



ONE LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

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The Journey for Horseshoe Bay started three years ago. At that time, the leadership team for the City of Horseshoe Bay committed to becoming a great city government, what we termed a High Performance Organization (HPO). We already are an above average city government. For those interested in how your city can raise the bar of its performance, this might be one good source to reference prior to starting your journey. Not all performance improvement journeys are created equal. Therefore, this information is not intended as a cookie cutter tool for all desired improvement initiatives. Instead, it is one humble organization's trip that might be illuminating for another organization possibly considering embarking on a similar journey.

The ultimate goal of our journey is to provide the highest level of (1) customer service, (2) products and services, and (3) financial performance to Horseshoe Bay's citizens and visitors—the stakeholders external to the organization. The answer to *"What is high performing for us?"*

There are two main pillars of HPO as we define it. One pillar is creating an engaged work culture based on shared values and behaviors. The second pillar is creating a common vision that ties directly to successful work performance. The leadership team chose very deliberately to address these two pillars in sequential order of culture change and then vision to performance improvement.



We subscribed to the quote attributed to the famous Peter Drucker, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." The right culture is key to unleashing the unrestricted efforts of an engaged workforce so that excellent work performance improvements can be achieved and thrive. Organizations often begin system and structure process improvement efforts by layering impressive performance improvement ideas on top of a poor culture. Successful performance improvement tools and concepts are based upon healthy and positive mindsets and behaviors—the underpinnings of employee engagement. This culture is also necessary to take on the heavy lifting needed to achieve sustained performance goals. The leadership team recognized this very early.

These two parts while representing different elements are intricately linked in our improvement plan. Neither workforce culture nor performance improvements alone can achieve our goal. Also, each has to be developed and nurtured as we move forward. Although the City of Horseshoe Bay had very good logic for starting with a focus on culture, it was and still is very aware that when it shifted focus to performance improvements it was not the end of culture improvements.

What does HPO mean in practice? HPO is a disciplined approach exercised at all levels of the organization to

expose the organization's current state in relation to its potential to improve performance. It focuses attention on clear understanding, implementation, and measurement of the City's mission, vision, values, strategies, programs, and outcomes. The best organizations live values that are evidenced by their culture that drives results. We strive for a mindset in individuals and in our culture of continuous improvement through greater employee engagement. This culture values performance always striving for even greater results.

We also like to say in our organization, "*HPO is a journey, not a destination.*" Just when we think we see the promised land of HPO, it will never fully materialize. Getting better never ends.

Every Wednesday at 10:00 a.m., the leadership team has a standing meeting to assess progress and discuss next steps. At the first meeting in 2016, the topic discussed was whether to become a great organization or be fine settling for just a good or above average organization. We decided we were not a high performing organization and that we wanted to become one. We have completed the culture phase of our plan (subject to ongoing activity) and are now engaging in the performance improvement phase. We have demonstrated success along the way. Our employees have embraced the culture change we sought. Employees led the effort to define our vision in concert with the plan. They are deeply engaged in the efforts to improve results.

We developed our plan and approach linking values, culture, and performance based on our understanding of the needs of Horseshoe Bay and what we found in our research that works. It has been gratifying to learn that what we are doing mirrors Craig Pedersen's research and conclusions (see preceding article) about what other high performing organizations and their leaders do. They too, align values, culture, and performance as we have done and continue to do. They build on the mutually beneficial impacts of supportive values and culture to assist their performance goals. They also recognize this is a journey that never ends but leads to better and better results.

I hope to be able to share more of our story as we progress in our journey to become a high performing organization. I encourage you to take on this challenge as we did. It is a difficult effort, but one full of emotional and tangible rewards.★