

Congratulations, You Are the Finance Director, Now What?

CSMFO Conference

January 9, 2019

Presented by:

T. Robert Hamud, Finance Director

City of Snoqualmie, Washington



Becoming a Finance Director-First Steps

- ▶ I was a finance and budget analyst for eight years before becoming the CFO of Cascade County Montana, including serving as Principal Financial Analyst in Santa Rosa.
- ▶ Did not do my full diligence in vetting the environment before accepting the position.
- ▶ Assessment of the operating environment before accepting a position is CRITICAL.
- ▶ What is the political and management environment, what is the financial status of the organization? CAN YOU MAKE IMPROVEMENTS?

Accepting the Right Position

- ▶ Do thorough research on the organization you are applying to.
- ▶ Assessment of the operating environment before accepting a position is CRITICAL.
- ▶ What is the political and management environment, what is the financial status of the organization? CAN YOU MAKE IMPROVEMENTS?
- ▶ Interview the organization after you are offered the position, ensure that you can succeed in the job.

The “right fit:” Snoqualmie WA



- ▶ Strong management and leadership, same City Administrator and Mayor for 15 years.
- ▶ Financial position of City is solid, little fiscal uncertainty. (not always possible)
- ▶ Full Service City, population +/- 18,000, \$50 million+ annual expenditures.
- ▶ Assured leeway by Mayor and Administrator to manage the department that way I envisioned.
- ▶ Beautiful place.

Beginning the Position-Environment

- ▶ Ended my position at my previous job one day, started the next day at a Council Goal-Setting Workshop.
- ▶ City was in the middle of a \$32 million bond issuance.
- ▶ 5 of 7 council members had not gone through a budget process before (City is on a biennial budget.)
- ▶ Known organizational challenges with Finance Department, lack of department growth while City exploded in population.

Planning for first Six-Twelve Months in Position

- ▶ Formulated realistic workplan and presented to City Administrator, do not offer “too much” or “too little.”
- ▶ Known major objectives for me(concurrently):
 - ▶ Finish Utility Bond Issuance.
 - ▶ Take leadership with Council Goals and Objectives Process including Staff Training.
 - ▶ Train both staff and council on biennial budget process and integrating new council objectives into the budget.(CRITICAL)

Assessing your Department

- ▶ Unless you have immediate vacancies and major obstacles inhibiting your department operations, take your time.
- ▶ Be inclusive, not exclusive: Get to know your staff, schedule regular staff meetings. **MOST IMPORTANTLY: TRUST YOUR STAFF**
- ▶ Gather from your staff and your assessment of what needs to be changes, operationally and organizationally, gauge how long will it take. Examples I found:
 - ▶ No dedicated budget analyst, no dedicated payroll manager.
 - ▶ No business license enforcement, no auditing of Sales Tax and UUT.
 - ▶ Too many manual processes taking up too much staff time.

Working with Other Department Heads, Organizational Leadership

- ▶ Ensure regular meetings with your supervisor.
- ▶ Set up “get to know you” meetings with all departments that you interact with.
- ▶ Get to know and understand the “culture” of your organization.
- ▶ Assess how the Finance Department is perceived by other departments and organizational employees.
- ▶ Where are items you can work with other departments to build trust, repertoire?

Working with Council/Governing Body

- ▶ Make sure you are introduced at a council/board meeting.
- ▶ Demonstrate that you are approachable and accessible to the council and to the public.
- ▶ Remember, you work for the taxpayers/ratepayers, and keep that focus in mind when you interact with Council.
- ▶ Yes, there is always at least one disrupter. Consult with management, other department heads on how to interact.
- ▶ Trial and error will occur as they are getting to know you and vice/versa.

Process Improvements

- ▶ Modify your workplan as needed as you become more familiar with your position and organization.
- ▶ Work on most immediate needs first (audit findings, budget deadlines, etc.)
- ▶ Solicit advice from your mentors and colleagues:
 - ▶ Utilize CSMFO listserv.
 - ▶ Have regular meetings and phone calls with peers.
- ▶ If you see something, say something!
 - ▶ Consult GFOA Code of Ethics.
 - ▶ Be familiar with state codes and city ordinances/organizational tenants that you operate under.

Questions?????

