

Managing your Public Relations and Customer Service Program

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Management vs. Leadership

All managers should lead by example. But that one sentence has two often different instructions: manage and lead. IAAO Course 400 on Assessment Administration gives the following definitions.

Management defined: The coordination process, equipment, and people to achieve goals and results.

Leadership defined: The process of influencing individuals and groups to set and achieve goals.

Although management and leadership are different functions, a good manager must be both. If you want to be successful as a manager, you also have to be a good leader.

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure is a key item that a manager must address. It is the primary mechanism for accomplishing the organization's goals and objectives. It also creates and maintains relationships among all the resources in the organization by indicating which resources are to be used for the various activities and when, where and how the resources are to be used. The organizational structure must compliment the long-range and short-range plans of the organization.

Management style can play a role in the selection of an organizational structure. Several good points on management style are found in Managing For Dummies.

One definition describes management as getting things done through others. Another definition more specifically defines management as making something planned happen within a specific area through the use of available resources.

A manager's real job is to inspire employees to do their best and establish a working environment that allows them to reach their goals. The best managers make every possible effort to remove the organizational obstacles that prevent employees from doing their jobs and to obtain the resources and training that employees need to do their jobs effectively. All other goals – no matter how lofty or pressing – must take a back seat.

Management is an attitude – a way of life. Management is a very real desire to work with people and help them succeed, as well as a desire to help your organization succeed. Management is a life-long learning process that doesn't end when you walk out of a one-hour seminar or finish viewing a 25-minute video.

An organization has life cycles very similar to that of a neighborhood. These cycles are: growth, stable and declining. During the growth stage there is most often changes occurring. This stage can be the most difficult in the life of an organization. During the growth stage the goal is to reach the stable stage. In the stable stage cycle the organization has reached its most productive stage. It is also the stage that requires the most continuous review. If an organization fails to monitor itself in the stable stage what generally happens is the declining stage. At this point the entire cycle must begin all over if an organization is to survive. Continuous review during the stable stage can allow for some growth or adjustments in the organization that will help lead to increased productivity and efficiency.

Planning & Goal Setting

Planning is something we all do, either formally or informally. It is not something done only by big businesses and corporations. Individuals make plans and we as managers and assessors have to be good planners and goal setters. The plans we develop will be an important tool that we can use to motivate and focus ourselves and our staff in the right direction. Well thought out plans can help us meet the demands of property owners, taxpayers, state officials and our local governing bodies.

The planning process is on-going. Good planning provides us with a blueprint for improving our performance, justifications for our budget requests and standards by which we can evaluate our performance. Planning also allows a manager to look toward the future and not just at their everyday operations. Planning is not just another activity but instead it is an integral part of the job.

I. Definition of Planning:

Planning - the act or process of making or carrying out plans, the establishment of goals, policies, and procedures for a social or economic unit (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary).

The process of determining how an organization can accomplish its objectives; the process of determining exactly how specific goals will be accomplished (IAAO Glossary).

II. Purpose of Planning:

- A. Help the organization accomplish its goals.
- B. Efficient use of the organization's resources (budget).
- C. Improve the decision making process.
- D. Keep managers focused on the organization's objectives.

Planning & Public Relations

I recently read an article by Michael Turney titled *Public Relations Planning is Essential*. It was a short but excellent article, even though it was written in 1998. The article had three (3) main components:

- Planning is good for you
- Planning helps clarify your intentions
- The most effective planning is slower and more methodical

Another good article from 2011 was an update to a book titled Strategic Planning for Public Relations by Ron Smith. It is typical that most experts state there are around six (6) steps to developing a successful public relations plan but article shows the following nine (9).

- Phase One: Formative Research
 - Step 1: Analyzing the Situation
 - Step 2: Analyzing the Organization
 - Step 3: Analyzing the Publics
- Phase Two: Strategy
 - Step 4: Establishing Goals and Objectives
 - Step 5: Formulating Action and Response Strategies
 - Step 6: Designing Effective Communication
- Phase Three: Tactics
 - Step 7: Selecting Communication Tactics
 - Step 8: Implementing the Strategic Plan
- Phase Four: Evaluative Research
 - Step 9: Evaluating the Strategic Plan

All of these phases are discussed in the one-day workshop that I have taught for TAAD throughout the state over the last several years. That workshop is titled, *Public Relations – Getting Ahead of the Game*.

Various names are currently in use for planning, such as: Strategic, Tactical, Visioning, and my favorite of Organizational Advancement. Whatever you want to label it, it is still planning.

Public relation is a constant program with consideration that each and every contact should be to portray the jurisdiction in the best manner possible. Always remember: It is all about the customer.

Development of a public relation plan requires that staff is included as they are the front-line of customer contact. Brain storm for ideas and then at a later date, start selecting the best ones. A successful public relation plan will be both proactive and preventive.

A jurisdiction should have one and only one Public Relations or Public Information Officer. This person should be the spokesperson for the office to avoid erroneous statements or quotes as best as possible. This allows for one voice to be heard and will develop consistency in dealing with the media and public.

A public relations template was developed for the Texas Appraisal Districts a few years ago and it has been discussed as part of the class *Public Relations - Getting Ahead of the Game*. The purpose of a template is to provide guidance and reference for building a public relations plan designed for your jurisdiction. There is the recognition that not all jurisdictions are created equal and the plan for smaller jurisdictions will be relatively simple but the degree of complexity will increase with the jurisdiction's size. Each of the steps is shown with a brief explanation. The template is designed for the user to type under each of the headers or to copy and paste from another document. To help create a professional look, place the plan on the jurisdiction's letterhead. Include any jurisdiction logo if not already on the letterhead. It could be beneficial to print and use as a reference the Public Relations Plan included in that workshop.

Step 1 – Mission Statement

A mission statement describes what the organization wants to accomplish. It sets the stage for planning. Typically what the appraisal office have to accomplish are spelled out in state statutes and administrative regulations, therefore, a mission statement for an appraisal office may contain language from those statutes and administrative regulations. The statement should be informative, to the point and understandable.

Step 2 – IAAO Standard

There should be a statement indicating that the public relations plan and policies are driven by the *IAAO's Standard on Public Relations*. The developer of the plan may consider including the following quote from the IAAO webpage about what IAAO is and possibly include the web address.

Step 3 – Assign a spokesperson(s) for the office

It is crucial that a spokesperson or persons be assigned the responsibility of all communication with the media. One person would be the preferred choice but this may not be possible in larger jurisdictions. The benefit of one spokesperson is the consistency of the message and the person may have a better understanding of each individual media representative. It is crucial that all staff know who the spokesperson is and that all media requests are forwarded to the appropriate person. Include not only the name but all methods of contact – email, phone, mailing address, etc.

Step 4 – Plan for emergencies

Stuff happens. A good public relations plan will address how the office should deal with emergencies. Emergencies can be unfavorable press, a public attack by a customer or group or a deluge of complaints and appeals.

Step 5 – Remind staff of continuous public relations/customer service

This can be done by periodic emails, written memos, staff meetings or short training sessions. A periodic review of the office customer service policy is also necessary. Staff should also be instructed about how to handle any new issues or controversies.

Step 6 – Develop and maintain a media contact list

In a large jurisdiction this can be problematic. Prior to any mass media release, all media should be contacted or at least view the media sources website to see who the current contact is.

Communication

Communication is the foundation of successful teamwork. As a manager have you ever communicated to an employee what needs done but when the job is completed it was not done the way you wanted? What was the problem? When we look further we typically find that there was a breakdown in communication somewhere along the line.

Knowing how to properly communicate with our staff, the public and other members of the organization is a vital part of a manager's duties. It is important that a manager successfully communicate what is expected and that the receiver

of the message is convinced it is a good idea. That sounds simple enough but a lot of times this can be a real stumbling block for managers. To effectively communicate your message the team members must be aware of the team's vision, mission, purpose, specific goals, allocated roles and responsibilities.

I. Definition of Communication:

Communication: A process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behavior; a technique for expressing ideas; the technology of the transmission of information (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary).

The sharing of ideas and information for the purpose of helping people understand one another (Advanced Supervisory Practices manual).

Technology

Investing in current technology can be a major time and labor saver. Admittedly most technology is not cheap but it is a long-term investment with both short-term and long-term benefits. It is not best to be on the bleeding-edge of new innovations - that is the first one to try something new. It is beneficial to be on the cutting-edge where the technology has already been developed, tested and put in place.

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Social media differentiates from traditional/industrial media in many aspects such as quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence. There are many effects that stem from internet usage. Internet users continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of site. Some of the more popular social media sites are:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn

A blog (a contraction of the words web log) is a discussion or informational site published on the World Wide Web and consisting of discrete entries ("posts") typically displayed in reverse chronological order (the most recent post appears first). Each jurisdiction should be very careful about participating on a blog. The assessor/appraiser must always remember that once a comment or response is made in social media, it can and is part of the 'world wide web.' If something is said wrong, there is no 'putting the Genie back into the bottle.' Something really

bad or controversial can 'go viral.' Personally, I cannot envision any reason that the assessor/appraiser should participate in any blogs.

A blog often creates or encourages negative comments by the public about the assessment office. Responding or attempting to correct any misconceptions, just allows for a running dialogue for those participating on the blog. It is very similar to responding to a negative article in a letter to the editor in a local paper. It hardly ever proves beneficial to the office.

Ten Common Management Mistakes

Ten common management mistakes:

1. Not making the transition from worker to manager.
2. Not setting clear goals and expectations.
3. Failing to delegate.
4. Failing to communicate.
5. Not making time for employees.
6. Not recognizing employee achievements.
7. Failing to learn.
8. Resisting change.
9. Going for the quick fix over the lasting solution.
10. Taking it all too seriously.

I would add one more to the list and that is failure to make decisions. One common complaint by employees is that the boss will not make a decision. Often the indecision slows down a process or function and then the same boss pushes the employees to get the work done in a fast time period. You have accepted the management position, one of the roles is decision making, so be a manager and make the decision.

Closing Thoughts

- Management is not easy
- You will make mistakes but it should not be from lack of trying
- Be strong but compassionate
- Work hard, take your work serious but not yourself
- Take time to relax and play