
Staying the Course in Challenging Times: Leading with Purpose, Resilience, and Authenticity

Zoe Dohnal, Town Manager, Town of Telluride and Jennifer Hoffman, City & County Manager, Broomfield

Local government isn't just being criticized. It's being rewritten by those who understand it the least.

For decades, city management has been built on the idea of quiet professionalism. We were taught that true leadership meant staying neutral, absorbing criticism, and taking the hits without response. We were conditioned to believe that professionalism meant enduring misinformation, allowing elected officials to make us scapegoats, and letting the public blame us for problems we had no power to fix.





**A professional is not just
someone who is knowledgeable
and competent...**

A professional is someone who uses that knowledge to defend what is real, what is right, and what is necessary.

Leadership is not passive. It does not watch misinformation spread in silence. It does not bow to those who weaponize ignorance. A true public servant does not simply endure, they engage.

The loudest voices are shaping public perception, dictating policy, and eroding trust in institutions that have held communities together for generations.

City management was never meant to be about self-preservation. It was meant to be about stewardship. And stewardship requires action. It requires advocacy. It requires leaders who are not just competent but courageous.


Brooks Williams

The future Emerging Managers must be must be bold, as we are and will continue to redefine what it means to lead.

Not with arrogance, but with authority.

Not with outrage, but with truth.

Not with passivity, but with purpose.



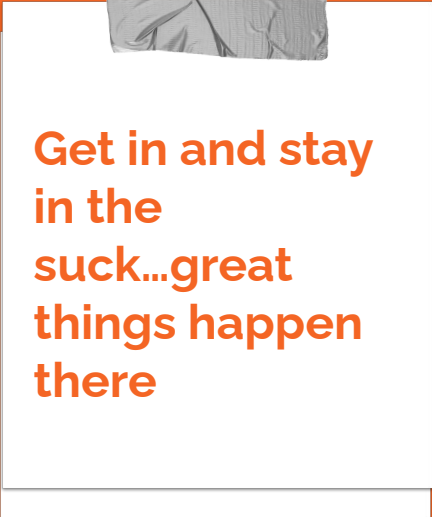
"Tomorrow I wake with second wind and strong because of pride. I know I fought with all my heart to keep the dream alive."

Staying the Course = Adaptive Leadership

Emphasize Value Over Flash: Focus on maximizing the value they derive from existing resources, including staff, tools, and budgets.

Adopt an outcomes-focused approach, measuring the success of new technologies not by how advanced they are but by how well they address real-community challenges.

Foster Innovation: Even with limited resources, adaptive leaders can encourage creativity within their teams. By fostering a culture of innovation, where new ideas are welcomed and tested, leaders can find unique solutions that provide better services without incurring additional costs.



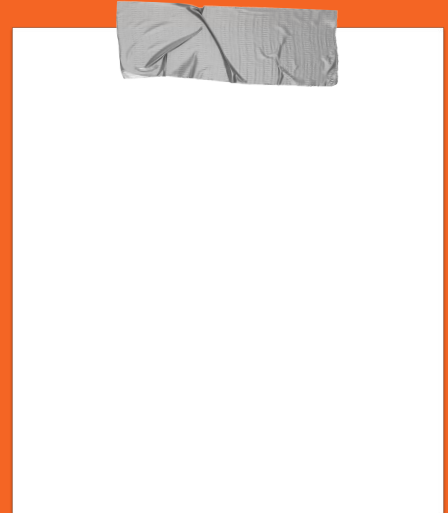
**Get in and stay
in the
suck...great
things happen
there**

Staying the Course = Adaptive Leadership

Streamline Processes:

Efficiency requires scrutinizing every workflow to eliminate redundancies. Automated workflows, document management systems, and data analytics tools can drastically improve operations. AI tools are free and readily available - saving time.

Invest in Cross-Training: Budget cuts often stretch staff resources. Cross-training team members to handle multiple functions increases flexibility and ensures continuity even with reduced personnel.





Many state and local government agencies will face difficult decisions as resources and funding become more constrained.

The terms “resourceful,” “innovative,” and “resilient” have long been part of government lexicon, but today they carry more weight.



Revisit your organization's core values and mission statement as a guide for decision-making.

When priorities shift and resources become scarce, your mission statement should serve as a touchstone to help you stay focused on what matters most.

What the team wants:

Are your programs still aligned with your purpose. A clear mission statement can help you determine which services are essential and where adjustments are possible.

Does your decision-making process reflect your core values? When facing difficult choices — whether it's budget reductions, staff realignment, or policy shifts —

Communication: In uncertain times, public confidence can waver. Reinforcing your mission through clear, consistent messaging can help stakeholders, employees, and the communities you serve stay informed and engaged.