



UTILIZING POLITICAL ASTUTENESS TO BRIDGE THE DIVIDE BETWEEN PUBLIC SERVANTS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

NEW LAW & ELECTION SEMINAR
DECEMBER 13, 2024

OUR PANELISTS



Kookie Fitzsimmons

- Council Member
- City of Saratoga



Britt Avrit, MMC

- City Clerk
- City of Saratoga



Jen Woodworth, MMC

- City Clerk
- City of Hollister



WHAT IS POLITICAL ASTUTENESS?

WHAT ISN'T IT?

HOW
POLITICALLY
ASTUTE ARE
YOU?



HOW
POLITICAL
IS YOUR
AGENCY?

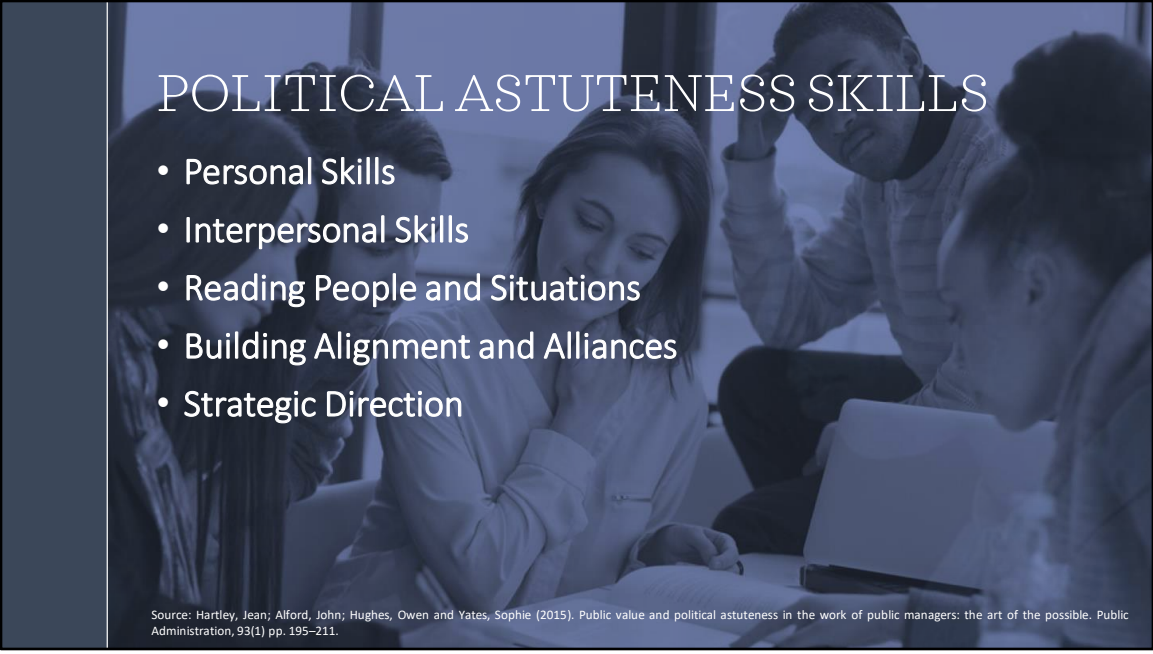




TWO APPROACHES

Characteristic	Policy Makers	Administrators
How Selected	Based on political, policy, ideological views or connection to certain constituent groups	Based on abilities
Role	Representative of constituent groups	Professional expert
Issues	Concerns of interest to constituent groups	More organization or community-wide perspectives
Attention to	Pushing a policy agenda	Operational details (Will it work? How will it work?)
Accountability	To voters on how they represent their interests and fulfill "promises"	To organization, public at large, peers and professional groups on how they achieve goals
Rewards	Winning next election, moving up political ladder, self-satisfaction	Getting next promotion, positive recognition among peers, self-satisfaction

Source: Career Compass #31: Political Savviness by Dr. Frank Benest, ICMA. March 28, 2013

A group of four people (three women and one man) are gathered around a table, looking at a laptop screen. They appear to be in a collaborative meeting or discussion. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

POLITICAL ASTUTENESS SKILLS

- Personal Skills
- Interpersonal Skills
- Reading People and Situations
- Building Alignment and Alliances
- Strategic Direction

Source: Hartley, Jean; Alford, John; Hughes, Owen and Yates, Sophie (2015). Public value and political astuteness in the work of public managers: the art of the possible. *Public Administration*, 93(1) pp. 195–211.

PERSONAL SKILLS

- Self-awareness of one's own motives and behaviors
- Be proactive
- Exercise self-control
- Be open to the views of others
- Listen to others and reflect on and be curious about their views

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- 'Soft' skills: able to influence the thinking and behavior of others
- Understand the need for buy-in from those you have no direct authority
- Ensure people feel valued
- 'Tough' skills: ability to negotiate, able to stand up to pressure from others, and ability to handle conflict and achieve constructive outcomes
- Coach and mentor others to develop their own political skills

READING PEOPLE & SITUATIONS

- Analyzing or intuiting the dynamics which can or might occur when stakeholders and agendas come together
- Recognizing different interests and agendas of both people and their organizations
- Discerning the underlying not just the promoted agendas
- Thinking through the likely standpoints of various interest groups in advance to understand what is or what might happen
- Recognizing when you may be seen as a threat to others

BUILDING ALIGNMENT & ALLIANCES

- Actively seeking out alliances and partnerships rather than relying on those already in existence
- Ability to bring difficult issues into the open and deal with differences between stakeholders
- Knowing when to exclude certain interests

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- Strategic thinking and action in relation to organizational purpose
- Thinking long-term and having a road map of the journey
- Thinking through scenarios of possible futures
- Noticing small changes which may herald bigger shifts in society
- Analyzing and managing uncertainty
- Keeping options open rather than reaching a decision prematurely







THE ROLE OF STAFF

GUIDE THE SHIP AS WE
BOLDLY GO FORWARD

PUTTING
IT INTO
PRACTICE





THE IMPORTANCE OF OBJECTIVITY

- 800 square foot second story ADU
- Potential “unreasonable” privacy impacts to neighbors
- Site Visit provided to Council
- Neighbors had opportunity to voice concerns
- Staff addressed each with data, details, and objective information



NEUTRALITY OVER EMOTIONS



- Room for interpretation
- “Unreasonable” impacts
- Neutral information and experience at the Site Visit overcame compelling personal testimony
- Council denied the appeal 5-0

CHALLENGED CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

A CLERK'S WORST
NIGHTMARE

General Election

Tuesday, November 5, 2024

Don't Delay, Vote Today!

Early vote-by-mail ballot voting period is from October 7 through November 5, 2024.
Polls are open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on November 5, 2024, Election Day!



VOTE SAFE CALIFORNIA

Every registered voter in California will receive a vote-by-mail ballot.

Write-by-mail ballots are mailed on or before October 7.

Write-by-mail ballots can be voted and returned as soon as they are received.

Write-by-mail drop boxes open October 8.

In-person voting options will be available in all counties.



Mobile-Friendly
SCAN ME



Official
Voter
Information
Guide



Certificate of Correctness
I, Shirley N. Weber, Secretary of State of the State of California, do hereby certify that the information included herein will be submitted to the electors of the State of California at the General Election to be held throughout the State on November 5, 2024, and that this guide has been correctly prepared in accordance with the law. Witness my hand and the Great Seal of the State in Sacramento, California, this 12th day of August, 2024.


Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D.
Secretary of State

THE SETUP

- Three incumbents up for reelection – Mayor and two Council members
- Incumbents all pull papers and file
- Challengers all file on final day of Nomination Period
- Candidate statement submitted Friday morning
 - Mentions current “City Council member” – STRUCK
- Two challengers file late Friday with similar statements but mention “City Council”
- Accept all three statements and forward to ROV

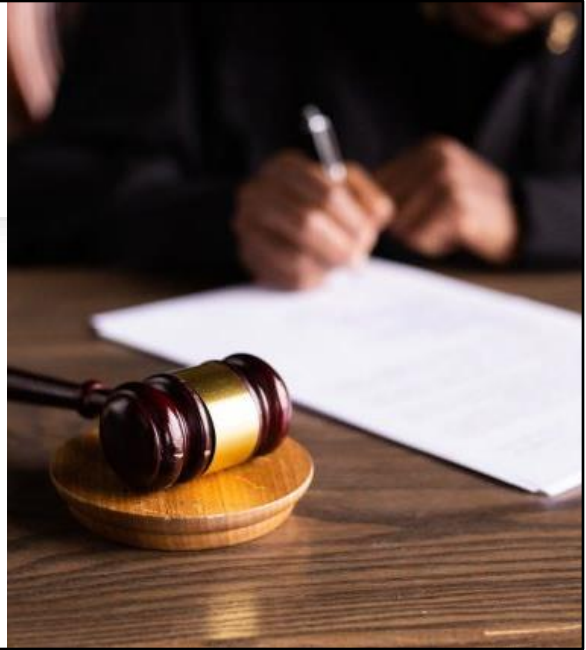


THE CHALLENGE

- Notified on Wednesday by Registrar of challenge to three statements
- Alerted City Manager
- Spoke with City Attorney on Thursday night
- My decision alone

RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY

- Did not file a writ
- Communicated the decision to the challengers of the statements
- No writ filed by any voters
- Positive relationships continued

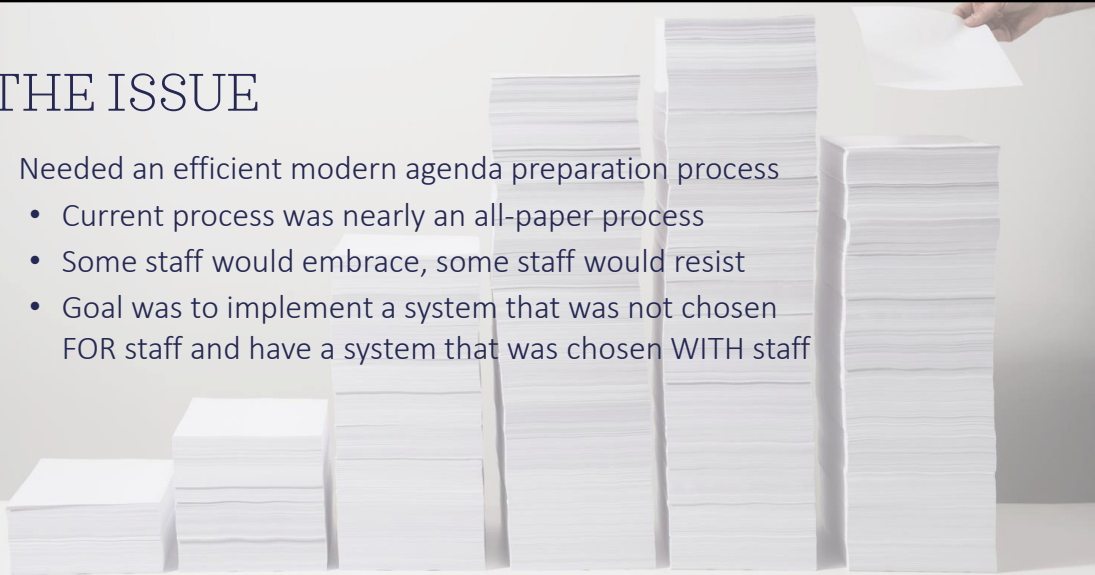




UNDERSTANDING INTERNAL POLITICS

THE ISSUE

- Needed an efficient modern agenda preparation process
 - Current process was nearly an all-paper process
 - Some staff would embrace, some staff would resist
 - Goal was to implement a system that was not chosen FOR staff and have a system that was chosen WITH staff



THE PROCESS

- IT included from the beginning
- Included supporters and cynics
 - All had opportunities for input every step of the way
 - Creation & review of the RFP
 - Interviews and demos
 - Selection of the vendor



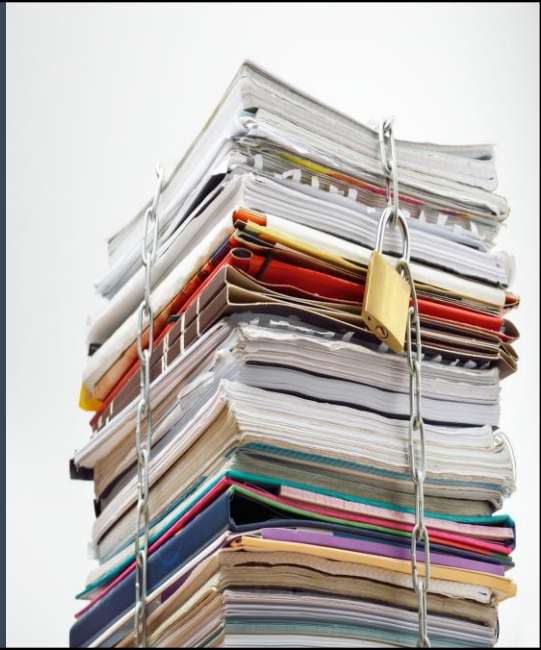
STRATEGIC DIRECTION OVER SHORT- TERM GOALS

- Relationships were built & strengthened
- Great feedback and input for what was important to users
- Chose a system that streamlined the process



TIMING THE RELEASE OF PUBLIC RECORDS

- Clerks **MUST** follow the Public Records Act
- Clerks *should* strive to shield the City Manager/Agency Director and City Council/Legislative Body





RELY ON ALLIANCES & ALIGNMENT

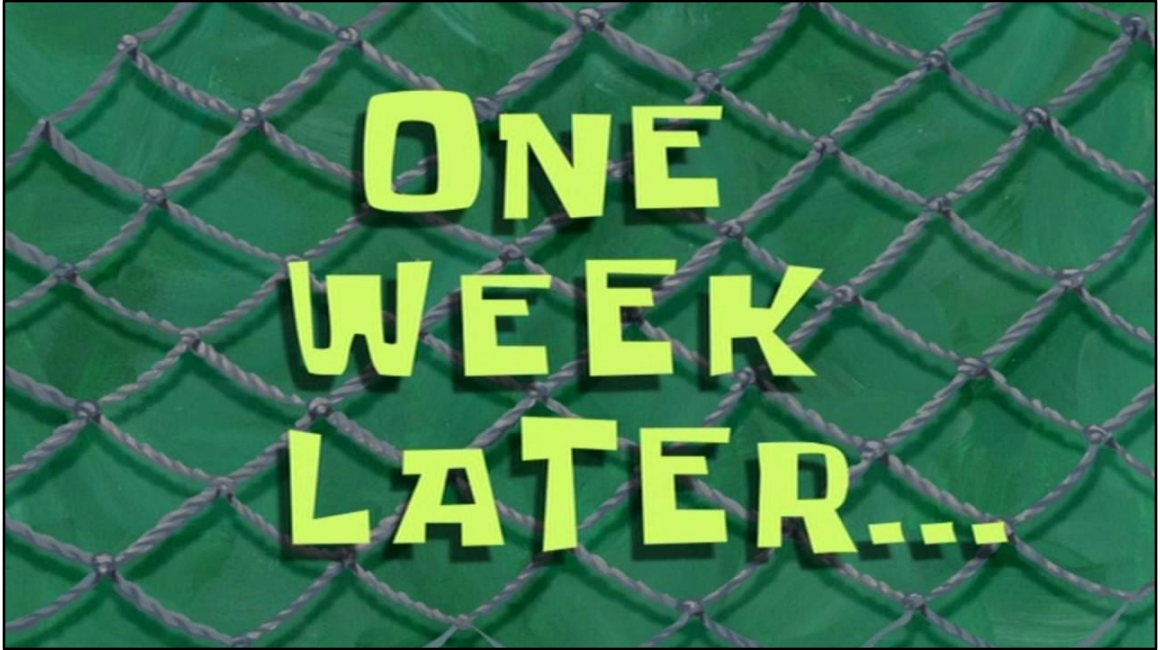
- Excellent discussion with City Manager and City Attorney
- Relationships strengthened
- Records provided without straying from normal practice
- Lesson learned for addressing the issue when it comes up in the future

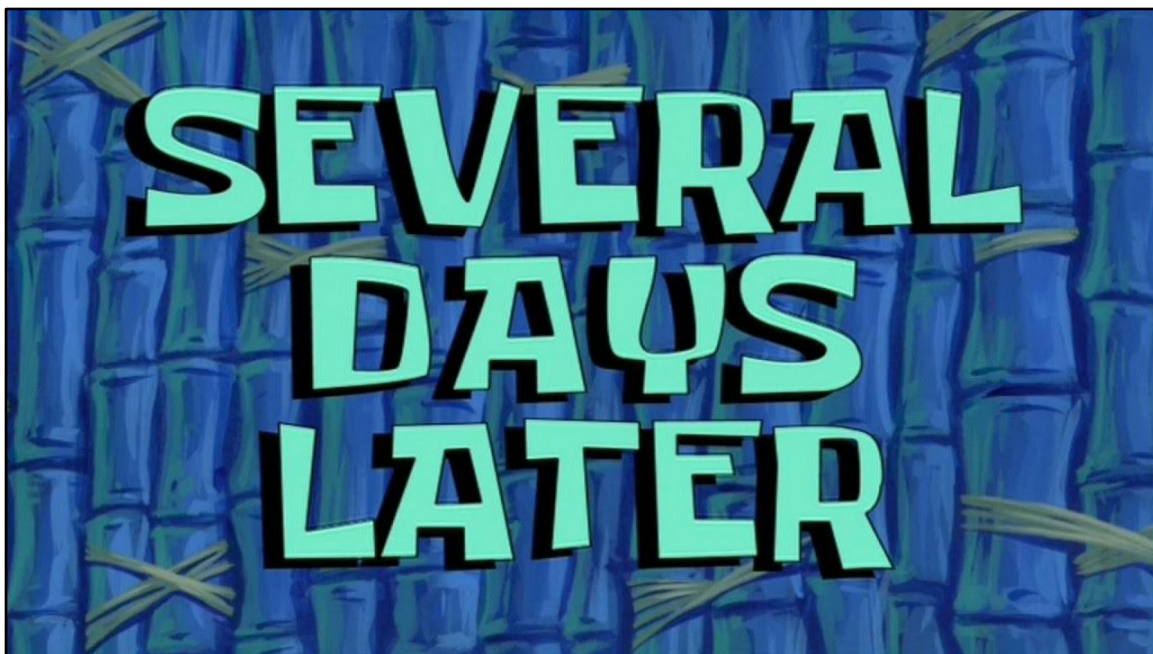
HOW TO GAIN POLITICAL ASTUTENESS

1. Gaining experience on the job
2. Handling crises
3. Learning from own mistakes
4. Good example of senior manager
5. Observing role models
6. Bad example of senior manager
7. Informal mentoring
8. Time out to reflect
9. Working with other organizations



IMPACTS OF NOT EXERCISING POLITICAL ASTUTENESS





LACK OF POLITICAL ASTUTENESS

Problems Caused

- Unclear direction to staff
- Unclear direction to candidates
- Complaints from residents/voters
- More work created for staff
- No one was happy with the outcome



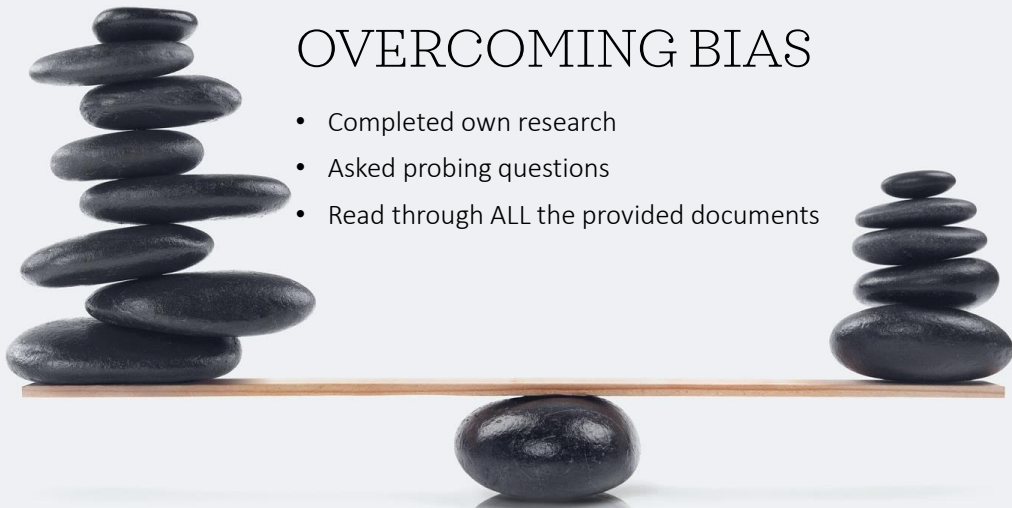
RECOGNIZING BIAS



- Two vendors competing for contract at a City-owned facility
- One vendor was new to the Community who had the contract for a year
- Other vendor was a second-generation local family who had contract for 40 years
- Former vendor lost contract after unconfirmed report of injuries caused by them
- Staff report perceived as biased against former vendor

OVERCOMING BIAS

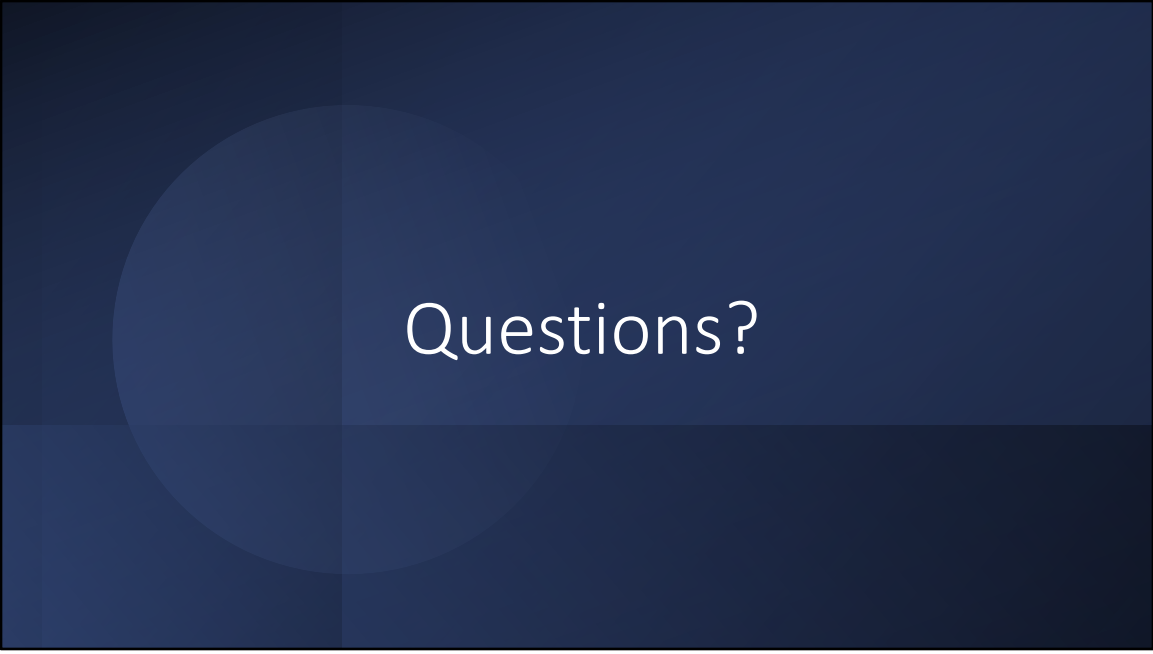
- Completed own research
- Asked probing questions
- Read through ALL the provided documents





THE POLITICALLY ASTUTE CLERK

- No favoritism shown, especially important during elections
- Public service to the ultimate
- Knows the rules, but also knows when to say they'll get back to you
- Like synchronized swimming, the surface is calm and beneath is where all the work is done
- Builds a relationship of trust and neutrality
- "Mr. Sulu, take us out"



Questions?

THANK YOU!

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