

CULTIVATING AN EFFECTIVE MANAGER / BOARD RELATIONSHIP

MMA 2023 Annual Meeting

January 20, 2023

An Art, Not a Science

- General observations on what's worked well over the years
- Changes with every new Board & all members have their own communication styles & interests
- One shoe doesn't fit all
- Most important goal = fostering belief & commitment that we're all part of the same team trying to advance the greater public good & make our community better now & for the future

An Art, Not a Science

- Board as policy leaders
- Manager & staff as day-to-day operational leaders & implementers
- Community accomplishes so much more when we all row in the same direction
- United team leads to better, faster decisions, improved staff morale, public confidence, & trust
- Bottom line = more gets accomplished when we work as a cohesive unit

Selectmen to Manager

- Honor chain of command
- Communicate with staff only through Manager's office
 - Formalize if possible
- Inherent danger when Board members speak directly to staff
 - Mixed messages on how an issue or matter will be handled
 - Can be perceived as a directive by staff
 - Can upset other Board members...and department heads & staff
 - Can lead to Open Meeting Law violations
- Honest & direct communication & feedback is appreciated
- Understand that the vast majority of social media is not factual

Selectmen to Manager

- When internal Board conflicts occur, the Board members need to play the lead role in trying to solve it
 - Many Managers get in trouble by getting in the middle
 - Can be perceived as playing favorites
 - Don't be afraid to seek outside expertise if all agree = Town Counsel, mediator / consultant, EAP, etc.
 - Remind Board that vast majority of votes & efforts = unanimous
 - Remind Board of their shared experiences & successes
 - Highlight disfunction elsewhere to show we're not unique...many much worse
 - One of the most difficult & stressful things Managers deal with
 - Adopt a Code of Conduct for boards & committees

Manager to Selectmen

- Recognize & respect the Board's role & who they represent
- Help Board recognize they are major part of the town staff leadership team
- Honor chain of command
 - 75+% of all communication is with Chair...maybe 95%
 - Set process to follow if something major happens that all should know about
 - When in doubt, speak with Chair & decide together
- Honest, accurate, & consistent communication with all

Manager to Selectmen

- Don't play favorites – treat all equally
 - Inevitably, some will have more time than others to stop at Town Hall & get involved in specific issue areas
 - Know key interest areas of each Board member
 - On the major issues, make sure all have the same information
- Establish guidelines to follow on what the entire Board might want to know
 - Major issues only
 - Don't bother Board so much that important matters lose their punch
 - Local newspaper inquiries or regional stories that might be controversial or take Board members by surprise...if you know about them in advance!
 - Major personnel matter...but only after reviewing with Chair first – most don't rise to the level of full Board knowledge
 - Be careful not to violate Open Meeting Law or employee's rights

Manager to Selectmen

- Quick hits & bullet points work best
 - Especially true during emergencies – invaluable during COVID
 - Formalize Manager authority during emergencies
 - Text or email group with brief facts = informational not decisional
- If important project or issue followed up on, send a copy of email or document to Board to keep them in the loop
 - Provide brief updates at Board meetings
- On full Board outreach, remind members no serial communications allowed

Manager to Selectmen

- Highlight shared professional responsibility of Board & management team, including department heads
- When something goes wrong, Manager takes blame
- When something goes right, Board & staff get the credit
- Greater public good, making community better, & playing it forward for future generations = shared goal of all of us
- Humor goes a long way – even if it's just attempted humor!

Conclusion

THANK YOU...ANY QUESTIONS?!