

Management in the Public Sector

by Larry J. Gordon, M.S., M.P.H. Deputy Secretary

New Mexico Health and Environment Department

An environmental manager with considerable experience in local, state, and national programs shares a few insights gained from thoughtful reflection on the process of getting the job done.

1) Let's bury the notion that managers in the public sector are inferior to those in the private sector, although there are many who subscribe to that point of view. The management inadequacies and bureaucratic bungs are as great in private industry, business, professional associations, and voluntary groups as in government -- they are more visible in government because of the necessity of public accountability.

2) Government will respond to modern management techniques as well, but perhaps not as rapidly, as private enterprise. Governmental managers have additional hurdles and points of endorsement or approval in order to change within the democratic process.

Being a competent professional manager does not depend on mastering a particular technical system, but is based on understanding and systematically applying the work of management in the areas of planning, organizing, leading and controlling. This is perhaps one of the most important and critical concepts to master. Most "managers" have become managers after being successful technicians, and have frequently been "selected out" because of their proficiency as technicians. This system of promotion to management ranks may not be the best, but is quite common. Those managers who continue to ply their technical skills and continue to act as specialists instead of developing skills in terms of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling may never master the management arts. However, they may continue to be managers to the detriment of their agencies, programs, objectives, personnel, and the public.

4) A simple definition of management is "getting things done through other people." The manager who attempts to carry out every function or review every detail of his organization's function may find that he cannot see the forest for the trees, and, in fact does not have time to be a manager.

5) Managers should be willing to create, innovate, and propose new organizations or methods where needed instead of being slaves to tradition and routine. Many managers become so intent on defending tradition and their own territory that they do not have time or talents to plan and promote necessary changes.

6) Managers must make every effort to recruit and retain the best talent available even if this means recruiting personnel better qualified than the top manager. I have frequently observed a management fear of such well-qualified personnel.

7) Managers must delegate freely and effectively in order to have time to carry out the most important management functions. This also prevents the manager from becoming a bottle-neck and improves the functions, value, and morale of subordinates.

9) Decision-making may well be the most important management function. But decisions must be made on the basis of the best facts available at the time. Some managers are so concerned about doing the right things that they do nothing - they simply study the problem to death. Frequently, there is more than one good answer to the problem - and the manager must make the decision in order for his organization to get on with the job.

10) Developing mature, productive, effective, knowledgeable employees and associates makes the manager look good. Give credit where credit is due. Utilize the principle that each of your employees should know more about his specific responsibilities than you do or the organization is a failure.

11) The duties of every level of management and each employee should be specific and reasonably discrete. A manager's duties and responsibilities are not the sum total of that of his staff. A serious managerial and organizational problem exists when more than one person in an organization is perceived to have the same responsibilities in whole or in part.

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