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Helping Organizations Change

November 5, 2007

Mayor Janet Jones
1234 Main Street
Anytown, Ohio 43302

Dear Mayor Jones:

Congratulations on your recent election to the City's highest office. I admire your investment in the future of our community; so few people are both willing and able to make that kind of contribution. In fact, you may not even realize how time-consuming and difficult the job you've just accepted really is. Elected officials often struggle to define themselves and their roles while planning policies, so here are sixteen (16)...yes sixteen...observations that may help you meet the challenge.

Observation #1:

Increased Special Attention - Because you're the new mayor you're now going to get lots of special attention. It's not because people are fond of you...although they may be. It's not because you've suddenly become a great leader, a wise person or a powerhouse of personality. While you may be all those things, the reason you're being treated so well is because you're now THE MAYOR.

It may seem like people really want to be your buddy. They don't. What they want is to influence you in your official capacity. Even if they appear to be your comrade, companion, colleague, soul mate or friend...don't you believe it! Of course, many people genuinely like you or you wouldn't have been elected, but when you leave public office and go back to being a normal, run-of-the-mill civilian, you won't hear from 95% of these people again. This doesn't mean that people are shallow, obsequious or sycophantic. It means that you're THE MAYOR and they want something you have...influence and the power to make public policy.

Observation #2:

Making Sausage - On one hand, I'm suggesting you avoid get sucked into believing this additional attention is genuine and long lasting. On the other hand, you shouldn't get cynical about all those friendly faces. It's about being a local government official. Your staff, constituents, special interests and lobbyists all try to use their personal wit and charm to get their agenda implemented ... and their work done. It's called politics. (You know... making sausage.) After all, you used politics to get elected... others will use politics to get support for their schemes. It's not good and it's not bad...it's just what it is. Politics. This is how work gets done within the democratic process.

Observation #3:

You're the Star Pupil - For the council to understand what is at issue, you need to understand what is at issue. You're the mayor so your council members depend on you to know what's happening. Whether they ask you or not, you're expected to have an informed

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opinion. This means you are no longer entitled to focus on just the issues that interest you; you are required to be fully informed on everything that affects residents.

So, what are you waiting for??? Get started!!!

Observation #4:

You Can Depend on Only One Vote - Even though you're the mayor, you're only one of many. Your new job is to be the deal maker and facilitate the council's success...to get a majority of your colleagues to find agreement. Since you only have one vote, controlling the outcomes of council discussions and actions is not possible. So, influence is now your stock in trade. Build your influence through statesmanship. (Remember that word... **STATESMANSHIP**. You'll see it again.)

Observation #5:

You are Responsible for Everything and for Everyone - It's not easy but the mayor represents everyone in the community on all issues. If you understand the issues, then the council will understand...and the community will understand. Why? Because you'll explain it to them! But, you can only explain it to them if you understand it. Have you figured out that the mayor is expected to know everything? (See Observation #2, above)

Observation #6:

The Amplifier and the Magnifying Glass - Did you know that when you took office someone fitted you with an amplifier and a magnifying glass? That's right. Everything you say and everything you do is now bigger, louder, and a whole lot more visible than it was just a few hours before. When the mayor speaks, everyone listens. When the mayor does something, everyone watches. So watch what you say and watch what you do from now until you leave office. The good news is that once you're no longer mayor...you can do just about anything you want and no one will hear or watch.

Observation #7:

Keep It to Yourself - Let others learn through honest, open discussion and intense questioning. Don't disclose your opinions on issues until absolutely necessary. Allow issue leadership to emerge. Pretend you're interested in all positions, even though you may not be so inclined. Act **STATESMAN-LIKE**.

Observation #8:

Learn to Count - Learn to count. If you have a council of seven...learn to count to four. If you have a council of nine...learn to count to five. And if you're really smart, you'll learn to count to, and work for, unanimity. When everyone agrees, that usually means life is good.

Observation #9:

Let Others Claim Credit - Encourage consensus building by supporting council members to make good, thoughtful public policy. Challenge them to continue the discussion, even when you know...absolutely...in your mind, that only one answer could possibly be right. Even if

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the answer is self-evident, let someone else come up with the answer, and let someone else claim credit. Orchestrate your success by helping others succeed.

Observation #10:

You're the Healer - You won the election, so now it's time to heal the wounds. It's your job to build the bridges and mend the fences that were destroyed during the political battles. Stick out your hand and welcome the members of the council who opposed you during the campaign. Ask them to join together for the good of the city. Remember that you're now the city's premier statesman. The what??? **THE STATESMAN!!!**

Observation #11:

Don't Raise Issues - If you were a council member in the past... forget what you learned about raising issues, bringing things to the attention of the group, and promoting an agenda. It's different now. As mayor, your job is to be the statesman. The what??? **THE STATESMAN!!!**

Observation #12:

Pretend You're Neutral - At all times pretend you're neutral about all the topics and issues your council members bring to the table. Hold your opinions until last...when the group is hopelessly deadlocked or the discussion is concluded.

Observation #13:

Think Strategically - Before an issue is formally put on the agenda, figure out what outcomes you're willing to accept, and what options are absolutely unacceptable to you. Then, when the issue is raised, encourage the other council members to do the heavy lifting. Let them carry the water. That's right, you have to give up being the hero...the champion...the trouble-shooter and the star. In exchange, you only have to fill the bucket. Save your social capital and political influence for the really tough stuff.

Observation #14:

Political Poker - As mayor you hold two trump cards in your hand at all times. First, you (in conjunction with the city manager) develop the agenda for the council meetings. Within limits you can get items on the agenda and you can keep them off the agenda. Get the picture? The second trump card is your role as the meeting manager. Taking a phrase from the old Outer Limits TV show, "You control the horizontal. You control the vertical." In fact, you direct the discussion. You control who speaks and in what order they speak. You determine who gets the first word and who gets the last word. You have the authority to limit or extend a discussion, permit or restrict public comment, and meter staff input. Those are both very powerful tools for making good public policy. Use them judiciously and for righteous purposes. You're now a statesman. A what??? **A STATESMAN!!!**

Observation #15:

Take the High Road - Preserve other peoples' self-esteem. You need everyone you can find to help you get the job done, so choose your battles carefully. Don't make unnecessary

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enemies and learn to “agree to disagree.” Look for common interests. Don’t fight over principals. And...always take the high road.

Observation #16:

Time will Run Out - You were given a fresh hourglass the day you were elected. Every decision over which you preside means someone probably wins and someone probably loses. When someone loses...a grain of sand falls through that hourglass. As the sand builds up in the bottom of the hourglass, it will become progressively more difficult to get it back into the top of the hour glass. When the sand runs out, your time is up. Leave gracefully.

I hope these observations are helpful to you and make your term as mayor even more productive. Good luck.



Lance Decker

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