

# New Manager Perspective: Tips for a Seamless Transition

By Katie Lichtig

I'm one of the lucky ones. My outgoing predecessor did everything possible to make my transition process successful. But even with all that was done to ease the transition, there are still some things I want to keep in mind if it's my turn again.

Here are my eight tips on what can help ease the transition from one local government manager to the next. To maximize the potential for a seamless transition, try to follow these tips during the first 100 days.

## 1. Have work-related transition plans.

This overall transition plan should include a plan for meeting with employees, labor leaders, and community groups like Rotary, Optimists, or other service organizations; a communications plan to introduce yourself and your management expectations to employees; and a plan for getting clear direction from elected officials on their performance objectives for you during the first year.

In my employment contract, it was spelled out that within the first 90 days the council and I were to develop performance objectives. This is extremely helpful for directing your time and attention.

## 2. Create a personal transition plan also.

This plan should include things like where to live, where to buy locally whenever possible (the sales representative at the local store where I bought my new appliances is, for example, the mom of a city employee), which grocery stores are located near your home, which dry cleaners are good, where to go to the gym, and other options for necessities.

Ask councilmembers, department heads, and the outgoing city manager for their advice. The less time you spend figuring out what you need to

know after you start, the easier your transition will be.

## 3. Get comfortable being the center of attention for the first 100 days.

I met and shook hands with more people, attended more welcome parties, and gave more speeches than I ever imagined possible. To help tailor the message, I created a standard “show and tell” about me and then tweaked the message depending on the group I was addressing. At one of the presentations, I actually got a laugh—and perhaps endeared myself to a few in the audience—by admitting that I felt a little like a new baby panda at the zoo the way people were flocking to see me and hear me speak.

## 4. Spend at least a few days in the community after your appointment but before you begin the new job.

There will be tons of curiosity—and some anxiety, too—about the “new manager.” This gives the new person an opportunity to start the process of getting to know the elected officials one on one (remember, these are your new bosses), the team of department heads, and the select members of a community. It also gives you a head start on tip number 2.

## 5. Ask the departing manager and the department heads to prepare an orientation package for the incoming manager that can, for example, include these items:

- Introductions and getting acquainted.
- Information about the organization: people, programs, and projects.
- Goals and objectives: departmental responsibilities.
- Key policy documents.
- Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats—in one page!
- Department field tour, including sug-

gestions for the future.

- Suggestions about community leaders to meet, from a departmental perspective.

Do your best to review the binder at least a couple of times before your first day, but don't have high expectations that you'll retain it all. Plan to go back to review the binder after 30 days and again after 60 days. It will be a great resource once you have context about the who, what, where, when, and why of the organization.

## 6. Ask the elected officials to take you on a tour of the community.

A guided tour is an incredible tool to get to know the councilmembers, their focus, and some interesting tidbits about the local government that you might not have learned otherwise. It also gives you the opportunity to learn your way around the community like an insider. In my case, my tour guide—the councilmember—was also the driver.

During your tour, be open to new ideas. One councilmember asked me if I was willing to take the tour on a bicycle (San Luis Obispo is a bike-friendly community), and I agreed. Another councilmember is a private pilot, and he has suggested that we take to the air for our tour. This trip is still pending.

## 7. Prioritize meet-and-greet opportunities.

Many people will want to get to know you, and you will need to space out your get-togethers with both current and former elected officials, department heads, employees, members of the media, chamber of commerce officials, representatives from major employers, community members, union representatives, and others.

Pace yourself because the meeting

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and greeting will take months, not weeks. But definitely get out, including spending time with employees in their own work environments. So far, I have trimmed trees, welded, changed tires, spent St. Patrick's Day on patrol with the police department (which included a code 3 incident), toured our reservoirs and dams, and saw the inner workings of the water treatment plant and wastewater treatment plant.

I also perused the bus depot and rode the busiest route, finished concrete, and cut the grass in a park. I still am making the rounds, but it has been an invaluable investment in getting to know our dedicated employees and the issues that our community faces.

8. Train yourself to recognize that it is a learning opportunity when you hear people say, "Well, when the former manager was here, he used to. . ."

There will also be times when people contact the former manager to seek an opinion on a topic, but they do not contact the current manager. Remember that these are all data points and can be used to guide you in many directions—not just in the opposite direction—to prove that a new manager is in charge now.

In the end, there are lots of people who want you to be successful, including the elected officials, the department-head team, other city employees, caring members of the community, and—we hope—your predecessor. Take advantage of these tips and the advice and counsel of those who offer to assist—all of this taken together will lead to a smooth transition in your new community.



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