



*Elizabeth H.*

# Governing Bodies and the Outlier Syndrome

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Those who have been working with municipalities for an extended period have observed a phenomenon that occurs at the governing body level. Let's call this phenomenon the Outlier Syndrome.

The Outlier is the "lone wolf" who sits on a school board or a city council and steadfastly refuses to act like a member of the team. Even while isolating himself or herself as the only person on the losing side of just about every vote, the Outlier manages to create havoc with the rest of the body. The Outlier may be obstreperous and obstructionist. The Outlier may refuse to recognize and respect the norms that guide the rest of the body's conduct. The Outlier may position himself or herself as the only "ethical" or "transparent" member of the body. The Outlier's every statement and action may be aimed at preserving that self-assumed distinction rather than making any concrete achievements. Sometimes, a board is unfortunate enough to have more than one Outlier.

Have you ever experienced the Outlier Syndrome in action? It can be called a syndrome because of the recognizable features or symptoms that seem to fester whenever an Outlier sits on a governing body. Do you have an Outlier on your governing body?

Could you possibly be an Outlier? Should the Outlier Syndrome be viewed as an affliction or malady? And if so, what can be done? We'll explore these questions in more detail below.

## **Power, Goals and the Outlier**

To understand the Outlier's impact on a governing body, let's start with the idea that elected officials can only act as part of a body — a collaborative decision-making body. You can search throughout the laws governing statutory municipalities, or just about any home rule charter, and you'll likely find no powers or duties that are to be exercised by a singular elected official — other than the mayor, who may have certain defined responsibilities. This means that, as elected officials, the only way you can get anything accomplished is to have a majority of the governing body on your side.

It's likely that each elected official has an individual list of goals; goals that those who voted for you want you to accomplish. But your goals can be accomplished only if they're part of the goals of the body as a whole. That means your success depends on creating a consensus of the majority! And where does the Outlier fit in on a collaborative decision-making body? Nowhere. Perpetually being on the losing side of a vote means that the Outlier gets



nowhere on his or her goals ... unless, of course, he or she feels that being an Outlier is its own reward.

### Are you an Outlier?

Perhaps you have met your share of Outliers, who tend to share one or more of these characteristics:

- There is an element of the lone crusader in them. They feel they were elected to shake up the status quo in some way. Maybe they think their predecessors were too cozy with developers, not friendly enough with the business community, too close to the municipality's staff or not close enough to the municipality's staff.
- They view themselves as independent thinkers. They are often highly intelligent, but not "people persons." In kindergarten, their report cards might have reflected a poor score on "plays well with others."
- They take a perverse glee in being the "outsider," relish arguments for argument's sake and place little value on matters like courtesy and regard for the feelings of others.
- They hate having to endure "soft" discussions, such as a council or board retreat, the establishment of a mission or vision statement, the development of consensus around rules of procedure or rules of conduct, a session to discuss goals and priorities, or an insurance liability training session.
- They feel they are always right, and everyone else is always wrong. They feel they are always ethical, and everyone else is not. They feel they are looking out for the citizens, and everyone else is not.
- Initially, they may just have been unfamiliar with the ways of local government and needed to build the skills to work effectively in a new environment. One or more gaffes may have caused them to be pegged as Outliers and treated accordingly, initiating an unhealthy Outlier dynamic.
- There may have been some explosive moments in private or public with the Outlier's colleagues, or the colleagues may have made some attempt at an "intervention."

These observations may not be totally on the mark, but one characteristic of the Outlier cannot be denied: he or she is seldom on the prevailing side of a vote, and is often at loggerheads with the rest of the body.

Do you think you may be an Outlier? If so, you might examine what your goals as an elected official really are. Do you want to have a list of concrete accomplishments at the end of your term? Or will it be accomplishment enough to have been the "loyal opposition"? If it's the former, then your behavior may be working at cross-purposes with your goals. If it's the latter ... really? Will the people who voted for you be satisfied with that accomplishment? Will you?

### Is the Outlier a Problem for the Rest of the Body?

Most people who've had to deal with an Outlier would say that yes, the Outlier is a problem. How? Here are some ways:

- Anger and frustration build when a board has to deal with an Outlier, siphoning away energy that could be spent on more positive endeavors. This is a particular problem if tensions have built to the point that confrontations have begun to occur. No reasonable person wants to attend or view a board meeting and have a hockey game break out. It may be entertaining, but it's embarrassing to the governing body and to the community.
- Healthy teams seek to build a sense of camaraderie and cohesiveness. That's not entirely possible when there's an Outlier. It's not healthy to build a team around a shared hatred of one of its own members, and most reasonable people would prefer not to have that happen.
- The Outlier's perspective tends to be oppositional. From a liability standpoint, such a perspective is risky. If you're taking positions on an oppositional basis, are you really meeting your fiduciary duty to look out for the best interests of the entity?
- A disharmonious governing body is a dysfunctional governing body. It's been the Colorado Intergovernmental Risk Sharing Agency's experience that liability claims thrive in an environment of disharmony and dysfunction.
- Your staff members are affected by the Outlier Syndrome, too. From the staff's perspective, seeing dysfunction on the governing body is a little like watching discord between one's own parents. It's unsettling, distressing and morale-crushing.
- Most importantly, it's a shame for the governing body to lose a potentially valuable contributing member. In a worst-case scenario, the Outlier becomes completely disempowered as he or she is ignored and marginalized. But this means that the body isn't running on all cylinders and is deprived of the valuable perspectives that the Outlier might otherwise bring. Ultimately, the voters and the community are the losers.

### Dealing with the Outlier Syndrome

You can't cure an affliction until you recognize it. And you can't recognize what you haven't named and defined. If your municipality is afflicted with Outlier Syndrome, you've taken the first steps toward a cure by naming, defining and recognizing it. Here are some other steps you might consider:

- Confront the issue forthrightly and compassionately in a neutral environment. A council or board meeting is likely not a neutral environment. Perhaps the matter could be discussed as one item on a retreat agenda. Be prepared

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with specific examples of how the Outlier has negatively impacted the body.

- Consider addressing the issue in the context of a larger discussion about governing body rules of procedure or rules of conduct. The “norms” that guide members’ interactions with one another may be obvious to some, but not to all, especially newer members. Those norms can be part of the discussion and the process of articulating them can facilitate a consensus to honor them.
- Consider bringing in an outside facilitator to assist you, as a governing body is a bit like a marriage that’s been arranged for you by the citizens. There’s nothing wrong with getting some outside help for perspective and to find solutions.

If you think you might have the Outlier label pinned on you, consider these suggestions:

- First, get a reality check. Find out how you’re being perceived by your peers. It may be very different from your own perception of yourself. Ask each of your colleagues to give you a frank assessment.
- Check your motivations. If you have concrete goals you want to accomplish as an elected official, you must accept that success in your position can’t happen without collaboration and consensus building. There is nothing that you can accomplish alone. So, set a goal to be on the “prevailing” side or to bring others over to establish a “prevailing” side.
- If you’ve already burned some bridges, understand that consensus building can’t happen without mutual trust, respect and a sense of cohesion. These will take time to build. Look for a retreat or other opportunities to clear the air and start fresh.
- Use staff as a resource! Your manager or administrator wants nothing more than to assist newly elected officials in learning the ropes and understanding the best time, place and approach to raising issues. Don’t get off on the wrong foot with blunders that might peg you as an Outlier.

[Editor’s note: Be mindful that board meetings to discuss the conduct of board members are subject to the Open Meeting Law. MSBA can assist school board members in this area.]

What if all efforts to deal with the Outlier Syndrome fail? Well, it might be time for the rest of the governing body to cut its losses and move on. Don’t continue to agonize over the Outlier and his or her impact on the body’s functioning. Continue to accord the Outlier the same opportunities to participate in discussion and decision-making as any other member, but don’t allow the Outlier to keep pushing your buttons. Remember, arguments and confrontations require more than one participant. You may need to simply say “thank you” or move on to the next point of discussion. Ultimately, the responsibility for putting an Outlier into office

rests with the citizens, so there’s only so much you can do. Try to go about your business without having the Outlier become the dysfunctional center around which the rest of you swirl.

## Conclusion

Governing body members don’t all have to be in lockstep, thinking and behaving in the same way. On the contrary, diversity of thinking, styles, opinions, experiences and approaches are healthy and necessary for a collaborative decision-making body. There is truly a collective wisdom that comes forth when many diverse minds work together on common goals. But the Outlier Syndrome is detrimental to a high-functioning governing body and, therefore, to the community. If your governing body is afflicted with the Outlier Syndrome, it’s time to do something about it.

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Wyatt B.





Coping with  
a disruptive  
elected official

By Kevin Duggan,  
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# The Outlier

If you haven't dealt with an outlier councilmember or elected official, you probably will at some point in your management career. While there are varying degrees of "outlier behavior"—behavior by people who are considered nonconformists—in the most extreme cases, these individuals can have a significant impact on their fellow elected

officials, the appointed chief executive, the members of the organization, and even the community.

In 2014–2015, Cal-ICMA, the official state affiliate for the International City/County Management Association in California, conducted a poll and a series of focus groups dealing with the major challenges faced by city and county managers in the state. Called the Survival Skills

project, the end result was a report titled *Challenges and Strategies: Maximizing Success for City and County Managers in California* ([http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/cal-icma\\_report\\_challenges\\_and\\_strategies.pdf](http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/cal-icma_report_challenges_and_strategies.pdf)).

This study revealed that while most of those surveyed viewed their relationship with elected officials to be generally positive, in a large number of cases a significant concern was one or more dissenters representing less than a majority of the governing body.

It was clear that even one such individual, depending on his or her conduct, could have a negative impact on the

manager and the organization. While outlier conduct can vary significantly, in the most extreme cases it can present one of the most difficult and frustrating challenges for a manager.

Based on these findings, Cal-ICMA sponsored two panels on the topic at League of California Cities conferences in 2017—one at a manager’s conference and one at a conference for elected officials. The issues discussed and the strategies suggested are the subject of this article.

## Different Types of Outliers

Sometimes an elected official, especially one who is newly elected, can be considered a nonconformist simply because he or she represents a change to the prevailing pattern. Perhaps the council has seen little change in recent years, and the new member is simply not someone familiar to the remaining members.

In some circumstances, a new councilmember can represent a different cultural, ethnic, racial, or gender group or a new generation. At other times, the member who is considered an outlier may have a different philosophy or orientation regarding one or more community issues. They may challenge the status quo.

In still other cases, the person’s work style may vary from the other members and perhaps from previous practice; for example, how much information the person needs and a preference on how it is communicated.

And, of course, someone can be considered an outlier because of personality, communication style, and nature of interpersonal skills. In the most challenging circumstances and probably what most of us would consider outliers to be, the conduct of the individual is disruptive and counterproductive.

While this article will focus on this last example, it is sometimes important for managers to remind themselves, as well as the elected officials they work with, that someone simply being new, representing a different demographic, having a different style, or questioning the status quo is not in and of itself inappropriate.

Assuming they are not conducting themselves in some fashion that is otherwise inappropriate or counterproductive, they have a right to be “different” and to represent diverse perspectives. There may be times when a manager needs to remind elected officials they work with that representing a different perspective or having a different working style should not be considered a problem.

Elected councils and boards are often strengthened by having voices that represent a broader cross section of their constituency. It can be counterproductive for managers and elected officials they work with to try to change a colleague who may not reasonably need to change.

## The Classic Outlier

Unfortunately, the elected council and board members who managers work with are often challenged by a much different type of outlier. Mike Conduff, a former manager who is a frequent *PM* magazine columnist on manager-council relations, describes the stereotypical outlier as often displaying these behaviors:

- Treats every staff presentation as an inquisition.
- Routinely discloses confidential information to the media.
- Spends all of his or her time on minutia and misses the big picture completely.
- Is never prepared for a meeting and regularly asks questions that were answered in the council or board packet.
- Is never willing to bring closure and always wants more information before voting.
- Refuses to abide by the meeting rules of order.
- Circumvents the manager, going instead to internal staff, including the manager’s assistants.
- Is always trying to make staff and the chief administrator and fellow elected officials look bad.

In addition, such individuals can often attack their fellow elected of-

ficials and sometimes members of the public. They can also vary in their time demands on the manager, ranging from never being available to meet or monopolizing large amounts of the manager’s time.

Such behaviors can have these negative consequences:

- Being disruptive to the work of a council or board, including the effectiveness of public meetings.
- Causing elected officials and organization to lose the confidence of the public.
- Discouraging other members of the public to serve as elected officials or in other capacities.
- Hurting the morale of the staff, including the manager, and making it more difficult to have a highly effective organization and possibly even to attract and retain staff.

## Time for Intervention

While it is often uncertain if any form of intervention will likely change the behavior, the nature of the negative impacts often compels the need to at least try.

One of the first steps to take is to be clear regarding what behaviors are considered inappropriate and why. As noted earlier, simply having a different personality, work style, or philosophy is not in and of itself inappropriate.

It is important to be clear that the behaviors that are suggested be changed are truly outside the norm of reasonable conduct for an elected official. It is also important to be clear about why the conduct should be changed. What are the impacts, and why are those impacts negatively affecting the governing board, staff, or public?

Among the challenges of determining how to deal with the conduct of a maverick official is avoiding either overreacting or underreacting to the conduct. In regard to the former, sometimes we can respond too aggressively to conduct that is an isolated incident or simply annoying.

In other cases, managers or elected officials can fail in their responsibility to

deal with serious inappropriate behavior, sometimes for fear of confrontation or the potential consequences of intervention. It is important, therefore, to initially evaluate what the conduct is that is causing concern, determine how far outside the norm of appropriateness it falls, and decide which strategies to confront the behavior are reasonable.

Intervention is necessary in a number of circumstances, including when the effectiveness of the elected body is negatively impacted, when the manager and staff's ability to conduct its work in a reasonable environment suffers, or when the public confidence in the organization is eroded.

Once the conclusion is reached that intervention is appropriate and necessary, the question is: "Who should do it?" A strong case can be made that the primary responsibility for dealing with an elected official's inappropriate conduct lies with that person's elected peers.

In particular, if the consequences of the outlier's behavior primarily impacts the other elected officials and the conduct of their business, it is usually appropriate for fellow elected officials to take the lead. This often falls to the mayor or chair since they are considered the leaders of the elected body.

However, there can be circumstances when another of the elected officials is better positioned to intervene. This can be the case when the mayor or chair has difficulty with having conversations on challenging issues. (Yes, you might ask: Why are they in their positions?) Or perhaps when another colleague is viewed as having more credibility with the person who is causing concern.

Unfortunately, the outlier's peers are often reluctant to take action due to concerns about the consequences of confronting the problem. What they often underestimate is the negative consequences of doing nothing.

## The Manager's Role

In these circumstances when the negative impacts are primarily on council (not staff), the manager can decide

to what degree to get involved. Some managers believe it is best to let the issue be addressed without any of their involvement since it is an issue between councilmembers, while others believe more direct involvement by the manager is appropriate.

The manager can often play a helpful role by suggesting to the other elected officials how they might approach the issue—serving as an adviser but not becoming directly involved. Some managers believe that their direct involvement is appropriate and necessary since the effectiveness of the council impacts the effectiveness of the organization as a whole.

The more the manager becomes directly involved, however, the more likely the outlier will directly target him or her. In the worst-case scenario, the manager could end up being blamed for the friction between councilmembers.

Often, outliers' conduct can be less public and primarily have negative impacts on the manager and staff. While in such cases it is often still most appropriate for the conduct to be confronted by fellow elected officials, the manager often has no choice than to become more directly involved.

If the manager's or staff's performance or working conditions are negatively impacted by the conduct of an elected official, the manager must determine how to deal with it. It is often appropriate for the manager to first intervene with the outlier directly to discuss the problematic conduct.

If eventually unsuccessful, the manager will probably need to enlist the assistance of the mayor, the chair, and or the elected body as a whole to address the issue.

**Among the challenges of determining how to deal with the conduct of a maverick official is avoiding either overreacting or underreacting to the conduct.**

And the manager's greatest responsibility is to protect the staff of the organization from inappropriate conduct, including that which would result in a hostile work environment. Chief executives cannot avoid their responsibility to protect their staff from undue influence and inappropriate conduct, even from elected officials—at least not if they are to truly accept the responsibilities of their position.

## Levels of Intervention

Here are the levels of intervention that can be undertaken:

- Personal intervention.
- Soliciting help from others, including potentially a facilitator.
- Formal and outside intervention:
  - Censure.
  - Investigation.
  - Formal complaint.

It is usually best to try to resolve the matter as informally as possible. In the best situations, a private conversation involving the manager and mayor can have the desired impact.

Often, the manager—or mayor depending on the circumstances—may seek the help of someone else to assist. This could be another councilmember who has a better relationship with the individual or even someone from the community who both agree that the conduct is counterproductive and has a good relationship (possibly a campaign supporter) with the outlier.

Sometimes using an outside facilitator to intervene is a reasonable approach—either in facilitating a conversation or in conducting a group team-building session, during which

time both positive and counterproductive behaviors can be discussed.

In the worst-case scenarios, formal action and intervention may be required. This could include public censure by the governing board, a formal investigation of the conduct of the elected official, or registering a complaint with an outside agency.

While these actions are usually best left until all other strategies are exhausted, a single act of serious misconduct might force one of these options to be implemented as a first step.

### What If All Else Fails?

The unfortunate reality is that there can be many circumstances of negative and counterproductive elected official behavior that cannot be changed. Assuming the conduct has not reached the point of significant misconduct and is more in the realm of being negative or counterproductive, these approaches may be helpful to keep in mind:

- **Exercise emotional maturity/intelligence.** Try to stay professional and not make it appear that you have made it personal. Hold firm to required positions but in a way that does not communicate personal animosity.
- **Keep communication open.** It won't be helpful to shut down communication with the individual, though he or she may choose to do so.
- **Keep it in perspective.** Don't let the conduct of one individual monopolize your attention and that of the council and staff. If this elected official's goal is to disrupt, minimizing that disruption to the greatest extent possible is the best response.
- **Insulate your staff from any negative conduct** to the greatest extent possible.
- **Help the council and staff stay focused** on the work of the organization.
- **Accept that the best you may be able to do is to minimize the negative consequences** of the outlier's conduct.

### You Are Not Alone

Dealing with a challenging outlier is not an unusual circumstance in the management profession. While it is one of our profession's most vexing challenges, do your best not to let it get in the way of your appreciation for all the other positive individuals you work with. Stay focused on the good you and your organization are doing for your community on a daily basis.

While we can't control who gets elected to a governing body, managers can control how they react to these individuals. In the case of problematic outliers, carefully reflecting on the type of conduct being exhibited and the role that you or others play in responding to the conduct and the actions to take, will best position you to appropriately respond to the challenge. **PM**



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## *Everyday Ethics for Local Officials*

### **Dealing With a Grandstander**

*August 2002*

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#### **QUESTION**

*We have an individual on our governing body who is running for re-election. His colleagues are very frustrated with him because he consistently uses the meeting to grandstand. His comments on agenda items are shamelessly self-promotional and often prolong the meeting significantly because of the time they take. A number of his colleagues have talked with him about this issue to no avail. What are your thoughts and, if you agree such conduct is inappropriate, what should we do?*

#### **ANSWER**

First, let's define some terms. The dictionary defines "grandstanding" as "playing or acting so as to impress onlookers." Public meetings were not created as opportunities for elected officials (or wannabe elected officials) to impress each other, the media or the public. The purpose of a public meeting is to accomplish the public's business in as productive, efficient and professional manner as possible.

A Greek philosopher once noted that "time is the most valuable thing a [person] can spend."<sup>1</sup> Public meeting time is an exceptionally precious resource. Most local officials recognize this and avoid yielding to any temptation to grandstand.

Grandstanding is a subset of a larger category of problematic meeting behavior: wasting meeting time (for example, rambling debates and asking questions that would be unnecessary with advance preparation for the discussion).

What can escape grandstanders is the ethical dimension of their behavior. Wasting meeting time implicates two values: *responsibility* and *respect*.

#### **The Public's Time**

How does grandstanding waste the public's time? There are likely to be individuals in the audience who are waiting an opportunity to speak or for later items on the agenda. They will be frustrated and resentful of an elected official who is prolonging the meeting in a



self-serving and unproductive manner – particularly when the audience members have taken the time to come and participate in the agency’s business. (The irony of this situation is that, in an effort to endear himself to voters, your colleague is likely to be having the opposite effect.)

Why should the grandstanding public official (and others) care about the public’s frustration? The sense that public meetings are unnecessarily long may ultimately discourage the public from attending the meetings (or watching them on cable) in the long run and alienate them from civic affairs. As a result, the public will be less informed and less supportive of the agency. Grandstanding therefore diminishes the public’s respect for the agency and its ability to address community issues. It also plays in to popular (and usually inaccurate) caricatures of self-serving and self-centered politicians.

## **Staff Time**

Grandstanding also wastes staff time at the meeting. Although staff is being paid to sit through the meeting, unnecessarily long meetings mean that staff is being used unproductively. Staff time is a public resource. It is never ethical to waste the public’s resources.

## **Colleagues’ Time**

Another precious resource is one’s fellow elected officials’ time. Serving on a public agency governing board inevitably takes time away from one’s family, work and personal interests. The purpose of discussion at governing body meetings is to gather and share information helpful to the body’s ultimate decision. By definition, grandstanding and other public meeting time-wasters use colleagues’ time for an altogether different purpose: self-promotion.

To the extent that public service gets too frustrating for individuals, the time-abuser has diminished another community resource: people’s willingness to engage in public service. This too can be an ethical issue because it deprives the jurisdiction of its potential leaders.

## **The Other Side?**

The grandstander may respond to these observations by saying “Hey, what about all the time I give to the community? What’s so wrong if I get some free public exposure in return? I am not doing anything illegal.”

This is an especially dangerous line of thinking. First, it puts public officials on an extraordinarily slippery slope. Looking for ways to “get something in return” for one’s public service is the kind of thinking that has gotten public officials into serious legal troubles for misusing public resources (including for campaign purposes) for personal

benefit and accepting bribes. Grandstanding is of course a much different issue, but there is a common thread in the analysis that local officials may want to ponder.

The bottom line is one should never expect personal advantages in return for public service. Public servants can have the satisfaction of having contributed to the betterment of their communities, but those who are looking for more individual benefits from public service are looking for ethical troubles.

Moreover, local officials sell themselves short when they key their ethical standards to what the law allows or prohibits. The bottom line is that just because conduct is legal, doesn't mean it is ethical. A public official who sets ethical standards by what the law allows and does not allow is using a false ethical compass. As indicated above, there are a number of ethical issues relating to using meeting time to grandstand, even though the conduct probably does not sink to the level of violating the law.

## Everyone's Doing It

The grandstander/meeting-time-waster may also point out that the public and his rival candidates the seat he is seeking re-elected to make the same abuse of the public comment time. Hard as it is, a tit-for-tat approach to misusing meeting time is not the best approach. The moms of the world have it right when they admonish that two wrongs don't make a right.

## Aspirational Goals

Other relevant ethics code provisions relevant to this topic include:

- **Respect**  
I listen carefully and ask questions that add value to discussions.
- **Fairness**  
I support the public's right to know and promote meaningful public involvement.
- **Responsibility**  
I come to meetings and I come to them prepared.  
I do not promise that which I have reason to believe is unrealistic.
- **Compassion**  
I realize that some people are intimidated by the public process and try to make their interactions as stress-free as possible.
- **Trustworthiness**  
I remember that my role is first and foremost to serve the community.

I do not use my public position for personal gain.

Other sample ethics code provisions are available under the "ethics codes" tab of the Institute's website at [www.ca-ilg.org/trust](http://www.ca-ilg.org/trust).



## What to Do?

Perhaps the more difficult question is what to do about grandstanders and other meeting time-wasters. Your colleagues have already taken a good first step by discussing the issue forthrightly with the offender.

Some agencies have adopted self-imposed limits on elected official comments. For example, a southern California water agency's "Code of Civil Behavior" includes this board member commitment to:

Limit the length of comments during board meetings to three minutes per director per item and do not repeat points that already have been stated by other directors.

This levels the playing field a bit and ideally will send the message that grandstanding by either elected officials or the public is not a productive use of public meeting time.

Similarly, some agencies have adopted codes of ethics and values that address these kinds of issues. For example, the City of Sunnyvale's code of conduct specifically says that city council members should "[b]e respectful of other people's time. Stay focused and act efficiently during public meetings." It also says council members should "[f]ully participate in City Council meetings and other public forums while demonstrating respect, kindness, consideration, and courtesy to others."

In a similar vein, the City of Santa Clara's Ethics and Values Statement emphasizes the importance of communication, particularly effective two-way communication that involves listening carefully and adding value to conversation. The statement also emphasizes the value of collaboration and acknowledges that city officials are part of an overall team. Interestingly, both the Sunnyvale and Santa Clara codes of ethics are phrased in the positive – describing what affirmative behavior city officials should engage in as opposed to what behavior is prohibited. Moreover, Santa Clara has taken the additional step of convening meetings with council candidates to discuss the city's ethics and values statements, so candidates are aware of and can be held accountable for behavior inconsistent with those values (for example, grandstanding during public comment time).

Author John Updike observed, "A healthy male adult bore consumes each year one and a half times his own weight in other people's patience." Patience is the great lubricant of a civil society. To the extent that grandstanders and other meeting-time-wasters exhaust the public's and their colleague's patience, the civility and health of our civic institutions are put at risk.

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This piece originally ran in *Western City Magazine* and is a service of the Institute for Local Government (ILG) Ethics Project, which offers resources on public service ethics for local officials. For more information, visit [www.ca-ilg.org/trust](http://www.ca-ilg.org/trust).

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**Endnote:**

<sup>1</sup> Theophrastus, from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.