

## A LESSON IN MOTIVATION FROM CIVIC GOVERNMENT

### Rosie Steeves, PhD

The City of Vancouver is a large and complex organization. With more than 9,000 employees and business units as diverse as libraries, parks, engineering, fire and police (to name just a few), it is an organization in which leaders face many considerable challenges.

For example, as **Judy Rogers**, Vancouver's city manager, points out, "The sheer number of constituents that a leader at the city needs to recognize and respond to is enormous. This can include councils, taxpayers, stakeholders, business improvement associations, numerous boards, plus adjacent communities and other levels of government. It is tremendous."

It is not unusual for the managers at city hall to face a real struggle satisfying all these diverse stakeholders. The chances of making everyone happy are remote. Thus, leaders need to be able to reframe and manage differences. Conflict resolution, mediation and the recognition of special interest groups are all important skills for leaders at city hall. Furthermore, unlike in the private sector, the performance of leaders in the public service is often on display for all to see and judge.

Research done in 1999 shows 54 per cent of Canadians believe government has a more difficult task than the private sector; 95 per cent believe that, compared to the private sector, government should provide higher [42 per cent] or about the same [53 per cent] level of service; and, contrary to popular belief, citizens rank the quality of many government services as being as good as or better than, those in the private sector.

The research suggests that in Canadian society there is a growing realization that a highly competent, professional and non-partisan public service, at all levels of government, is central to meeting the challenges facing Canada in the 21st century. In Vancouver, effective leadership at city hall is essential in sustaining our democratic institutions and in fostering economic prosperity and social well-being.

However, given the complexity of managing all the interrelationships and the fact many Canadians do not have a positive image of public service, what on earth would attract managers to this environment?

Rogers offers some insight. "You get the intrinsic reward of being able to see a community develop, to see people enjoy something that you have been a part of creating."

Clearly, values play an integral role in attracting and sustaining leaders at city hall.

We often hear from organizations in the private sector about the importance of having a clear mission or sense of purpose. Boldly stated in annual reports, proudly displayed on the walls of the office complex, a clear mission can indeed be an important element of organizational effectiveness.

However, all too often we hear from employees that when the rubber hits the road, the primary driver is just one thing -- the quarterly return to shareholders. However, public service is different. As Rogers states it, "At the city, leaders really do have an opportunity to influence people's lives. It is about making the city a better place to live, to increase the quality of people's lives, to be the social conscience for the city."

It is this desire to contribute to their communities that appears to attract leaders to public service. At times, it can test an individual's leadership. People bring their passions to their communities, and the leaders at the city must be able to lead these people to constructive solutions. They must enjoy the challenge of working in a diverse environment and have the ability to grasp the big picture.

To work successfully with the huge number of people interested in the business of government, one cannot be a chameleon or play to the crowd for too long with lasting success. Congruency is crucial, and when leaders are congruent human beings, their leadership is apparent through their personal and professional lives -- wherever they are.

"When someone is not clearly grounded in their values, they don't seem to last very long in this type of environment," points out Rogers. "It is hard and it can be mucky. The community can be a harsh judge and phoniness gets picked up fast."

Research shows leaders in the public service are motivated more than their private sector counterparts by intrinsic incentives [e.g., job satisfaction] than by extrinsic rewards such as pay and perks. This isn't to say money and perks are not important.

But when it comes to working for an organization in the throes of change, and in which leaders are faced with considerable challenges both internally and externally, the organization must connect with something deeper, more powerful, and more sustaining than simply financial rewards.

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