

Chief Officer Survival in Today's World of Local Politics and Great Expectations

Colorado State Fire Chiefs
Association

October 19, 2007

Setting the Stage

- What are the difficulties and challenges you face as a chief officer with your board?
- How have they changed since you started this profession?

Keys to Success

- Vision and strategic thinking
- Clarify roles and expectations
- Develop and hold to protocols and practices
- Communicate, Communicate, Communicate
- Establishing and maintaining trust
- Help build capacity

Vision and Strategy

- Focus on the goal:

Vision and Strategy

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My responsibility is to get my 25 guys playing for the name on the front of the shirt and no the one on the back.

– Tommy Lasorda, Former Manager, Los Angeles Dodgers

Vision and Strategy

- Focus on the goal
- Board work that matters (30,000 ft. level)

Vision and Strategy

- Focus on the goal
- Board work that matters (30,000 ft. level)
 - do-or-die issues central to the organization's success
 - driven by results that are linked to defined timetables
 - clear measures of success
 - engagement of the organization's internal and external constituencies

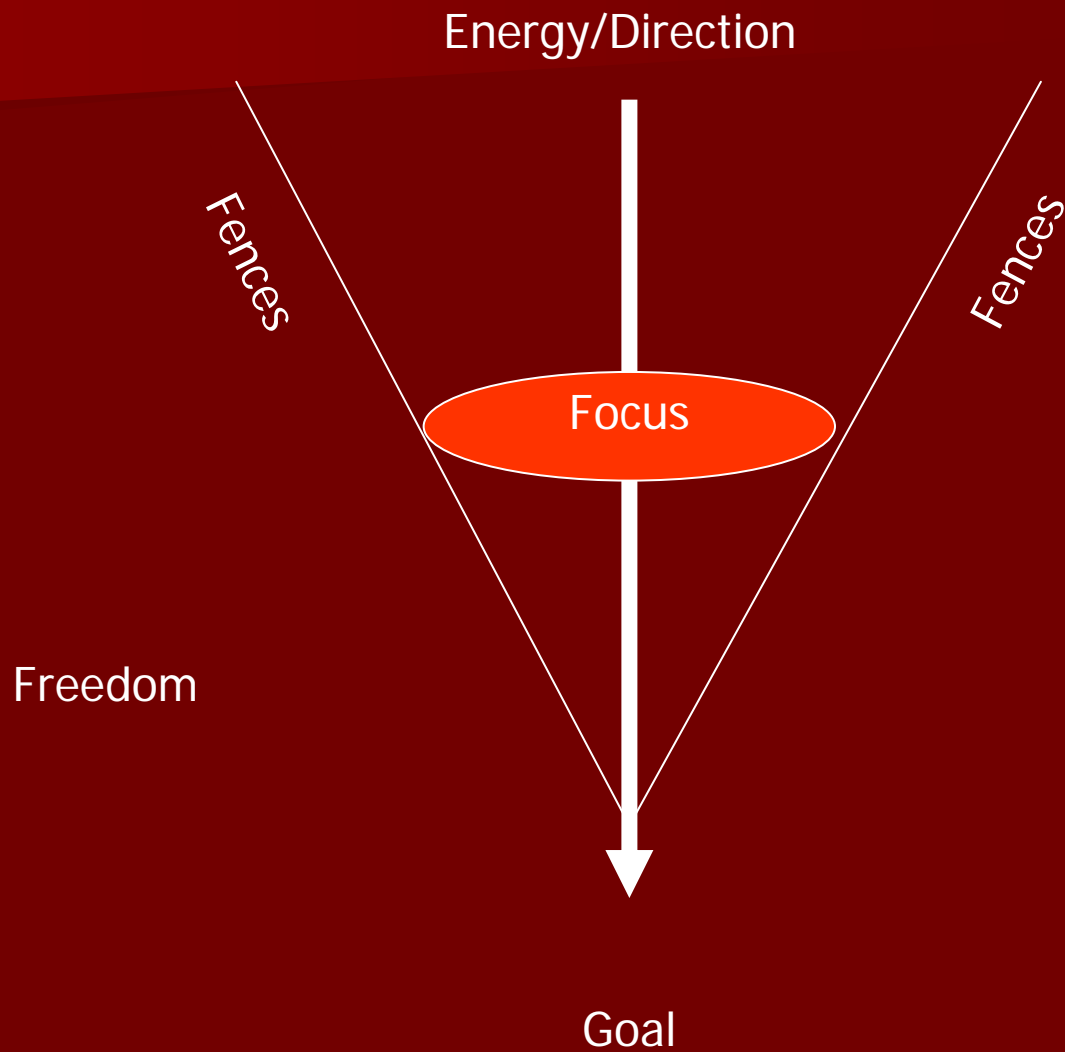
Vision and Strategy

- The foundation for a sound Board/CEO relationship begins with a clearly defined long-range vision and strategic direction for the organization.
 - The vision should be realistic in light of the internal and external environment.
 - The vision should challenge the organization's leadership to stretch and explore new ways of doing things.
 - The vision should clearly define organizational priorities.
 - And, given resource constraints, the vision should identify initiatives that are not achievable in the foreseeable future.

Vision and Strategy

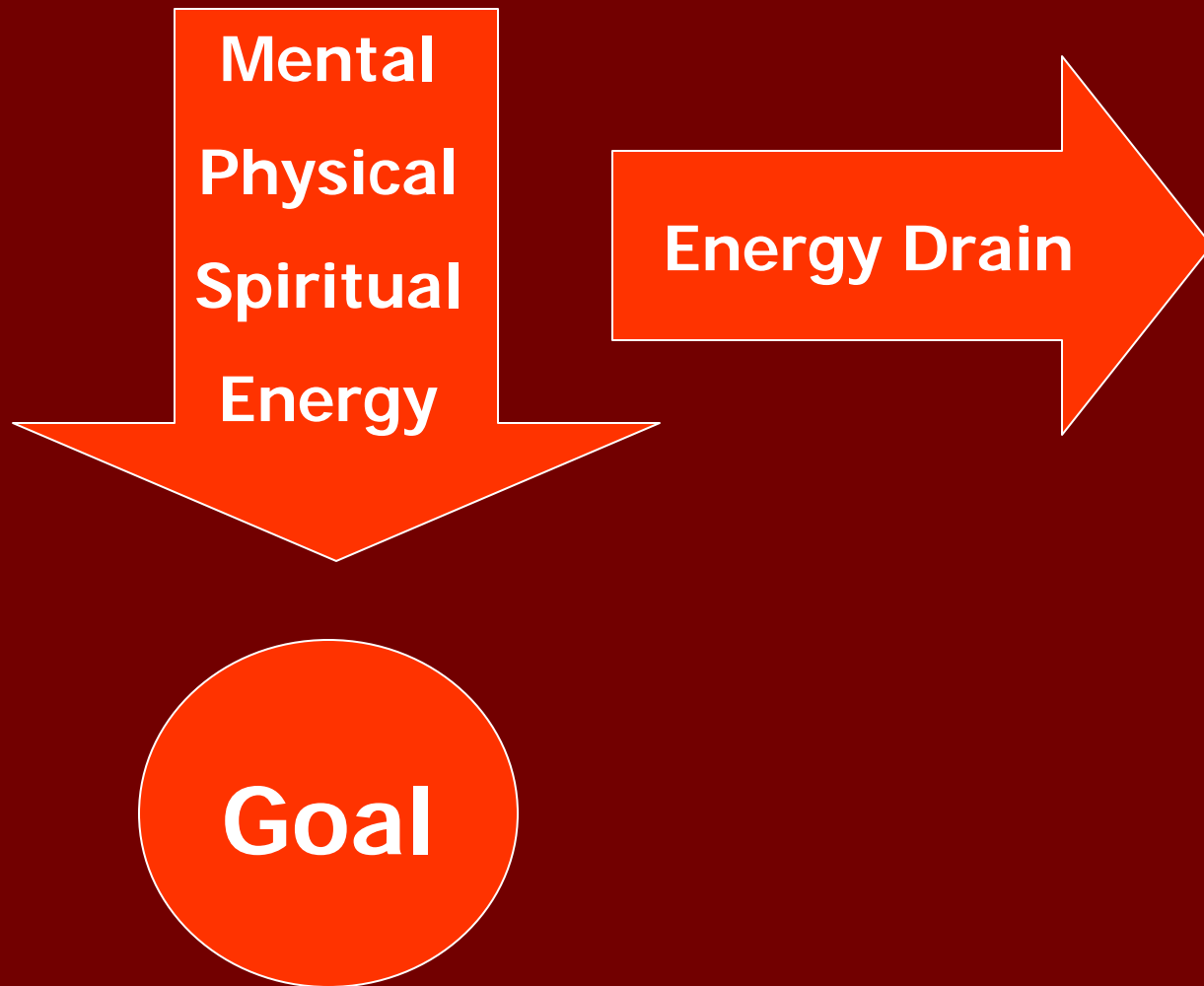
- Key focus of Strategic Thinking
 - Defining the current state
 - Envisioning the future state
 - Performing a gap analysis
 - Establishing goals and objectives
 - Creating an action plan

Vision and Strategy



*Credited to Greg
Piburn

Larson and LaFasto's Model of Problem Solving in Teams



Clarify of Roles, Goals and Expectations

- Research indicates that the primary cause of dysfunction in boards (and the board/staff relationship) is a lack of clarity in roles, goals and expectations:
 - The expectations that each of these players brings to their respective responsibilities and authority;
 - The goals and objectives established for each, and for the organization as a whole which create a focus on results;
 - The lines of communication and accountability for performance;
 - Evaluation against established standards of conduct (particularly with respect to major organizational changes, management of resources, expenditure authorities, and expense claims);
 - All these should be supported by written documentation and policies, and reliable information in manageable chunks that permits objective decision-making; that is, based on fact rather than conjecture or assumptions.

Clarify Roles

- Who is responsible for what, by when, and how are we going to check with each other to make sure we're on track?
- Role of the Board:
- Role of the CEO:

Role of the Board

- Elected and accountable to the citizens
- Appoints the CEO
- Ensures that the organization is abiding by the law and is compliant
- Represents the organization to the wider community and its stakeholders
- Governs the organization
- Responsible for policy formation
- Responsible for strategic planning
- Approves long term goals
- Monitors and evaluates the implementation of policy
- Approves annual budget
- Established financial policies
- Ensures annual audit
- Manages board meetings
- Signs legal documents

Role of the CEO

- Appointed by and accountable to the Board
- Appoints the staff
- Manages the organization in order to ensure its compliance
- Manages day to day contact
- Manages the organization
- Responsible for policy implementation
- Responsible for informing and guiding board on realistic and achievable goals
- Responsible for implementation of strategic plans
- Delivers on short term goals
- Provides the board with relevant material with which to make policy level decisions
- Prepares annual budget
- Implements financial policies
- Liaises with auditors and provides all financial records
- Inputs to agenda for board meetings
- Liaises and manages relationships with the organizations legal representatives

Clarify Expectations

- The Psychological Contract
 - Party A has expectations of party B
 - Party A is willing to obligate itself in certain ways to party B in order to gain party B's compliance with party A's expectations
 - Party B has expectations of party A
 - Party B is willing to obligate itself in certain ways to party A in order to gain party A's compliance with party B's expectations
- In order for a relationship to work effectively, the obligations that one party is willing to undertake must correspond to the expectations of the other.

Expectations Activity

- 2 groups: Board and Chief
- Each group address:
 - What do we expect of the other group?
 - What should the other group expect of us?
(What are we willing to give the other group?)

Develop and Hold to Protocols, Formal Practices and Procedures

- Formal Practices and Procedures that Can Minimize Conflict
 - Protocols – ground rules on how to work together
 - Have clearly written and approved procedures for evaluating the chief
 - Have regular board training sessions
 - Never conceal information from the rest of the board.
 - Celebrate accomplishments.

Develop Protocols


- Develop and invoke a set of ground rules to build trust
 - Protocols may include:
 - Council conduct with one another
 - Council conduct with city staff
 - Council conduct with boards and commissions
 - Communication
 - Legal and ethical standards
 - Protocols should answer:
 - How do you want to be treated?
 - How do you think you should treat others?
 - How do others think you want to be treated?
 - How will we resolve conflicts?

Protocols

- **Suggested topics for discussion:**
 - Overview of Roles and Responsibilities
 - Policies and Protocol Related to Conduct
 - Board Conduct with One Another
 - Board Conduct with Staff
 - Board Conduct with the Public
 - Board Conduct with Other Agencies
 - Board Conduct with the Media
 - Leadership Selection Process
 - Committees and Appointments
 - Agenda Setting Process
 - Sanctions

Communicate

- Power Needs
- “Political Irrationality” versus “Technical Rigidity”
- Different Perspectives
- Part-time versus Full-time
- Technical expertise versus “Citizens”
- Formal Proceedings

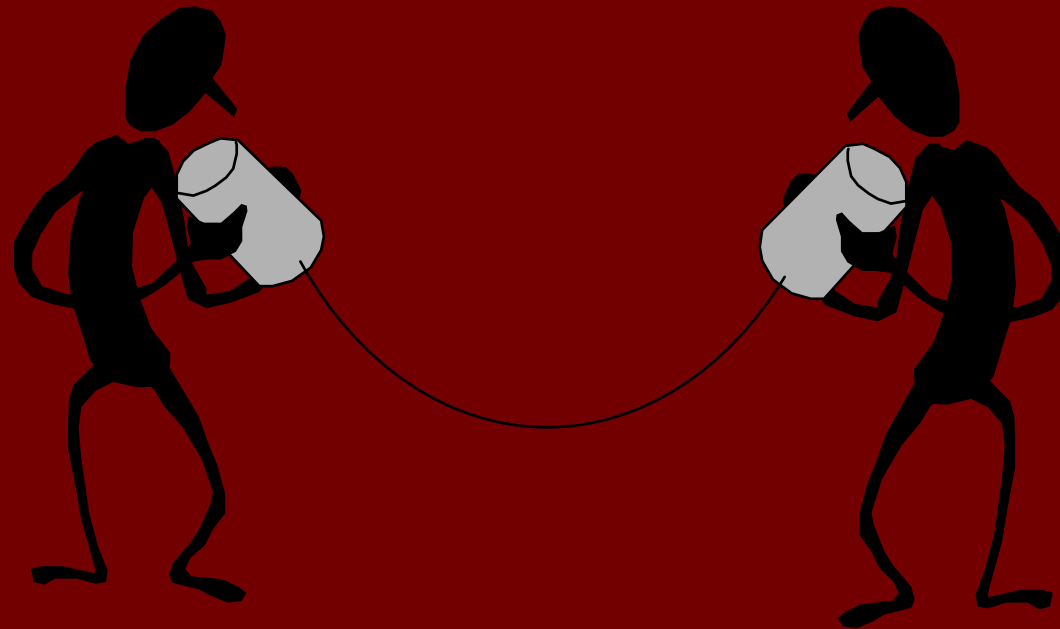
A black silhouette of a person is shown on the left side of the image, holding a large, white, irregularly shaped speech bubble with a thick black outline. The person is facing right and has their right arm raised to hold the top edge of the bubble. The background is a solid dark red color.

I did not say
she stole the
blouse.

Ways to Improve Communication Between the Board and Chief/Staff?

- Professional conduct (no surprises)
- Meet individually with each member – get to know them
- Don't take sides or go through one member to get to the group
- Communicate with all consistently, equally at the same time

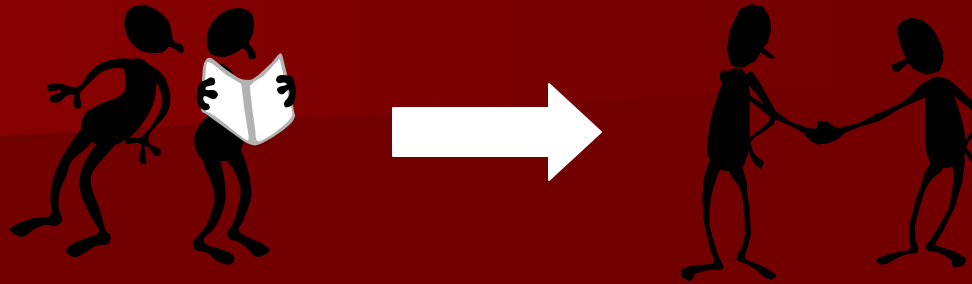
True communication is the
response you get.



Establish and Maintain Trust

- Have an annual game plan to build and maintain trust. Ask:
 - Are we invoking the ground rules for board-staff relationships? Do new board members (and new staff) have the opportunity to explore and discover why the ground rules are important?
 - Are we measuring and monitoring key indicators of trust? Am I using those measurements to facilitate better communication and collaboration?
 - Am I paying attention to my personal leadership and communication styles. Are there aspects I need to change or new skills I need to learn to become more proficient at creating an environment of trust?

Nine Strategies for Creating Trust



“The very best way to repair a broken bond of trust is to not let it be broken in the first place. If that is no longer an option, you have a long road ahead of you, winning people back to your confidence. The only way we know is to keep slogging. Tell the truth. Keep your promises. Be reliable. Rebuild your account using regular, small deposits. ”

From *The New Why Teams Don't Work*, Harvey Robbins, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001.

Nine Strategies for Creating Trust

As a prerequisite for building trust, team leaders and members must:

1. Have clear, consistent goals

Having goals that are clearly stated and consistently supported helps me establish a foundation of trust that will strengthen over time as the team moves in a predictable direction toward agreed-upon outcomes.

2. Be open, fair, and willing to listen

The more open, fair, and willing to listen individuals are, the more they are likely to receive the trust of others (both on and off their team.)

3. Be decisive – and how

When it comes to building trust, even a bad decision is better than no decision.

Before teams can make important decisions, they must decide how to make those decisions.

4. Support all other team members

A team is a family.

Nine Strategies for Creating Trust

5. Take responsibility for team action

Finger pointing destroys the fiber of teamwork.

6. Give credit to team members

"Nothing is yours until you give it away" – Albert Einstein.

7. Be sensitive to the needs of team members

The best way to build up a strong trust bank account is by showing awareness of and sensibility to the needs of others.

8. Respect the opinions of others

Trust without respect is like a sandwich without bread.

9. Empower team members to act

Trust given results in trust, support, and loyalty in return.



From *The New Why Teams Don't Work*, Harvey Robbins, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001.

Build Capacity

- Elected officials are choosing not to develop their governance capacity.
- WHY?
 - Part time
 - Resent being “trained”
 - Overwhelmed by the technical complexity of the public issues
 - Tendency to over-manage and under-lead
 - Supply of training programs
 - Cost of learning is high, but cost of not learning is even higher

*The best time to plant a
tree was 20 years ago.
The second best time is
now.*

Chinese Proverb





Thank
you!