



“Management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things.”

Warren Bennis

30 TIPS FOR NEWLY ELECTED MAYORS AND COUNCILMEMBERS

operations. Your primary role is to set policy and direction for the city. For example, instead of spending time reviewing invoices, make sure you have a good purchasing practice in place for generating invoices.

1. Allot ample time to be effective in your public service role. Your most important responsibility as a mayor or councilmember is participation at council meetings, but attending meetings isn't enough. Research, study, and discuss the issues; keep yourself informed.
2. Pace yourself. Prioritize the meetings you attend. Recognize the need to spend time with your family, and achieve a healthy work/life balance.
3. Deliver on your promises. Most major decisions and actions require approval of the governing body, which takes a majority vote.
4. Treat your colleagues, constituents, and city staff with fairness and respect. People come to you with issues that are important to them. Do what you can to resolve their issues, or suggest other resources that might be helpful.
5. Allow your city staff to do their work and handle
6. Take your budget preparation role seriously. The budget is your policy development tool and road map. It determines what your city does or doesn't do in the coming year. When budget cutbacks are necessary, ensure adequate funding for activities that are vital to city operations.
7. Be aware of the little things. While little things can go unnoticed, it's often those tiny details that require the most attention.
8. Establish policy statements. Written policy statements let the public and city staff know where they stand, and help the governing body govern. Written policy statements also provide a process to develop consensus.
9. Maintain the infrastructure. Make certain you are keeping up with what you have before taking on new projects. Deferring maintenance costs to the future burdens the next generation of leaders.

10. Be comfortable telling people that you don't know the answer to their question. It's better to tell constituents that you need to research an issue rather than provide inaccurate information.
11. Always keep the long-term interests of your city top of mind. Don't be hurried into action, or misled by the demands of special interest groups who want it done their way, right now.
12. Be open and honest with your colleagues. It's unwise to spring surprises on your fellow councilmembers or city staff, especially at formal meetings. If a matter is worth discussing, it should be placed on the agenda. Surprises often cause embarrassment, create distrust, and erode the team approach to governance.
13. Respect and don't bypass the system. If you have a city manager or other chief administrative official, follow policy and avoid personal involvement in day-to-day operations.
14. Don't let others bypass the system. Insist that people — such as bond dealers or equipment suppliers — work with your city staff first. If direct contact with councilmembers is necessary, ensure it happens with the council as a whole and not on a one-on-one basis.
15. Formalize your personnel rules and regulations. Make sure they're clear. For example, if you don't pay for unused sick leave when an employee is terminated, put it in writing. Once the rules are established, councilmembers should stay out of personnel matters.
16. Familiarize yourself with the Texas Open Meetings Act and the Public Information Act, and complete the state-mandated training in both. Respect the letter and intent of both acts.
17. Keep your constituents informed through social media, a regular editorial in the local newspaper, radio interviews, or news releases. Be friendly in your interactions with the news media. Effective communications keeps citizens engaged and fosters civic pride.
18. Keep your city staff informed, particularly those on the front line who have frequent contact with the public, or are in a decision-making role.
19. Appoint citizen advisory committees as needed and be prepared to follow their advice. Appointing your opposition to a desired committee helps them work for you, instead of against you.
20. Hire the best people you can, and give them as much responsibility as they can handle. Support and inspire them to succeed.
21. Encourage your employees to look for new ideas and better ways of doing things. Listen to what they have to say.
22. Have your city attorney attend your council meetings, but don't expect him or her to have all the answers. Give your attorney time to research key issues, and come back with an opinion.
23. Ask your city attorney "how can we legally accomplish this objective?" instead of simply asking whether or not you can do something.
24. Remember that if yours is a typical city, your city attorney will not be an expert on every issue. City government is too complex. You may occasionally need outside counsel which can be a good use of public funds.
25. Make sure your city has a solid financial accounting and reporting system in place. Some cities have had financial troubles because more money was spent than was available and it went unnoticed.
26. Remember that your city does not operate in a vacuum. You must work within the intergovernmental system to be effective. Keep in contact with school, county, state, and federal officials. Use the Texas Municipal League as a resource.
27. Sometimes, hiring a consultant can be a good way to get the expertise you are missing. However, it is important to maintain a leadership role with consultants, ensuring they stay on course, and act in your city's interest.
28. Keep your eye on state and federal legislation that can negatively affect your city through unfunded mandates or by eroding your ability to make decisions locally. Read the Legislative Update in the weekly *TML Exchange* for updates on key legislation and regulations.
29. Budget money for your officers and employees to attend TML workshops and conferences. TML provides excellent learning opportunities and personal contacts who can be valuable to you, your city staff, and elected officials.
30. Finally, know that you are in the public eye, and your words and actions affect your city and citizens. Follow your conscience, and act as a steward for your city's good governance. ★