

# Eric's Top 10+ Local Government Manager Tips

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- 1. Make it comfortable/easier for others to share bad news.** Regularly encourage others to push back, share alternatives, point out potential problems, and concerns. Otherwise, it won't happen, and you'll miss opportunities to solve problems while still small and manageable.
- 2. Build relationships and listen.** Learning what's important to elected officials, co-workers, and the community is your most important job. Understanding why others view situations differently, as well as the many perspectives and dynamics involved in situations allows us to see things we'd otherwise miss and help craft options and solutions.
- 3. Learn about decision-making failure points and how to guard against them.** Many mistakes are easily avoided if a little time is taken to review key questions to ask and risks to weigh (i.e., "slower is faster"). Keep a file titled "Decision-Making Checklists" with guides and reminders when tough issues arise. Two good ones are Chip & Dan Heath's Four Villains of Decision-Making from their book "Decisive" and Dr. Leisha Dehart-Davis's "Getting to Green Tape: Twenty-Five Questions for Managers."
- 4. Problem solving systems.** There is no one right approach and each situation is unique so having the ability to adjust for conditions is essential. Techniques such as Red-Teaming, Lean, Toyota Production System, City of Tacoma's innovation and problem-solving approach, and many others increase inclusivity, identify blind spots, boost creativity, and encourage constructive push-back.
- 5. Become the chief storyteller.** The manager is often the person who "frames & explains." Translating complexities into understandable information facilitates good decision-making, trust, and engagement - people participate when they understand. The budget message is a good example, but deciphering confusing issues helps with many issues.
- 6. Build your deception detection skills.** This is a hard yet critical skill to develop. The stickiest problems, often personnel, can gridlock progress on everything else. It's hardest to recognize in those you like, trust, or have a positive opinion. Recognize warning signs someone is not being honest or has integrity issues. "I know you're lying" by Mark McIsh and "Talking to Strangers" by Malcolm Gladwell are two great resources. I would have been a much better manager had I read these 30 years ago!
- 7. Be yourself.** It's easier, less stressful, and people will appreciate you, your quirks, knowing you're not perfect.
- 8. Failing to pivot: the downfall of managers/directors.** Many choose to stay in their comfort zone "while Rome is burning." A close #2 is failing to ask for help and admitting mistakes. Be on the lookout for these pitfalls, especially with new leaders so you can coach, assure, and help them.
- 9. Battle selection**

*Part I - Is it worth it? Will it make a difference.* Asking these questions is essential to avoid getting bogged down - remember, it's easier to stay out of trouble than to get out of trouble. Monitor how often you speak - the more you talk, the less people listen. When possible, wait and let the conversation evolve to pick the right time to engage.

*Part II – Delay and regroup when appropriate.* Resist the temptation to fight things out, especially when others are tired or dug in. Ask the governing board or others if it's OK for you to take some additional time to consider the points raised, rethink, and look for alternatives to bring back.

*Part III – Bullies.* We all must take a lot of hits, often without responding. My biggest mistakes have been waiting too long to respond or take a stand. Every time I've finally confronted this behavior with bullies it's been effective - then, I regretted waiting so long.
- 10. Getting Things Done (GTD).** The higher you move up in an organization the harder it is to find time. Develop a system that allows you to deal with the stream of daily meetings, issues, and crises, yet provides regular blocks of uninterrupted time. Quiet time is essential for complex thinking and creative problem solving. Make time for escapes daily, weekly, and throughout the year to recharge your batteries. Getting away from the chaos allows your mind to connect random pieces of information and solve problems (e.g., ideas emerge when walking, cutting the grass, or in the shower). One rarely has a great idea at our desks or responding to emails. GTD #1 tip – SLEEP!
- 11. Quarterback, Linebacker, or Running Back?** Many people envision the manager being the one who points and directs others. This is true sometimes, but especially in smaller organizations, the manager needs to plug holes or take the ball to get things done. You have to wear multiple hats and get your hands dirty to be effective.
- 12. Say "thank you"!** Look for opportunities to recognize and talk with employees, thank them for their great work, whether it's emails on birthdays, work anniversaries, after promotions, or writing personal messages in holiday cards.