INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD:
Leadership & Human Resource Challenges

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by
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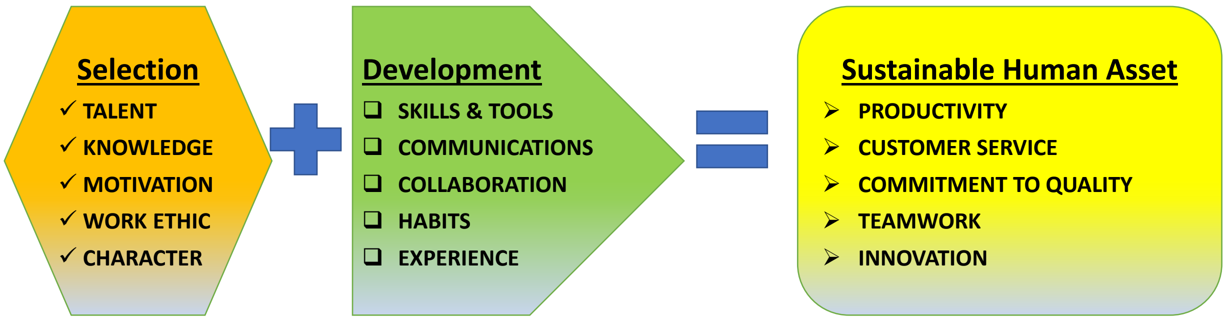
1

Jeff's Quick Bio

- **RDO Experience**
  - 29 years with a regional development organization: **Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments**, headquarters in Gallup, NM
    - 20 years as Deputy Director
    - 9 years as Executive Director
  - 29 years with NADO
    - 13 years on the NADO Board; 5 years as an Officer
    - President in 2015-16
  - 29 years with NewMARC
  - "x" years with SWREDA since inception
- **Early Background**
  - 8 years program development, grantsmanship and executive leadership in Education & Community Development on the Navajo Reservation
  - 2 years as a Teacher in Tanzania, East Africa
  - Bachelor's from Prescott College, 1973; Master's in Higher & Adult Education, Arizona State University, 1976
- **Family:**
  - Married to Helen, Navajo educator
  - Son Sean (wife Noelle) & granddaughter Stormy
  - Daughter Philana (husband Nick) & grandson River

2

Human Resources as our #1 Asset



3

Human Resource Development
Acquiring, Protecting & Polishing the Asset/1

- **Selecting**

  How do you know you've got the "right fit"? What do you place the highest priority on? How do you find out, and how do you know when you've got it?
  - Academic qualifications?
  - Diversity or depth of experience?
  - Social & cultural competency? Get along with others? Teamwork?
  - Personality? Maturity? Self-direction? Adaptability?
  - Work ethic? Public service motivation? Passion for the work? Follow-through?
  - Technical skills? Writing skills? Presentation skills?
  - Aptitude: Savvy? First-bounce quickness? Instinct? Problem-solving?

4

Human Resource Development *(continued)*:
Acquiring, Protecting & Polishing the Asset/2

- **Onboarding**

  How do you welcome, orient and integrate new personnel into the organization?

  - **Purpose:** What's our mission? Our values? Our priorities? Why do we exist? Who created us? What are we known for? What's our reputation? What have we done?
  - **People:**
    - Who are we? Who are the staff? Board? Stakeholders? Customers? Investors/Funders?
    - What's our organizational structure? What are the roles & responsibilities of all the key players? How will the new staffer fit in? Workspace?
  - **Place:** Where are we? What's the lay of the land? What are the key socioeconomics, geographics, demographics, politics?
  - **Process, Policy & Procedure:** What's the culture of the organization? How do we roll? What are the rules, guidelines and processes that govern how we do things?

5

Human Resource Development *(continued)*:
Acquiring, Protecting & Polishing the Asset/3

- **Managing**

  How do you direct, guide, interact with, support and evaluate your human assets?

  - **Direction:** What are the goals and expectations for each position? What will it take to achieve them? What are the metrics: How will progress & success be measured? What are the critical timelines? What's the supervisory structure? How are tasks & assignments delegated? How much autonomy does the staffer have?
  - **Communication:** What are the preferred communication styles & methods? How does communication happen between the staff and supervisor/manager? Among staff? Externally? What's the dividing line between appropriate and inappropriate communications? How do conflicts and problems get resolved? What is the balance of formal and informal communication?
  - **Support/Development:** What additional information or resources are needed to help staff be successful? Training? Degrees or Certifications? Career plan/potential for advancement? What feedback is needed to ensure clarity of direction, to enhance quality and efficiency, to provide encouragement? How do we deal with personal issues, barriers, outside factors? How sustain individual morale?
  - **Team-Building:** How do we build a "culture of collaboration"? What are the dynamics of a great team? What are potential dysfunctions to be avoided? How build trust among all members? What are the specific strategies and benchmarks for building and sustaining the staff team? For building collaborative teams with external partners? How do we sustain high morale on the part of individuals, teams and the staff community as a whole?
  - **Assessment:** How is feedback provided throughout the year? How frequent do staff and supervisors meet to check in about achievements, progress, issues, shortfalls? How do corrections get communicated and implemented? How are compliance issues handled (punctuality, policy & procedure, behavior, interactions with staff or clientele)? How is the tough stuff handled (behavior, interpersonal conflict, lack of performance, disruption/sabotage)? What's the timing, structure and process for both formative and summative evaluation of staff performance? What's the style: Top-down? Mutual/interactive?

6

HR Lessons from the Field/1

- **People First**. Without human energy that's bought-in, motivated and empowered, it's hard to build and sustain excellence in service to your members and your region.
  - **Personal connection:** Check in often, in-person whenever possible; show you care; pay attention to people's real lives, feelings, ups and downs; be there for them. Acknowledge! – it's what employees want the most, once basic employment security needs are met.
  - **Service Leadership:** Being of service to your constituency begins with being of service to your team. What do I bring every day that can help them be successful? Delegating and giving direction are important management functions, but leadership need not be "Top-Down" all the time.
  - **Nurture the Goose:** To keep the "'golden eggs" coming, make sure you don't kill the goose that's laying them; provide the resources and support needed for health and production. Use feedback, evaluation and assessment as opportunities for real communication, capacity-building and mutual understanding of goals, timelines and performance. Take the time for training and coaching, early and often.
  - **Listen:** As CEO, you don't have to always be the "doer" or the "fixer". Listening to your staff, and giving timely and empowering feedback, can help them generate – and "own" – their own solutions. Remember Stephen Covey's principle: "Seek first to understand; then to be understood."

7

HR Lessons from the Field/2

- **Mission/Vision Focus**. All growth and development happens in the light of Purpose. Without clear purpose for the work, we're just "putting in time." Make sure everyone understands, participates in and buys in to the organization's mission, vision and values.
  - **Team Process** – Take the time to include staff, as well as Board leadership, in articulating, modifying and defining organizational purpose, mission, vision and values. It may not work as well for the leader to just "deliver" these and expect everyone to buy in.
  - **Alignment** – Make sure to align project work, tasks and timelines with the over-arching mission and goals of the organization. Create feedback loops when you and staff check in with each other on how the work is progressing and aligning with mission, goals and values. Communicate your progress and alignment with your Board, members and constituents.
  - **Prioritize** – Run new opportunities, work requests and project ideas through the "Mission" gauntlet. Make sure external demands don't distract you from your core, pull you off course or undermine high-value work already underway. Avoid grant-chasing for the sake of the money.

8

HR Lessons from the Field/3

- **Communication**. This is the essential "fuel system" for running a planning & development organization. Failure in this arena can result in erosion of morale and functional breakdown across the board.
  - **Clear & Mutual**. Be clear, transparent and thorough in communications, particularly where the chance is higher for misunderstanding, or where tasks and issues are complex. Invite and give feedback to ensure alignment along the way.
  - **What's the Medium?** – In our high-tech digital age, all professions have transformed into IT-centered operations. When used wisely and well, IT can enhance performance in every arena. But it comes with the risk of accelerating the pace and density of workloads and weakening human relationships by substituting personal contact with digital messaging. Get clear on when in-person contact is the best medium. Make a conscious effort to communicate in person whenever that's called for.
  - **Beware Emails & Texts** – Never use email or text messaging – whether internal or external – as the first option for resolving conflicts, communicating negative messages or fixing interpersonal problems. Never message "adversely" about others in your electronic or written communications.
  - **Courtesy & Consideration** – Be careful not to jump to conclusions, and be slow to judgment; acknowledge that different folks can have different perspectives on issues, and take that into account in your responses; remember Stephen Covey's advice: "Honor those present and not present."

9

HR Lessons from the Field/4

- **Know Your Stuff**. The HR field is evolving all the time – in the continuous emergence of new case law and regulations, as well as in the literature on best practices. It's the Executive Director's responsibility to be on top of the field, even if there are others in the organization dealing with day-to-day HR management.
  - **Policies & Procedures** – Pay attention to your HR policies & procedures, make them compliant, timely and understandable, and at the same time practical and implementable; and update them periodically. Keep it simple where possible, but cover the bases, and don't let "the tail wag the dog." Tap HR expertise and then customize from there.
  - **Liabilities** – In particular, it's important to know all the ways you can get in trouble with law and regulation, and to ensure that you have policies, procedures and protections in place that minimize potential adverse consequences. Retain legal assistance with expertise in employment law – to review & advise on policy and when tricky problems arise. Keep your "side-boards" clear and clean, so that legal issues don't come back to bite you.
  - **Stay Current** – Schedule time to reflect on your HR work, read up on new developments in the field, and make proactive plans to communicate with staff in alignment with HR principles. Make sure your general HR policies are integrated with your payroll policies, as payroll is a potential arena for mistakes and liability.

10

HR Lessons from the Field/5

- **Embrace and resolve conflict.** Too often we avoid the "tough stuff," the difficult communication, the highly-charged issues, the "unsolvable" interpersonal problems. But no, such things don't usually just work themselves out! Use conflict as an opportunity for positive growth for yourself and the organization.
  - **Engage Now** – Some problems or complaints have an easy solution and need a light touch – but they still need to be addressed timely and effectively. Others reflect urgent needs, major conflicts, high emotions and/or serious misbehavior in the workplace. These too must be addressed immediately – even if the problem-solving process will take awhile.
  - **Listen & Talk First** – Don't use written communication as first resort. Speak directly with those involved, get their perspectives and suggestions, and proceed from there to gather all pertinent information, refer to appropriate policy and lay out an effective course of action. Require written documentation and commit your own conclusions to writing only after direct in-person communications have been initiated.
  - **Fair & Balanced** – Be sure to take multiple stories and perspectives into account, maintain your "People First" orientation but balance it with the needs of the organization, strive to protect the integrity and reputation of both the organization and the people involved, and apply accountability and discipline judiciously and in proportion to the nature and causes of the problem. Refer to and ensure alignment with Policy.
  - **Stay in Touch** – Keep all involved parties well informed of how the issue is being handled and what, if any, conclusions have been reached or actions taken. Where response by others is required, monitor closely and make sure these responses get done.

11

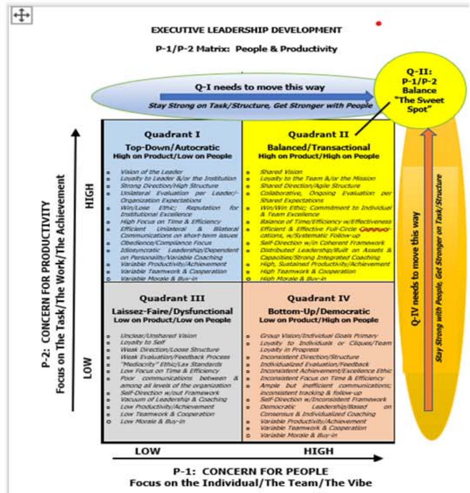
Leadership Succession & Transition/1

- **You think you "know everything" … but you don't!**
  - You've taken direction and helped plan, communicate, supervise and implement, but you haven't been the top decision-maker.
  - The stress is different. You have more personal leeway and discretion, but you also have more accountability and responsibility. If it goes down, "it's on me."
  - The "view" is different from the top, and now folks are depending on you to put it together, keep it together, and drive it forward. Don't "assume" you know all the ropes, and don't be passive about engaging structure and process. Come at it as a "new job": review all facets with a critical eye, ask the tough questions, affirm what's working, lay out plans to change what needs improving. Set your own personal development plan, with goals to demonstrate and improve your leadership over time.
  - Beware the "*Peter Principle*" (i.e., that people in a hierarchy tend to rise to their level of incompetence). It's not automatic that a master teacher will become a good principal, that a master planner will become a good CEO, that a technical expert will become a good manager, that a great innovator will become a good entrepreneur. It's also not automatic that your most competent in-house program manager or supervisor will be best suited to the Executive Director role.
- **No matter what you do, things will be different.**
  - Your leadership personality is different, and so everyone around you will be adjusting to different communication styles, use of authority, structure and process, etc. It may be hard for them to make the transition from a "colleague" to a "boss" relationship.
  - Leadership makes a difference. The organization will come to reflect both your strengths and your weaknesses – and to a heightened degree!

12

Leadership Succession & Transition/2

- **Know Your Style & Seek Balance.**
  - This matrix shows "Concern for Productivity" on the y-axis and "Concern for People" on the x-axis. Generally, the extremes are to be avoided along both of these axes.
  - Leaders tend to fall into one of four Style quadrants:
    - **Quadrant I** (High on Product/Low on People) represents a "Top-Down/Autocratic" style; a "control" tendency.
    - **Quadrant II** (High on Product/High on People) reflects a "Balanced/Transactional" style; the preferred "sweet spot."
    - **Quadrant III** (Low on Product/Low on People) represents a "Laissez-Faire/Dysfunctional" style; would need serious remediation.
    - **Quadrant IV** (Low on Product/High on People) represents a "Bottom-Up/Democratic" style; a "permissive" tendency.
  - Avoiding Quadrant III altogether, leaders in Quadrant I are encouraged to moved "to the right" toward Quadrant II, and leaders in Quadrant IV are encouraged to move "up" toward Quadrant II.
  - Quadrant I and Quadrant IV leaders may find a lot of conflict in their relationship, but they can also complement & balance each other out.



Leadership Succession & Transition/3

- **Change is Hard**
  - You have some things you've been chomping at the bit to do … but sometimes, you'll find it's not so easy just to "do something new" or to change practices or structures you thought needed an uplift. Sometimes the leader needs to "be the change" before he/she can expect others to follow.
  - You still have to "manage the process." Just telling others what you want doesn't always get it done! And change takes time.
- **Listen First**
  - The temptation will be to jump on your horse and ride to the front of the herd. After all, isn't that what leaders do? But it might work better if you just sit down with your staff – one-on-one, as well as together – and listen to their ideas. Maybe they've been "chomping at the bit," too! And are they going to feel that you value them as professionals and as "co-owners" of the enterprise?
  - Get in touch with your Board leadership and other stakeholders, partners and funders, and hear what they have to say about your organization. Listen to their perceptions, expectations and suggestions. Build new relationships with them in your new role. Get them on your team in leading the organization into the future. Buy-in and support will be stronger if your plans and goals reflect inspiration from and alignment with these many conversations.
  - Strategic Planning sessions – or similar workshops organized around local and regional development needs and priorities – can be very helpful, but they need to be carefully designed to elicit input and consensus from those who have a stake in – as well as sound knowledge of the mission and work of – the organization. General plans, strategies and priorities adopted by the Board need to then be broken down by staff into specific action plans, timelines, resource development and other tasks.

Leadership Succession & Transition/5

- **RDOs are Unique; Honor the Difference & Promote the Value**
  - **Demonstrate Value & Build the Brand:**
    - **Add Value** –by demonstrated service and by being out in front of the change curve;
      - Build your reputation by being a "Go To" resource that adds value to the work of your members and constituents. Don't be a burden or "added work." How do they feel when your team walks through the door?
      - Celebrate, lift up and promote others, and let your actions and the results you achieve be your signature.
      - Be a transformer, not a check-box. Data is everywhere, and Internet users can find information from many sources. Become known for interpreting, transforming and applying data in ways that add new value for your customers. Be a Master Projecteer: a group that can help your constituents take ideas from seed-stage through vetting, design, development, financing, implementation and asset management.
    - **Presence** –by "being there" when you're needed to navigate, advise, facilitate, support and (sometimes) lead the way forward;
    - **The Message** –by a differentiating logo-phrase; and
    - **The Look** –by creating visual and symbolic coherence across your products, documents and communications

Good Luck … and Power On!

15