

Top Ten Tips

To Ensure the Board and Manager Maintain a Strong and Effective Working Relationship

By Rick Dacri

- ✓ 1. Establish a clear, mutually agreed upon mission for the town and define values from which to operate. Take the time to discuss vision, strategy and policy. If your focus is simply surviving today, you'll likely stagnate. Effective boards understand the importance of strategic planning as a means to steer the organization.
- ✓ 2. Identify clear, annual goals and needs along with a time frame to complete. Develop a vision for your community. Dream big and move forward, one step at a time.
- ✓ 3. Establishment a clear division of responsibilities and accountabilities for the board and manager. Be specific about boundaries and control. Governance must be clearly delineated and understood. You can only have one town manager at a time.
- ✓ 4. Establish a forum for ongoing open communications and planning. Build open discussions into your calendar. Set up formal times to meet, both formally and informally with the manager to maintain focus and to nurture the relationship.
- ✓ 5. Establish methods to resolve conflict in a respectful, open and honest manner. Conflict will occur. Set up a process to address it, and, if that doesn't work, bring in outside professional help.
- ✓ 6. Establish priorities with the understanding that they must be reviewed on an ongoing basis since the town's challenges are ever changing. We live in a rapidly evolving environment. The board and manager must be nimble. The strategic planning process helps to anticipate the expected challenges, threats and opportunities before they emerge, but external and internal changes can occur that will change the picture.
- ✓ 7. Develop methods to establish trust and support, where everyone adheres to the plan and each of you "has each other's back." Trust is a critical element in any healthy relationship. Without it, things fail. Work to continuously build trust and get help when repair is required.
- ✓ 8. Develop and implement an effective annual performance evaluation system that is an ongoing process. There should be no surprises in annual evaluation if communication has been healthy, ongoing and honest. No business relationship can occur without clear accountability standards. A performance evaluation can be an excellent tool for this. Establish a formal process. Provide each board member an opportunity to contribute. Focus on the future and avoid creating a "report card" system. And encourage informal feedback throughout the year.
- ✓ 9. Develop a process to bring newly elected board members up-to-date on what has been established and agreed upon amongst the current board and manager. Board orientations bring new members up to speed quickly, allowing them to make an immediate contribution.
- ✓ 10. Create a board of selectmen self-assessment. This is a tool designed to help clarify roles and responsibilities, assess board performance, seek ways to improve and plan for the future. Outside professionals are often engaged to help boards develop such a mechanism.