

What it's really all about (Part 2)



George B. Cuff

Last month, I spoke to some of the key underlying bases of “being elected.” I began with trying to dismiss the notion (held firmly by some for the whole term) that it is not really all about you. I began here because some both begin and end there. The ego kicks in; the sense of power and influence proves an intoxicating balm to the soul; and the requests for YOU to attend this or that function almost makes you think that your personal sense of worth was finally embraced by the unwashed others. Most gradually realize that the new found popularity is a façade and that those “friends” are gone as quickly as one could say, “You just got beat!” It is a harsh reality, but a reality nonetheless.

I also spoke to the fact that, in most places across Canada, the term is four years – not four months – and so a degree of pacing is required. When I ran cross-country and middle distance races, what often happened was that someone would start as though the matter was to be finished in the first 100 metres. It wasn't; he was.

Being elected is all about serving the public interest. This is something I have preached for the past 35 years and, God willing, I will continue to do so. The continual question and motivation on any issue should be: How will this recommended action serve the public interest?

Finally, I spoke to the need to develop and articulate a vision for the

future of the community. If you, as leaders, cannot do so, who do you suppose will? You have much of the power to influence the future in your hands. Use it wisely.

Your Role

For as many times as I have written to this theme, I continually face the reality that while many may listen, few hear. Your management would love to say this to you (and with considerable gusto); but, they like their employment and prefer to feed their children. I am not handicapped by such realities. **You are not elected to manage!** How can I say that more clearly? There might be a way; I simply repeat myself using as many paragraphs as possible being convinced that even slow learners will eventually catch on to what is being said.

You were not elected to manage. Now, that might seem strange because, after all, you are noted as a good manager in your workaday world. In *this* world, however, you are not expected to prepare a budget. You are not required to sign cheques. You are not expected to visit every pothole or referee the arguments with regard to minor hockey's access to ice time. You are not expected to be in the office every day (unless you are the mayor of a big centre and they pay you enough to be termed a full-time elected official). You are not the head of human resources, so you are not expect-

ed to actually interview and hire *anyone* except the CAO. In fact, even though you now are more powerful in the eyes of the community than you were the day before you got elected, you are not expected to (or even allowed to) influence any other personnel decision; it will either be deemed to be interference or perhaps illegal.

You are not the advocate for the real estate industry or for the biggest industry in town. They have their own people in those roles. You are not the spokesperson for the museum or the heritage society: they have their own chairperson (who ought not to be you). You are not the face of the Chamber of Commerce: that would be their president or chair (and that also ought not to be you).

You are a governor. You are a visionary. You are a fiscal realist. You want the community to prosper, not regress. You can stand the heat of decision making; you will not shrink in front of your fellow citizens who are relying on you to make final policy decisions,

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and are not all that impressed by seeing you debate the merits of this supplier of asphalt versus the other. You enjoy seeing the valley below you unfold (i.e., you can think conceptually) and you do not have to be in the thick of every issue to figure out which way they should go. You may be driven by a "save the environment" agenda or by a "save the economy" one; or you might be keen to do both. You are someone who can trust others; you do not have to stand next to them to see how the work is getting done; if the CAO says it is, your normal reaction (unless proven otherwise) is to trust. In short, you can guide, govern, guard resources, see the big picture, and advocate for others (including those with limited means or ability to do so). You are an elected official who is delighted to serve others as a servant-leader.

Your Impact

You have gained a measure of influence that can be very effective if used wisely. There are choices to be made. Do you intend to spend your time focused on what it is the administration is doing in a seemingly capable manner? Or, do you focus your energies on the broader community agenda and how your council can influence it for the betterment of all citizens? Do you want your council to function as a corporate leadership body that, while it may differ on certain goals or policies, can do so in an atmosphere of respect? Are you intent on making a name for yourself as someone with a precarious ego who must always be heard and always "win"? Or, are you going to be comfortable with working collaboratively with the others who were similarly and equally elected?

Are you intent on making progress on the big issues facing the community? Or, will you find comfort in the morass of minutiae?

Your impact is directly related to your intent. Your intent is a direct reflection of the spirit of cooperation with which you approach your role. Your legacy should be one of "he/she cared for the whole community; he/she improved the economic stability of our town; she/he was a strong advocate for those with less resources ..." but, it could be "I don't remember that person. How long did you say they served?"

A Closing Thought

Becoming elected is the starting point. Being effective is the goal – and that is only truly accomplished by having a heart intent on serving others. MW



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