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# THE CLEAR VIEW

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## What are Cities Looking for in Job Candidates??

By: Kent Myers, Ph.D

During my city management career, I participated in the hiring process for many municipal positions, including department heads and mid-level supervisors. I have also served as the Vice-President for Recruitment Services for Clear Career Professionals for the past two years. Based on these experiences, I have noticed that cities are now looking for a variety of characteristics in the new managers they are hiring. Recently, there appears to be much more focus on the following personal traits for these candidates:

**Leadership Abilities** – Many cities are placing greater emphasis on candidates' leadership abilities and focusing less on direct management experience. It's important for candidates to be able to articulate their leadership style and demonstrate a commitment to continuously improving their leadership skills. Municipal governments are finding that effective leadership at all levels is critical to the continued success of their organization.

**Work/Life Balance** – In the past, cities often viewed candidates who were “workaholics” as having a strong work ethic. Individuals who worked 60-70 hours a week were often considered positive role models for other employees. However, more cities are now recognizing the potential for burnout with this approach. While maintaining a strong work ethic is still a positive trait, candidates who also demonstrate an interest in maintaining balance in their personal lives are increasingly favored. Cities are looking for individuals who are well-rounded and have personal interests outside of work, recognizing that this balance helps ensure long-term productivity and well-being.

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## The Power of Relationships in Leadership

By: James Groom

I was recently talking to another local government official about politics and the issues that face many of us on a daily basis. As we were speaking, I was reminded of how important the professional relationships we form are to our success. Teddy Roosevelt once said, “The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.”

Strong relationships are the foundation of effective leadership. It's not enough to simply give orders or oversee tasks; real progress and genuine teamwork come from earning trust and building authentic connections. Trust is earned through consistency, integrity, and genuine care for those you lead. It means showing up, keeping your word, and being there when it counts.

Communication is at the heart of strong relationships. Effective leaders communicate openly, clearly, and often. In the realm of public service, where clarity can significantly impact safety and efficiency, it is crucial for leaders to articulate expectations, provide constructive feedback, and share important information without unnecessary delay. Encouraging two-way communication—where team members feel comfortable offering their insights, ideas, and even dissenting opinions—also helps to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and continuous improvement.

One effective way to nurture relationships and improve communication is through Management by Walking Around. By spending time with your team—not just at a desk or in meetings, but where they work—you gain insight into their challenges, learn more about them as individuals, and offer support when it's needed most. This casual presence helps break down barriers and shows your team that you value their work and respect their expertise. Such an approach sends a powerful message: that you, as a leader, are not disconnected from the day-to-day work but are actively engaged in ensuring a positive and productive environment.

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Vice President

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.



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**Training and Personal Development** – With emerging technologies, changing demographics, and increasing demands from the public, a candidate's focus on continuous career development is an important factor cities consider during the hiring process. Cities want to hire employees who are personally committed to their own training and personal growth, as well as the career development of their team members. In areas where a candidate may have less experience, it is crucial that they demonstrate a plan and commitment to addressing any gaps through additional training.

**Self-Awareness** – In the past, candidates were often asked about their strengths and weaknesses, and they tended to provide standard responses. However, this approach is no longer as effective in interviews. Cities now want to learn more about a candidate's personality, values, and unique traits. They are seeking candidates who have a clear understanding of themselves and can convey who they are as a person, including any unique characteristics. This self-awareness helps cities determine whether a candidate will be a good match for both the community and the city organization.

**Political Neutrality During Political Discourse** - In today's increasingly polarized environment, it's becoming more important for job candidates to remain neutral in political discourse, particularly within their professional roles. Local government elections are becoming more partisan, and the lack of civility at city council meetings is becoming more apparent. A recent survey from the Global Civility Summit 2024 found that 46% of respondents reported an increase in acts of incivility within their jurisdictions. While everyone has personal political beliefs, cities expect public sector managers to be discreet when expressing political views and to remain neutral, especially on state and national issues. This discretion helps to ensure that the focus remains on serving the community without the influence of partisan politics.

I hope this information is valuable to individuals who may be applying for public management positions in the near future.

By: Kent Myers Ph.D



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## The Power of Relationships in Leadership

Building professional relationships also involves listening—really listening. Taking the time to understand your team's concerns and perspectives creates an environment where people feel heard and valued. Listening goes beyond just hearing words; it involves empathizing, asking questions, and showing a genuine interest in your employees' experiences. This can be particularly meaningful in a public service setting where employees often encounter high-pressure situations. Listening attentively and responding thoughtfully demonstrates that the challenges and contributions of your staff matter, and it helps create a culture where collaboration thrives.

Trust is central to the leader-team relationship, and it cannot be overstated how important it is in a public service context. Trust forms the basis for effective communication, collaboration, and, ultimately, performance. But trust must be earned through everyday actions. Leaders should be transparent in their decision-making processes, admitting when mistakes are made, and sharing both successes and setbacks openly. Authenticity goes a long way in earning the respect and trust of your team members, as it humanizes you and makes you more approachable. A leader who shares their vulnerabilities and acknowledges their own challenges fosters an atmosphere where others feel more comfortable doing the same.

Beyond MBWA and listening, building relationships involves fostering a sense of belonging and community among your staff. Public service often attracts people who are mission-driven, with a desire to make a positive impact on their community. As a leader, it's important to tap into this shared sense of purpose. Highlighting the contributions of individuals and recognizing the achievements of the team can reinforce the value of their work and the importance of the mission they serve. For instance, celebrating milestones—whether it's successfully completing a major project, responding effectively to a crisis, or even small daily wins—can significantly improve morale. Public recognition, whether in a meeting or a department-wide email, can help foster a culture of appreciation where people feel their work is noticed and valued.

Another essential component of relationship building in leadership is empowerment. Empowerment means trusting your team with responsibilities, allowing them to take ownership of their work, and giving them the autonomy to make decisions within their roles. Empowering your team members helps build their confidence and demonstrates that you believe in their capabilities. In a public service context, where challenges can be unpredictable and solutions are not always clear-cut, empowering staff to make informed decisions is crucial. It ensures that frontline employees—who are often the first to respond to community needs—are equipped and authorized to act in the best interest of those they serve without unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles.

Investing in professional development is another way to cultivate relationships and build trust. Offering opportunities for your team to grow in their careers shows that you are invested in their future and well-being. This can include training programs, mentorship opportunities, or simply taking the time to share your own experiences and insights. In a rapidly changing world, especially in local government roles, staying up to date with best practices and new skills can help your staff feel more competent and capable. When employees see that their growth is a priority for leadership, they are more likely to feel valued and remain committed to their work.

It's also important to acknowledge the human side of leadership—understanding that each team member has a life outside of work. Leaders who show empathy and flexibility regarding work-life balance can strengthen relationships and enhance team morale. Whether it's accommodating a personal emergency or simply checking in on a team member who seems stressed, small gestures of care can significantly impact how valued people feel. Empathetic leadership fosters loyalty and respect, and helps create an environment where people are motivated to give their best.

Building effective relationships in public service leadership also means being present during difficult times. When the team is facing challenges—whether it's a high-stress incident, resource constraints, or internal conflicts—a leader's role is to provide steady guidance and support. It's during these moments that relationships are truly tested and strengthened. Leaders who stand by their teams, advocate for their needs, and help navigate through challenges build deep-rooted loyalty and trust that lasts beyond any one crisis.

In conclusion, leadership is about more than making decisions; it's about making connections. Relationships are the glue that holds a team together, especially in public service roles where the stakes can often be high and the demands relentless. Trust, listening, empowerment, empathy, and effective communication all play vital roles in fostering these connections. By focusing on these aspects, leaders can create a cohesive team that is not only effective in their duties but also deeply committed to the mission of serving the community. The stronger those connections, the stronger the team—and ultimately, the stronger the impact they can make together.

By: James Groom