

HEADLINE: Local Governing Body Conducts Business Efficiently

Did you read the heading above? You may be wondering if I have that incorrect? Actually it would be nice to see such as a headline on the front page of the paper or hear a reporter delivering the good news on TV. However, doing things 'right' usually doesn't garner any attention. And, sadly, doing things wrong, often doesn't get any attention until those wrong decisions and policies wind up in tragedy.

For the most part, city councils and RWD boards of directors in Kansas, try to operate in an efficient manner. Generally members show respect to their co-members and the citizen/customers. Unfortunately, this is not the case in all communities.

Most people serve on a board or council with the true intent and belief that they can make a positive difference. They understand that they are accountable to a wider community. They acknowledge that their election to the office will involve a commitment of time and energy. Their goal is to operate as efficiently, as responsibly and as respectfully as possible while providing high quality service whether it be quality water, wastewater treatment, electrical production/distribution or a myriad of other services.

Those are the folks who set self-interest aside and consider only the good of the community. But there are others for whom that word 'self' takes on a list of meanings, self-absorbed, self-admiring, self-centered, self-important, self-involved, self-serving. The world never seems to have a shortage of selfish people who seek power and position. For some reason such people thrive on dislikes and discontent. They show no patriotic assimilation as a member of the board/council. This is not about national or state level politicians. I'm referring to folks in small town USA and rural water districts.

I hope that as you read this you are saying, "I'm glad we don't have that problem in our community."

To that I say, "Great! Your community or RWD is blessed to have a governing body that is responsible and receptive to the community it serves, be sure to include them in the blessings listed at the Thanksgiving table this year."

Meanwhile there are bound to be people reading this article who immediately picture faces and think of names of persons in positions who misuse and abuse their power towards selfish ends. Some follow very specific agendas to in some way be personally enriched or to help out some family members or good-ole-boy friends, while others have



less obvious interests. Some seem to still be in junior high school, thinking that local government and staffing should be managed like an adolescent popularity contest. Often these are people that thrive on picking at and berating others, perhaps with the goal of 'getting rid' of a person or persons, while others just seem to think that by putting others down they will elevate themselves.

If board or council members are constantly ranting on topics better left to a manager to handle in a professional fashion, particularly if these subjects are approached in a mean-spirited and petty manner, that board or council has a problem. A smugly asked question... "Why did the employee pour concrete on the south end of town?" A snippy remark about... "Why are there two holes on the street heading out of town? When are they going to be filled back up? Who allowed the holes to be dug?" Or the question at the RWD board meeting, "Why was the RWD truck stopped at the pharmacy?"

So... now the meeting becomes an inquisition with an employee publicly under the gun giving a complete a minute-by-minute log of their daily work in order to defend him/herself.

And then there are the situations where one or two board members, behaving not like members of a team serving the public, but like dictators running the show, do something like have GPS installed on utility trucks arranging for the information gathered to be available only to them and not to managers or other council or board members. These are not issues that the board/council should be involved in.

Sometimes these self-important types start thinking that the small town or water district is their own personal property and they start running it like Ebenezer Scrooge

refusing the funds to supply employees with the necessary tools, equipment or replacement parts to do their jobs efficiently and safely. And, if they do approve the money for the big items like backhoes, sometimes they forget that the indoor staff, like the clerk also has needs like keeping hardware and software for utility billing and other office work up-to-date along with the training to make the best use of that investment.

Of course some of these self-involved misers are equal opportunity cheapskates, they want all the staff, indoors and out, to do without. A power company wouldn't sell a truck especially equipped to bore holes and set poles and expect the employees to dig them by hand or use a post hole auger rented from a farmer, and yet, unfortunately, that is a real world example of what one city council saw as a good choice.

Yes, they had the right tool for the job and yet the decision was made to sell the power pole digging/setting truck, leaving their employees to figure out a way to get the job done without the right equipment. I can assure you the common post hole auger, even with the best sweat-efforts of the employee, will not dig deep enough to safely set a power pole nor safely raise to place the pole.

How is the employee supposed to set the new pole? Scrooge's answer, since he has now sold the truck the city had for such work, at a used price, would be to use the backhoe. Larry, Moe and Curly might also think this was a good idea, but no professional who knows anything about utilities and safety would follow such bad advice. Check with any manufacturer for the safe uses of a backhoe. They were never intended to be used to set power poles. Knowingly jeopardizing employees' safety is setting the system up for financial disaster and possible tragedy, even death.

The self-centered person must always get his/her way in a meeting and if challenged by another member of the body, he or she is likely to wait for the opportunity to return to the topic when that member is not present to attempt to convince and perhaps even intimidate the other members to reverse a previous decision. After all, what ever he or she thinks is never wrong, even when an expert, professional disagrees.

The self-serving person doesn't like to follow protocol at meetings; he/she tries to keep information hidden from others in the community. This is a violation of the Kansas Open Records Act (KORA). You can also suspect that this person also disregards the Kansas Open Meeting Act (KOMA) by talking to others on the governing body in the coffee shop about city or RWD business. Self-absorbed members like for things to be arranged before the regular meeting is ever held.

Every town and rural water districts should have procedures or policies that have been adopted and are

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adhered to by the governing body. RWDs have bylaws and rules and regulations. Cities have ordinances. These rules establish procedures that help a community treat citizens uniformly and fairly. It's the board/council's job to make sure that happens. It's not the job of a board/council member to twist a rule to create a special favor for a friend or relative or themselves.

The self-admiring person doesn't believe the guidelines should apply to him/her.

How can a board/council member require a customer to do something when the governing body member doesn't abide by the same rule? Allowing double standards does not make for good governance. And being the loudest person at a meeting doesn't mean that person is the smartest or right.

Self-serving behavior is not limited to board/council members. Employee's too can have selfish agendas. The employee's job is to provide the governing body with accurate information in order to promote appropriate polices and guidelines. Ultimately the board is responsible to the customers. The customers are paying the salaries through services.

The good news is that no matter at whatever level this happens, the self-absorbed, self-serving, self-admiring, self-centered, self-involved, self-important, self-absorbed people who masquerade as public servants will sooner or later be exposed. Better sooner than later. The truth surfaces. Good board/council members will remain committed to providing service to the best of their ability even though their good work may not make any headlines. Let's hope we can all work to keep damage caused by poor, so-called public servants to a minimum.

"Happiness doesn't come through selfishness but through selflessness. Everything you do comes back around."

– *Anonymous*

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