

WELCOME TO THE



Michigan  
Municipal  
Executives

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# Personnel Reshuffling

Presenter

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# My Experience



I have led the City of Otsego for the last 8 years and before that I was the Village Manager of Decatur. I have dealt with several personnel reshuffling that left me feeling very uncomfortable and unprepared for significant moments in my career. I hope I can help you avoid that feeling when you are thrown into a similar moment. And it is a “when” and not an “if”.

There are a few topics that need to be understood “before” those moments occur not during or after.





# Small Municipality Hardships

- Money to pay salaries and equipment
- Lack of promotion opportunities with small structures
- Applicant's attention and consideration
- Reputation as a “slow” community (Mayberry)
- Etc...

These are hardships for every hire. Now what about when you need to replace a unicorn?

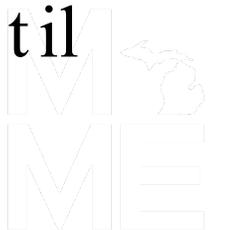


# Unicorns



A unicorn is that employee that is indispensable and usually highly certified. When unicorns leave; you need to find a new one. Not easy.

- Examples: Police Chief, Fire Chief, Wastewater OIC, and Water OIC
- You probably have some unicorns whether you realize it or not.
- They make our jobs much easier. Not fully recognized until after they leave.



When they do leave, you have a problem.

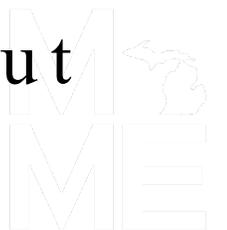
# Small Municipality Management



If you manage a small municipality you have probably felt very isolated as if you live on an island.

- No assistant or deputy
- How many times have you asked “what does everyone else do?”

Many times we just try to keep the existing systems continuing on. After all, that is the easiest path forward. But is it the best? You may have to ask yourself: Is this a “Manager vs Leader” moment?



# Manager vs. Leader



Much of a municipal manager's work is broken down into 2 categories:

**Manager-** This is the successful continuation of operations. Much of this category is centered on the internal day-to-day operations. The “management” of the existing systems.

**Leader-** Some problems require a “Leader”. Maybe a system is no longer feasible and requires outside of the box thinking to build a new system. This could include making significant changes to meet a long term vision.



# How do you solve a major personnel question?



Some resignations, retirements or separations can be abrupt. You may not be able to have that exit interview to wrap your arms around keeping a department afloat. And even if they give you 30 days...that time will fly by and you will not gather the information you need. Time will most definitely not be on your side.

First thing is first; get your certifications right...somehow.



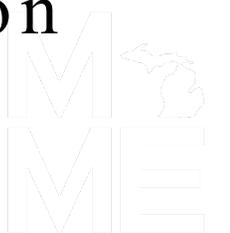
# What certifications?



It would be wise for you to have an in depth understanding of what certifications are needed for all of your departments to stay legal.

Water and Wastewater: I am looking at you! To have an Operator In Charge (OIC) license for your infrastructure is much more rare and difficult to obtain than you would expect.

- 1<sup>st</sup> call should be to regional EGLE office to update them on the situation.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> call should probably be with your engineers to brainstorm on ideas on potential OICs until you find a long



# Long Term Plan



While you are trying to stay legal you also must consider what the long term solution will be to replace the Unicorn. This is an important moment. This is in many ways the only point that you can set up the optimal personnel systems to handle the workload. We all start jobs in communities with personnel structures that we did not setup or choose. Most likely if we could start everything over we would set a few things up differently. That time is now that the opening occurred...maybe.



This is a very important decision to make. What is considered to help make that decision?

# Long Term Plan Consideration



- Internal Resources- Looking at your existing employees; what are your realistic options? What talents do your existing employees possess? Some are great leaders, some are great followers. What successful structure is possible with the chess pieces that you possess?
- External Resources- Do not hesitate to use the support that you have. That includes using your attorney or engineer who may be familiar with the situation. You need to talk through some of these ideas. Other employees are probably not a good audience. Other managers who may have some similar experiences would be helpful.



# Things to Remember



- It would be wise to do some research on what each of your departmental requirements are before you have an emergency. This includes not only licenses but also reporting requirements.
- You may think that you have an employee who could be an OIC, but requirements may require for at least an additional year before they would even be eligible to take the test.
- Contractors are available if needed; Infrastructure Alternatives, F&V, Michigan Rural Water Association.
- Don't be afraid to ask "What does everyone else do?"



# My Shuffles and Lessons



1. Named Village Manager on the same day as the Police Chief resigned (not a shot at me, he just waited until my predecessor left to retire). Interim -Chief did not pan out and I had to take over Police Chief duties for a department of only 3 officers for multiple months. As you could imagine; I learned a lot! Held down the fort until we found a great candidate. Had serious considerations of closing the department and contracting with the county. I had to consider any and all options to know what is best going forward.



# My Shuffles and Lessons, Contd.



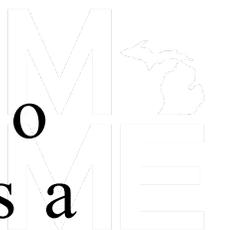
2. In 2023 in Otsego the WWTP Superintendent was the OIC for both Water and Wastewater. He left to go to a neighboring community. The Unicorn is going out the door! I had always envisioned the departments to be separated and placed under the DPW. I had the utmost confidence in the Director of DPW to handle the additional duties. Short-term; I had a contractor come in and serve as OIC for a year while I had employees get the necessary licenses. This was one of those things that just made sense to me looking at the overall structure and available talents.



# My Shuffles and Lessons, Contd.



3. Later in 2023; we separated from our part-time Fire Chief. The Otsego Fire Department is not a large fire department. The position never made sense to be a full-time position. The former Chief was also a full-time police officer. It made sense for everyone when they were hired many years ago. When it came to filling that position; it was impossible! Our department was too young and no one was capable of taking over as Chief. I could either pay close to \$100K for a full time Chief who is capable and try to justify the cost to the residents. Or keep it at part time and get someone who would not be as qualified and/or experienced and posed as a huge risk going forward.



# My Shuffles and Lessons, Contd.



I chose to put my Police Chief in charge of the fire department as well. He had a wealth of fire experience retiring from Kalamazoo Public Safety. I made him the Director of Police and Fire and gave him additional compensation. This move saved money, kept the expectations high and allowed for us to build up within the department until he retires.



# Same Response to Each Situation



During each of these struggles I asked the same question:  
“what does everyone else do?”

I am now asking you that: “What do you do?”

- Utilities
- Police
- Fire
- Office Staff
- Etc.



# Thank you!



The rest of the time is yours.

- How have you handled some similar situations?
- What personnel chart works for you that you would like to share?
- Questions?

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