Saying “No” When Saying “No” Isn’t Easy -- webinar

1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Pacific Time, Thursday, September 11, 2014

Cal-ICMA Coaching Program in partnership with ICMA State Association Coaching Partners: Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, and Wisconsin

*** Advance registration required for this no-charge webinar:
https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/720512633

Webinar topics:
1. What are difficult situations when local government professionals need to take a stand in ways that may not be popular?
2. How can you position yourself and the issues to be heard and respected?
3. What can you do when your response isn’t accepted?

Presenters:
* Lynda Humble, Interim City Manager, Duncanville, TX
* Greg Larson, Town Manager, Los Gatos, CA
* Charlene Stevens, City Administrator, Willmar, MN

Audience: all employees

1. Register in advance for the webinar:
There is no charge for participating in the webinars, but each requires advance registration.
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https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/720512633

2. Connect with the webinar and audio:
Use your logon information from the email confirmation you receive via email from GoToWebinar. We recommend the telephone option dial-in number provided by GoToWebinar for sound quality. Depending upon your internet connection, VOIP option for audio (computer speakers) can have delays or sound quality issues.

3. Ask questions:
You may submit questions anonymously via email to Cal-ICMA@DonMaruska.com in advance or via the webinar during the panel discussion. As moderator for the session, Don Maruska will pose the questions.

4. Presenters’ presentation materials: We post these with the Agenda at “Agendas & Archives” tab of www.cal-icma.org/coaching. A PDF of the presentation materials will be available at least 2 hours before the webinar.

After a webinar occurs, a digital recording along with a PDF of the presentation materials and results of the polling questions will be available after 24 hours at the "Agendas & Archives” tab of www.cal-icma.org/coaching.
Post-Webinar Group Discussions

Many agencies are organizing groups to participate in the webinars (live or recorded) and discuss the topics among themselves after the webinars. Some are summarizing their discussions and distributing them to managers throughout their organizations. Use the Coaching Program as an effective way to enhance professional development in your agency. Here are some discussion starters for this session.

a. What are some tough issues and decisions our agency is facing where people will not want to hear "no"?
b. What approaches can we use to say "No" nicely?
c. How can we use resources to encourage a culture of constructive candor?

MORE RESOURCES--See the "Coaching Corner" at www.cal-icma.org/coaching for valuable resources to boost your career. Sign up for the complimentary email list to keep informed of the details for future Cal-ICMA sessions and other resources at www.cal-icma.org/coachingList. You may register for each of the remaining webinars with the links at http://icma.org/en/ca/newsroom/highlights/Article/104065/CalICMA_Coaching_Webinar_Schedule

We appreciate the sponsors for the Cal-ICMA Coaching Program. They include:

Platinum Sponsors: ICMA and CA Communities Joint Powers Authority

Gold Sponsors: California City Management Foundation

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Enjoy the resources and support to thrive in local government.

Don Maruska, MBA, JD, Master Certified Coach
Director, Cal-ICMA Coaching Program
Author of “Take Charge of Your Talent” www.TakeChargeofYourTalent.com
Lynda Humble, Interim City Manager, Duncanville, TX

Lynda embodies a personal philosophy that government service is a noble profession, providing an opportunity for employees at every level to make a difference in the quality of life for those served on a daily basis. She believes that customer service is not only important in the private sector, but in order for government to thrive, it is crucial to recognize taxpayers as ‘customers’ who must perceive that they receive value for their tax dollars. Operating from an abundance mindset and truly believing that people choose to work for local government because they want to serve, Lynda has repeatedly created this reality through the development of customer-centered organizations.

Lynda is a passionate motivator with a proven track record of fostering employee development and facilitating the emergence of hidden talents by focusing on the 4 P’s – People, Performance, Process and Passion. As the Managing Member of Lynda Humble Consulting, LLC, she provides a unique approach to organizational transformation because no two cities are alike. Offering 25+ years’ experience in the public sector, having worked for several DFW Metroplex cities in various roles including as City Manager, Lynda has a proven record of creating transformational change with her extensive knowledge and broad based understanding of the inter-workings of all aspects of local government organizations and systems.

Lynda Humble: the facts.
MBA Degree from Amberton University
Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration (Accounting) from Northeast Louisiana University
Economic Development Institute at the University of Oklahoma
Certified Public Manager from the University of Texas at Arlington
Managing Member, Lynda Humble Consulting, LLC, 2013-Present
Interim City Manager, City of Duncanville, Texas, December 2013 to present
City Manager, City of Rowlett, Texas, 2009-2013
Assistant City Manager, City of Desoto, Texas, 2002-2009
Managing Director of Management Services, City of Desoto, Texas, 1996-2002
Managing Director of Administrative Services, City of Desoto, Texas, 1995-1996
Director of Economic Development, City of Cedar Hill, Texas – 1994-1995
Business Development Manager, City of Garland, Texas, 1990-1994

Greg Larson, Town Manager, Los Gatos, CA

Greg Larson has spent most of his career in Silicon Valley and local government, serving as City Manager, Budget Director, Environmental Services Director and
Planning Director for communities as diverse as Los Gatos, San Jose, Scottsdale, Milpitas and Santa Cruz. Greg lives in Santa Cruz with his wife and two young children.

He was also President/CEO of United Way Silicon Valley and Chief of Staff and campaign Manager for former State Controller Steve Westly, who was co-student body president with Larson at Stanford University.

He previously served on the Advisory Board for Women of Silicon Valley and as a professional facilitator for the Santa Cruz Commission on the Prevention of Violence Against Women.

Larson has chaired the Santa Clara County City Managers Association and serves on the boards of both Cal-ICMA, his professional association, and the City Managers Department for the League of California Cities.

Charlene Stevens, City Administrator, Willmar, MN

Charlene Stevens has almost twenty years of experience in local government and nonprofit management. Since August of 2011, she has served as City Administrator for Willmar, Minnesota – a regional center of 19,651 located in west central Minnesota.

Prior to joining the City of Willmar, Charlene spent five years in Sedgwick County, Kansas as Assistant County Manager. One of her noted accomplishments in Sedgwick County was helping to start a mentoring and networking group for women in local government. Charlene also spent ten years in the Philadelphia Metropolitan area working for two separate suburban communities.

Charlene served on the ICMA (International City/County Managers’ Association) Executive Board from 2003 to 2006 and has since served on various task forces and special committees for ICMA. Ms. Stevens was recently elected to a term on the League of Minnesota Cities Board of Directors.

Charlene has a BA in International Relations from Pomona College and Masters in Public Administration from the University of Kansas.

Charlene and her husband, Dave Paulsen, are kept very busy with three young sons and she enjoys running, cycling and yoga.
Saying “No” When “No” Doesn’t Seem Like an Option

Coaching Program Webinar, September 11, 2014
Coaching Program: 11th year
Preparing the Next Generation Committee

Platinum Sponsors: ICMA
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Overview of Session

1. What are difficult situations when local government professionals need to take a stand in ways that may not be popular?
2. How can you position yourself and the issues to be heard and respected?
3. What can you do when your response isn’t accepted?

Greg Larson, Town Manager, Los Gatos, CA
Charlene Stevens, City Administrator, Willmar, MN
Lynda Humble, Interim City Manager, Duncanville, TX

Don Maruska, Director, Cal-ICMA Coaching Program

…and polls and questions along the way.
Polling Question #1

How many people are participating at your location?
Freedom to Think
Courage to Act

Saying No When Saying No is Hard

Greg Larson, Town Manager, Los Gatos, CA
September 11, 2014
Presentation Overview

• Introduction

• Academic Framework - Leadership on the Line

• Personal Framework – Focus on Ethics

• Tips and Take-Aways
Leadership On The Line: Freedom & Courage, Creativity & Change
An Academic Framework
Harvard Faculty

- Leading is dangerous
- Provides examples, not a “How-to”
- Guiding principles
- Perspective most important
Leadership on the Line

- **Technical Solutions**
  - The problems we deal with every day
  - The answer is generally known or discoverable
  - Most common role of managers and experts

- **Adaptive Challenges**
  - The “real” problems; *We don’t know the answers*
  - Usually a sense of loss, conflicting values & choices
  - Best to broaden the scope, involve others
Inherently Tough Issues

• Internal Challenges (e.g., personnel, labor, budget)
• External Demands and Conflicts
• Political Requests and Conflicts

• Conflicting:
  – Information
  – Perspectives
  – Interests
  – Values
Polling Question #2

What kinds of issues are tough in your agency?
Chapter 3 – “Get on The Balcony”

- Distinguish Technical from Adaptive
- Find Out Where People Are At
- Listen to the Song Beneath the Words
Chapter 4 – “Think Politically”

- Find Partners
- Keep the Opposition Close
- Acknowledge Their Loss
- Accept Casualties
Chapter 5 – “Orchestrate the Conflict”

• Create a Holding Environment

• Control the Temperature

• Pace the Work

• Show Them the Future
Chapter 7 – “Hold Steady”

• Take the Heat

• Let the Issues Ripen

• Focus Attention on the Issue
ICMA Code of Ethics

• Tenet 2 - Affirm the dignity and worth of the services rendered by government and maintain a... deep sense of social responsibility as a trusted public servant.

• Tenet 3 - Be dedicated to the highest ideals of honor and integrity in all public and personal relationships...

• Tenet 4 - Recognize that the chief function of local government at all times is to serve the best interests of all people.

• Tenet 10 - Resist any encroachment on professional responsibilities... and handle each problem without discrimination on the basis of principle and justice.

• Tenet 11 - Handle all matters of personnel on the basis of merit so that fairness and impartiality govern a member's decisions...

• Tenet 12 - Seek no favor; believe that personal aggrandizement or profit secured by confidential information or by misuse of public time is dishonest.
Polling Question #3

Does your agency employ the ICMA Code of Ethics to help resolve tough issues?
Courage is the Foundation

Courage is the price that Life exacts for granting peace. The soul that knows it not knows no release from little things.

Amelia Earhart *Courage* (1927)

Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the point of highest reality.

C.S. Lewis *The Unquiet Grave* (1944)

Courage is not a virtue or value among other personal values like love or fidelity. It is the foundation that underlies and gives reality to all other virtues and personal values.

Rollo May *The Courage to Create* (1975)
Tips and Take-Aways

• Decide your behavior in advance
  – Easier to be courageous in the abstract

• Even better, have it in writing
  – Third party references de-personalize the issue

• Elevate the discussion, raise the vision

• Ask questions, engage, involve
  – No better way to minimize power dynamics
Saying “No” when “No” Does Not Seem Like an Option

September 11, 2014
Charlene R. Stevens
Willmar City Administrator
What factors Determine if a Decision will be Unpopular?

• Politics
• Dysfunction on the Council or within the Community
• Controversial matters – land development, tax increases, service changes, gun ranges!
• Interest groups
• Uncertainty of the outcome
• Change
Positioning Yourself to be Heard

• Build Credibility and Relationships before you need them.
• Remember that no cares what you know until they know you care.
• Be very well prepared, drill down.
• Analyze the risk (personal and professional).
• Recognize your own emotions and harness them.
Polling Question #4

Which of the following would you like to do more of in order to be heard effectively?
My experience - Closing the Gun Range

• City owned Historic Auditorium had operated for 30+ years with a gun range in the basement.
• Other uses in the Auditorium included children’s playground, basketball, various community events.
• During a routine inspection, learned that an air handler in the range was not functioning.
• Initial decision to temporarily close the range and conduct lead dust testing.
  • Contacted Rifle Club in advance
  • Informed Council
  • Assumed it would be short term
Closing the Range – it gets worse.

• Testing showed us air handling had not functioned properly for sometime and likely was never correctly designed.
• Test results were very clear.
• City lacked a proper hazardous materials disposal permit.
• Realized City staff had not exercised oversight on the building and users.
How was I heard?

• Not well, initially...
  • Rifle and Pistol Club worked to discredit lead testing and lead results.
  • Rifle and Pistol Club claimed City staff was anti-gun, filled the Council Chambers and threatened legal action.
  • Council questioned if we (staff) could really close the range.
  • Lobbied by individual members of Council to just let it go, it wasn’t harming anyone, had operated for 30 years with no complaints, etc.
What steps did I take?

• Met with Rifle and Pistol Club leadership (repeatedly).
• Enlisted allies in the cause (City’s Insurer, City Attorney)
• Dug into the details with my staff
  • In this case a little micro-managing was warranted.
• Crafted clear messages:
  • ”handled no differently than if I had learned that the chlorination system at the City’s Aquatic Center had failed.”
  • “priority to clean the building and restore the entire building to public use.”
  • “If the range was to be re-opened, it has to operate in a way that does not jeopardize the rest of the building.”
Additional Steps

• Made a change in who would lead the project at the staff level.
• Used my credibility in the business community, with media to get the message across.
• Re-assessed regularly.
• Got the full picture of damage and restoration and gave Council decisions points.
• Once council made decision to re-open range at any cost, identified funds available. (Cost estimated at $500,000).
• Started developing new operational procedures (still in progress).
What Worked?

• Using credibility I had in the community.
• Assessing the personal and professional risks.
  • Unwilling to operate a facility, I knew was a hazard.
• Staying on message with Council – even those who were lobbying and bullying.
• Not taking the “anti-gun” bait. Issue was the building’s condition, not the usage or right of usage.
• Changing the staff.
• Enlisting the City’s insurer.
• Acting quickly on follow up testing, engaging architects, etc.
Key Takeaways

• Don’t allow others to discredit you.
• Keep perspective and be willing to reassess situations and change.
• Dig in and become an expert on the subject. Know what your staff is doing.
• Be firm and clear on legal, ethical and organizational consequences.
• Have confidence in your skills, abilities and knowledge.
• Have confidence in your career.
• Stay calm and harness your emotions.
• Get advice.
Saying “No” When “No” Isn’t Easy
Webinar

Lynda K. Humble
Interim City Manager
City of Duncanville, TX
Common themes with difficult situations requiring an unpopular stand

**What is the “Principle of the Matter?”**

Why is this a problem to start with?

- What is the mission of your organization?
- What are the values of your organization?
- What are the laws, rules, and/or policies governing this issue?
Common themes with difficult situations requiring an unpopular stand

*Risk mitigation* is defined as taking steps to reduce adverse effects.
Common themes with difficult situations requiring an unpopular stand

WHO IS THE CUSTOMER?

Answer:
It isn’t always the person standing in front of us, emailing us or calling us on the phone!
Common themes with difficult situations requiring an unpopular stand

WHAT IS A REALISTIC OUTCOME?

Happy

Fair yet consistent
Common themes with difficult situations requiring an unpopular stand

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO “FRAME THE ISSUE?”

- Develop your message
- Keep it “Bumper Sticker Simple”
- Practice! Practice! Practice!
- Re-evaluate complex topics constantly
Polling Question #5

Where would additional attention help you “frame the issues” you face?
Faith-Based Rehab Facility Located on Residential Street

- Perceived Security Threat – “Why are those people on my street? They don’t belong here.” – Make them go away....

- Federal Fair Housing Act – Illegal to discriminate against drug and alcohol rehabilitation in neighborhoods – They have a right to be there....
Faith-Based Rehab Facility Located on Residential Street

HOW CAN YOU POSITION YOURSELF AND THE ISSUES TO BE HEARD AND RESPECTED?

• Framed Issue for the Community:
  – Held meeting with neighborhood to educate them about the federal fair housing laws and local zoning ordinances (Making them go away wasn’t an option)
  – Explained that the rehab facility had the right to be there and how the City was willing to go to Court to protect our residents based on limits of the law because they were our customers. (Rehab Facility had a right to be there with limits)
Faith-Based Rehab Facility Located on Residential Street

HOW CAN YOU POSITION YOURSELF AND THE ISSUES TO BE HEARD AND RESPECTED?

• **Mitigation of Risk vs. Eradication of Risk:**
  – Filed suit in Texas State Court using the building code as basis to limit number of occupants
  – Initial inspection found 30+ occupants on 1 ½ acres
  – Building Code changes construction requirements as occupancy load increases
  – Goal: Limit occupancy to 9 plus 2 supervisors for a total of 11 occupants in residential area
  – Rehab Facility sued City in Federal Court claiming protection under Federal Fair Housing Act
Faith-Based Rehab Facility Located on Residential Street

HOW CAN YOU POSITION YOURSELF AND THE ISSUES TO BE HEARD AND RESPECTED?

• **What is the “Principle of this Matter?”**
  – City Attorney was NOT optimistic that the City would win.
  – Filed suit anyway because our customer’s personal security and peace of mind was at risk. *Doing nothing wasn’t an option for the City.*
  – Federal Judge ruled in favor of City – Rehab Facility stayed with limits - 11 occupants maximum.
  – No one was happy because neither side got what they wanted, but most were satisfied with the outcome given the principle of the matter and the laws regulating the situation.
What can you do when your response isn’t accepted?

Once you Frame your Issue...

- Write it down (Press Release, Council Report, Webpage, etc.)
- Some People will actually want to read it AND hear it!
- Some don’t let facts get in the way of their beliefs!
- Do the Right Thing Anyway!!!
What can you do when your response isn’t accepted?

Would you rather:

Be Liked?

Be Right?

"You have enemies? Good... That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life...

If you are doing your job, someone is guaranteed not to like it!"
More Resources and Feedback

Go to “Agenda & Archives” tab at web site for a recording of this webinar (available in 24 hours) and other professional development resources.

www.cal-icma.org/coaching

Please complete the follow up survey.
Post-Webinar Discussion Questions

a. What are some tough issues and decisions our agency is facing where people will not want to hear "no"?

b. What approaches can we use to say "No" nicely?

c. How can we use resources to encourage a culture of constructive candor?
Polling Question #6

How was the webinar of value for you and your agency?
Upcoming webinars

“Leading by Example – developing your leadership values and narrative”
1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Pacific Time, Wednesday, October 15, 2014
register now:
https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/314112744

“Storytelling to Promote Positive Solutions”
1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Pacific Time, Wednesday, October 29, 2014
register now:
https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/793974784
See us at the ICMA Conference

“ICMA Coaching Program -- Best Practices and Opportunities Ahead”

11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Room 218AB

Monday, September 15, 2014
Contacts for Today’s Session

Greg Larson, Town Manager, Los Gatos, CA, Glarson@losgatosca.gov
Charlene Stevens, City Administrator, Willmar, MN, cstevens@willmarmn.gov
Lynda Humble, Interim City Manager, Duncanville, TX, lyndahumblellc@gmail.com

Don Maruska, Director, Cal-ICMA Coaching Program Cal-ICMA@DonMaruska.com

A PDF of the PPT, results from polling questions, and a video recording will be available in 24 hours. Go to www.cal-icma.org/coaching and click on “Agenda & Archives” tab.
Success is often built on a reflexive habit of saying “yes” to opportunities that come our way. We’re hungry for any chance to prove ourselves, and when we’re presented with one, we take it, even—or especially—if it seems daunting. (A lesson I learned years ago was to say yes to opportunities that made me feel nervous because the anxiety was a sign that I’d learn something useful.) We may also tend to say “yes” out of a fear that turning down an opportunity even once sends a message that we’re not interested, and we’ll stop getting additional chances in the future.

But success tends to attract bigger and better opportunities. As we succeed, a key challenge becomes prioritizing the many opportunities that present themselves. We often try to do this without saying “no” definitively—we still want to keep our options open. Inevitably, though, this results in a lack of clarity and overcommitment, and we wind up disappointing people, exhausting ourselves, or simply failing. To prevent this we need to learn to say “no” gracefully but firmly, maintaining the relationship while making it clear that this is one opportunity we’re choosing not to pursue. And success in this effort is founded on the ability to manage the emotions that come up when we close a door or extinguish an option.

These emotions can be subtle: a twinge of regret, a trace of anxiety, a faint voice that whispers, “Are you sure you want to turn this down?” We often respond reflexively to such emotions, driven to eliminate the discomfort they evoke. So we say “yes” and feel some relief—until later, when we realize the costs of the commitment we’ve now made. A critical step in managing these emotions is training ourselves to resist that initial reflexive response; I often describe this to clients and students as “becoming more comfortable with discomfort.” We notice the discomfort provoked by the possibility of saying “no,” and yet we can tolerate it. We’re not compelled to take action to eliminate it.

There’s no magic formula for saying “no” more effectively, but here are three steps that can help:

1. **Slow down.** Feelings of anxiety generated by the possibility of saying “no” can escalate into a full-blown threat response, an emotional state in which we have diminished capacity to process information and consider options. Slowing down the pace of an interaction or a decision-making process can allow us to catch up and make the choice that’s right for us, not merely the choice that alleviates our anxiety in the moment.

2. **Recognize our emotional cues.** We experience many emotions before we recognize them in conscious awareness, but feelings often have physiological markers that can help us identify and name the emotion sooner. Once we’re aware of an emotion, we can take action to influence how we respond. What do we feel—physically—when we consider saying “no”?

3. **Practice.** Saying “no” is like any other interpersonal skill—it feels clumsy and awkward at first, and we improve only with repeated effort.

*Many of my executive coaching clients and MBA students at Stanford are going through a transition that involves a step up to the next level in some way. They’re on the cusp of a big promotion, or they’ve launched a startup, or their company just hit some major milestone. Very few, if any, of these people would say that they’ve “made it”; they’re still overcoming challenges in pursuit of ambitious goals. And yet their current success has created a meaningful inflection point in their careers; things are going to be different from now on. The nature of this difference varies greatly from one person to another, but I see a set of common themes that I think of as “the problems of success.” I’ll be writing about these issues in a series of posts, of which this is the first.*
Polling Results from “Saying ‘No’ When ‘No’ Doesn’t Seem Like an Option” – webinar  
September 11, 2014  
416 locations; 1,104 estimated participants in live audience

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many people are listening on your line?</td>
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<tr>
<td>72% 1 – just myself</td>
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<td>17% 2-5</td>
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<td>8% 6-10</td>
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<td>3% 11-20</td>
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<td>1% 21 or more -- please send number using Question on webinar</td>
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<td>What kinds of issues are tough in your agency?</td>
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<td>70% personnel or labor issues</td>
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<td>55% pressures from elected officials</td>
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<td>61% strong-willed community members trying to advantage position</td>
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<td>40% ethical challenges (fairness, influence, etc.)</td>
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<td>8% other (send via “Question”)</td>
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<td>Does your agency employ the ICMA Code of Ethics to help resolve tough issues?</td>
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<td>37% not aware of Code</td>
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<td>46% aware of Code, but not discussed explicitly</td>
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<td>15% Code is part of our training, culture, and practice</td>
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<td>3% other (send via “Question”)</td>
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<td>Which of the following would you like to do more of in order to be heard more effectively?</td>
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<td>65% build credibility and relationships before I need them</td>
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<td>40% demonstrate to people that I care</td>
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<td>51% be very well prepared, drill down</td>
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<td>43% analyze the risk (personal, professional)</td>
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<td>53% recognize my emotions and harness them</td>
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<td>Where would additional attention help you “frame the issues” you face?</td>
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<td>69% develop my message</td>
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<td>64% keep it “bumper sticker simple”</td>
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<td>36% practice practice practice!</td>
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<td>50% re-evaluate complex topics constantly</td>
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<td>2% other (send via “Question”)</td>
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<td>How was this webinar of value to you?</td>
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<td>49% understanding difficult situations when need to take a stand</td>
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<td>62% how to position myself and the issues to be effective</td>
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<td>62% what to do when point of view isn’t accepted</td>
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<td>56% resources to think through and resolve these issues</td>
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<td>2% other (send via “Question” in webinar)</td>
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