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# THE CLEAR VIEW

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## Job Tenure in the Public Sector

By: Kent Myers, Ph.D., Vice President

When I retired following a 42-year city management career, I decided that I needed some type of transition to retirement. So, I decided to help create a new company that assists local governments, Clear Career Professionals. We offer a variety of different services, as outlined on our website [www.clearcareerpro.com](http://www.clearcareerpro.com). One of our primary services is the recruitment of management personnel for cities in Texas and Arkansas.

During a recent recruitment assignment, I met with a City Council to discuss their wants and needs in terms of their next city manager. They shared with me that they had been through an extended period of turnover in their city manager position, with their previous managers lasting only two to three years. So, they requested that we focus our search on individuals who might offer some stability in this key management position. I have found that most cities are looking for stability (at least 3-5 years) in the personnel that they hire for most management positions.

During this discussion, they also expressed their surprise that I had personally served as City Manager in Hot Springs, Arkansas for 14 years and as City Manager in Fredericksburg, Texas for 10 years. They wanted to know how I had managed to survive the political, legal, personnel, and many other challenges in these cities for so many years. I provided the Council with a brief response to their questions. However, I have continued to think about how public sector managers (including both city managers and department heads) can enjoy a long tenure in a particular position while also remaining effective. I offer the following five keys to survival which seemed to work for me during my career.

**Adaptability to Changing Conditions:** During my lengthy career, I relocated to five different cities in four different states to serve in city manager positions. During this time, I served with over 100 different elected officials who had their different priorities on what they wanted to accomplish. Adaptability to these changing conditions was not just a personal preference; it was a necessity for survival. One of the keys to this adaptation was obtaining a clear understanding of the expectations of the Mayor and City Council. During my initial meetings, I asked questions such as “What do you perceive to be the role of the City Manager?” and “What are your personal priorities and what specifically do you want to accomplish during your term of office?” and “What can I do to help you succeed in your positions?” I found that my flexibility and ability were directly related to (1) how well I understood their responses to these key questions and (2) how well I was able to make the necessary adjustments in my approach to the job to meet their requirements.

**Building and Maintaining Trust:** Building and maintaining trust with City Council members and City employees is an obvious contributor to a longer tenure with a particular city organization. As managers in our organization, we set the example for creating a trusting environment. When this trust is gone (and signs indicate that it cannot be restored), it is likely time to move on to another position.

**Serving as an Authentic Leader:** I found out at a certain point in my career that being an authentic leader was also a key ingredient to job tenure. One of the common traits of an authentic leader is their ability to solicit opposing ideas and viewpoints from others before making any major decisions. Authentic city managers and department head leaders learn to balance the processing of information gained from others, including elected officials and other city employees, before making key decisions.

As experienced and knowledgeable public managers, we sometimes have the tendency to think that we know most, if not all, relevant information on key topics that are being discussed and considered. And we often have limited time to gather information from outside sources to consider in our decision-making process. I found that when I took the time to consider other ideas and viewpoints, this often had a positive impact on my final decisions. And I realized that the individuals who offered their input sincerely appreciated the fact that I considered their views before making my final decisions. The solicitation of this additional input seemed to help build teamwork and an overall cooperative working environment in the cities where I served.

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Kent Myers, Ph.D.

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Clear Career Professionals

Kent, a Fort Worth native, served as City Manager of Fredericksburg for 10 years starting in May 2012. With a 40-year career in city management, he also managed cities in Converse, Texas; Casa Grande, Arizona; Hot Springs, Arkansas; and Port Angeles, Washington. He holds a Bachelor's in Criminal Justice from UT Arlington, an MPA from TCU, and a PhD in Leadership Studies from Our Lady of the Lake University. Active in the community, he is a TCMA member and lifetime ICMA member. Kent has received the TCMA Mentor of the Year Award and the National Service to Youth Award from the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

# Job Tenure in the Public Sector

**Respecting Authority and Supporting Policies:** As experienced managers in local government, we often have extensive knowledge about key issues, and we use this knowledge to base our recommendations to city councils. When the City Council decides not to follow or adopt our recommendations, it can be both frustrating and disappointing.

It is critical at the end of the day to recognize the clear authority of the City Council to make policy decisions. Following any decisions that are made, it is critical for city staff to fully support the decisions of the City Council. Once you lose this respect for the council's authority to make these policy decisions and fail to support these decisions, it creates a working relationship with the City Council that can become non-productive.

Recently, I was involved in assisting a city search for a new City Manager, and we identified four job candidates whom we recommended as finalists for their position. Following our recommendation, the City Council met, and they selected several other candidates for consideration. My immediate reaction included both frustration and disappointment. My thoughts focused on "How could they not follow our recommendations and realize who were the best candidates for their position?" Then I realized that the City Council is clearly elected to make these types of decisions. They should know what is best for their community and the type of individuals with whom they can effectively work. This decision is clearly within their authority, and I eventually recognized that I needed to respect and support their decision.

**Work-Life Balance:** Last but certainly not least, I discovered that one of the keys to a stable job tenure is the ability to maintain a successful work-life balance. When I was serving as a city manager in my 20s and 30s, I recognized that I needed to have some type of balance to the pressures of my job, or I would suffer burnout at an early age. While we serve in important management positions, it is still only a job. We have a life separate from our jobs.

It is critical for public managers to get involved in enjoyable and rewarding activities outside of work. At times, I found that not all outside activities were enjoyable for me and learned to move on to other efforts to balance my life. For example, in my first city manager position, I joined the local softball league. However, I soon learned that hearing the complaints about the conditions of the city softball fields was not something that I enjoyed during my time away from work. So, I got involved and really enjoyed the opportunity to coach youth baseball and football teams. And I got involved in tennis and 5K running events. I found that in a way these activities served as a temporary distraction from the job. And I was able to return to work refreshed and ready to take on new challenges.

These are a few insights that I believe helped me to achieve a fairly long tenure in at least two cities where I worked. While there are many good reasons for changing jobs during a local government career, there are also lots of good reasons for enjoying many years working for the same community and seeing it continue to progress.

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Clear Career Professionals

<https://clearcareerpro.com/>

## ➤ Current Career Opportunities:

Senior Budget Analyst  
City of Taylor, Texas

City Secretary  
City of Nassau Bay, Texas

## ➤ Upcoming Career Opportunities:

Wastewater Plant Superintendent  
City of Sweeney, Texas

Chief of Police  
City of Levelland, Texas

## ➤ Recent Placements:

Jim Williams, ACM  
City of Fair Oaks Ranch, Texas

Mark Barta, Risk Manager  
City of McKinney, Texas

## ➤ Clear in Action:

Clear is attending the Texas City Managers  
TCMA Conference in South Padre,  
June 20th - 23rd.

Michael Boese will be speaking at (LEMIT)  
Leadership Command College on Issues in  
Police Legitimacy and Law Enforcement  
Executive Career Development on June 25th.

Clear will be attending the TML Annual  
Conference in Houston, October 9th - 11th.

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