

2022

# WORKING RELATIONS WITH PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Texas Association of County Auditors  
May Institute  
New County Auditors

## Session Overview

- The three building blocks of relationship building for County Auditors
- Courthouse politics and where you fit
- What about you? Invest in yourself.
- Bonus: The do's and don't's

# Knowledge

- Learn as much as possible, continually
  - Know your job better than anybody else knows your job
- Knowledge builds credibility, and credibility earns trust
- Embrace the new; understand that change is inevitable for your knowledge to stay relevant

# Independence

- Learn to read and interpret statutes for yourself
- Seek input from those you trust, but form your own opinions
- Be consistent & be flexible? Yes

Key Concept: Consistency

# Communication

- Keep lines of communication open, and make sure officials know that
- The best rule of thumb is the “80/20” rule
- Know your audience; think about how the message will be received
- Listen to your staff

# Effective communication techniques

- Silence
  - Highly effective, let others volunteer information
- Open ended questions
  - Not one word answers; opens an array of possibilities
- Understanding
  - Two way communication
  - Both parties can clear up questions and see points of view

## Effective communication techniques (continued)

- Empathy
  - Essential to be effective
  - Emotions are a natural part of everything
- Enthusiasm
  - Treat others like you would like to be treated
  - Positive, upbeat, and interested
- Writing with first person content
  - Make it personal
  - Create ownership, presence, authenticity

## Effective communication techniques (continued)

- Keep a sense of humor
  - Because life is funny
- Smile
  - Opens people up, eases nervousness
  - It just shuts down the naysayers: kill 'em with kindness
- Honesty
  - Be the honest broker in the courthouse
  - You are uniquely positioned for it

# Courthouse Politics

- Authority doesn't equal power; it establishes a system of checks and balances
- Where do you fit?
  - If you must choose sides, do so carefully
  - Remember which hat you are wearing
- Keep party politics private

# Courthouse Politics (continued)

- If it's within your ability, help someone who needs it
- Someone has to make a decision; it's going to be you a lot of the time
- Consensus building
- Strategic thinking and planning

## What about you? – Don't undermine yourself

- You are not perfect, mistakes will be made. So forgive yourself and don't dwell
- Avoid martyrdom
- Manage stress
- Take time out for yourself

## What about you? – Confidence and Trust

- Be confident and be bold
  - Even when you aren't....
- Trust yourself
  - You know far more than you think you do
  - You are the Pro in the courthouse when it comes to finances
- Learn from mistakes
  - Adapt to and embrace change

## The “Art” of being a County Auditor

- Skillful mastery of three main tenets
  - Knowledge, Independence, Communication
- Developing interpersonal skills and building relationships
- Critical and strategic thinking, always have a plan, and honestly self evaluate
- Never compromise character

## Bonus: By all means, DO these things:

- Keep your district judge(s) informed
- *Communicate frequently with other officials*
- Know your job better than anyone else
- *Use your district and county attorney*
- Facilitate information to the media
- *Attend all commissioners court meetings*
- Use Common Sense

## Bonus: But, DON'T:

- Embarrass your district judge(s)
- Argue with any official in a public meeting
- Bad mouth any official, employee, or department at any time or encourage gossip
- Refuse assistance to a reasonable request
- Ignore staff recommendations or ideas
- Compromise your principles or ethics
- Procrastinate

## Closing items of interest

- **“Someone knew what they were doing” by Tommy Tompkins**
- **Against all odds: Advice from successful longtime auditors**
  - 2016 Institute presentation
  - Link on homepage [www.texascountyauditors.org](http://www.texascountyauditors.org)
- **Exceptional professionalism, leadership, self-discipline, ethics, loyalty, friendship, faith, compassion, courage, and service to others**
- **“In God we trust, all others we audit”**

# Questions?

- Melissa Jeter
- County Auditor
- Houston County, Texas
  
- 936-348-4516
- [mjeter@co.houston.tx.us](mailto:mjeter@co.houston.tx.us)