

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

Jessica Cowles, Ethics Director, ICMA  
Graham Mitchell, City Manager, El Cajon  
Rosanna Bayon Moore, City Administrator, Piedmont  
Fran Robustelli, City Manager, San Leandro



# 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**

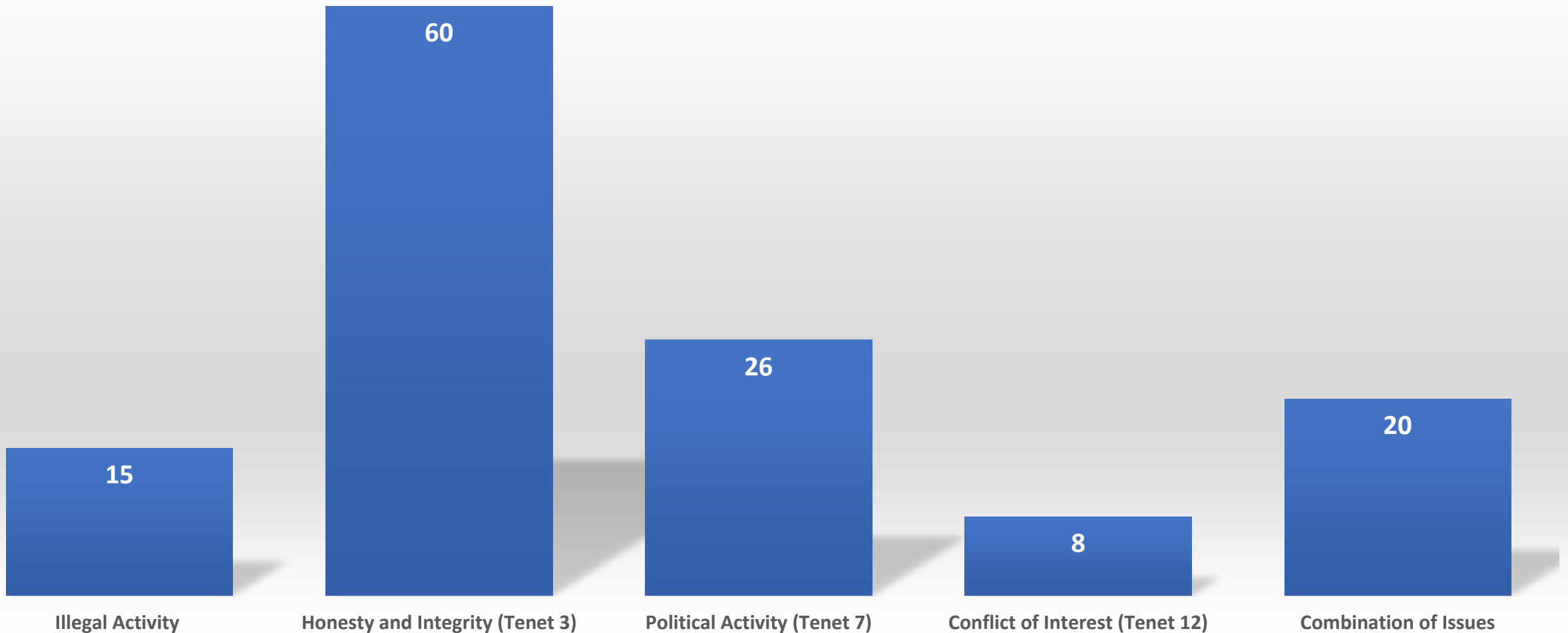


**12 tenets address  
personal and professional  
conduct**

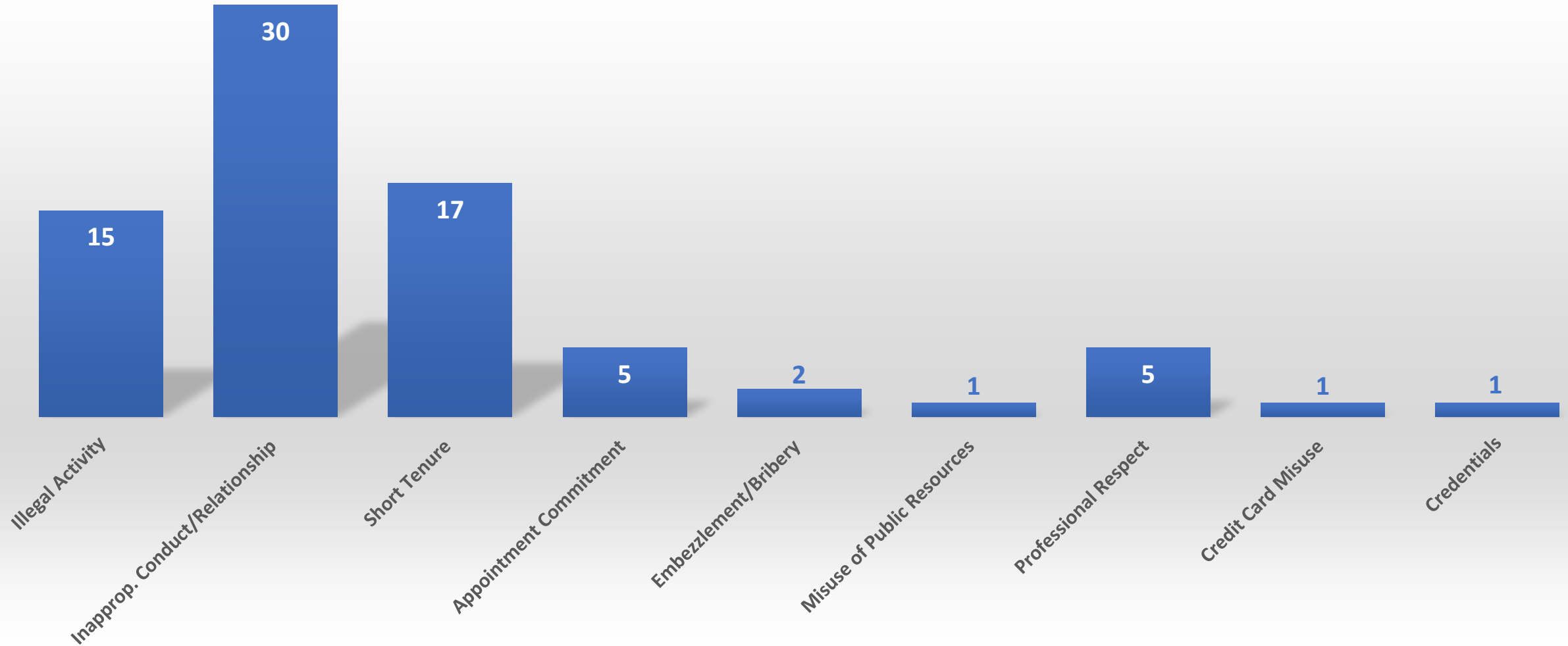


**Why? Build and maintain  
public trust**

# Number of Cases by Violation Issue (FY 2014-2023)

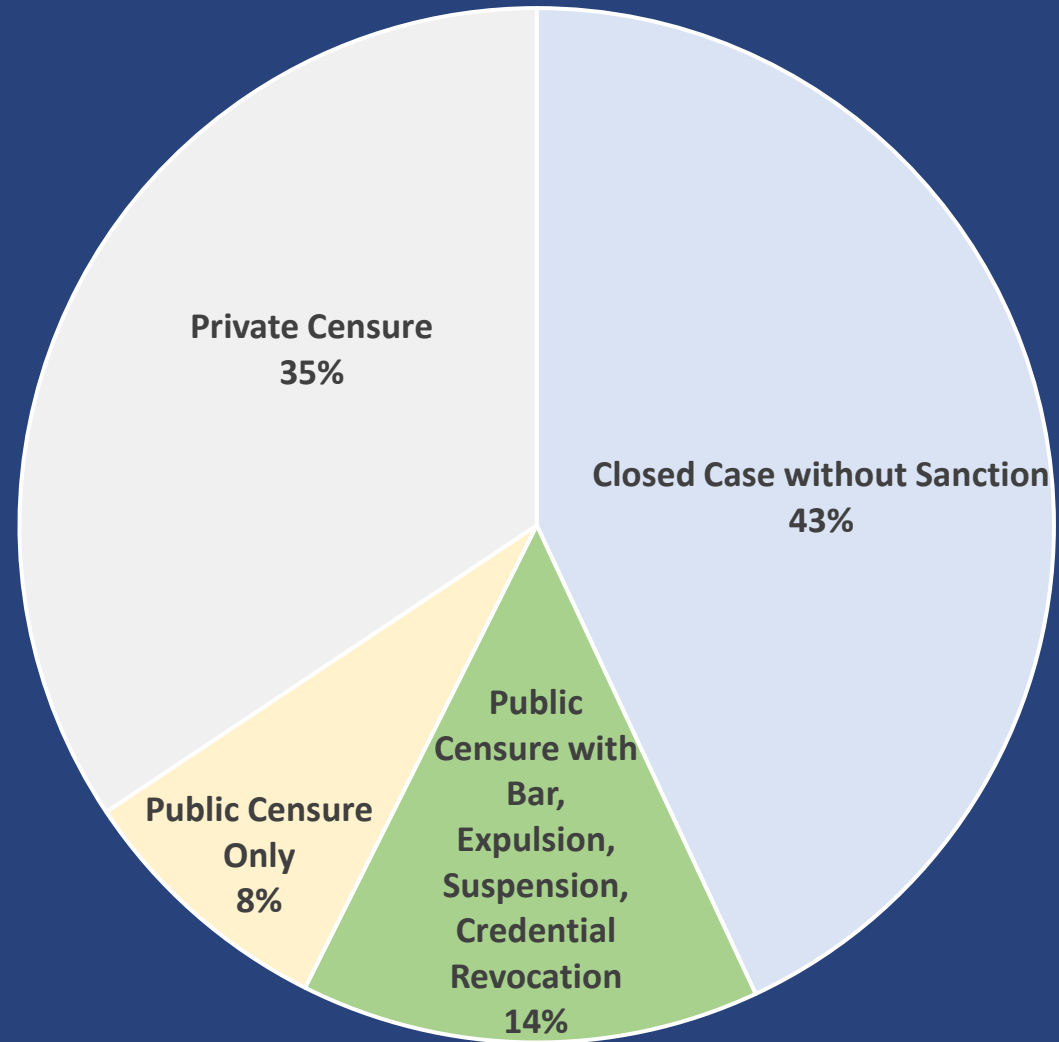


# Number of Tenet 3 Violations by Issue (FY 2014-2023)



# 230 Total Ethics Cases: FY 2014-2023

## Resolution of Ethics Complaints







## 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

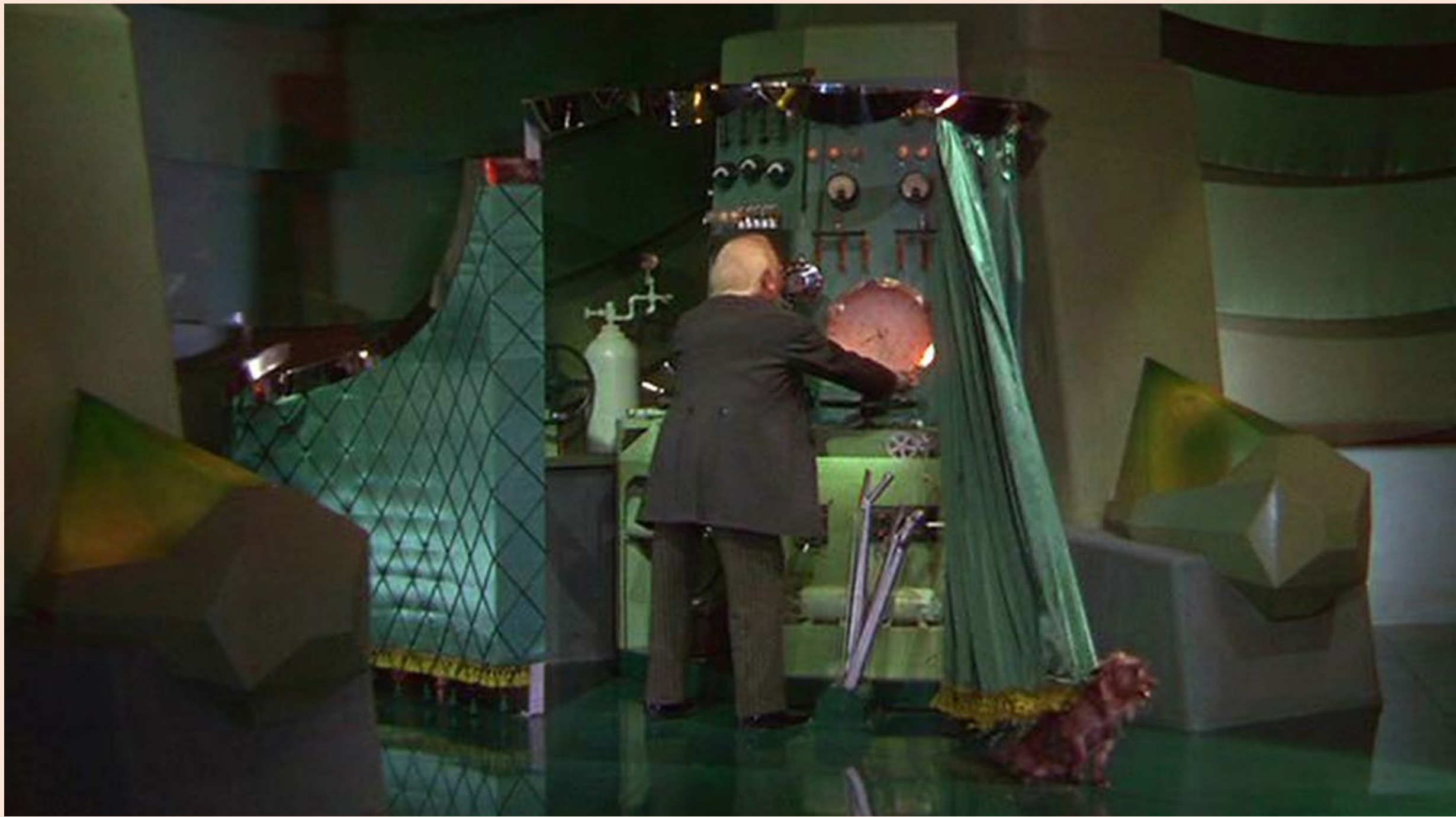
# WHAT IS ETHICAL FADING?

- *“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”*

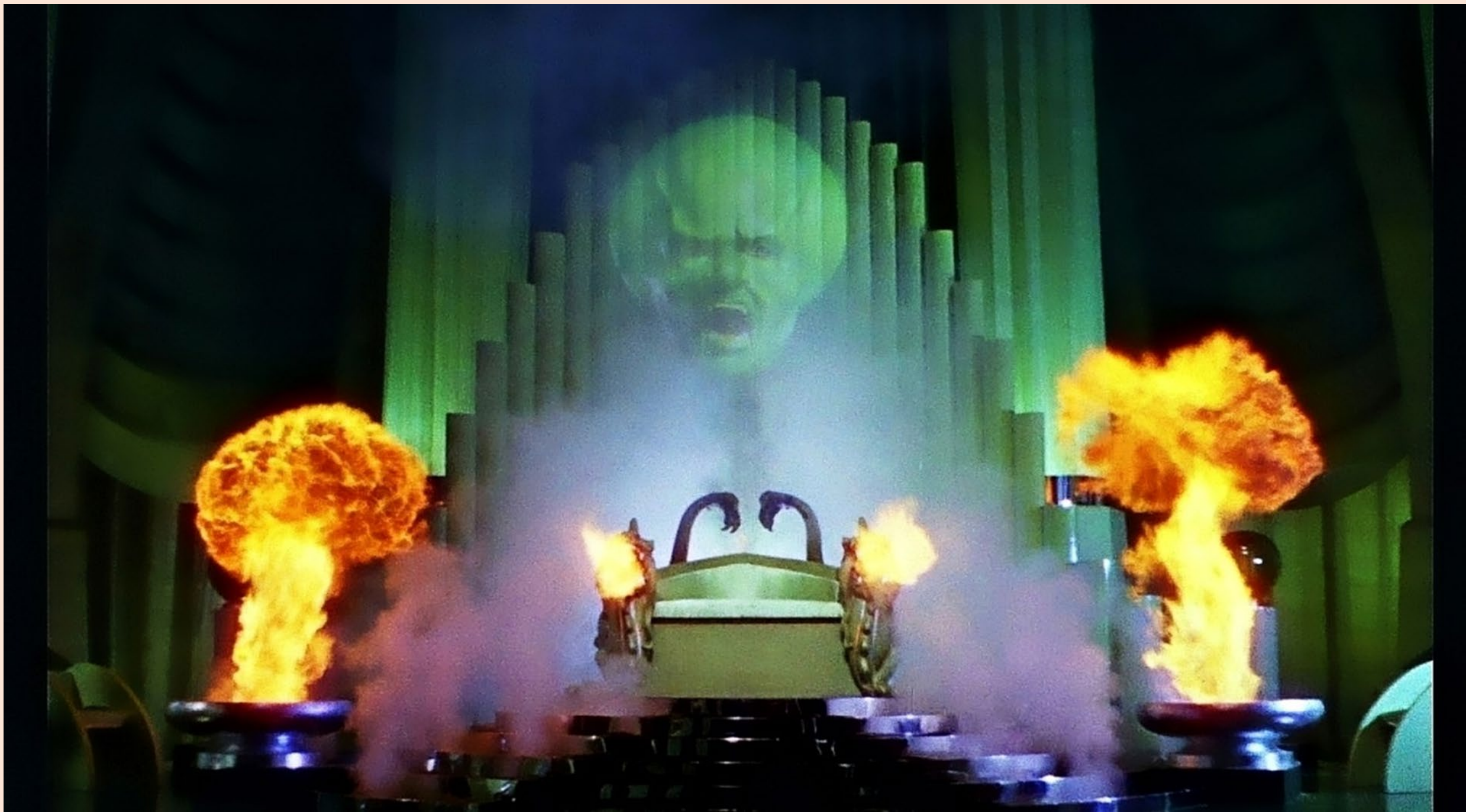


[What is Ethical Fading? | Simon Sinek \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8v33333333)









# INFLUENCE





# MANAGE



# MITIGATE & COACH



# EARLY MANIFESTATIONS OF ETHICAL CREEP





WORKING WITH  
THE ELECTED BODY:  
THE LOOK AHEAD



# WE REAP WHAT WE SOW



# CASE STUDIES





Be a Boss. Marry a Boss.  
Build an Empire.

# El Cajon councilman sued over Miss Middle East pageant

Former contestant alleges Ben Kalasho propositioned her

Author	Publish
Dorian	Date
Hargrove	Aug. 2,
	2017



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

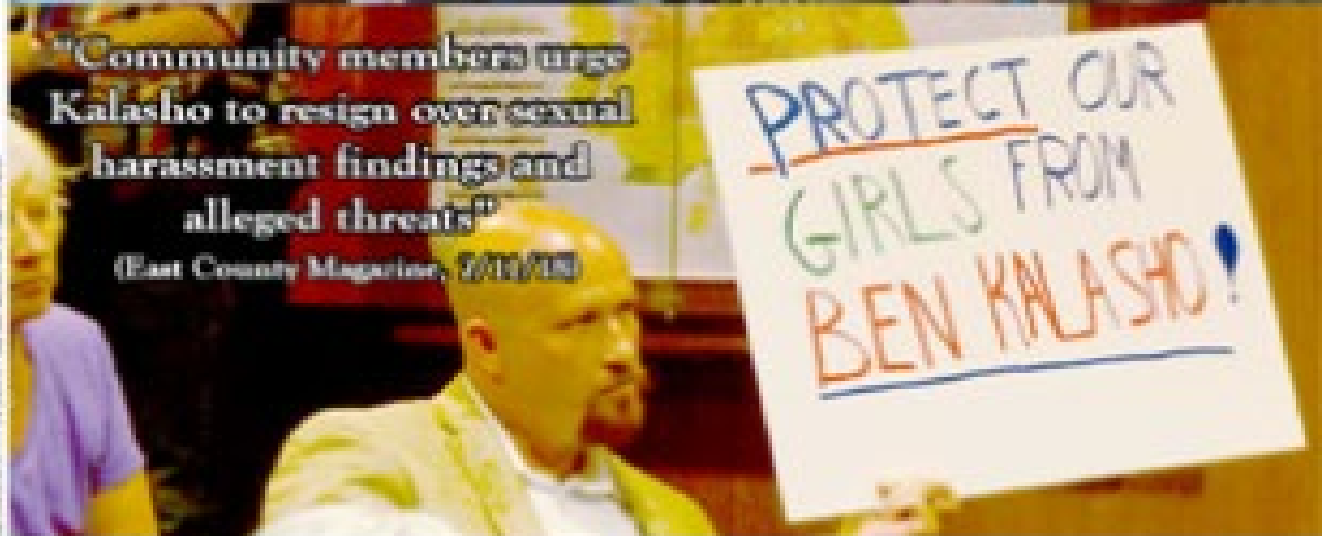
(The San Diego Union Tribune, 8/16/18)

Judge finds facts true and admissible in case against Kalasho:

- faked nude photos
- sexual harassment
- defamation
- offer to trade sex for pageant crown

(East County Magazine, 6/6/18)

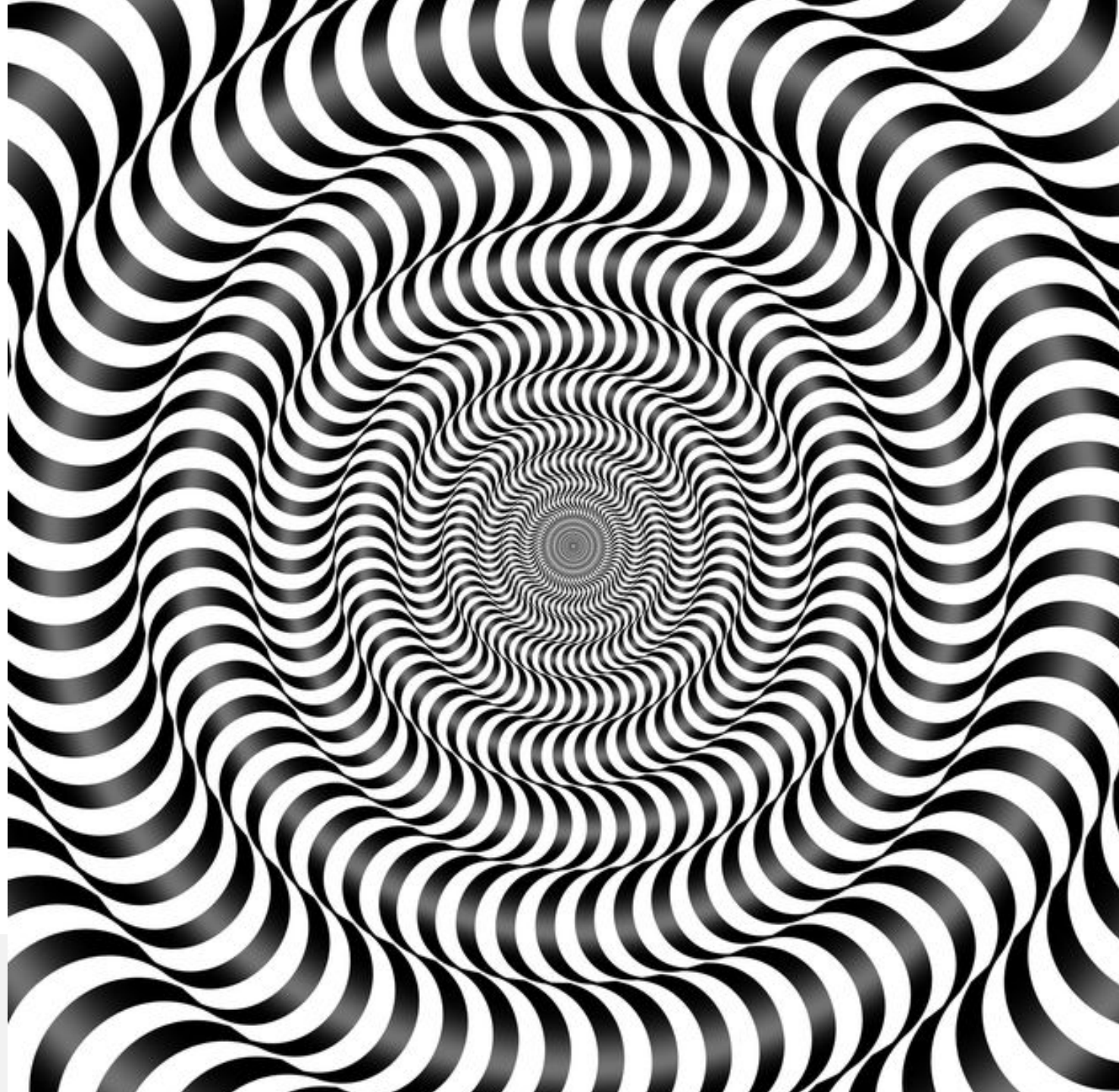
(actual photograph of Ben Kalasho)





# ...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

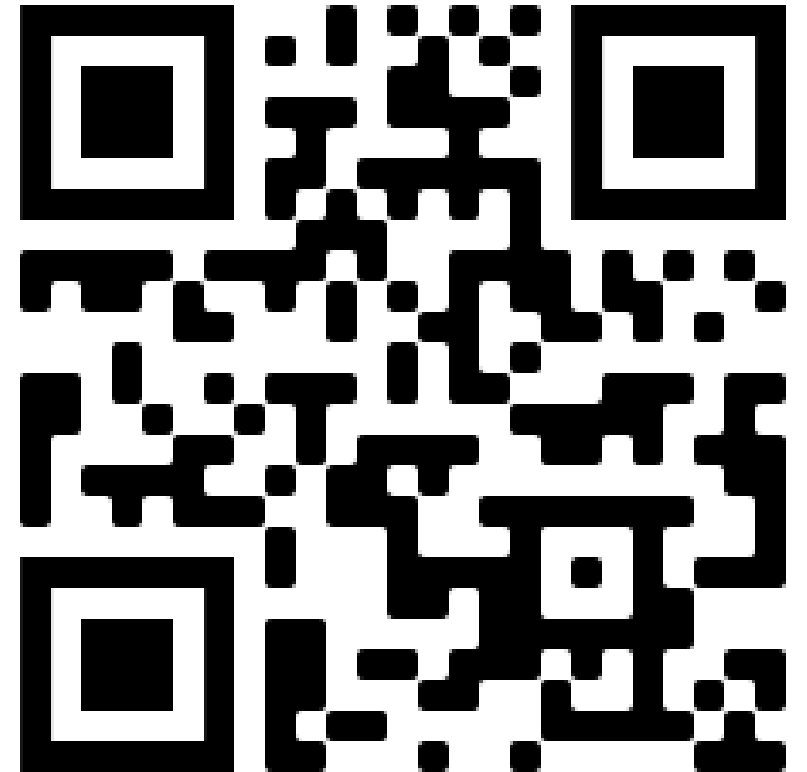
- ❖ Fair decision making
- ❖ Open & honest communication/proactive
- ❖ Come prepared – ask questions beforehand
- ❖ No blindsiding
- ❖ Time management – not every item needs commentary
- ❖ Step up / step back
- ❖ Clear processes & consistent application of process

## Council Commitments:

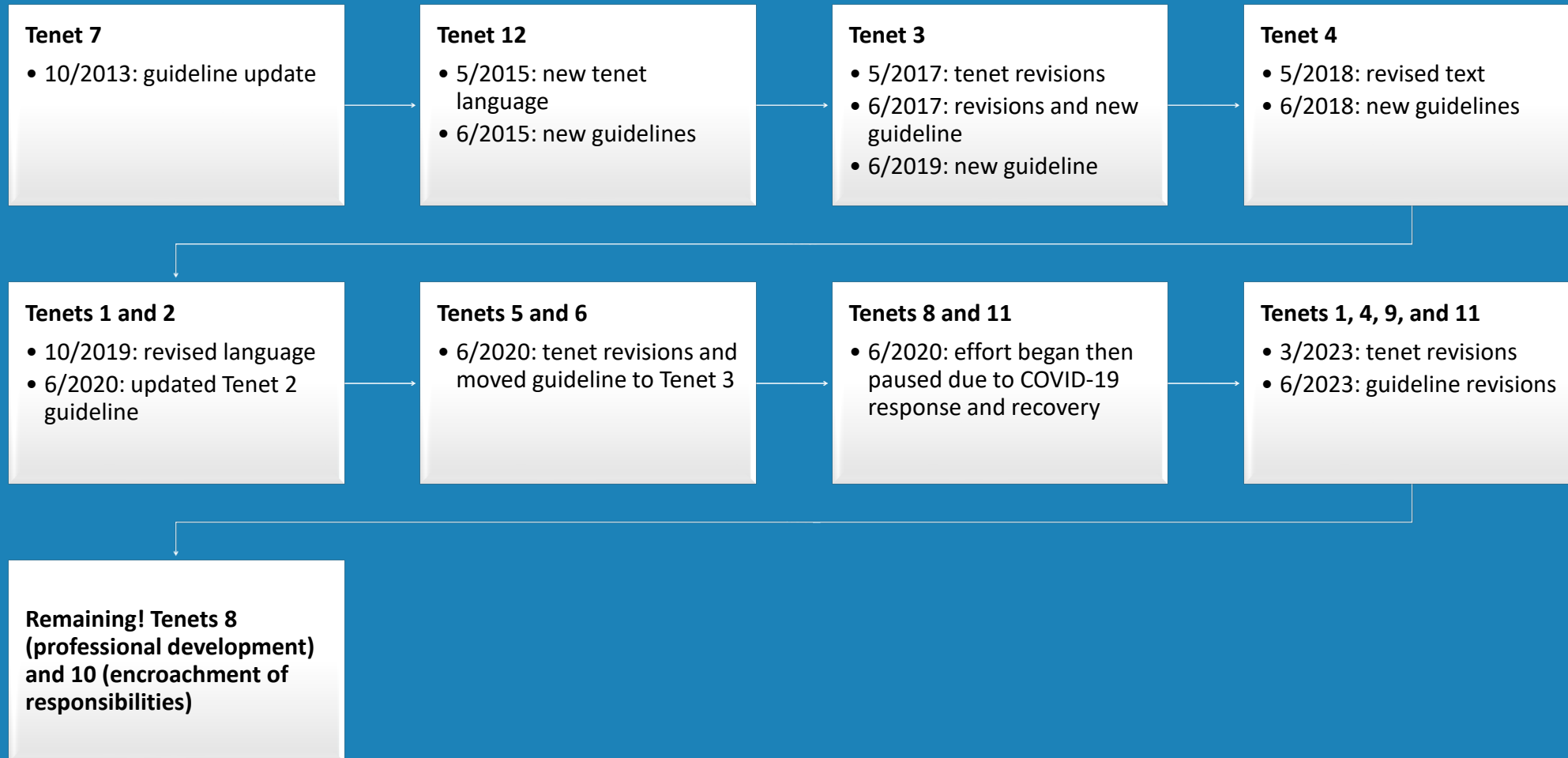
1. Genuine, open dialogue
2. Willingness to get out of comfort zone
3. Don't villainize / do not support villainization
4. Genuinely consider both sides to understand underlying interest
5. Work toward a solution: something is better than nothing
6. Consider all constituents
7. Stay focused – not every 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

# ICMA Ethics Resources and Membership Benefits

- Confidential ethics advice
- Monthly Ethics Matter! column in *PM* Magazine
- Frequent issues and advice on [ICMA.org/ethics](https://www.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)



# Thank You!

Jessica Cowles [JCowles@ICMA.org](mailto:JCowles@ICMA.org)

Fran Robustelli [frobustelli@sanleandro.org](mailto:frobustelli@sanleandro.org)

Rosanna Bayon Moore [rbayonmoore@piedmont.ca.gov](mailto:rbayonmoore@piedmont.ca.gov)

Graham Mitchell [gmitchell@elcajon.gov](mailto:gmitchell@elcajon.gov)