



True Community Leadership

A column by Circle Pines Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (8/22/2017)

As a community leader I've worked hard to understand my role. I get paid \$4,200 per year as the Mayor of Circle Pines to provide leadership and to positively represent the best values and dreams of my community. Our city administrator makes a good full-time salary to run the day-to-day operations, directing a team of talented city staff who make Circle Pines a special community.

As I look back on my many experiences in public life I realize I've worked with a varied group of elected officials. The good ones (conservative or liberal) shared a true passion for service and for working with others to build a better community. On the other hand, the bad ones were often all about themselves and tended to polarize the community with their nasty and destructive behavior. I'd like to share with you what I have seen as common characteristics among those who successfully work with others to improve their communities.

- **Good leaders are civil.** There is absolutely no need to be nasty and turn every disagreement into a verbal and public brawl. Good elected officials at every level behave as if their mother, pastor, or young children were watching and listening. They understand that their behavior sets the tone for how the community sees itself. When a newspaper story about their community describes a mess, they realize that they personally contributed to that sad situation.
- **Good leaders are humble.** Yes, getting elected can give a person an inflated sense of self-worth, just like losing can seem to be a personal, very public shaming. Good leaders stay true to their roots and remember who they represent. It's truly not about them - it's about what they can do in their position by working with others to help community members reach their full potential.
- **Good leaders listen more and talk less.** People who know me realize that I am a 'work in progress' on this one. But all of my work in conflict resolution has taught me that most of all, people in conflict just want to be heard. Being mean or loud doesn't make a good leader. Paying attention to the needs of others, and being able to find common ground with them, is what makes a difference.
- **Good leaders find the shared interests.** They work hard to identify what people agree on and build from that base rather than immediately looking for a differences and a fight.
- **Good leaders appreciate their staff.** Blaming, bullying and micromanaging the staff is totally unacceptable and is the opposite of any successful business leadership strategy. Like elected officials, staff want to be part of a proud, high-quality organization and community. Elected officials come and go, but I believe part of the staff's job is to safeguard the long-term health of the community from the swings of politics. True community leaders find ways to support and work with their staff to accomplish great things within limited budgets. (On a personal note: I will always defend my city staff and if I ever need to question a staffers performance I will discreetly pull my city administrator aside and quietly express my concerns, which they will then address as they see fit, using their professional training and judgment. And that is the end of my involvement on the issue.
- **Good leaders are cautious and discreet.** Especially in criticizing other community leaders or organizations, like school boards or community nonprofits.

True community leaders reflect and learn every day because helping to improve the lives of your neighbors is a very important responsibility.