

# Your Leadership Role

## Working with Your Professional Staff

Effective Governance Best Practices

*Susan Danson, MPA, QPA, ICMA-CM  
Township Manager – Maple Shade, NJ*

# Elected Officials & Professional Staff



## Elected Leaders

Policy direction, strategic goals, oversight – know your form of government



## Professional Staff

Implementation, operations, execution

# Professional Staff Key Responsibilities



## Policy Execution

Implement council decisions



## Budget Leadership

Manage departments & budgets



## Staff Leadership

Hire & develop talent



## Service Quality

Deliver results to residents

# Why Professional Staff Matters

## **Expertise**

Technical skills & specialized knowledge

## **Continuity**

Stability through transitions

## **Consistency**

Merit-based decisions & transparency

## **Protection**

Reduced risk & liability

# The Partnership: Distinct Roles

## Elected Officials

- Set community vision
- Approve major policies
- Represent constituents

## Professional Administration

- Execute your vision
- Manage implementation
- Ensure accountability

# Keys to Strong Communication

## ✓ Transparency First

Keep staff informed before public announcements

## ✓ Data-Driven

Request clear facts for all decisions

## ✓ Private Discussions

Address concerns offline, not at the table

## ✓ Unified Message

Speak with one voice to the community – *“One Message, One Voice”*

# What You Should Expect from Staff Leadership

## Analysis & Solutions

Professional recommendations with alternatives

## Financial Clarity

Clear budgets and transparent financial reports

## Regular Updates

Transparent progress reports and challenges

## Risk Management

Proactive problem-solving and mitigation

# Building Strong Partnerships



## What Strengthens It

- Respect expertise
- Allow time for execution
- Clear expectations



## What Weakens It

- Micromanagement
- Unrealistic timelines
- Ambiguous goals
- Public Criticism

# MEAN POSTS

MUNICIPAL  
EDITION





Top Contributor

Sadly this has been a long time coming - what burns me is that the Township Manager has far too much authority and is incompetent.

11w Like Reply

10  



yeah we really should organize something if we get 1,000-2,000 people to show up to the municipal building and refuse to depart until she resigns. They will have no power. The power belongs to the people Not some authoritarian non resident.

7w Like Reply



Twp mgr is horrendous!

9w Like Reply

# Investing in Your Professional Team

## **Development**

Support training, certifications & growth

## **Recognition**

Acknowledge excellent performance & service

## **Accountability**

Address concerns through proper channels

## **Capacity**

Build long-term organizational strength

# Professional Relationships: Setting Boundaries

## ✓ Work Through Admin Leadership

Direct requests to chief administrator, not individual staff

## ✓ Respect Chain of Command

Professional hierarchy ensures accountability

## ✓ Speak with Courtesy

Always address staff with professional respect

## ✓ Private Concerns

Never criticize staff publicly; raise issues privately

# How to Work with Staff

## ✗ Individual Directives

- Individual officials cannot command staff
- Circumvents administrative authority
- Creates accountability confusion

## ✓ Work Through Leadership

- Request chief admin coordinate action
- Administrative leadership ensures proper routing
- Chief administrator tracks follow-up

# Building Trust with Your Professional Team



## Show Respect

Value their expertise and experience in their roles



## Listen Actively

Hear their professional concerns and recommendations



## Give Time

Allow staff reasonable time to implement decisions



## Support Publicly

Publicly support staff decisions to build credibility

# Real-World Scenarios

## **Scenario: Constituent calls about pothole**

**Best Practice:** Contact administrative leadership, provide location details, let them coordinate response and follow-up with you.

## **Scenario: Staff member shares department concern**

**Best Practice:** Listen respectfully, thank them for sharing, and suggest they work through their department head or HR if appropriate.

## **Scenario: You see inefficiency in operations**

**Best Practice:** Discuss observation privately with chief administrator. Share concern, ask questions, allow them to investigate and address.

# Your Leadership Sets the Tone



## Model Professionalism

Your behavior sets the standard for all interactions



## Defend Integrity

Protect staff from inappropriate criticism or pressure



## Foster Collaboration

Encourage teamwork between elected and staff



## Lead by Example

Demonstrate respect, courtesy, and transparency

# Together, We Serve

Professional management excellence + Strong elected leadership = **Better outcomes for our community**