

important that your board, the community, the chambers of commerce, and so on have to know where you are coming from.

3. *Customers.* Customer orientation is not just a new "buzz term." It is real, and you need to focus on it continuously. You need to know who your customers are, where they are coming from, and where they are going.
4. *Common vision.* Establish a common vision so everybody knows where you are going and everybody can get behind that common vision.
5. *Clear understanding.* Have and project a clear understanding of your policies and objectives, and mission. I do not think there is anything worse than a manager providing a message that is not consistent and clear.

ONE BOARD MEMBER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

When I was on the National Commission on Intermodal Transportation, everyone on the commission made it very clear that they always watched California because that was where the rest of the nation was going. Unfortunately, if that is true, transit is in a bad way.

The state government has stolen from the counties for the last several years, so the counties have figured that, if it worked for them, then it will work to go steal from somebody else. We are slowly eating our young and it is very distressing. It is distressing that one can be a good local manager and build up an organization, but then be raided by other powers. It is indeed a strange time of transition, and the outlook is going to be rather frustrating for the next couple of years.

Policy Boards

I want to present my perspective as a policy member, although I no longer serve on a transit board. However, I did serve for fourteen years. Now it is interesting to watch the process from outside. Credibility has been

sorely hurt by the very weakest link in the chain of transit, and I have to say that the weakest link is the policy board.

Policy board members come with many different perspectives, different levels of dedication, and different attention spans. These differences are actually both a strength and a weakness. A policy board that is only transit oriented does not create the needed linkages to local government, land use, and to other societal issues. On the other hand, a policy board that is all over the map has so many things on their plate that they are not focusing on transit. A happy medium must be struck where board members can be engaged in transportation as it relates to other societal issues. Transit is like the foundation upon which we lay the rest of our services and community needs. If you can build the linkages, then transit affects land use, health care, and social services. In order to do this, board members must broaden their perspective so that they can see that those linkages are made possible and those services enhanced by an efficient transportation network.

When I started serving on the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, there were 23 people there and we had just validated the sales tax to start collecting money for rail. I have found that the difference between our board and today's is that we said openly to the world that we did not know everything. We had to learn, and we learned together. We were all on the same team. Today's policy board members need to know that the answers are not only for the staff to bring to them, but for them to seek as well.

To accomplish this there is a tremendous amount of training that has to go on, a tremendous amount of working with them, but remember you are working with people who have tremendous egos. You have to help them by feeding those tremendous egos. One of the things we fed them was by deeming each of them specialists in a certain area. Each of the chairs of the committees were the specialists. When the finance committee gave its report, it was not staff, but rather the board member, who gave the report on what was going on in that particular area. There were chairs that did not know what they were talking about, so the staff had written that report. We all knew that, but if a board member is making a report, it is more difficult for another board member to really go after them and they really do not know what they are talking about. Board members simply do not do that to other board members. The meetings became much more civil.

There was a feeling that the board understood and could explain board policy, even to the press and people that were out in the audience. There was much less acrimony, much more mutual respect, and a better presentation of the agency as a whole.

One especially disturbing observation of the current MTA is that the board members have been allowed to step outside and pretend they are not on the board. When they get quoted in the paper, they say things like, "I don't know how this happened; who was watching?" In fact, board members are all on the same team and should not be able to step outside and pretend they are not responsible. If they are part of the presentations and act as the specialists, it becomes a little harder to disown an issue.

Another board activity I would encourage is taking trips. Riding and experiencing the system is very important. I once took another board member to ride wheelchairs for a day. We obviously could not replicate the experience of being handicapped, but it was fascinating to see from the wheelchair user's perspective what happens on a bus when a wheelchair approaches it.

Out-of-town trips are also valuable. When we were considering a light rail system for L.A., we hardly knew anything about it. Light rail sounded good, and we saw it working in other cities. So we decided to see one of these other systems. We started taking bus loads of community people and board members to San Diego. We found it extremely useful to actually see its potential.

I also found my trips Europe and Japan very helpful. There are some things that cannot be figured out from reading about them in a book. A video tape can be very helpful, but witnessing and experiencing the system first-hand means a lot more.

Trips like these are often considered "junkets," or simply expenses-paid vacations for the board members. This is unfortunate, because there really is value to be gained. I am a strong advocate of taking your board members out. If people want government to act like a business, they should ask themselves, "Do businessmen in the world build something that they don't know anything about?"

To help dispel suspicion that the board was simply vacationing on the public's money, we started to invite the media to join us. Press participation is a good check on both the board and the media. It helps keep

the board focused on their work, and it generates positive media. Most importantly, these trips allow the board to become part of the system and understand the potential. Too often, board members truly are the weak link. These are some ways to address this problem.

Celebrate Success

In transit, we never celebrate our own successes. It is particularly hard to celebrate now, because we are so caught up in crises that we forget the good things. In reality, we do a lot of great things and no one knows it. The good news is not only good for the media and the public, but for the board as well. The policy board members do not want to be associated with an agency that only has bad news to distribute. We need to showcase the good things we do by getting board members out to the community with press to present a success. We have several successes, and we need to make their promotion a priority.

Recently in Los Angeles a wonderful thing happened and no one knew it. It was the fifth anniversary of the Blue Line. The whole rail system is under public attack, yet the Blue Line is carrying more people today than we projected it would be carrying. It is servicing our community; it has a constituency. But there was no celebration, only a small paragraph in my local paper that said it was the fifth year of the Blue Line. We could have had all kinds of officials there, owning a piece of the system. That is the kind of thing we need to do to bring the policy members on board.

In summary, we all have to be responsible because ultimately the public says, "I don't understand this." The public looks at us as if we are all on the same team, and we all better figure that out because it hurts us all if we fail to understand.

Media Relations

It is unconscionable to me that we are expected to know everything we are supposed to do, but somebody gets a pad of paper and a press badge and does not have to know anything. They can come out and destroy your career or even your agency. My favorite story in this regard is from my city council experience in a very small city. We had a reporter come, spend the whole evening, and write everything up. These local reporters are really important to us. At the end of the council meeting, he came up to me and said, "Could you just tell me what an ordinance is?" He sat through the whole evening without understanding what

he was covering. We know they want to sell ads and they have deadlines, but they also have a responsibility. They are a communication channel.

There may be ways that we can help cross train each other so that we can be responsive to their needs and they can become informed. Perhaps APTA or TRB could sponsor a workshop for the media. I personally believe the media are getting more and more irresponsible at reporting on our business and the news in general.

Partnerships and New Ways of Doing Business

Transit is, in and of itself, the provision of access and the ability to allow people to get to the services that they need. Are we mobility managers or are we access providers? I am not sure. My uncertainty stems from the fact that we are in the middle of a revolution in the way we do business. The revolution is telecommunications and information delivery, and I am not sure how it is going to turn out.

I do know that there will be a lot of people who will no longer need to go where they used to go. Transit will have to adjust to that and may have to provide access to different places than it has been providing to before. We, as transit officials, have to try and look ahead to figure out what all that means. Part of what it means is access to services that might not be in the traditional places. For example, Los Angeles MTA is involved in a project called the Blue Line Televillage. Fiber optics from the rail line have been strung up to a transit center to provide tele-medicine, tele-education, tele-distance learning, etc. With the fiber optics run along the transit line, MTA is providing an information highway. The Blue Line Televillage is located in Compton, a community that will not necessarily have a lot of private access to this new technology, so public access is being provided.

In several similar ways, transit centers can become the focal points for this new-age way of providing services. These are the kind of things transit managers and boards need to begin to look at. Transportation is changing, and it is our job to be responsive to these changes.

There are other partnerships that are more problematic, but which might also have application. When I was in Europe I went to the theater in Germany and on my theater ticket was a transit pass. It gave me a ride to and from that theater on transit. The ride must have been included in the price of my ticket. Of course, that

only works if the system runs to 11 o'clock at night or later. If you figure that in a downtown area you could work with all the hotels and the performing arts centers and try to establish those kinds of linkages. You would get a different kind of rider. You would have a safer system because a lot more people would be riding at different hours of the day.

We should also create partnerships with social service agencies. Maybe some food stamp users also ought to get a transit pass to go to get and to use their food stamps. I think Smart cards will be a tremendous help to instituting this type of system. In this case, we can give somebody something that is of value that the social service agency can control. The social service agency still feels they can control the use, the transit agency gets paid, and a real service is provided to someone in need.

Conclusion

I think that we live in very interesting times. I learned when I achieved public office that you never have any problems, you only have opportunities — and we do have opportunities! It is important for us to continue in this positive light. Transit agencies are very creative and are doing wonderful things. We need to get that message out. As long as we feel we are accomplishing something positive, we can handle a lot of these crises a lot better.