

Top 10 Rules of Working With and For Your County Board

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Minnesota County Engineers Association



Key Presentation Topics



- Who are we?
- So....you are now a county engineer....
- Top 10 Rules with Examples
- Discussion and Questions



Who Are We?

Brian Giese

- Pope County Engineer - 9 years
- Stevens County – 12 years
- MCEA member since 2003

Jodi Teich

- Stearns County Engineer - 12 years
- MCEA member since 2002

Joe MacPherson

- Anoka County Engineer – 4 years
- MCEA Member since 2012

Wayne Sandberg

- Washington County Engineer- 13 years
- MCEA member since 2002



So....you are now a county engineer..

- Working with a County Board to implement good public policies and projects that improve your communities can be extremely rewarding
- To do this work effectively, is also challenging.
- Maintaining a relationship with your county board takes effort
- Top 10 Rules – to help you and remind you how to effectively build, strengthen and retain this relationship



1. Establish A Good Relationship With Your Board

- Associate and mingle with members at events like County Fairs or before and after Board meetings. Get to know their spouse's name and their children's name(s). Use these in conversation.
- Do not show favoritism. Treat them all the same.
- Have good relations with everyone in the community - you don't know who the next Board member is.



2. Be Available To Each Board Member

- Calls from Family, County Administrator and County Board are a priority for you. Step out and take the call OR text and call back asap.
- Make sure they know it's okay to call you 24/7 for emergencies.
- But set boundaries early (e.g., you'll respond on weekends to emergencies but on all other issues you will respond on Monday)



3. Inform The Board On Projects and Issues

- Never let a board member or administrator be “surprised to learn” about an issue.
- Learn your commissioners preferred communication methods. Use the tools you have to keep commissioners updated on issues in their district and county.
- Develop yourself as a trusted resource for information and advice. This is also true for other elected officials – Council, Town Board, State, Federal.
- Any/All communication – including text – is subject to being forwarded and printed in media.

4. Honor Your Board and Members in Public. Never Show Animosity to A Board Member



- When a commissioner makes a mistake speaking, correct it later privately. Never in public.
- If it's an egregious mistake that cannot be left as stated – find a way to redirect the conversation as needed, while deflecting away from the mis-statement.
- If a board member is taking heat, step in and help deflect and diffuse.
- Never, even in private, speak poorly of your Board or an individual member.
- Even if they insult you, take it professionally, and not personally.



5. Manage Your Public Persona, Including Social Media Presence

- As County Engineer, you represent your county and the board. Be mindful of your public persona. Serve in your community with honor and grace.
- Your role is very visible to the community and now so is your social media.
- Social media can be a tool to stay connected with your Board and learn what they are focused on in the community.
- Because of your role – do not post negative or partisan comments about the board, or any other city representative or on a business or community member.
- This also means your friends/connections to other social media pages can become an issue for you. Pictures and posts on your site can damage your reputation.



6. Give Credit And Praise to the Board

- If a constituent thanks you, give credit to the county board or board member.
- At public meetings, make sure they are introduced and given speaking parts. Prepare talking points and letters for them.
- Never meet with an elected official(s) without inviting or informing your Board member.



7. Provide A Professional Technical Recommendation

- Never ask the board what to do on an Engineering issue – make your recommendation.
- If you don't want them to run your department, don't ask them to run it.
- Frame their decisions to be policy decisions, i.e., you're not approving this driveway, but what do you want the policy on access to be.
- If you have to use standards as a reason, you've lost, i.e., you're not creating a clear zone to meet standards, you're doing it to save a life.
- Always give the board options. Never back them into a corner.
- If the board goes a direction that is different than your recommendation – remain professional. It is not personal. This is their prerogative – they are elected.



8. Respond to Any Board Issue Referred To You As A Top Priority

- The faster you respond the better. Always let a constituent know you're calling them or emailing them on behalf of that Board member.
- “Commissioner _____ asked me to call/email you directly on their behalf...”
- If you can solve it, give the Board member or Board the credit.
- If you cannot solve the issue – a response letting the person know it is being evaluated is critical. The same day you got request is best.



9. Be Strategic with Board Presentations

- Learn what comments need responses. Let the bad comments just go by. Let the Board bask in the good ones.
- Know when to stop talking. Presentations to the board are not conversations. Some comments are made for other reasons and do not require a response.
- If asked a question, simply respond to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer – acknowledge this and state that you will obtain the information and follow up on the topic. Do not guess or make up responses.
- Use board committees and/or board workshops to introduce and discuss controversial items. Never spring an issue on your board or ask them for a decision if they are not fully informed on an issue.



10. Educate Your Board to Allow Informed Votes To Be Taken

- Share all sides of an issue with your board. Work to avoid coming off as biased.
- Try and know your vote count before the meeting.
- If the ship is sinking, don't get off the ship. Find a way to defer the vote and come back another time. It is easier to garner support than to change a vote.
- “There are some good questions on how we'll finance this program. Let me work more with Administration and come back to you with better information on this important item.”

Discussion

