

Managing and Leading in a Municipal Environment

Managing and leading? Are you kidding? I'm just trying to survive.

Well, you're not alone. The municipal governments in the Quinte/Napanee/Prince Edward County areas are trying to survive in an era of amalgamation, downloading, new employees, increasing costs, and demands for partnerships and more accessible services.

Like governments everywhere, they are challenged to meet the pressures from partner municipalities and the public in an era of tight fiscal responsibility and increasingly transparent accountability.

Unlike governments everywhere, these municipal leaders have banded together with the Loyalist College Training and Development Centre (LTDC) to not only meet the challenges but to re-invent themselves in the process. They know that yesterday's leadership just isn't good enough for today and tomorrow.

"We need to grow our own managers," says Larry Keech, CAO of the County of Lennox & Addington, "It's not easy to attract and retain skilled people, and our aging workforce requires us to think ahead about succession planning."

To do that, the Counties of Lennox & Addington, Hastings, and Prince Edward have joined with the Cities of Belleville and Quinte West to pool their skills with LTDC. The result is a suite of skill building programs called *Managing and Leading in a Municipal Environment* to achieve positive results in three key areas:

Leadership

- Lead and sustain change
- Establish strategies to analyze problems
- Reduce conflict situations

Relationships

- Connect with people to build a stronger commitment and motivation
- Create positive relationships to achieve greater results
- Communicate more effectively
- Inspire passion and boost performance
- Improve the quality/quantity of communication about performance

Management

- Complete projects on time and within budget
- Effectively interview and select staff
- Make better bottom-line decisions
- Manage more effectively in a unionized environment
- Improve overall meeting effectiveness

- Effectively use Employment Legislation, such as the Labour Relations Act, to improve decision making in the municipal workplace

It sounds ambitious, and it is.

“I can see three immediate benefits,” says Mary Anne Evans Director, Information Services, County of Lennox & Addington, “First, the resource materials provide a very helpful tool in helping me perform better. Second, focusing on the big picture with other managers in my organization is something I never have time to do on the job. And, third, I am already more conscious of how I present myself as a professional manager because of some of the key principles behind effective two-way communication.”

It wasn't sufficient for public sector managers to simply take existing courses at LTDC with their colleagues in the private sector. Most corporations have international accountability for profit while municipal governments have local accountability for service. That's where LTDC's reputation for customizing training programs came to the rescue.

“We began as a small business in the early 1990s, and we know how business works. That's what drives our training and development centre,” says Chuck O'Malley, Trainer and Account Manager for LTDC. “So, when local businesses large and small require training, they naturally turn to us. One of our strengths is needs assessment and customization. We saw the need for development in the municipal environment and put together a proposal that received an enthusiastic endorsement from the leaders of our local municipalities.”

The LTDC proposal was a five-year program for seven groups of managers including both core modules and electives (see sidebar).

The program began in the fall of 2004 with an optional self-assessment program called LSI 1 that uses 240 inventory items to distinguish and measure 12 key thinking patterns, or styles, that are either effective or ineffective.

LSI 1 is part of the Life Styles System that has been successfully used by over 1,000,000 managers and 240,000 organizations in the past 20 years.

Their results have indicated that significant connections exist between individual LSI 1 scores and the development of:

- Leadership effectiveness

Managing and Leading

Core Modules:

- Self-Managed Leadership
- Leading Change and Organizational Renewal
- Local Government and Public Administration
- Managing Performance
- Managing in a Unionized Environment
- Interviewing and Selecting Staff
- Essentials of Financial Management and Budget Planning
- Problem Solving, Decision Making and Action Planning
- Legal Issues
- Meeting/Group Facilitation

Electives:

- Three A's of Leadership & Authority – Putting Supervisory Skills into Practice
- Business Writing Skills
- Project Management
- Time Mastery
- Giving Performance-Related Feedback
- Developing the Business Case
- Creativity and Innovation for Break Through Results
- Translating Strategy Into Performance
- Dealing with the Media
- Coaching Skills
- Presentation Skills

- Increased ability to cope with pressure and change
- Achievement of set goals
- Flexible and creative thinking
- Improved relationships with others

Following the inventory, LTDC provided general feedback in a 1-hour small group session plus in-depth analysis in a personalized 1-hour session with every participant. The result was a quantified measure for looking at strengths as well as self-defeating behaviours, so that each participant could further improve upon strengths and precisely target the areas in which he or she wanted to improve.

With specific goals in mind, 18 CAOs, CFOs, and Senior Directors from Hastings County, Prince Edward County, and Lennox and Addington County participated in twelve days of core modules taught by expert facilitators from LTDC.

Mark Norman is one of those facilitators, and he sees some essential differences between public and private managers that must be addressed. “Profit is the bottom line for private-sector managers,” says Norman, “While public trust is the bottom line for the public sector. Also, for private sector managers, their final goals to decrease costs and increase income rarely change. In the public sector, a different level of responsiveness is required. Managers must heed the public, elected councillors, and influential individuals who can sway those councillors. Also, goals can change depending on the values and type of community people want.”

“Above all,” says Norman, “I really admire these public sector managers. They are remarkably effective, flexible, and responsive. They get things done in the midst of many pressures and priorities.”

Norman started the group with Self-Managed Leadership, focusing on the contribution of leaders to their culture based on their day-to-day behaviour. The first step is self-management, stabilizing emotions, remaining composed in stressful situations and preparing for challenging situations. This is necessary if a leader is going to promote an open culture of trust.

Others sessions taught by Norman include:

- Managing Performance – long-term, dynamic employee development outside the annual ritual of performance appraisals
- Meeting/Group Facilitation – building the components of successful meetings so the real issues are on the table and you don’t have the meeting after the meeting.
- Problem Solving – learning disciplined patterns and templates to understand the nature of multi-cause problems such as disasters or chronic absenteeism

Beginning with the foundation of Self-Managed Leadership, each module builds on the one before it. The modules are spread out every 2 months (with email reminders and tips in between from Norman) so the managers have time to apply the concepts before moving to the next level.

In some modules, existing staff of the local governments are sharing their knowledge with each other.

This is a unique application of ideas first presented in *The Leadership Engine: How Companies Build Leaders at Every Level*, the 1997 Business Week Book of the Year by Noel M. Tichy.

Tichy, a professor at the University of Michigan School of Business, has observed that business winners have "good leaders who nurture the development of other leaders at all levels of the organization."

"Part of this development is by example," says Brian Beiles, MBA, CA, another LTDC facilitator in the program. "There is a strong symbolic commitment from senior management to the program if they help deliver it. Plus, they are the people with the expert knowledge."

"When it came time to deliver some of the more technical modules such as Local Government and Public Administration or Essentials of Financial Management and Budget Planning, it was immediately obvious that the people in the modules are the ones who should be teaching some of them. So I helped them to refine their content with tips on program design, case studies, exercises, and group discussions. My role was to help with the timing, engagement, and awareness of some of the more subtle non-verbal cues from an audience that many facilitators miss because they are focused on their content."

In addition, Beiles facilitated the core module on Leading Change and Organizational Renewal. He began with a pre-module assignment asking for an example of major change in each participant's organization so he could tailor the module to practical essentials. In the first day of the two-day module, he focused on specific personal actions each manager could make to better manage change, beginning with their personal attitude toward the change they described.

"Every leader has to take a stand on a suggested change," Beiles says, "They are either for it or against it. If they are for it, they have to assume responsibility for the organization's success. If against, they have to decide on their responsible course of action."

On Day 2, Beiles has adapted some of the work done by John Cotter at Harvard University. He helped the participants create a personal road map for change with seven specific steps outlining where to start and how to proceed, including the establishment of a compelling reason for change, communicating that reason, assembling a critical mass of change leaders, engaging others in the process, and creating performance measures and reward systems aligned with the desired change.

"After the first day, the participants felt more encouraged, able, and positive about their role in leading change," says Beiles, "After day two, they had concrete steps to take and were much better organized and effective."

The first group of 18 municipal leaders finished their core modules over one year. Now they are immersed in the electives they have chosen. Group 2 leaders (January 05 to September 06) include the original three counties plus the City of Belleville and the City of Quinte West. This group has expanded their membership to include the O.P.P. Chief of Police responsible for Quinte West and the Belleville Deputy Fire Chief.

Group 3 (May 05 to October 06) and Group 4 (September 05 to December 06) are well underway. Group 5 began in January of this year and Group 6 will begin in May.

“This is a great opportunity for us not only to learn new skills, says Shaune Lightfoot, Human Resources Manager, Prince Edward County, “But to share experiences and war stories with our colleagues in other municipalities. We applied some of the information from the modules immediately and it has been an excellent program so far for us. LTDC has been quick to adjust the modules to the specific needs of our participants, and our senior management is really supportive and excited about having all our managers participate in this very worthwhile program.”

Jim Pine, CAO for Hastings County, agrees. “One of the real benefits of this program has been the knowledge and information exchange among participants. We face similar challenges in our respective organizations, and we have developed something that is hard to put a value on...the advice of our peers and neighbors.”

Mixing larger and smaller jurisdictions has resulted in some unexpected benefits for the original participants.

“We have a smaller top group of managers,” says Don Houghton, Director of Human Resources for Lennox & Addington, “So once we have those people trained, Hastings County and the City of Belleville will still have training to do at their top levels. That’s when we can open participation to our Tier 1 managers from our smaller municipalities and townships to fill openings in the core modules and really broaden the training opportunities across our whole county.”

Is it working? The overwhelming feedback from Group 1 has been positive.

“The key is that we are focused on a broad range of administrative competencies,” says Dick Shannon, CAO of Prince Edward County. “Most of our past development activities were one-day and off-the-shelf to achieve economies of scale. This program is extensive, tailored to our needs, and raises the bar for our managers. I’m delighted with the results so far and it should get even better as we tweak and modify the program.”

Now, armed with this successful template, O’Malley and his team from LTDC are looking forward to the training of the other groups, confident that they will be able to make a very valuable contribution to managing and leading in a municipal environment.



Managing and Leading participants in a session on leadership coaching skills using the simulation software Climat®.