

Conduct of Board Meetings
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FASD-2010 Conference

I would like to begin by stating that I am an elected official of Palm Harbor Fire Rescue. Palm Harbor Fire Rescue is a full-service department serving approximately 65,000 residents in a 20 square mile area within unincorporated Pinellas County.

Palm Harbor Fire Rescue is chartered as a state independent fire control and rescue district, which is governed by a board of five elected fire commissioners. The fire commissioners are elected district-wide for four year terms which are staggered, and are non-partisan. The Board is empowered to govern District operations by the District's charter (Chapter 2000-386), as well as F.S. 189 and F.S. 191.

Under its operating authority, the Board of Commissioners is the governing Board of the Palm Harbor Special Fire Control and Rescue District. The Board has the power to supervise, control, regulate and manage the Fire Department, which provides services to the District, and, promulgates and enforces all necessary and desirable rules and regulations.

The Board is also authorized to undertake any action required to accomplish this directive including, without limitation to: making contracts, borrowing money, levying assessments and ad valorem taxes, collecting assessments and ad valorem taxes, building necessary facilities, acquiring firefighting equipment, hiring a fire chief and other such personnel as are required; to inspect property, and to provide administrative support. The Board shall adopt a fire code and adopt ordinances for the District and such rules and regulations as it deems necessary to transact its business and carry out the provisions of the charter.

The Board shall hire a fire chief to serve as the administrative head of the fire department. As such, the chief shall be responsible for all personnel, property, and operation of the Department. The major responsibilities of the Board are twofold, i.e., policy making and setting the annual budget. Serving under the Board is the Fire Chief, who is responsible for the day to day operation of the Department, and carrying out the policy decisions of the Board.

The Fire Chief is responsible for the organization, management, and direction of all functions,

decisions and personnel within the parameters of the fire district's enabling legislation, direction and policies set forth by the Board of Fire Commissioners. In essence, the Chief is the CEO of the Department. Both the Chief and the Board (elected officials) should provide leadership and guidance to the fire district's community. In the case of the special district, it is the sphere of government closest to the people. They act on behalf of all residents of the district collectively.

Overview of special district organization and administration:

At the most general level, all special districts, as defined by Florida law, are a form of special purpose local government. All Special Districts are defined as political subdivisions of the State of Florida by general law, Section 1.01 (8), Florida Statutes.

Additionally, special districts are creatures of statute in that they are typically either created by special act of the Florida Legislature or authorized by a general law. As such, special districts have the limited purposes specified in the special act or general law that has authorized their creation.

Districts are categorized by general law as either independent or dependent. Section 189.403, Florida Statutes, essentially defines an Independent Special District to be a Special Purpose Local Government with an independent governing board (either elected or appointed) which establishes its own budget and collects taxes, assessments or fees and spends them without oversight by a county or city.

Dependent Districts functionally operate as an arm of either a city or county.

An important difference between districts and counties or cities is the fact that as creatures of statutes, districts do not have the "local home rule" power that has been granted to general purpose governments. Districts have only the explicit authority granted by statutes. Typically, Boards are comprised of either three, five or seven members.

Commissioners are encouraged to represent the district at special meetings and events, such as the Chamber of Commerce. A Commissioner may be asked to:

- * speak at community functions
- * elicit feedback from constituents regarding district operations
- * represent the District at local and state organizations e.g., FASD

- * represent the Board at Department functions
- * be open to the public, as a "local unit of special purpose as opposed to general purpose government," a special district falls within the parameters of Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law, as set forth in Section, 286.011, F.S.

Each January, the State Commission on Ethics mails surveys to all counties, municipalities and special districts to find out who must file Commission on Ethics Form 1, Statement of Financial Interest (Form 1) the Limited Disclosure Form.

What motivates people, both elected and appointed officials?

In 1822 the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham wrote, "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure", this can also be found much earlier in Plato's Protagoras and in modern terms as a central assumption of motivational theory. There has been increased concentration on human motivation and behavior in organizations. Behavior on the job is a function of what the person brings to the situation and what the situation brings to the person.

What the person brings to the situation is but one blade of the scissors. The other blade is what the situation brings to the person. It is only as the blades come together that the pattern of behavior is cut. It is important to understand how motives dispose people to behave in particular ways, and how managers or elected officials can profit by matching task requirements and behavioral predispositions. It is important to see how individual predispositions and situational characteristics come together to produce particular ways of behaving on the job. Also, how managers can behave skillfully to increase the probability that subordinates will perform effectively. Different motives tend to express themselves in different behavior. When a need or motive is strong in a person, its effect is to predispose the person to behavior which has become associated with the satisfaction of that need.

Effective Decision Making

The complexity and time pressure of public office can leave elected officials with little time to consider public challenges.

When elected officials possess a framework for discussing public issues and challenges, they are more likely to engage in effective problem solving.

Elected officials must live with the consequences of their decisions. Even the decision to do nothing, is, in fact, a decision. The decision maker must find a way to assess what demands the situation places upon those involved, what solutions (and their consequences) would be personally desirable to him/her, and what alternatives can accommodate both the situation and the decision maker.

Big decisions are built on little decisions.

The conditions for ideally rational decision-making may be summarized as follows:

1. an individual is confronted with a number of different, specified alternative courses of action;
2. to each of these alternatives is attached a set of consequences; and
3. the individual possess criteria that permit all sets of consequences to be ranked according to preference so that the alternative that has the preferred consequences may be selected.

Given these conditions, the process of decision-making include the following steps:

1. diagnose-identify and clarify the problem's nature and causes.

- 2 find alternative solutions-alternatives range from doing nothing (remember earlier we said no decision is a decision) to finding a way around the difficulty, removing the difficulty, or even modifying the objective.
3. analyze and compare alternatives -
i.e., compare alternatives as to advantages and disadvantages.

The rational model of decision making assumes that the decision-maker:

1. is aware of the problem
2. is aware that a decision must be made
3. has a set of alternatives, and
4. possesses a criterion for making the decision.

As a decision-maker, it is always important to ask yourself the question, is this the best decision, taking into account all relevant factors? The situation itself is a powerful determinant of the appropriate decision. There is NO, one best decision. What is best depends upon the situation and the values of the decision-maker.

In other words:

- * be fully informed
- * be scrupulously fair
- * be highly objective

There is a saying, "I am not willing to discuss it; I just don't want to talk about it."

Good decision making should be:

- * Balanced
- * Collective
- * Unbiased
- * Factual
- * The result of consideration of all aspects of the matters before them
- * Made in the public interest rather than personal interests
- * Made entirely on merits of case
- * Made without conflict of interest

Blaise Pascal once said of a decision, "The entire ocean is affected by a pebble."

Leadership has been described as the " process in the accomplishment of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task ."

Over the years the terms management and leadership have been so closely related that individuals in general think of them as synonymous.

However, this is not the case even considering that good managers have leadership skills and vice-versa.

A clear distinction between management and leadership may nevertheless prove useful. This would allow for a reciprocal relationship between leadership and management, implying that an effective manager should possess leadership skills, and an effective leader should demonstrate management skills. One clear distinction could provide the following definition:

- * management involves power by position
- * leadership involves power by influence

There are some other distinctions between the two groups:

- * managers administer, leaders innovate
- * managers ask how and when, leaders ask what and why
- * managers focus on systems, leaders focus on people

- * managers do things right, leaders do the right things
- * managers maintain, leaders develop
- * managers rely on control, leaders inspire trust

Albert Einstein once said," We should take care not to make the intellect our God; it has, of course, powerful muscles but no personality. It cannot lead; it can only serve."

Fundamentals of procedure and the decision-making process show how ideas and opinions discussed in an orderly fashion enable groups to reach an acceptable, majority decision.

Today's accepted rules of procedure have their roots in parliamentary practices of the Roman Senate, though they have been modified through past centuries. Refinements were made when the British formulated its Rules of Procedure, but the foundations of the ancient law were not lost in the British documents. Both, Canada and the United States formulated their laws and procedure primarily from the British documents. Modifications have been introduced since that time to reflect changing times and cultures.

A basic structure of the Board or Commission is:

Chairman

Vice-Chairman

Sec-Treasurer

Some basic motions are:

Accept- to give support to a motion.

Adjourn- terminate/end a meeting

Adopt- to give approval to a motion

Agenda- lists the detailed business to be considered at a scheduled meeting

Amend- to alter a motion by a modification of the motion as it was initially worded

Motion- a proposal made for consideration and action

Quorum- the number of members who must be present in order to transact legally the business of the Board

Meetings of the Board or Commission

Regular Monthly Meetings - set a day and time, except said day and time may be changed by agreement of a majority of the Commissioners.

Special Meetings or Emergency Meetings - may be held at any time agreeable to the Board to resolve an issue that must be resolved prior to the next Regular Meeting. The agenda for such meetings must be restricted solely to the item or items that were given in the notice of meeting.

Open Meetings Policy - meetings of the Board shall be held in accordance with the provision of the Florida Open Government Laws (Sunshine Law

Section 286.011 and Chapter 119,"Public Records Law"), and secondly, are open to the public.

Notification - notice of Regular and Special/Emergency will be advertised in a local publication of general circulation.

Place of Meeting - all meeting of the Board shall be held in a place that is available to the public

Minutes - All meetings of the Board shall be recorded on audio-tape.

The politician's (elected official) shrewd sense of when to speak, when to listen, and when to duck, is equally essential for his self-defense.

An organization can be thought of as consisting of a network on interconnected relationships. In contemporary organizations, more and more jobs require the ability to work effectively with diverse individuals.

As George Bernard Shaw once said, "The worse cliques are those which consist of one man."

Also, as a famous Guinness Stout ad stated, "I don't know I don't like it, because I never tried it."

Harry Truman told us, "Leadership, is the ability to get men to do what they don't want to do and like it." And , "the buck stops here."

And with that, I want to conclude with a quote from Barnard Baruch, "I'm not smart. I try to observe. Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton was the one who asked, why."