

**THE RIGHT PERSON
THE RIGHT PLACE
THE RIGHT TIME**

A Talk Given by
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INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by thanking the Romney Institute for this award. Of the 35 previous recipients of this award, I personally know 17 of them, and I am honored to be considered worthy to be in their company. I do have one concern—last year's recipient, David Walker, who is comptroller general of the United States, appeared on 60 minutes several weeks ago. A standing truism is that you know it's going to be a bad day when you get to the office and the 60 minutes crew is waiting to interview you. I hope he did not set a precedent; my experience has been that when you are seen on the major network stations you have usually had an extraordinary event take place—one you would most likely prefer to forget. Two summers ago Joel Jenks was my intern, and Bountiful made national news for a wonderful "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" episode. Joel did a great job coordinating the logistics of the week-long (actually all summer long) project. Last summer Malinda Okerlund was my intern, and Bountiful made national news for a particularly gruesome murder—thanks, Malinda! I'm not sure if we'll make national news this summer, but it's nice to know that if we are, we'll have Jeff Jensen to blame!

Let me also express publicly my gratitude to the Institute of Public Management, and to BYU. Almost 35 years ago I graduated from this institution—young, idealistic, enthusiastic, and at least partially educated and trained to enter the field of public service. Our class used to joke that the sign at the entrance to the campus should have read, "Enter to Serve, go forth to Learn." All of the Institute faculty who taught me are now retired, but to them I owe a debt of gratitude for giving me excellent and relevant training that helped me enter the city management profession, a profession with which I have had a love affair for the past 35 years. My roots at BYU go back to my father, who taught here from 1954 to 1979,

and most of my family got their education here—including my younger brother Jim, who also went through the MPA program and chose city management as his profession. Finally, I worked on campus teaching Spanish at the Language Training Mission, and research methodology and statistics to graduate students and got handsomely paid for it. The question back then was, how could you make a million dollars working at BYU? The answer was, work a million hours. I trust the pay scale is slightly more competitive now!

If most of you are like I was 35 years ago, you have one overriding concern at this moment—getting a real job! Let me give you both some comfort and some admonition: the first job will usually be the hardest one to get, since you will be competing with so many others who have limited experience in the public sector. However, if you do the first job well, and gain meaningful experience, your second job will be easier, and each subsequent job will probably be likewise. I am not suggesting that you take the first job that comes along, but what you do in that job, what you learn from that job, and how you perform are more important than what your job title is or where you go.

I would like to talk tonight about what I believe to be the key to finding fulfillment, happiness, and joy in the work place—being the right person in the right place at the right time for the right job. While some of my remarks are more directly applicable to city management, they apply to almost any profession, and hopefully will be of some value to you now, and in the future.

THE RIGHT PERSON

Let me give you a list of attributes that will qualify you to be the “right” person for the job, and why I believe these attributes will serve you well throughout your professional life:

1. **Competence(What you know):** Do you really understand the technical, legal, and operational aspects of your job? For example, do you really understand taxes, fee structures, budgeting, the legal aspects of employment or land use, or how a water, or power, or sewer system operates, where the water and power that is sold comes from, what the true costs and benefits of residential vs. commercial development are, or what constitutes a legally defensible, clearly understandable, and politically acceptable policy for the use of deadly force? I am not suggesting that you have to know everything there is to know about every aspect of your job, but knowledge is power, and understanding is real power. As a wise person once said, “everyone is entitled to their own opinions; what they are not entitled to is their own facts.” The more you know, and the more you do, the more valuable you become.

With due respect, what you have learned here at the Romney Institute barely scratches the surface. To be truly competent, you must develop and nurture an insatiable thirst for knowledge, for innovation, for issues in your community, your school district, your county, your state, your nation, and yes, even your world. Learn to “connect the dots” on complex issues, identifying all the players, participants, and pretenders. Learn how to find out not only what is being reported and said publicly, but what is being said and thought privately. Talk to and observe mentors you trust and respect. Constantly read the professional literature, newspapers, magazines, etc. Volunteer for involvement with citizen groups, professional task forces, intergovernmental planning, legislative policy development, etc. Attend school board meetings, city council meetings, town hall meetings of state and federal officials, council of government meetings, etc. There will always be a market for someone who has not only a working knowledge, but an understanding, of the technical, legal, operational, and in many cases, the political and public relations implications of issues. If you really understand the issues and can express yourself verbally and in writing, as the E.F. Hutton commercial used to say, people listen. You will be the person who will be relied on to handle the bigger issues and the more complex challenges—in other words, the really fun and exciting stuff!

Just a brief word about technological competence. When I entered the MPA program when there was one computer on the BYU campus, and you had to reserve time on it, and then type up “format cards” (I can guarantee you none of you know what I’m talking about), which you placed in front of your box of punched data cards to run through the computer because the computer did not have enough memory to simultaneously store both the data and the program to run the data. There were no hand-held calculators, cell phones, or word processors. There were no CD’s, DVD’s, Ipods, MP3’s, no personal computers, no cable or satellite TV, no TV remote, no fax or copy machines, and no internet. Some of you may think I lived in the dark ages, but I am talking 1971. Compare that with all the technology available to you today. Now project that order of magnitude of change into the future, and you will probably conclude that today’s technology and skills might be rendered obsolete in a short period of time. Lifelong learning is not an option; it is an absolute requirement to maintain your value to an organization.

Now, I would like to tell you that all city managers are wonderfully competent, lifelong learners, but I would be less than truthful if I did. What I can tell you is that after your first job, no one is going to care what your GPA was, what you scored on the GRE, or ACT, or any other test or grade you have gotten. What they will care about is what you know and what you have done, and what they believe you can do—in other words, what potential value you bring to the organization.

2. Integrity (Who you are): Be the type of person people trust and respect,

someone who cannot be persuaded to compromise his personal or professional ethics in the name of promotion, advancement, monetary gain, or political favor. You have had ethics training here at the Romney Institute—hopefully it simply sharpened your skills and heightened your awareness of what you should already intuitively feel and know.

You may be wondering why I listed competence before integrity. The answer is because if you are honestly incompetent, you are of no value to an organization. On the other hand, if you are competent but lack integrity, you will sooner or later be of no value to the organization. I have seen managers in both of these categories—and they tend to move quickly from job to job and eventually leave the profession. Imagine a matrix of these two qualities. The only box in the matrix in which you want to reside is in the box that contains both qualities—competence and integrity.

Be aware that in public life you are going to deal with and ultimately have to recommend or decide a number of issues for which there may be a “best” answer, but no “right” answer. For example, should water—a precious resource in the arid Western United States—be priced based on the cost to produce and deliver it, or should be priced artificially high to discourage use and encourage conservation? Should low-income or senior citizens be given some sort of price subsidy? Should utility charges be waived for those serving our country in the armed forces? Should new development pay higher rates that reflect the higher incremental cost of “new” water, or should all citizens pay a rate that blends the costs of new and old water together? Should water be priced seasonally, charging more for consumption in the summer and less in the winter?

A problem presently facing Bountiful is where to acquire additional long-term electrical power supplies for the present and future needs of our residents and businesses. Signing up for a large coal-fired or nuclear project is a 40-year commitment in a take or pay contract. Should we sign up for additional coal-fired power, which is currently the most inexpensive and reliable source, but produce significant amounts of CO₂, or should we sign up for wind and solar, which are more expensive, and less reliable, and which then have to be backed up with natural gas-fired generation, which may drive up the price of natural gas for residential as well as commercial consumers? What is the likelihood of additional federal regulations on greenhouse gases, and what form would they take? Is the federal government going to impose a “carbon tax” on emissions? What really is the “inconvenient truth” about global warming, and what difference would it make to the environment if just Bountiful, or just Utah, or just the United States tried to wean itself off of dependence on fossil fuels? At the current time China is completing approximately one coal-fired power plant per week, and China is not installing the expensive pollution control

equipment that will minimize the emissions of carbon and nitrogen oxides (CO_x and NO_x). What are the public, political, economic, and environmental consequences of our decision? I can guarantee you that there are citizens and businesses that have strongly differing viewpoints, and there is no “perfect” solution out there.

3. Faith and Optimism: Good public managers need to exude confidence and optimism. They have to view problems as challenges and opportunities. For the successful public manager, the glass is always half full, and with a little bit of work and luck it can be filled or traded in for a larger glass! Unfortunately, you can get others to follow you if you are a negative person—I have seen organizations that reflect negativity at the top, and they are not pleasant places to work, and are rarely, if ever, successful. No one makes himself or his organization look better by attempting to drag others down.

Faith and optimism do not require you to be unrealistic about a situation or an issue, or require that you like everything that you do or everyone with whom you associate. You cannot ignore the bad, but you can always seek to make it better. My most painful and least favorite responsibility is terminating a department head. In addition to the trauma and disruption of that person’s life, it is in part an admission of failure on my part to inspire, coach, or motivate that person to be successful. One of the things I have tried to do through the years is to try to help these employees find a new or different job, and maintain a cordial relationship with them. It is easier said than done, but more than worth the effort.

4. Problem Solver: If I were to grade city managers, I would primarily grade them on their ability to solve problems. My grading would be as follows:

- F Ignores the problem
- D Identifies the problem
- C Identifies and analyzes the problem
- B Identifies, analyzes and comes up with potential solutions to the problem
- A Identifies, analyzes, comes up with potential solutions, and then works to implement the solution.

Last year this body heard David Walker, the Comptroller General of the United States, identify the structural problems of the federal deficit and the federal debt. So far, Congress and the President seem to be getting an “F”—ignoring the problem in hopes that it will go away. Interestingly, the problem is not without solution—balancing a budget is not rocket science—it involves either increasing income

(revenue) or decreasing expenses (expenditures), or both, to the point that the two equal each other. As another wise person has said, "Denial is not a river in Egypt." Lest you think that Mr. Walker is the only person to have ever identified the problem, the Congressional Budget Office has come up with over 200 alternatives to either increase income or decrease expenses, and how much each of those alternatives would achieve toward a balanced budget. That probably deserves a C grade, since the CBO is staff to the Congress, who must still act. I hope for your sake, and mine, that somehow the public can impress on Congress that the deficit, and the debt, matters. I am optimistic that there are real solutions to the federal deficit and the federal debt, but know that these solutions run into what I call "Hardy's Law of Government Programs":

1. There is no government program so bad that no one likes it.
2. There is no government program so good that someone isn't opposed to it.
3. Proposing real solutions to real problems could get you fired!

There are several corollaries to Hardy's Law that apply to public budgeting:

1. There will always be more needs and wants than money to fulfil them.
2. It is always easier to say "yes" than it is to say "no" to a request.
3. It is always more expensive to say "yes" than it is to say "no."
4. After you say "yes" initially, it is much more difficult to subsequently say "no" to the same request, or to a competing request.
5. When you find yourself in a hole, it is hard to quit digging.

If a solution is not found, I will plead with you, as I do with my kids and grandkids: be successful—very successful—so you can support me in my retirement.

5. People Person: As a city manager I work with a variety of people—citizens, employees, department heads, service organizations, council members, and mayors. But I also work with legislators, school superintendents, county commissioners, special district boards and managers, and other mayors and managers from surrounding communities and throughout the state. Your ability to relate to people, and to get them to relate to you, may be the difference between succeeding and failing on many of the complex issues of today. Many problems today cannot be solved by you, or by your organization alone. We have become increasingly interdependent, and the term "partnerships"—different organizations working together to achieve a solution—is a necessity today where not so long ago it may have been viewed as an option and a luxury. This involves understanding other

organizations—their language, their culture, their challenges, their fears, their aspirations, and their limitations. It involves getting to understand people and organizations personally and professionally. It involves figuring out who and what is needed to solve a problem, and getting the who to share the vision of the solution and provide the what to solve the problem. You cannot be a leader if no one follows, and if you ever want to be a leader, you will have to depend on others. If you enjoy people less and problems more, don't be a city manager, because the two are so intertwined.

Most of us, when we have our choice, choose to be around people we like, who have a positive outlook, a sense of humor, and a genuine concern about us. Relationships matter—and the further you advance in any profession, the less you use your technical skills and the more you use your people skills.

Finally, the successful people person has an impeccable sense of timing—he or she knows when it's the "right" time to deal with an issue. By being sensitive to the financial, physical, legal, political, and emotional state of other people and organizations, you can most effectively and efficiently accomplish what needs to be done.

THE RIGHT PLACE AND TIME

In conclusion, let me share just a few thoughts about being in the right place professionally. When you become a city manager you work for elected officials. I have worked as city manager for 7 mayors and over 30 council members. I have worked primarily in medium-sized cities—30,000 to 100,000. I didn't see that as my final destination—I thought I would eventually manage a large city. But being a city manager is like a marriage—you have to be compatible to survive and prosper. I have been so fortunate to have had, for 27 years in Bountiful, Utah, and 3 years in Ontario, Oregon, a wonderful succession of intelligent, principled, men and women who ran for public office with no agenda other than serving the community and making it a better place. They have allowed me the freedom and opportunity to do what I thought was best, and who encouraged me to think outside the box and push the envelope. To them I owe a debt of gratitude, for their faith and trust in me. I hope I have honored that trust, and count myself as being so fortunate to have had these people touch my life for good. Likewise, I count myself lucky to have been associated with so many other quality individuals from whom I have learned so much.

I hope I have left each place I have worked better for my having been there. I have been given a unique opportunity to serve in a profession I love, and will strive to continue to be a credit to a most worthy profession.