you care for your employees? Do you believe in their capabilities and their competence of completing the work assigned or do you micro-manage the way they work and are constantly intervening in their work process? Employees need to know that their supervisor believes in them and has their back. They need to know that you trust they will accomplish the work they have been assigned without the constant need to be watched over and told what to do.

The care of your employees can lead directly into expectations. If the supervisor has clearly outlined the expectations of the job, the employee should be able to meet those expectations as they see fit. So, if an expectation is all “i’s” are to be dotted and all “t’s” are to be crossed and it needs to be done weekly, it shouldn't matter how the employee gets it done. Everyone has their own style in how they perform their work. The fact that they get everything done within the specifications and the timeline as outlined in the expectation is the key.

Our final element is feedback. It is helpful for an employee to know they are doing a good job all along the way. A supervisor should not wait until there is a problem to engage in a conversation regarding feedback. At a minimum, a supervisor should reach out to their direct reports two to four times a year; even better, have a discussion with your employee and identify how often they would like to receive feedback. The feedback needs to be constructive covering what they are doing well, things they need to work on, and setting goals towards improvement.

Another part of feedback should be the supervisor asking the employee how they are doing as a supervisor—another way of asking for a 360° feedback. Through this type of interaction, the supervisor can ensure that the employee feels they are getting enough feedback, the roadblocks they are hitting against are being cleared, and they feel that they are an important part of the team. One of the ways to improve as a supervisor is getting the feedback from those you supervise.

The Public Works Department in the City of Tempe, Ariz., had developed an employee recognition program from the ground up. In the December 2013 *Reporter* (bit.ly/3zKi06C (<https://bit.ly/3zKi06C>)), the program was outlined illustrating how it was both developed and executed by a group of employees. The City of Tempe Public Works Policy Advisory Committee established Guidelines with goals for an Employee Recognition team:

“The purpose is to provide guidelines to develop high performing employees by using a recognition system to energize individuals and teams to use their knowledge, talents, skills and abilities to advance the workforce and/or their profession. The program will be administered timely, fairly and consistently and will recognize and reward individuals and groups for excellence in promoting the City, Department, and/or Division core purpose, values or initiatives.”

The article goes through the details of the development, the tiers of recognition, and who can nominate at each of the tiers. It was a slow start but after the first year, the feedback received was proving the program to be a success in addressing both employee needs and wants for recognition while balancing with the Department's goals.

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October 2021 » Columns » Yes! Let's celebrate

Yes! Let's celebrate

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Rwandans celebrating their success

Following up in our series of leadership framework, let's talk about celebration...yes, celebration! Often, as we get a project or task done with a team effort, what do we do? We go on to the next project, while the successful staff complete their work and get new assignments. What is missing? With success shouldn't we celebrate? Why not encourage those who designed this sewer lining project, conducted a sign replacement program, or chip seal rural roadways to celebrate a job well done? We help many to enjoy a better life, so why not enjoy that success? Life is short, and it is not meant just to struggle throughout the year. Successes should be noted, and those involved acknowledged. We often finish a road widening, a relating sewer project, or even completing an inlet cleaning program in public works, yet only those on the effort know about it. The employees and team worked hard to create success and helped so many people have a safe and higher level of lifestyle with fully functioning infrastructure.

The author trained 70 pastors to guide their members to develop clean water practices through better hygiene, in-country water purification, and keeping water sources clean when working in Africa. The effort was a six-day hands on "training the trainer" class. After completing it, the participants received a diploma with their picture as we brought a small portable camera and printer. What was next... we celebrated for half a day with food, dancing, and singing. Others in the community came and saw their success and celebrated too. Then, as the pastors left to travel back to

another part of the country, they were excited and felt the joy and encouragement to surge forward to train others; and their enthusiasm continued the train the trainer process all due to the celebration and acknowledgement of what they had accomplished. Without that celebration, what would have happened? Witnessing this event had a very tangible impact on the author. How often do we complete a team project and go on with the next without even as much as a thank-you or acknowledgment? We just move on to the next assignment. Let's follow the Rwandan example and celebrate the gift of success.

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Create Community Spirit

Completing a successful project or program is an occasion to celebrate and let those involved get together and discuss their success. People are meant to be together; we are social animals, and we should let others know of our success. For example, once a new stop sign change-out program is complete, let others, such as media, newspapers, and city leaders know it has occurred, identify the success, those that participated, and how it increases community safety.

The leaders should take part in and support these celebrations recognizing the team effort and openly be involved in this appreciation. The leader should say how they overcame obstacles or did this in record time, not just a general thank-you. The celebration should not be a rigid formal event. It should be fun, life should be enjoyed, and work is part of life. Research shows that working with friends, feeling connected, and being a part of a community is more supportive of the jobs as they believe their effort is essential and impacts others (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The leader must set the tone. In the author's experience, he observed a public works director with a semi-annual potluck where he would grill hot dogs and hamburgers for his staff and wear crazy outfits. He had fun and encouraged his people to enjoy what they do too. What was the result? Many of his team eventually left and went to other places, and many become public works directors themselves, often with the same people-friendly and celebratory way for their employees.

Leadership Involvement

The leader must make the success of the celebration. If not, then the employees are not sure if they are supported. As covered in the first aspect in the five steps in the leadership framework, leaders must model the way. The leaders must show they are there to help, demonstrate appreciation and let employees know you believe in them and support them... you have their back! Nothing beats having the leader being involved. You must show you care, and it must be done truthfully and honestly, as fake, or not believable support, can have an opposite effect on morale.

Encourage the Heart has two components

The leader should brag on his staff and tell their narrative to others, while giving them credit. For example, once a project is complete, the director could tell the elected leaders stories of the team's success with specifics about people and how it impacts the community. Also, it should be shared with APWA either by writing an article or presenting a story while letting the team be directly involved. The key is clearly showing your support and appreciation.

Institutionalize This Approach

Establish a way to celebrate throughout the year. Do this with key milestones on projects, have recognition events, special occasions for completing a new project-process. Show you care means just that. Annually or during National Public Works Week is an ideal occasion for showing others the appreciation and support the organization has for its employees. In one case, a new city engineer changed the city public works culture by having the employees stage an open house for citizens and family members to see what public works is all about. This encourages the employees to explain and have pride in operating a snowplow or front-end loader. The author remembers seeing a picture of an equipment operator from a National Public Works Week event in a county beaming with his kids sitting in the seat of the front-end loader he operated. Sharing employees as outlined in the September issue is essential.

Five-Step Leadership Framework

Let's Celebrate Our Public Works Employees

The celebration of what employees do is most needed as it is complete integration of the leadership five-step framework approach of modeling the way, inspiring vision, challenging the process, and enabling others. The system being adopted by the APWA leadership frame is a way for leaders to create an excellent path to lead the most critical people resources of our public works to accomplish the best they can be in a positive and supportive work environment. So, yes, we can celebrate, and we should, as public works helps so many! Rwandans showed us the way, so let's enjoy our successful employees, and maybe we can dance and sing too!

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November 2021 » Columns » Who is the Leader?

Who is the Leader?

Jack Plaunty, CPWP-M, Assistant Public Works Director, City of Kingman, Arizona, and member, APWA Operations & Maintenance Task Force



The City of Kingman team at a public outreach event (photo courtesy of Coleen Haines)

As we continue deeper into the "Learning Leadership" *APWA Reporter* series, it is time to look at what makes a leader. The reality is that leaders come from everywhere. They can come from any walk of life, age, background, and level of an organization. So, what makes a leader? Are they born, developed, or both? This article will look at some of the virtues and actions that define an individual's leadership abilities. This article will blend traits from *The Leadership Challenge* by Kouzes and Posner and those adopted by the City of Kingman, Arizona. Our organization looks for these virtues in new hires and especially in our leaders.

In nearly every presentation, Kouzes and Posner answer the question of whether leaders are born or made. Their response to this question is:

"We've never met a leader that wasn't born. We've also never met an accountant, artist, athlete, engineer, lawyer, physician, writer, or zoologist who wasn't born. We're all born. That is a given. It is what you do with what you have before you die that makes a difference."

This statement emphasizes the notion that leaders are made and that leadership is a skill that can be improved and strengthened—the same concept as an athlete or tradesman who develops their talent over time. Just like an athlete's ability, leadership is not a skill obtained over a weekend. It is one's hunger for continued improvement and deliberate practice that sharpens their leadership abilities. The first step in this journey is to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and expectations.

Leadership is Everyone's Business is more about self-reflection and the concept that anyone can grow into a leader. Leaders, or those who aspire to be, must first come to know themselves. After all, there are no tangible "tools of the trade." You, as the individual, are the instrument. Being self-aware provides clarity to what virtues you hold as important and what you stand for. Looking inward defines a leader's strengths, weaknesses, expectations of themselves, and what they expect from those they lead. An individual should take time to reflect on their actions and answer some potentially difficult questions. This reflection should increase a leader's smarts. Not in the sense of technical ability or IQ but in the importance of understanding people.

There is no shortage of questions of self-reflection available. There are several questions in chapter 12, or a quick search of "questions of reflection for leadership development" will provide a vast number of results to start one's journey of self-reflection. These questions should give awareness of the importance a leader possesses and their impact on their own life and the lives of others around them. This affirmation of a leader's importance is not to elevate them above others but rather to ensure they remain grounded with the humility of knowing "you can't do it alone."

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It is all too easy for one's personal ability to cloud their judgment. Leaders can fall to the notion that they must be decisive and know all the answers. Their pride creates a fog to hide the flaws and failings of human nature.

This fog of pride and self-importance also obscures the view and relationships of those around them. A leader needs to understand that they cannot control every variable or solve every problem. They are human, and they will make mistakes. They must be unassuming and open to others.

We have identified some virtues of a leader and established that leaders can be made. How does one become a leader? Practice! Just like an athlete, "it is an observable pattern of practices and behaviors and a definable set of skills and abilities." A study by B.Z Posner found that leaders improve over time. It is not necessarily the years of experience that contribute to a high performer. It is methodical and deliberate practice that strengthens one's leadership ability. These facts lend to the fact that we can develop leaders. I think it is important to discuss the current and future leaders within our organizations.

In all organizations, there is most likely someone who can become a great leader. Some aspire to lead, and some are leaders but do not know it yet. It is not to imply that everyone wants to be a leader or be great at it. An individual's hunger to learn is a limiting factor. As leaders, we should be on the lookout for leaders within our organizations. Every day, at every level, there are opportunities to coach, promote, and strengthen the skills of others. It not only enhances the individual. It also strengthens the team and organization. A problem facing many organizations today is succession planning. Leaders must keep an eye on the future to ensure the continued success of their organizations after their departure.

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Leaders who lack humility may provide success in the short term but can leave behind a wreck after their departure. Their need for self-gratification can prevent them from seeing the bigger picture. They choose not to share their expertise and help others develop the skills needed to transition into leading the teams they leave behind easily. The

goal of any leader should be the ability to walk out the door without impacting the operation. It is not to imply their legacy is forgotten or unappreciated. Instead, they have led others to success and to be leaders.

Leaders are important. They guide the direction and mission of the organization. They are called on to solve the significant dilemmas of an organization. Leaders are not as far away as one may think. They can be found at all levels of an organization regardless of rank or title. They are watched, and their behaviors are emulated by those they lead. They are accountable for their actions and work to bring the best out of those around them. Each day, everyone has the opportunity to lead and make a difference.

It would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to thank some of the people who have provided me opportunities to grow. Thank you to my leadership for the guidance and opportunities you provide. To those who allow me the privilege of leading them, thank you for challenging me daily and taking our values to heart. To my friends from APWA's Emerging Leaders Academy, thank you for the great memories and belonging. Sue, Diane, Steve, and the others involved with ELA, thank you for the time you invest in the program and students. Also, thank you for the opportunity and confidence you provide to me. There are many more whom I have not forgotten but cannot list. Thank you for the difference you all have made.

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The Mission, Vision and Values of Kingman. These are posted in city facilities and used for the MVV Recognition Program.

| Table 12.1 Who Are Role Models for Leadership | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Role Model Category | Respondent Age Category | |
| | 18-30 years old | Over 30 years old |
| Family Member | 40% | 46% |
| Teacher or Coach | 26% | 14% |
| Community or Religious Leader | 11% | 8% |
| Business Leader | 7% | 23% |
| Political Leader | 4% | 4% |
| Professional Athlete | 3% | 0% |
| Entertainer | 2% | 0% |
| None/not sure/other | 7% | 4% |

Table from Kouzes and Posner "The Leadership Challenge"

Leadership Challenge Table: Chapter 12 of The Leadership Challenge



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December 2021 » Columns » Learn to be a better leader

Learn to be a better leader

Jonathan Gano, P.E., Director of Public Works, City of Des Moines, Iowa; Chair, APWA Leadership & Management Committee



At the end of a calendar year, many of us harbor thoughts about what we got accomplished in our life and at work in the last twelve months. We try to squeeze in those last few things that can only be done in the current year, whether it's using up flex benefits, making tax-deferred investments, or meeting personal or business goals, or maybe even just not putting on too many pounds during the holidays. If you've been following along with the work of the Leadership & Management Committee, perhaps you've been trying to make a better leader out of yourself by putting the practices of exemplary leadership into practice.

These five practices are used by exemplary leaders in their organizations to create positive change. The key words are "practices" because these are actions and abilities, which means they can be learned. Leadership is not some ineffable quality. It is an ability, a skill that can be taught and improved.

Leadership is an ability, a skill that can be taught and improved.

The monthly column of the Leadership & Management Committee has, all year long, introduced the leadership framework based on these practices that APWA will be using for years to come to teach leadership. Take some time to look back through the back catalog of issues of the *APWA Reporter* to read explorations on the practices and their application to the field of public works. If you want to dive into the source material, you can find it in *The Leadership Challenge*.

This book was first published in 1987 by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner and is built on the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, a research-based framework of observable behaviors.

Everyone has the opportunity to influence people to create positive change—the definition of leadership.

The first practice is to Model The Way. The first part of it is obvious—leaders set the example for others to follow. Align your actions to your values and let everything you do communicate their importance. Less obvious is that you need to find your own voice and way to communicate those values. It is incredibly common to try to mimic styles of leadership gurus. We've all read their books and given it a try, often only to see it not work quite as well for us. You need to find your own voice. Be authentically you and your values will come through loud and clear.

The second practice is to Inspire A Shared Vision. Many readers will remember the Dunkin' Donuts guy unenthusiastically mumbling “time to make the donuts” as he trudged to work in commercials from the '80s. Work instead to imagine a future for your team that is exciting and interesting. The follow-up to creating the vision is to enlist your team into bringing it into fruition. The lone leader trying to steer a ship all by themselves is missing out on all the help of their teammates.

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The third practice is to Challenge The Process. In many communities, the public works department can feel like it's under a microscope, making a lot of leaders rather risk averse—no one wants to fail in the public eye. Start with small wins to build credibility and capital for bigger changes and innovations. While no one likes to be wrong, no one reasonably expects to always be right either. Learn from mistakes and do it better next time.

The fourth practice is to Enable Others To Act. Letting go of authority is one of the hardest parts of leadership. We often want to delegate the work—the responsibility—but not the authority, reserving final say on far too many things. To see your team really grow and take ownership, try delegating both the responsibility and the authority. Institute appropriate accountability—it's not a blank check—rather than requiring approval of all of your subordinates' work and you'll be surprised at how much better it becomes. This is a very hard thing to try to live out and makes many leaders nervous. Start small.

Start by understanding your own leadership abilities.

The final practice is to Encourage The Heart. We spend a lot of time at work. We should, at least, like each other a bit. Search out ways to recognize the contributions of team members to build a sense of community. We're long past the days where workers are “just a number” or a cog in the machine. Taking time out of even a busy schedule to celebrate your organization's values and victories can pay real dividends in employee engagement over time. People like to look back from time to time and see what they've done. Rather than a relentless always-onward slog, it helps when looking forward to put value on what's in the past by recognizing those who brought it about.

It is essential to remember that leadership, broadly defined, is not just for the senior-most person in a workgroup. This is not just the purview of the “boss.” We are all leaders, each in our own way, whether we bear a title formally bestowing “leadership” responsibilities or not. Even if it's just an informal kind of leadership, everyone has the opportunity to influence people to create positive change—the definition of leadership.

Start by understanding your own leadership abilities. Read the articles or the book and take an inventory of what you think you do well and what you don't. Pick one practice and find a way to put it into practice in your workplace. There are tons of ideas out there to be inspired by.

These practices are all actions that anyone can do. Because leadership is an ability rather than a quality, the skills of a leader can be steadily improved through deliberate action. Examine your own leadership skills to see where you can improve and you, too, can learn to be a better leader.

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