

THE ADMINISTRATOR

A PUBLICATION OF THE N.C. CITY & COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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NOMINATING COMMITTEE NEEDS YOUR HELP

The North Carolina City & County Management Association (NCCCMA) is seeking nominations for three (3) people to serve as members of the Board of the Directors.

These positions would be for two-year terms expiring in 2015 (replacing those going off the board in 2013). Two (2) of these nominees should be municipal members and one (1) a county member.

In addition, the membership should nominate a municipal

member to serve as Secretary-Treasurer for a one-year term.

These nominations will be presented to the Nominating Committee, which will then issue a report at the opening session of the Winter Seminar on Wednesday, February 6th. The members will vote on the matter during the winter business meeting. The successful nominees will take office at the end of the summer seminar in New Bern, June 20 -22, 2013.

The Nominating Committee needs to have its report completed by January 4, 2013.

Please submit names to the NCCCMA Nominating Committee.

The members of the Nominating Committee are Past Presidents Harry Jones (harry.jones@mecklenburgcountync.gov) Lane Bailey (lbailey@ci.lenoir.nc.us); and Mike Dula (mdula@ci.elon.nc.us).

LAUGHTER FEATURED IN BOOK ABOUT WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT

Mills River Town Manager Jaime Laughter, the first woman to serve in such a capacity in Henderson County, is among 50 women from across the nation to be included in a book about women in management positions within local government. The book is called *Democracy at the Doorstep, Too* and is co-authored by Melissa Byrne Vossmer and Mike Conduff..

Laughter, 32, became Mills River town manager in 2006, three years after the town was incorporated. She is the town's second manager.

"The whole reason I went into public service is that I enjoy seeing communities thrive and I care about their futures, just like I care about my children's future and the community that they will grow up in," Laughter told the *Times-News*.

"I think for women, there is a perception that it's not family friendly, and in a field that is dominated by men, it's hard for a woman to find a mentor and find people that want to help support you in your career and help you grow that career. For me, I've been very fortunate that my town and the citizens of Mills River have been very

supportive and encouraging, and I've had peers in North Carolina be very friendly and supportive."

Just 14 percent of municipal managers are women, according to Laughter. In short: there's still room for improvement.

"Overall, women are not going to school for it — they're not choosing it as a career," she said. "A lot of managers are retiring and there are not enough people coming up to fill those positions. I would encourage anyone to pursue this as a career. I would encourage

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The Administrator is a monthly newsletter of the North Carolina City and County Management Association, a professional association for city and county managers and assistant managers from counties and municipalities throughout the state of North Carolina.

For comments or suggestions, please contact Matt Lail, editor, at 919-819-3979, or email at collards12@yahoo.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

N.C. City & County Management Association Winter Seminar
Sheraton Research Triangle Park
February 6-8, 2013

N.C. City & County Management Association Summer Seminar
Craven Convention Center,
New Bern
June 20-22, 2013

CAREER COMPASS 27: CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION

By Dr. Frank Benest

Career Compass is a monthly column from ICMA focused on career issues for local government professional staff. Dr. Frank Benest is ICMA's senior advisor for Next Generation Initiatives and resides in Palo Alto, California. If you have a career question you would like addressed in a future Career Compass, e-mail careers@icma.org or contact Frank directly at frank@frankbenest.com.

Career Compass has been edited for space.

Question: *I am a hard-working and newly promoted project manager in the Public Works Department of a mid-sized city. Things are pretty dreary in the organization—we've experienced budget cuts even lay-offs and everybody feels overwhelmed. Like others, I am dealing with quite a number of projects.*

I would like to enroll in a

well-regarded certificate program for project management but of course our Director has gutted the training budget in the department. I'm afraid that my manager would not be sympathetic to my request that she find the training dollars and the time off. However, I think the certificate program would strengthen my project management skills and energize me.

I do not have much of a relationship yet with my manager and she seems a bit gruff. How do I create a safe environment so I can propose the certificate program without being thrown out of her office?

Frank's Response: To be successful over time, we often must conduct difficult and even courageous conversations with supervisors or peers. Such a difficult conversation may be about a colleague not carrying one's weight, or a conflict with a peer, or the desire to be given

ETHICS: WHAT WOULD YOU DO: PART 2

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Test your ethics and knowledge of the ICMA Code of Ethics to solve this latest round of real-world issues.

See the answers on the next page.

QUESTION 1: You recently had the unfortunate but profound experience of leading your organization and community on the road to recovery after a tragedy, and the publications editor at your professional association has asked you to contribute to a new book on that subject.

The book is not a theoretical discussion on recovery. Authors must write about what happened in their community and offer specifics on lessons learned. As a small gift of appreciation, you will receive an honorarium of \$2,000. You agree to the project and start to pull material from the city's archives. Is it ethical for you to accept the honorarium for this work?

A. Yes, because even though city staff may help on the research, this is compensation for your work product.

B. Yes, because you plan to do all the research and writing on your personal time.

C. No, this isn't appropriate.

QUESTION 2: A colleague in the encore stage of her career (read retired from the county but not from the profession) is writing the quintessential book on building good council-manager relations. Over many a meal, you and she have shared personal tales of triumph and dismay in your mutual efforts to achieve relationship nirvana.

Your takeaway from all those conversations is that your colleague has valuable insight to share. In the early stages of the project, she approaches you to provide a quote about the book for the jacket cover. You

A. Politely decline because ICMA members can't endorse books.

B. Agree to provide the quote. Building good relationships with elected officials is the key to success in this profession.

C. Ask to read the book before agreeing or providing the quote.

QUESTION 3: The town manager's daughter applied to the local college and is competing in a scholarship program designed for local students. This particular scholarship, developed years before the town manager arrived on the scene, was the college's effort to strengthen town and gown relations.

These full scholarships are

based on academic merit and highly competitive. Town officials have no involvement in the selection.

Shortly after the daughter completed her application, the town council directed the town manager to enter into dialogue with the local college about a payment in lieu of taxes. Up to this point, the town manager had not advised anyone of his daughter's intentions.

While she is an excellent student, she is also competing with others in her class for the scholarship. The manager is astute enough to see that he has a conflict of interest to address. His personal life is now intersecting with his professional duties. It may be just an appearance of a conflict of interest or one in fact. Either way, it must be addressed.

The town manager should

A. Withdraw his daughter's application for the scholarship in order to avoid any conflict of interest.

B. Say nothing publicly about the situation and negotiate with the college to reach a deal. After all, he will be negotiating with the college president and chief financial officer, not the dean of admissions who oversees scholarships.

C. Delay the negotiations until a final decision is made about the scholarships.

D. Disclose his daughter's application to the town council and talk about how to address the issue.

ETHICS MATTERS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

QUESTION 1:

Correct answer: C. Sharing knowledge and insight about effective local government management is beneficial for the professionals as well as the profession. For that reason, writing as well as teaching are acceptable activities for ICMA managers and members.

Being compensated for the effort also generally does not create an ethical issue when it clearly happens outside regular work hours. Yes, you are using professional expertise gained from one or many organizations for personal benefit. But when the work has no direct connection with your official duties and takes place without the use of city resources, it's fine.

What makes accepting an honorarium in this case different? The facts. The individual is writing in his official capacity about a recent and high-profile event. Would accepting the honorarium create the appearance that the individual is leveraging the

city's official position for personal gain? To avoid even the appearance of impropriety, it would be best for the individual to decline any personal compensation for sharing the story.

QUESTION 2:

Correct answer: C. The guideline on endorsements does allow members to endorse books by offering comments for a book jacket or doing a review as long as there is no compensation involved. In this scenario, the individual could agree to provide a quote about the book.

But when you put your name and reputation on the line, wouldn't it be appropriate to read the book first to ensure that it is worthy of your endorsement? Otherwise, what is the true value in doing so, and where is your integrity?

QUESTION 3:

Best answer: D. The town manager does not have a direct conflict

of interest here as neither he nor the town plays any role in awarding the scholarship. This situation does not require his daughter to withdraw her scholarship request. Nonetheless, this situation creates an appearance issue that could taint the entire process of negotiating a deal with the college.

The best approach is to disclose the situation to the town council and then to talk about options. Entering into negotiations without disclosing his daughter's plans opens the door for someone to argue, validly or not, that the manager may not have acted in the town's best interests in this matter.

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LAUGHTER, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

women to rethink their preconceived notions about this type of work and consider it as a career."

Laughter has a dozen years of experience in government, having served for four years as a transportation planner at the state Department of Transportation and a community planner for Cary for two years before her DOT job. She is a 2002 graduate of North Carolina State University with a Bachelor of Science in Political Science and a minor in Geology. She has a master's degree in Public

Administration, also from N.C. State.

Her gender was never a factor when Laughter was chosen from a pool of more than 50 applicants for the job in Mills River, Mayor Roger Snyder told the *Times-News*.

"Jaime stood out because of her education, her willingness to serve the Mills River people and she just stood out head and shoulders above the other candidates," he said. "We wanted the best person that

could represent Mill River. I feel that's what we got. I support Jaime 150 percent. We have four excellent town employees who serve the council and the public very well."

"Democracy at the Doorstep, Too" is available online at www.democracyatthedoorstep.com or through the International City Managers Association's website at www.icma.org.

CAREER COMPASS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

more room to operate by your supervisor. In any case, you need to create some "safety" so you can confront the situation. To have a productive exchange, it needs to be safe for you and for the other person.

To create a safe environment for a difficult conversation, I would suggest a number of related approaches:

Demonstrate value

First and foremost, you must demonstrate that you are a reliable and productive team member. As staffing has been reduced, those who perform well and can be counted on to produce become very valuable commodities.

Over time, you should go out of your way to help the manager with her priorities and projects and take problems off her plate. She will be more open to assisting you as you become helpful to her and more indispensable.

Create rapport

As you interact with your new manager, you can work to slowly create rapport. To do that, take some time to get to know who she is and what is

important to her. Ask questions and listen intently.

To find out something about your manager's family and non-work-related interests, you can disclose a little bit about your family and/or leisure pursuits and see if that encourages your manager to disclose any of her interests. Take cues from her about what she is comfortable in discussing.

Understand the concerns of your manager

As you develop "positive regard" for your manager, you will identify her concerns. Even if you do not agree with her concerns and issues, you must acknowledge them because they are "real" to your manager. For instance, your manager may feel that a certificate program may cost too much given that training monies have been stripped from the budget; the training program will take you away from work and there is not coverage; and/or there is simply too much work.

Confront your fears about the conversation

Many of us do not like confrontations and certainly do

not like the feeling of being turned down. So we avoid the conversation.

To minimize the fear, acknowledge it. Your manager may say "no." The manager may say that you must be aware of the reduced training budget. How likely are the feared consequences? Can you live with any and all of these possibilities? If so, you can proceed.

Prepare for the conversation

Preparing for the conversation makes it easier. In your mind, or on paper, you may wish to:

- Identify your goals, which are hopefully aligned with those of your manager

- Acknowledge possible concerns of the manager

- State the "facts"

- Propose specifically what you want

- Be prepared to respond to the concerns raised

- Develop a back-up or Plan B proposal

Select a good time and a safe or neutral location

Depending on your manager, it may be helpful to hold a difficult conversation at the beginning of the day (if your manager arrives early) or end of the day (if she stays late). To avoid distractions and create some privacy, it may also be a good idea to invite your manager for a cup of coffee at a nearby café.

Use “I” language

To minimize defensiveness from the other party, you should use “I” language: “I believe. . .” “I feel. . .” “I hope. . .”

Focus on the “facts”

To help create a safe environment for any difficult conversation, you should start the conversation by identifying some facts or making statements that the other party will not generally dispute. For instance, using “I” language, you could state the following:

-“I am a new project manager trying to become a better project manager.”

-“I know that we have less staffing and demands have not diminished.”

-“I am committed to the

team and to helping produce tangible team results even with reduced resources.”

State directly what you want

You need to put your proposal on the table and directly and non-defensively ask for approval and support. In this case, you may state that you want to free up some monies so that the city pays for the certificate program and that you want work time off so you can participate.

Sell the benefits

After stating your proposal, you should quickly identify the benefits from the manager’s point of view. For example, participation in the training program would:

-Make you more productive and valuable to the department

-Keep you energized and excited about your project management role

-Allow you to share what you learn with other project managers and team members so everyone can benefit

Inquire about any issues and respond

At this point, you may

indicate that you know that the manager may have some concerns and **inquire** what some of the issues may be. Be open and acknowledge whatever issues are stated. By asking questions, you can demonstrate **openness** to any perceived issues, again even if you do not agree that the concern is legitimate.

Show a little vulnerability

In the hope of promoting some openness, you may wish to demonstrate some vulnerability. For example, even though your request may get rejected, you could say: “I am a new project manager and would like to enhance my skills. I need your support.”

Don’t force a decision or resolution

If you sense that the manager is not ready to say “yes,” ask her to think about your proposal and suggest that you two can discuss it at a follow-up meeting next week.

Regardless of the difficult topic and the outcome, you should express appreciation that the other person considered what you have said and your interests and concerns.