

# Make Your City Attorney Your Best Friend

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## Types of City Attorneys



## Dr. No

- Always finds the way *not* to proceed
- Extremely conservative legal advice
- “You can’t do that.”


*TIPS: Have candid conversations about how they can really add value. Focus on strategy. Involve early in decisions. Keep informed. Use other outside counsel to remind them of the advice you really need.*



## The Sixth Council Member

- Blurs the line between legal advice and policy
- Talks as much as the council members
- Speaks even when not spoken to

*TIPS: Talk with them directly. Engage Mayor to talk with them if possible. Structure an evaluation where this can be discussed. Reach out to another attorney colleague about the challenges this can cause.*



## The “I Don’t Work For You” Attorney

- Absent between Council meetings
- Spends more time socializing with Council members outside of meetings than responding to staff
- Ignores Manager emails as a habit
- Discusses other clients

*TIPS: Make an effort to directly engage them more. Expect them at Executive Team meetings. Setup a lunch meeting in the city periodically. Engage them in an appropriate citywide committee. Get them to participate in a nonprofit or at a fundraiser in the City. Tighten their information sources so they have to come to you.*



## The Figurehead

- Council meeting-only attorney
- Primary manager contact is with other attorneys, or outside counsel
- Constantly losing things in translation

*TIPS: More regular meetings, involve them in Executive Team, expect more involvement in projects, communicate (or have Mayor) with managing partner to discuss the situation.*

## The Anti-Team Player

- Actively works against Manager and staff
- Stays in lane at all costs
- Everyone else must adjust their schedules to fit

*TIP: This is an intolerable situation especially if they enjoy support from the City Council. This must be dealt with directly. If they continue to be divisive discuss with the Mayor/Council to get an evaluation and/or regulate information to them so they must sit with you. Tighten up communication and information with department heads. Tighten up information loop and increase your insurance with them.*



## Mr./Ms. Wordy

- Simple questions result in complex answers that do not answer the question
- Emails take up considerable time and bandwidth
- Abundant legal jargon and word salads

*TIP: Express your communications preferences. Respond with very short and direct questions and answers. Make it clear what the staff has time to deal with and doesn't. Make it clear and offer examples of where information is too much. Set clear parameters on timelines.*





## The One Hour Lawyer

- No billing entries less than one hour
- Regularly exceeds budgets
- Argues over time spent on simple matters

*TIP: Discuss bills and expectations directly. Discuss contract language if need be. Have clear and frequent reporting on budget expectations/billings. Expose legal costs to the City Council at a public budget meeting.*

## Jim & Dave: The Odd Couple?



## At the City

- Mutual respect for each other's professionalism and our differences
- Common Mission
- No Surprises- Create trust
- Admit mistakes and or freaky buttons to each other
- Don't take things personally
- Consult each other frequently and candidly
- Strategize together on projects/problems early
- Be clear about what we need from each other



## Outside the City

- 24/7 communication
- Tell each other where we are
- Socialize off the clock
- Take interest in each other
- Don't take things personally
- Humility towards each other
- Don't let the council get between us



Questions?

