Organizational Culture and Ethics: Peanut Butter & Jelly or Oil & Water?

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Session Agenda

This will be interactive!
Plenty of time for questions
Leave with key takeaways
Ground Rule: Safe space to share and learn
The Code of Ethics at 100 - A Century Strong: Shaping Leaders, Transforming Communities

Defines the local government management profession’s values and expectations

12 tenets address personal and professional conduct

Why? Build and maintain public trust
Number of Cases by Violation Issue (FY 2014-2023)

- Illegal Activity: 15 cases
- Honesty and Integrity (Tenet 3): 60 cases
- Political Activity (Tenet 7): 26 cases
- Conflict of Interest (Tenet 12): 8 cases
- Combination of Issues: 20 cases
Number of Tenet 3 Violations by Issue (FY 2014-2023)

- Illegal Activity: 15
- Inappropriately Conducted Relationship: 30
- Short Tenure: 17
- Appointment Commitment: 5
- Embezzlement/Bribery: 2
- Misuse of Public Resources: 1
- Professional Respect: 5
- Credit Card Misuse: 1
- Credentials: 1
Resolution of Ethics Complaints

230 Total Ethics Cases: FY 2014-2023

- Closed Case without Sanction: 43%
- Public Censure with Bar, Expulsion, Suspension, Credential Revocation: 14%
- Public Censure Only: 8%
- Private Censure: 35%
WHAT DOES ETHICS LOOK LIKE?

- Infinite work
- Fragile
- Leadership
- Good People doing Good Things
- Association of our decisions to impacts
- Use of real words – avoiding self deception
WHAT IS ETHICAL FADING?

• “Ethical fading is a condition in a culture that allows people to act in unethical ways in order to advance their own interests, often at the expense of others, while falsely believing that they have not compromised their own moral principles”

What is Ethical Fading? | Simon Sinek (youtube.com)
EARLY MANIFESTATIONS OF ETHICAL CREEP
WORKING WITH THE ELECTED BODY: THE LOOK AHEAD
WE REAP WHAT WE SOW

AFTER SEVERAL HOURS, JOE FINALLY GAVE UP ON LOGIC AND REASON, 

AND SIMPLY TOLD THE COUNCIL THAT HE COULD TALK TO PLANTS AND THAT THEY WANTED WATER
CASE STUDIES
Be a Boss. Marry a Boss. Build an Empire.

ICMA | ethics
El Cajon councilman sued over Miss Middle East pageant

Former contestant alleges Ben Kalasho propositioned her

Ben Kalasho allegedly waited for his one-on-one interview with Zhala Tawfiq in a darkened room with a camera.
THE TERRIFYING TRUTH ABOUT

BEN KALASHO

Judge calls Kalasho’s actions “a disgrace” in fraud and sexual harassment case
(‘Los Angeles Times’, 9/1/18)

Ben Kalasho pled guilty to fraud, sentenced to criminal probation
(The San Diego Union Tribune, 8/16/18)

Judge finds facts true and admissible in case against Kalashos:
- faked nude photos
- sexual harassment
- defamation
- offer to trade sex for pageant crown
(East County Magazine, 6/6/18)

“Community members urge Kalasho to resign over sexual harassment findings and alleged threats”
(East County Magazine, 7/11/18)

“Reporter accuses Ben Kalasho of assaulting him with dog”
(San Diego Reader, 2/17/18)

(Actual photograph of Ben Kalasho)
...AND THE MORE SUBTLE LAPSES

In the final analysis, honesty & integrity are the rubric for culture
TAKEAWAYS

• What we do when no one is looking is who we are in public service

• Walking the talk when it comes to ethics is our most valuable currency

• It's a lonely profession but we are not alone

• It's our duty to lead and support a healthy work culture
Attributes of a High Functioning City Council

- Fair decision making
- Open & honest communication/proactive
- Come prepared – ask questions beforehand
- No blindsiding
- Time management – not every item needs commentary
- Step up / step back
- Clear processes & consistent application of process

Council Commitments:

1. Genuine, open dialogue
2. Willingness to get out of comfort zone
3. Don’t villainize / do not support villainization
4. Genuinely consider both sides to understand underlying interest
5. Work toward a solution: something is better than nothing
6. Consider all constituents
7. Stay focused – not every item requires comment
8. Trust the City Manager
9. Be prepared: read packets, prepare questions, help staff succeed
10. Practice a team mindset: share information, uplift others, be united
11. Commit to holding ourselves and each other accountable
12. Focus on the issue

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ICMA Ethics Resources and Membership Benefits

• Confidential ethics advice
• Monthly Ethics Matter! column in *PM* Magazine
• Frequent issues and advice on ICMA.org/ethics (scan QR Code)
• Networking, professional development through webinars and certificates, and more
• Senior Advisor program
• First-time administrator resources
ONGOING CODE REVIEW (2013-2024)

Tenet 7
• 10/2013: guideline update

Tenet 10
• 5/2015: new tenet language
• 6/2015: new guidelines

Tenet 3
• 5/2017: tenet revisions
• 6/2017: revisions and new guideline
• 6/2019: new guideline

Tenet 4
• 5/2018: revised text
• 6/2018: new guidelines

Tenets 1 and 2
• 10/2019: revised language
• 6/2020: updated Tenet 2 guideline

Tenets 5 and 6
• 6/2020: tenet revisions and moved guideline to Tenet 3

Tenets 8 and 11
• 6/2020: effort began then paused due to COVID-19 response and recovery

Tenets 1, 4, 9, and 11
• 3/2023: tenet revisions
• 6/2023: guideline revisions

Remaining! Tenets 8 (professional development) and 10 (encroachment of responsibilities)
Thank You!

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