

Local Government Leadership Academy

Managing the Council/Board- CAO Relationship

February 2014
George B. Cuff, FCMC

Agenda

- Some Basics
- How Should this Work
- What is Expected of a CAO
- The Challenges of a CAO
- Council/Board Expectations of their CAO
- The Key Principles
- Seven Sins of Poor Relationships
- Why Relationships Go Sour

Agenda

- Signals it's Not Working
- Some Survival Strategies
- The Tools
- What Do You Evaluate
- Process Questions
- What Have I Said?!

Introduction to George B. Cuff, FCMC

- Advisor to municipalities for the past 35 years
- Has experience in all regions of Canada and some work internationally; has a solid reputation as a “no nonsense” consultant who calls a spade a spade
- Concurrent 12 years as Mayor of Spruce Grove, Alberta; former President of Alberta Urban Municipalities Association & Federation of Canadian Municipalities; received Award of Distinction from both
- Author: Magazine articles since 1979; two books “Cuff’s Guide to Municipal Leaders, Volumes One and Two; 3 books of articles “Off the Cuff”; Reports for approximately 500 organizations; another 500 seminars in all 10 Provinces, 3 territories

Introduction to George B. Cuff, FCMC

- Some recent work
 - Review of the committee system & membership for a regional board; orientation seminar
 - Review of a natural gas co-op
 - Review of rural municipality in Alberta
 - Review of a rural municipality in Ontario
 - Review of a non-profit social services corporation
 - Review of the meat inspection process for Alberta Agriculture
 - Seminars for 25 municipalities & boards in western Canada and the US over the past 12 months

“The only man I know who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measurements anew each time he sees me. ... The rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them.”

--George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright

Some Basics (Councils/Boards Function Well When...)

- Councils/Boards function well when they:
 - Pay attention to their mandate
 - Listen to what the residents say and have said
 - See each other as colleagues
 - Treat each other and their views with respect
 - See the administration as critically important; as colleagues in this enterprise; as supporters AND
 - As professional apolitical advisors

Some Basics (2)

- Councils/Boards function well when they:
 - Identify their governance model
 - Balance Councillor participation across the term; rotate membership
 - Establish clear committee expectations
 - Review their governance model from time to time to see what improvements could be made

Some Basics (3)

- Councils/Boards function well when they:
 - Understand the distinction between leadership and management; between thinking/visioning and managing
 - Focus on their roles and seek clarification rather than on the roles of their management
 - Strongly support their admin resources because they understand quality

Some Basics (4)

- Councils/Boards function well when they:
 - Discuss priorities as a body
 - Realize that a municipality/region is an organism in motion; some issues have been resolved; current activities reflect prior commitments
 - Recognize what drives action are resolutions
 - Understand that this Council/Board can make a difference (or not)

Some Basics (5)

- Councils/Boards function well when they:
 - Show respect for their chief elected official
 - Allow him/her the time to grow into the position
 - Correct him/her privately if he/she steps beyond Council/Board policy; cut him/her some slack if that is the result of an unplanned meeting/media request
 - Ensure that the Chair/Mayor is accompanied to any planned Government briefing

One Key to Good Governance

The relationship of the Board/Council to its chief officer (the CAO) is one of the most significant keys to any system of governance. This relationship must be founded on respect, trust, role clarity, open communication, transparency of decision-making and no surprises.

How Should this Work? (1)

- Board/Council inherits its CAO
- Board/Council reviews his/her authority
- Board/Council reviews its expected relationship
- Board/Council reviews the past performance review
- Board/Council discuss “what do we expect?”
- Board/Council discuss with CAO “what do we expect?”

How Should this Work? (2)

- Board/Council discuss format to be used; input sought
- Board/Council discuss review date with CAO
- Board/Council monitor relationship
- Board/Council conducts review alone or with external guidance
- Board/Council invites CAO feedback
- Board/Council agree on what is going well, not so well, changes to be made, review period

What is Expected of a CAO(1)

- Proven ability in finding quality people
- Judgment in knowing who fits, who doesn't
- Ability to inspire confidence in not only this governance body but subsequent ones as well
- Decisive decision-making
- Sensitivity to a governance body who wish to be informed and sometimes involved

What is Expected of a CAO(2)

- Understanding of personal limitations
- Willingness to hear the voices from below
- Personal discipline and high ethical standards
- Unwillingness to compromise personal standards
- Candid, unfettered advice
- Support for second tier and junior staff even when...
- Willingness to admit failure; accept blame

What is Expected of a CAO(3)

- Advise the Board/Council of policy issues; new developments; concerns in the community
- Act on the resolutions of the Board/Council; ensure timely response to requests
- Assess the need for more resources; assess the responses of the public
- Attract and build a solid management team
- Administer the organization

What is Expected of a CAO(4)

- Team leader of the administrative body; champion
- Conduit of Board/Council decisions to administration
- Approval authority for administrative actions
- Quality control of advice up & action down
- Partnership builder; building alliances as appropriate

The Challenges of a CAO (1)

1. Inability to manage “up”

- 1.1 Power of misplaced roles
- 1.2 Impact of a leadership vacuum
- 1.3 Absence of respect & maturity
- 1.4 Expecting political leaders to “come prepared”

The Challenges of a CAO (2)

2. Inability to manage “change”

- 2.1 Lack of preparation for a new Board/
Council
- 2.2 Limited guidance to Board/Council’s
strategic agenda
- 2.3 Lack of concern re: Linkage of
administrative agenda with political priorities

The Challenges of a CAO (3)

3. Inability to manage “through”

- 3.1 Molding a top flight leadership team
- 3.2 Recognizing the unbelievable power of example
- 3.3 Recruiting to fill in core competencies
- 3.4 Developing comfort with the uncomfortable

The Challenges of a CAO (4)

4. Inability to manage “the basics”

- 4.1 Planning performance measurement
- 4.2 Chairing effective team meetings
- 4.3 Monitoring what is communicated, to whom
- 4.4 “I am a rock, I am an island”

Council/Board Expectations of their CAO (1)

- First class advice: comprehensive, succinct, policy-sensitive, publicly-sensitive
- Respect for their roles: manner of addressing, deferring on public pronouncements
- Loyalty to THIS Board/Council

Council/Board Expectations of their CAO (2)

- Sense of team management: credit given to others; appearance of “team” in front of Board/Council
- Accountability for advice and decisions: willingness to own up when others flee
- Common treatment: no sense of favoritism
- Integrity and stewardship
- Advance warning of impending issues

Council/Board Expectations of their CAO (3)

- Sensitivity to those who are new to the world of governance
- Expressed support for those elected to govern; commitment to “their” agenda
- Immediate outline of a comprehensive orientation process; build in sufficient “ownership” by new Council
- Advice on how to fully surface “their” agenda
- A sense of servant-hood; humility

Council/Board Expectations of their CAO (4)

- Minimal presence in the media
- Advice on how to track issues
- Information on current budget process
- Sense of “this is your term; we are here to help make this successful for you”
- Advice on what potential conflicts exist
- The power/control levers of a Council

Council/Board Expectations of their CAO (5)

- Advice on “where can we add value?”
- The full picture; advance notice of emerging issues; follow up issues and Council decisions
- Equal treatment for all Council members
- Courteous relationships with the public
- Public support for tough decisions

The Key Principles (1)

- #1 Trust in the word of each other
- #2 Respect for the “one employee” principle
- #3 Concurrent information
- #4 Personal relationship to the CAO
- #5 Complaints about behavior of a Board/Council Member

The Key Principles (2)

- #6 No surprises
- #7 Current skill development
- #8 Regular briefing of all Board/Council Members
- #9 Monitoring/updating the Board/Council
"Agenda"
- #10 Urgency of action; cohesion of spirit

Seven Sins of Poor Relationships

1. We inherited you; we did not choose you!
2. We are the boss here; your communications style runs counter to that
3. The public has demanded that your dismissal is our first order of business
4. You were too close to the former Mayor/Chair
5. We need to change current policies; you will simply resist us or be in the way
6. We do not trust the information you provide to us
7. We lack confidence in you as our CAO

Why Relationships Go Sour

1. Limited to no orientation at the outset of every term
2. Significant turnover; no one thought this would happen
3. Bylaw and contract may be fuzzy or may be disregarded
4. Staff allowed/encouraged to think they report to the Chair/Mayor

Why Relationships Go Sour

5. Authority to expend funds and change staff unclear
6. New Mayor/Chair not interested in building a relationship; he/she already decided on what needs to happen
7. Board/Council sense that management does everything; limited role for them
8. Opposition to policies of prior Council/Board blamed on the CAO & administration

Signals it's Not Working

- For the CAO: So You Think the End is Near
- Conversations change when you approach
- Meetings held that do not involve you
- Evaluation either not conducted when that is normal practice or done with seeming alacrity when never discussed previously
- Advice consistently ignored or not asked
- Talk of an efficiency study or an unplanned performance review surfaces

Some Survival Strategies

For the CAO: How to Survive

- Approach your role with professionalism
- Approach your day with enthusiasm
- Manage the vertical relationship
- Encourage/mentor staff; release them to lead
- Deal promptly with problems
- Admit to human frailty
- Accept the realities of being in a highly-charged political environment

The Tools

CAO Control Mechanisms

- CAO Bylaw
 - Bylaw # xxxx; dated xxxx
- CAO Position Description
 - Position Profile
- CAO Contract (Letter of Offer)
- CAO Performance Appraisal
- CAO Goals/Objectives
- Organizational Performance

What Do You Evaluate?

CAO Spheres of Competency (1)

- Assistance to Council in understanding its governance role
 - Being responsive to feedback and input
 - Communicating governance advice to Council
 - Preparing for arrival of a new Council
 - Ensuring a sound orientation program
 - Committing to equal treatment/courtesy/assistance
 - Advice on potential areas of conflict/pecuniary issues
 - Development of a relationship based on mutual respect, trust and integrity

CAO Spheres of Competency (2)

- Relationship building with the Chair/Mayor
 - Early meeting with new Chair/Mayor
 - Identifying style and needs issues
 - Ensuring the apolitical nature of the relationship clear
 - Identifying areas of potential overlap & strategies to address
 - Ensuring Chair/Mayor prepared for any engagements/speeches
 - Ongoing meetings held on scheduled basis
 - Development of a relationship based on mutual respect, trust and integrity

CAO Spheres of Competency (3)

- Policy Advice and Leadership on Key Issues
 - Assistance to Board/Council in designing a strategic planning session; ensuring the recruitment of an appropriate facilitator
 - Working with the Board/Council in identifying the strategic issues; providing strategic advice
 - Ensuring both Board/Council and administration aware of importance of policy development
 - Providing quality advice and guidance to Board/Council on identified policy issues

CAO Spheres of Competency (4)

- Fiscal Management
 - Ensuring the development of a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent process of business planning
 - Ensuring that Council provides guidance to the administration in the development of both plans and budgets
 - Providing Council with accurate, comprehensive advice on the current status of the fiscal condition
 - Advising Council on the status of any changes required by the external auditor; acting promptly on audit recommendations

CAO Spheres of Competency (5)

- Leadership of the administrative team
 - Providing ongoing, consistent leadership to department heads and through them to the full administration
 - Communicating effectively and regularly
 - Making administrative decisions
 - Providing effective modeling
 - Delegating/empowering within reasonable limits
 - Disciplining behaviour and correcting promptly
 - Ensuring sound corporate communications plan
 - Ensuring that senior staff are involved in the process of developing goals and priorities

CAO Spheres of Competency (6)

- Discharge of all legislative and CAO bylaw requirements
 - Determining changes to the organizational structure
 - Continually assessing the needs of the system
 - Developing a sound approach to recruitment & selection
 - Ensuring a planned approach to training/development
 - Attending suitable conferences/courses
 - Encouraging mentoring
 - Fulfilling all Charter/Act and bylaw requirements

CAO Spheres of Competency (7)

- Development of community relationships
 - Maintaining a positive profile in the community
 - Providing advice to Council on how to engage the public (community communication plan)
 - Maintaining network with other administrative leaders in this community/ RD & Province
 - Developing rapport with media
 - Ensuring courteous relationships with the public

Areas for Improvement?

- Relationships with members of Council/Board
- Relationships with members of the administration
- Rapport with the public
- Delegation skills
- Decision-making skills
- Enhanced information
- More direct feedback to Board/Council
- Needs to speak up more especially when council gets into the weeds
- Needs to feel free to intervene even if feel you're sticking your neck out
- A big improvement from last evaluation

Process Questions

Who Reviews?

- Responsibility of all members of Board/Council
- Led by the Mayor/Chair
- Input sought from all governors
- One Board/Council member acts as primary author OR
- Retain external expertise to act as intermediary
- Should others participate/how?

When do the Review?

- Annually
- Semi-Annually
- At year end
- On anniversary date
- When problems arise

What's the Outcome?

- A healthy relationship based on openness, candour, respect, mutual trust, no surprises
- An apolitical administration whose goal is to provide first rate advice to Board/Council and the best service delivery to the citizens
- A Board/Council that commits to its role and reflects the public will

What Have I Said?

Assessing the Results of a Healthy Relationship

- Accomplishments abound: Board/Council priorities tackled and acknowledged
- Sense of trust and respect permeate the atmosphere
- Citizens hear positive comments from the Chair/ Mayor
- Staff respect their elected leaders
- Elected leaders respect their boundaries
- “It’s a pleasure to work here!”

Summary Messages (1)

- Model the expected behavior of the organization
- Code of conduct important; behavior must align
- Young people have had very different socialization
- Discuss values; write them; post them; live them
- Celebrate successful careers; reminders for all

Summary Messages (2)

- Build on the essential base of clarity of role
- Focus Board/Council on governance
- Keep Board/Council & administration on separate but linked pages
- Determine then describe then model values
- Develop quality friends/accountability partners
- Counteract any undermining of your staff
- Mentor learning; develop others

“I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough, we must do.”

Leonardo de Vinci (1452-1519)

In Summary

“Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right.”

- Henry Ford, American industrialist

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- Videos on www.georgecuff.com website for your Council
- Books available through www.municipalworld.com
- Mission to Romania: assistance to a children's camp: contact George if you are interested in how you can help
- Questions: contact George at george@georgecuff.com

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Questions, Comments, Adjournment