

# Collaborating Across Boundaries in a Messy World

League of California Cities  
Fire Chiefs Leadership Seminar  
Dec 13, 2018

Dr. Frank Benest  
[frank@frankbenest.com](mailto:frank@frankbenest.com)  
(650) 444-6261

## Your Messy World

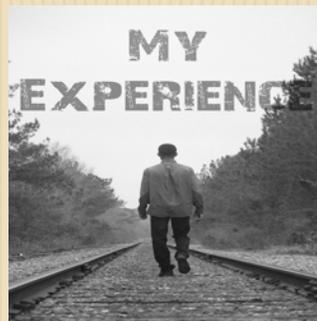


## Big Ideas



## My Personal Experience

- In what situation did your fire agency need an another department, outside agency or other stake-holder group to **collaborate** with you but there was little effective collaboration?
- What specifically **hindered** collaboration with the other group?



## Drivers of “Disruption”

- “What are the mega-forces disrupting local government, including the fire service?”

**disrupt**

## Drivers of Disruption

- Permanent fiscal stress
- Structures, processes, & rules oriented toward static world
- Technology
- Demographic, generational, value, political, & economic shifts



## Drivers of Disruption

- Problems are complex, difficult to solve, emotion-laden, & divisive
- Power is diffuse (“veto” power)
- No one institution can solve any problem
- Citizen mistrust in all institutions including govt



## Leading in Disruptive World

- Leaders must cross boundaries & engage others as partners
- Tech skills become quickly obsolete
- Learn-how becomes as important as know-how
- Leaders must focus on securing partners, experimenting, getting it “roughly right,” & fixing things up along the way



“Are we learning as fast as  
the world is changing?”

Gary Hamel

Collaboration



## What Collaboration Is Not

- Collaboration is **not**. . .
  - Better communication
  - Cooperation
    - Seeking assistance from others so you can achieve your individual or unit goals
    - “If you help me, I’ll help you”



## Collaboration

- **Collaboration** is. . .
  - Two or more people or groups working on shared goals to create something better
    - Often involves diverse actors with diverse ideas
    - Requires giving up some control & becoming somewhat vulnerable
    - Cannot force someone to collaborate
    - It’s messy



## The Big Challenges

- What are **2-3 critical challenges** facing the your Fire Dept in the next 3-5 years?



## The Nature of the Challenges

- **Technical challenges** (“tame”)  
Solutions are known & can be addressed through management
- **Adaptive challenges** (“wicked”)  
Solutions are unknown, often involve value conflicts, & require leadership at all levels



## The Essence of Leadership

“Leaders do not force people to follow—they invite them on a journey.”

Charles Lauer

## Avoiding “Buy-In”



## Day Workers in Brea



## Day Workers in Brea

- ❑ Redeveloping downtown was #1 priority
- ❑ Day workers congregating in downtown
- ❑ Council wanted to use police enforcement
- ❑ Organized diverse staff team
- ❑ Proposed jobs program at community center



## Day Workers in Brea

- Expanded team
- Started conversations with stakeholders
- Identified issues & concerns & addressed them
- Framed issue differently for different groups
- Proposed Job Center pilot
- Pilot passed 3-2



## What's the Frame?

- How do we frame issue of “Job Center for Day Workers” for different groups?
  - Merchants
  - Day workers
  - Police Dept
  - Faith-based community
  - City Council





## Tips

1. Model collaboration
2. Focus on the “why”
3. Develop relationship & rapport before requesting collaboration
4. Calculate costs of not collaborating
5. Start authentic conversations

“Real listening is a willingness to let the other person change you.”

Alan Alda



## Tips (con't)

6. Integrate the interests of other stakeholders in the proposal; get everyone’s fingerprints on project
7. Frame issue differently for different groups
8. Pilot everything
9. Celebrate progress
10. Debrief the experience & learn as you go
11. Seek guidance from “dream team”



## Resources

- Simon Sinek, TED.com talk, “How Great Leaders Inspire Action”
- Frank’s Career Compass advice columns
  - ✓ “Leadership is the Art of Conversation”
  - ✓ “Taking Smart Risks”
  - ✓ “Story-Telling—A Powerful Way to Lead & Communicate”



## Resources (con't)

- ICMA Coaching Program
  - [www.icma.org/coaching](http://www.icma.org/coaching)
  - ✓ Webinars
  - ✓ One-to-one coaching
  - ✓ New training videos & resources
  - ✓ Career Compass columns



## “Only One Thing”

- “Starting tomorrow, what is one thing I can commit to in my own sphere in order to promote collaboration?”

**MY COMMITMENT**



[www.frankbenest.com](http://www.frankbenest.com)