

## **AT THE END OF THE DAY, I WILL HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE**

I imagine, that when the organisers of this conference selected the topic of our presentation, they assumed that there are tricks of the trade that can be shared with other colleagues in building successful local government. Perhaps it is assumed that one can do two or three things consistently well and this will then provide a key to unlock service delivery at the local government level. Seasoned practitioners surely must be able to give advice to colleagues which they can use in managing their own institutions.

I am afraid that there is no magical formula which will ensure success in local government. The answer lies in a word which is used so often in government and may well be the key to the successes that we achieve. This word is the word “integrated”. Unless you have an integrated approach to the very wide scope of activities and supporting functions that local government must undertake, the results will remain fragmented and unacceptable. It calls for dedication from officials working as managers in local government beyond anything that a person can imagine. It is only when you experience the pressures of everyday local government management that you realise not only the wide diversity of fields in which we are active but also the breadth, the depth and the complexity of local government management. It is only this integrated wholeness that carries the secret of success.

When we talk about “making a difference” I am not talking about my achievements. My talk will concentrate on issues that I have learned in my own experience and also have observed from the actions and experiences of others who are my peers in the same field of work. In fact often our failures provide the best opportunity to grow and learn.

This integrated whole that we must address and attend to can be described in various formats. The one may not be better than the other. My choice of ordering various topics into a whole are of no significance on their own. It is purely a scheme to describe the totality of activities necessary to impact on

the quality of lives of our citizens. When we in local government achieve this, we will also make an impact on life in South Africa in general and improve the country to draw nearer to the ideals expounded in the Constitution of South Africa.

## 1 Personal Attributes

- According to the bible, when Solomon was asked to select an attribute to support him in his appointment as the King of Israel he requested to be blessed with **wisdom**. In a similar vein the bible tells us that Joseph showed exceptional wisdom in serving King Pharaoh of Egypt and was therefore elevated to the position just below the king. We need wisdom to balance the many issues that are thrown at us on a daily basis. Wisdom is not something that you can learn from a textbook but you can be taught through experience to increase your wisdom. Some people are blessed with it as a natural attribute. Be aware that this characteristic will stand you in good stead and seek ways to increase your personal wisdom.
- A sick person cannot perform in the same way that a **fit and healthy** person is able to do. Exercise regularly, find ways to relax in a profound way and eat healthily.
- The work of a Municipal Manager requires extraordinary **dedication**. It almost requires super human qualities of relentless application to the tasks that you execute. Our Municipal Managers are away from their offices too often resulting in a lack of leadership at our municipalities which is translated into a lack of service delivery. Be available as much as possible and do your work with great dedication. Read continuously about developments, solutions and best practices in local government. We can never say, when we close our doors at the office, that our work is up-to-date. There is always more to do, to understand to absorb.

- Much is made these days of so-called **emotional maturity**. This is simply the ability to act in a balanced way to the pressures exacted upon us by the public, government, councillors and human relations. Remember, if you get angry you have lost the argument entirely. Shouting and swearing is absolutely forbidden. Keep your cool.
- We cannot afford to lose the **humanness** of our beings. We have to be able to have empathy with the problems and the views of other people. We must be able to listen to people and identify with their situation. We must be available and able to hear people out often requiring patience and dedication.
- There are various ways in which we can **inspire, motivate and unlock the creativity** in other people. This is one of the most important attributes of a leader. Whether you do it by example, or whether you get assistance from experts in the field, you have to make your staff feel valued and respected.
- I refer above to the issue of availability. You must continuously be **visible and accessible**. I was shocked to hear a staff member of a large organisation, and I will not say whether this is a public or private institution, indicate to me that staff are not allowed to speak to the Chief Executive Officer of the institution. Unless the Chief Executive Officer addresses staff members, they may not do so on their own initiative. Any problems that staff members may experience must be rooted to the Chief Executive Officer through a relayed route which weakens good communication. My personal view is that a Municipal Manager should be willing to speak to anybody and then assess the best way to deal with the situation, even if it is just to refer the person to the correct HOD.

- A high standard of **ethics** is required of managers. Any hint of a conflict of interest will invariably lead to a decline in trust and a lack of respect. We are aided by various documents concerning our conduct and should adhere to them religiously. Lets do the right thing.
- **Flexibility**, the willingness to listen to others and to change our views will show growth in our personal development. Transparency and consistency in our actions is required at all times.

## 2. Technical skills

- The technical requirements of managing local government changes continuously. This is true not only in the purely technical sense but also in terms of financial management, human resources and legal principles. We must continuously sharpen our **technical skills** to be able to advise our Councils.
- The trusted principles of public administrations must be known and applied. **Planning, organising, leadership and control** continues to apply even in the most complex of service delivery organizations.
- A thorough **knowledge of the goals of the government** of the day and the mechanisms to achieve them should be part of our make up. We cannot set out to achieve these goals if they are not known to us. Knowledge about infrastructure and service delivery issues should feature high on our priority list.
- Know the **demographics** of your area, the economic and social trends, the service levels as well as employment and skills levels. This includes knowledge about what other government structures are doing or failing to do in your area so that you can either address it or attempt to revive or coordinate it.

- Understand and realise the intimate connection between **policy issues and functional issues**. The integrated approach referred to before will ensure good interaction between these phenomena.
- Understand **the law** applicable to local government and remain within its boundaries. The Structures Act, the Systems Act, the MFMA, the new Property Rates Act, Preferential Procurement, Employment Practices, and Safety – the list of topics where a good understanding of the law is required is long and always growing.

### 3. Relationships

- The Municipal Manager must have good working relationships with **stakeholders inside and outside the municipality**. Internally, relationships with councillors, trade unions, HOD's, other senior staff and indeed all staff and externally, with government departments, municipal institutions, business, NGO's, churches, the press and the public must be fostered at all times. Avoid close personal friendships with people who will make demands on your powers and decision-making authority to benefit them. Relationships are built up over a long period of time but like the vegetable garden growing at the back of your house, they should be tended almost on a daily basis.
- Unless you train yourself to have a **customer focus** in relation to municipal services, your relationship with the public and business will remain shaky. Do not always assume that the municipality is correct in terms of its actions towards the private individual. Be open-minded when complaints and criticism comes the way of the municipality. Find ways and means to ensure that every enquiry, written, verbal, telephonic, e-mails, whatever, gets quick and proper attention and, more importantly feedback. I have made a compact

with my colleagues at uMhlathuze that every communication with the municipality, verbal, telephonic, or written gets a full reply within 30 days or an explanation why the full reply will take longer than that. I also have a system in place where every case of a complaint or enquiry that comes through my office gets noted and followed up to the smallest detail. The result is that my colleagues know that whenever such a case is brought to my notice by the public they are already in breach of this agreement.

- The relationship with **Traditional Leaders** and local government has been somewhat problematic. A certain amount of distrust between municipalities and Traditional Leaders exist far too often. Time must be set aside to improve this relationship, as service delivery in traditional leader areas will be impossible in the absence of good relationships. Personally I find the work performed by the KwaZulu Natal Department of Traditional Affairs extremely handy when it comes to this issue.
- There is an old saying that **respect** is something that you earn. Be civil, transparent and consistent in your dealing with councillors, the public and staff. Think of other ways in which you can enforce and confirm the respect that grows around your office. In turn you will find that you get the support and increased trust of the same people.
- **Customer surveys** are a handy way of establishing the standing of your organization with the public and therefore improving service delivery and relationships. Make use of them and make sure that they are objective and not a public relations exercise.
- I wish to deal specifically with the issue of relationships with **the media** by mentioning that such good relationships will lead to the absence of fear in our dealings with them. Honesty, integrity,

transparency and availability will improve your contact with media representatives.

- **Councillors** should at all times feel **involved** in the work of the municipality. Extensive delegations may well strip councillors of a feeling of involvement. The portfolio system in our municipality works well to make councillors feel part of the system and part of the decision making process. Even if a matter is delegated to the Executive Committee the portfolio committees create reports and make recommendations that eventually come to the executive committee and in this way councillors support the decisions taken by the Executive Committee.

#### **4. Human Resources**

- The **trade unions** are an important part of human resources. We should allow the trade unions to play their role which is spelt out by the law. It serves no purpose to become irritated and to spoil relations by not acknowledging the trade unions as a role player in local government.
- A variety of **policies** are required to make human resources run smoothly. Employment practices, disciplinary hearings, employment equity, skills development, succession planning and retention of staff are all aspects which require implemented policies to benefit the Council.
- Various ways to achieve a coordinated team, working for the municipality is available to the municipal manager. During a recent Peer Review project at my municipality councillors and officials of other municipalities remarked on the fact that the uMhlathuze staff members are proud to work for the municipality. This is a positive

sign. **Team building** is a continuous exercise which must always be at the back of the mind of the manager.

- Every organisation has its **culture, values and standards**. Some of these are described in legislation but most emanate from the organisation itself. Proper induction will ensure that these values, standards and cultures are transferred to new employees.
- **Achievement and excellence** should always be **celebrated**. The manager must develop an eye for innovation and must create opportunities where some sort of celebration around achievement is attended to.
- Part of the culture of an organisation should be the **encouragement of new ideas and experimentations**. Although it may require additional time to attend to all of these ideas and to deal with those which are practical, creativity is something that grows and expands if it is nourished and managed.
- Public organisations are well known for instances of **corruption** taking place. Part of the human resources policies should include an anti corruption policy. Dishonesty should be pursued with vigour and those who are guilty removed from the organisation.
- Since ancient times the law has required that individuals be given **fair treatment** when they deal with public organisations. This is especially true of the human resources function. Fair procedure relates to disciplinary procedures and grievances but also to every other aspect of human resource management.
- In every organisation there is a grapevine which attempts to destabilise the organisation through disinformation. A well-

established **communication policy** to ensure that correct information gets to staff members is essential.

- There should be an **organisational HIV policy** so that officials who are affected know exactly where they stand in relation to dealing with their illness and also remain with the feeling that they are valued employees of the organisation.
- **Harassment** of employees has become big news in the human resources field. A policy to deal swiftly with people making themselves guilty of harassment should be in place.
- A further instrument in the fight against corruption and mal-practices in local government is **whistle blowing**. A policy in this regard will ensure that people will feel safe and protected while providing information about wrong doings in the municipality.

## **5. Communication**

- It is essential that the residents of a municipality must understand the **service delivery issues** which impact on implementation. Service delivery can be extremely complex and is further influenced by a number of legislative prescriptions. A proper communication of the relevant information to the public will ensure that they do not become impatient.
- The issue of **consultation and participation** by the public in local government affairs is emphasised in many places in the law. It is good and right that in a democracy such processes should be in place. Consultation and participation should not stand alone however, as adequate information on the concomitant civic responsibilities of citizens must be communicated to communities.

Citizens must have an understanding of their responsibilities including the responsibility to pay for services.

- There are many organisations from government, through to municipal organisations and the private sector who interact with the municipalities. This **interaction** should take place at a higher level **by skilled people** and skills in transferring information by way of communication should be provided to employees.
- One of the aspects of service delivery is the needs that communities have and the resources available to reply to these needs. It is highly advisable that these aspects be discussed with ratepayers and citizens so that they understand the strong link between **needs and available resources**.
- Previously reference was made to good relations with traditional leaders. This implies that communication with traditional leaders on all issues which affect them and the people within their areas are understood well. **Continuous contact with the traditional leaders** will ensure that communication remains at a high level.
- There should be **regular contacts with stakeholders** in the municipality. Besides the fact that the law prescribes compulsory contacts during the IDP, the budget and performance management, other opportunities to interact with stakeholders should continuously be kept in mind and implemented. Decision-making should be brought closer to the people so that democracy can grow to its full flower. This is a two-way process where information is not only transferred to citizens but the opportunity is also used to listen to the views and suggestions of communities.

## **6. Systems and Processes**

- The obvious source of systems and processes, also establishing strong links in terms of control lies within the MFMA. Issues like **affordability, billing, credit control, resource levels** all emanate from this legislation and provides guidance on good systems and processes. Not only should systems and processes be monitored but they should also be evaluated for their efficiency. This will increase the control that municipalities have over their destiny.
- The Systems Act requires **delegations of powers** to be created in order to ensure that municipalities operate in the most efficient way. Out of thousands of actions that the municipality can take, only a handful are exempted from further delegation e.g. accepting the budget or accepting by-laws. Without a proper set of delegations the municipality will not nearly get its work done.
- A good idea is to **share good practices** within an organisation. Because municipalities are compartmentalised into departments excellent synergy can be achieved by creating opportunities where the exchange of good practices can take place.
- No municipality can operate without proper **audit processes** in place. Both the internal and external audit processes can assist a municipal manager to improve the performance of the municipality and make a lasting impression.
- The whole system around **performance management** is built on systems and processes. Substantial guidance is provided by legislation approved by the National Legislature. When all processes dealing with performance management are coordinated the results are that municipalities are placed in a position to address their mistakes and to improve their ability to deliver.

## 7. Policy

There are thousands of policies accepted by municipalities to ensure the smooth running of their operations. The following are cited because of their importance or because they serve as examples.

- An **indigent policy** must deal with the issue of credit control and assistance to the poorest of the poor including free services to such people.
- Policy dealing with **the disabled** is becoming increasingly important.
- Besides an internal AIDS policy municipalities should also create **external HIV/AIDS strategies**. Although local government is not in a position to deal with the entire threat of HIV/AIDS it can be in position to coordinate efforts and make them more effective.
- Policies on **donations and sport development** are examples of other areas where policy will be a handy instrument to ensure equal treatment for all yet proper attention to issues confronting the municipality.

## **8. Special Projects**

- Local government is required to be developmental in nature. Municipalities therefore have to attend to projects which will **stimulate economic development** and lead to job creation. Drawing investors to municipalities is just one of many ways by which local development can be furthered. Partnerships between the public and the private sector may be useful in this regard.

- Special projects to deal with **vulnerable groups** like children, females, and the disabled have now become common practice in local government. Although it is somewhat removed from the hard-core services that municipalities are required to provide as a basic service to communities the whole approach in South Africa is to also be aware and look after such vulnerable groups. The establishment of special desks to coordinate efforts to make life easier for vulnerable groups is therefore recommended.
- Municipalities are going through tremendous changes in the field of social development, legislation, education and training and science. A **change management** programme to assist employees to deal with the changed environment in which they work may therefore be of assistance. Such programmes must be well planned, thought through and continuously evaluated for adjustment where necessary.
- Each municipality should stand back and look at the progress that it makes in terms of **addressing the service back logs** in South Africa. Service provision must exceed natural growth. With the aid of the government large sums of money is pumped into service delivery back-logs and this money must be spent in an effective and efficient way to gain the maximum benefit for the Country.

## **9. Meeting Its Challenges**

- Every person that I speak to involved in local government refers to the issue of **political interference in the administration**. The provisions of the MFMA, excluding councillors from participating in the allocation of tenders have brought this issue into sharp focus. Material on the different roles of councillors and administrators should continuously find its way into the agendas of Councils. The fact that so many people complain of interference is not an

indication that councillors set out deliberately to interfere in administrations. The whole process is insidious both from the perspective of the councillor and the official. Councillors start off by exacting general pressure on officials to attend to small issues outside the prescribed policies of the Council. Over time this pressure increases and one concession leads to a higher degree of pressure. My advice to my colleagues is that this matter should be aired between the councillors and the officials from time to time so that everyone remains in agreement about the roles of the stakeholders.

- I have discussed under a separate heading the issue of relationships. I cannot over-emphasise the requirement that **relationships between councillors and officials** should be of the highest standard. There should be trust and there should be understanding for difficult work that both of these groups are doing. If officials respect councillors, allow them to do their work as the political decision makers, do not sabotage the implementation of the decisions taken by Council, and consistently serve all councillors in an unbiased way with information and advice within the confines of the law this matter should not cause too many problems. Nevertheless there are always perceptions of councillors about officials and what they are busy with. Constant communication should deal with some of these misconceptions and relieve stress. Successful service delivery is fully dependent on cooperation between councillors and officials and in the absence of such cooperation service delivery will suffer.

If all of the above is attended to in a way which will speak of an honest attempt on the part of the officials to serve their communities, there will be substantial chances of successful local government taking place. Even then, there remain many other issues which will require the attention of managers to achieve the best possible model of local government management.