

June 2016

Suggested Protocols for “Joys and Challenges” Segment at Area Manager Group Meetings

Background

- The “Joys and Challenges” segment of an Area Manager Group (AMG) was a suggested peer support strategy that came out of the focus groups conducted as part of the Cal-ICMA “Survival Skills” Project.
- The goals of the “Joys and Challenges” segment of the meeting include:
 - ✓ Express gratitude for our leadership role and experiences
 - ✓ Vent a bit (but not too much)
 - ✓ Receive practical peer advice on any specific challenges with which Managers are struggling
 - ✓ Get social support from colleagues who face many of the same dilemmas
- It is suggested that the “Joys and Challenges” segment is a “Managers Only” part of the meeting (if the group feels comfortable, include the Assistants; if not, invite Assistants for the regular meeting that follows).
- The president or other designated member of the AMG facilitates this part of the meeting.

Suggested Protocols

1. Typically, there is a social time when Managers gather prior to the start of the meeting.
2. The president of the AMG welcomes people and encourages everyone to participate in “Joys and Challenges.”
3. Everyone around the table is encouraged to share one recent joy related to their City Manager (or Assistant City Manager) role and briefly share the experience.
4. Once joys are shared, the president or facilitator of the discussion asks someone to share a challenge and what they’ve done to address the problem.
5. Someone briefly presents the challenge and what they’ve done to address it.
6. Once the challenge is described, the facilitator asks colleagues if they have one or two clarifying questions to better understand the situation (no advice yet).
7. The facilitator then asks colleagues to provide any peer advice.
8. Typically, the Manager presenting the challenge just listens.
9. Once everyone with any advice provides it, the Manager with the challenge says “thank you.”
10. Assuming that there is still time, the facilitator asks for another Manager to present a current challenge and there is then another round of peer advice.

A Few Simple Ground Rules

We recognize that we are all challenged in our leadership roles and experience stressful conflicts of one kind or another.

We all work to create a "safe" environment for sharing problems, ideas and suggestions.

The conversation is confidential.

We don't mention names of specific persons who are involved in the leadership challenges presented.

There is a forward orientation--how do we suggest that you improve the situation or address the challenge going forward?

It is allowed to express some frustration but the focus is on how to improve the situation going forward.

We do not criticize or judge each other but offer positive, constructive suggestions for future action or behavior.

The best comments are specific and behavioral--what can the leader specifically do going forward?

Everyone offers ideas to help and support the leader presenting the challenge. We don't debate suggestions.

The Manager is under no obligation to take any of the advice.