

Title I - The Clerk

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Chapter 1.04 The Clerk

Sections:

- 1.04.010 The oldest government profession

1.04.010 THE OLDEST GOVERNMENT PROFESSION. The municipal clerk, along with the tax collector, is the oldest public servant. The office can be traced to biblical times and even before.

Saint Paul and his followers during his missionary work in Persia (now Western Turkey) owed their safety to the action of a town clerk. As related in Acts XIX, 23-25, the artisans of Ephesus who made the idols of the time, feared the effect of Paul's missionary work on their trade. They incited a mob to seize two of Paul's followers. The town clerk; however, spoke out against this action and insisted that charges laid against these men had to be settled in the proper manner and before the proper authorities. There was no justification for riotous conduct. With that, he dispersed the crowd.

Ancient Greece had a city secretary who read official documents publicly. At the opening of a meeting, one of his duties was to read a curse upon anyone who should seek to deceive the people.

The early keepers of the archives were often called remembrancers, and before writing came into use, their memory was the public record.

The title as we know it is derived from the Middle Ages. A "clerk" was any member of a religious order, a "cleric," or "clergyman." Since, for all practical purposes, the scholarship of the Middle Ages was limited to the clergy, the name "clerk" came to be synonymous with "scholar."

The office of clerk can be traced back to the year 1272 A.D. in the History of the Corporation of Old London. In the 1500's in England there was not only the "Towne Clarcke" but also the "Clerc Comptroller of the King's Honorable Household." In 1603, there was a "Clarke General of the Armie." King Henry the Eighth had a "Clarke of the Spicery" and King Charles had his "Clerk of the Robes."

When the early colonists came to America, they set up forms of local government to which they had been accustomed, and the office of clerk was one of the first established. The colony at Plymouth appointed a person to act as a recorder.

Over the years, municipal clerks have become the hub of government, the direct link between the inhabitants of their towns and their government. The clerk is the historian of the community, for the entire recorded history of the town and its people are in the clerk's care.

The eminent political scientist, Professor William Bennett Munro, writing in one of the first textbooks on municipal administration, stated:

"No other office in municipal service has so many contacts. It serves the mayor, the city council, the city manager (when there is one), and all administrative departments without exception. All of them call upon it, almost daily, for some service or information. Its work is not spectacular, but it demands versatility, alertness, accuracy, and no end of patience. The public does not realize how many loose ends of city administration this office pulls together."

Those words, written over 75 years ago, are even more appropriate today.

Chapter 1.08 The Clerk as Manager

Sections:

- 1.08.010 Fundamental principles
- 1.08.020 Functional divisions
- 1.08.030 Planning
- 1.08.040 Organizing
- 1.08.050 Staffing
- 1.08.060 Directing
- 1.08.070 Controlling
- 1.08.080 Reference and Resources

1.08.010 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES. The office of the clerk has many and varied functions and responsibilities among Washington municipalities and in order to get the most accomplished each office must be efficient and well managed. Regardless of whether the clerk works alone or directs a large staff, and regardless of the scope of responsibilities, there are certain fundamental principles that are equally applicable. It is the intent of this chapter to outline basic procedures that may be of assistance to clerks searching for ways to upgrade the operations of their offices.

1.08.020 FUNCTIONAL DIVISIONS. Management may be conceptually divided into five functions: planning, organizing, staffing, leading and controlling. Often, more than one of these concepts is operable simultaneously in our work, but should be kept separate in thinking about how we do our jobs and where we could improve.

1.08.030 PLANNING. The old adage, "Plan your work and work your plan," was never more relevant than in today's rapidly changing world. A basic plan of operation ensures deadlines are met, work flows smoothly into and out of the office and emergency situations or demands can be accommodated.

Planning is prioritizing tasks and projects in need of completion. Planning takes on many forms, including deciding how to obtain additional revenue, how to meet the demands of expanding service areas, how to conduct public information programs and how to meet existing service requirements. The manager must decide what will be accomplished, when the tasks will be undertaken and an expectation for completion.

Goals are set by the mayor, manager/administrator, council or commission during the budget process, based on input of the constituents and needs of the municipality. These goals govern the tasks they wish to accomplish for the year. The goals are inherited by the staff, who create and implement programs based on those goals. "Goals" may be thought of as visions for a better product, program or process. Goals as a manager should be consistent with the goals of the municipality, whether stated by the council, mayor, or manager/administrator. If the departmental goals seem unrealistic or inappropriate, remember effective managers strive to influence their supervisors to set more realistic or appropriate goals.

Once goals have been set, break them down into measurable objectives. Planning to meet objectives generally involves budgeting funds, planning the timeframe, staffing for the project, purchasing needed supplies, and making contacts to obtain the necessary information.

1.08.040 ORGANIZING. Organizing is the answer to "How will the work be divided and accomplished?" An important aspect of supervision and organizing is delegation. Delegation involves assigning duties, granting the authority to accomplish the tasks and allowing subordinates to assume responsibility for the tasks. Delegation does not mean the supervisor has given away the ultimate responsibility, but rather the work is being accomplished through other people.

Organization is still essential, even if supervising others is not a job function. Organize work by creating a complete list of duties and responsibilities, including the time required for each task, as the starting point. The list should include all functions, regardless of the degree of importance, and be prepared by the person actually performing the work.

Distribution of duties and responsibilities includes scheduling the work by priorities, as well as the assignment of specific duties to appropriate personnel. Certain functions, such as publications and mailings of legal notices, have inherent deadlines and demand higher priorities than, filing, generating miscellaneous correspondence, etc., which, although important, may be done during less critical time periods. A degree of flexibility must be maintained in any work schedule to allow for unexpected interruptions or unusual requests. If staff allocation permits, it is desirable to assign responsibilities for certain functions to those employees who appear to have aptitudes and interests in such areas. This promotes a sense of pride within the employee. Care should be taken; however, to train another employee to substitute in the event of illness, vacation, or resignation.

Functionally, organized work areas are also important in maintaining an efficient flow of work. For maximum productivity, workstations and facilities should be laid out to permit a smooth flow of work with easy access to equipment, files and work areas. If space permits, there should be a service counter. Arrangement of the service counter for public use is particularly important. The citizen coming to the counter must feel free to state requests or problems without distractions of employees moving around him or, even worse, being required to move aside to permit someone to enter or leave the area. Employees serving the counter should be located in reasonable proximity to avoid delay in service.

The operations of the department should be reviewed periodically. Even functions dictated by legal requirements should be studied for opportunities to increase efficiency. Review of processes and procedures may also disclose some practices seem to have no real reason for existence, other than "because it has always been done that way." In considering elimination of any traditional function the clerk must carefully weigh anticipated time-saving advantages against possible negative response from the staff or public. Changes that affect other people in your department or organization should be involved in the planning process.

An example of streamlining workloads is the use of personalized form letters or templates, for such matters as general or routine correspondence, notification of bid awards, and transmittal of requested information or copies of documents. Also, do not overlook use of the telephone in lieu of a written response; it takes less time than preparing a letter and offers the further advantage of a personal contact with the citizen or business.

1.08.050 STAFFING. Staffing is the availability and ability of existing staff hired to perform the essential function of the position and/or the ability to hire qualified staff to fill vacant positions. This involves preparing appropriate job specifications, recruitment, orientation, training, evaluation procedures, and considerations for promotion and replacement.

1.08.060 DIRECTING. Directing includes guiding, teaching, motivating, and supervising subordinates. Directing is to encourage workers to perform tasks effectively and efficiently on a continual basis.

Employees may be motivated by a number of different factors, including achievement, recognition, a diverse workload, responsibility, growth, and rewards. A misconception is financial rewards and working conditions are the most important motivators of employees, but actually, once "human needs" (financial and security) are adequately met, more complex needs tend to dominate as motivators.

Employees will most likely be motivated to perform jobs efficiently when approaches to supervision are utilized which enhance the employees' job satisfaction. These approaches include:

- **Delegation with authority and responsibility:** The employee is given general directions to accomplish the task but is permitted to use judgment in implementing the task.

- **Job growth and enrichment:** The employee is given the opportunity to grow in the job by assuming more responsibilities for the types of work in an area of interest. Cross training is another way to enrich a person's job and as they learn to perform more duties, they become a valuable "back-up" to another employee.
- **Participation:** Employees' advice and suggestions are sought and used to improve the work flow, create a new assignment, or develop new procedures. This helps make employees aware of the importance of their role in the department.

1.08.070 CONTROLLING. Controlling means making certain objectives are achieved as planned. This brings us back to the original function of planning, and completes the process. This function establishes feedback to the manager on the plans implemented during the previous work cycle. It is recommended an evaluation period of at least yearly is established to measure department's accomplishments. Adjustments to the next work period's schedule may need to be made based on the feedback received from the evaluation of the goals.

1.08.080 REFERENCES AND RESOURCES. Many questions of a general nature come to the clerk on a daily basis and can usually be answered by office staff. Questions requiring more than routine information may be forwarded to the specific department.

While it is common to reference individual websites an easy single reference source for answering routine questions, may be helpful to keep on hand. Frequently asked questions about your municipality, state and surrounding community may include:

- Contact information for local officials and other department directors.
- Schedule of council meetings, dates and time.
- List of council sub-committees and members, dates and times of meetings.
- Phone numbers for emergency services.
- Names and addresses of board and commission members.
- Phone numbers and addresses of local school districts.
- Business hours, addresses and phone numbers for local libraries.
- Local voter information.
- State legislature phone listing.
- Directory of local public services.
- List of clubs and community organizations.

Chapter 1.10 The Clerk as Leader

Sections:

- 1.10.010 Definition
- 1.10.020 Leader vs. Manager
- 1.10.030 Empowerment
- 1.10.040 Motivation
- 1.10.050 Mentoring
- 1.10.060 Self-care

1.10.010 DEFINITION. In addition to being a good manager, as described in Chapter 1.08, clerks must be leaders, regardless of the organization's population or number of employees. Leaders are people who influence others. The goal of the leader in today's organizations is to create an atmosphere in which dedicated, self-confident people work in challenging jobs with a meaningful purpose. In pursuing that goal, leaders must:

- Define and focus the attention of the group on a purpose;
- Translate a clear, detailed vision of what the organization is in terms of results;
- Organize the work around the results that shapes the vision into reality and gives people or teams clear responsibility for accomplishing those results;
- Define a clear, unwavering set of values and sense of right and wrong, which supports the vision and through which everyone is held accountable; and
- Brings out the best in colleagues and staff, encourages growth, empowers members of the organization, and fosters an atmosphere in which employees feel successful and supported.

1.10.020 LEADER VS. MANAGER. Both leading and managing are crucial to the success of an organization. The difference is that leaders focus on the *future* rather than the present.

- Managers make sure things work well. Leaders create visions and develop improvements.
- Managers solve today's problems. Leaders create a better future.
- Managers focus on the process. Leaders focus on the product.
- Managers make sure to take care of the details. Leaders set broad goals and objectives.
- Managers make sure people have the tools to do their job. Leaders inspire people to do more than is expected.
- Managers focus on efficiency. Leaders focus on effectiveness.

1.10.030 EMPOWERMENT. Leaders recognize the five dimensions of empowerment:

1. Helping others to feel legitimately important and truly making a difference by their efforts. The leader constantly reminds every one of the significance the organization is making in the lives of others, by keeping the mission in mind. In so doing, the leader keeps the focus on PEOPLE not THINGS.

2. Enabling people to learn and sharpen their skills on the job. Leaders view the workplace as a setting for continual learning and encourage others to increase their sense of expertise. Leaders reward creativity, innovation, problem-solving and new ideas. They challenge staff to stretch to the limits of their abilities and beyond.
3. Joining everyone in a shared purpose and consistently keeping the purpose visible to the entity as a whole. Leaders create a climate of trust and risk-taking, encouraging anyone to question or suggest better ways of doing things. Leaders are sincere and empathetic. They empower people to provide input and creatively problem solve.
4. Modeling the values of a sense of adventure and play. Leaders create a climate that is rewarding and encourages fun.
5. Providing a sense of structure. Leaders provide the framework, which provides the knowledge, and understanding of an organizations underlying purpose. Rather than merely assigning tasks, leaders give people meaningful responsibility for results and provide an environment in which employees feel safe working on challenging tasks.

1.10.040 MOTIVATING. This is a primary leadership skill. Leaders provide appropriate stimulation, reward, supervision, and support.

Leadership in the workplace, says Max DePree in "Leadership Jazz: The Essential Elements of a Great Leader," is like playing jazz; it's more an art than a science. Today's successful managers are attune to the needs and ideas of their followers and even step aside at times to be followers themselves. As a result, they spark vitality and productivity from their work force. They cultivate communication and spontaneity, diversity and creativity, and the unique potential of every person in the organization to contribute to the success of the team.

Brian B. Brown, in "The Easy Step by Step Guide to Motivating Your Staff for Better Performance" notes that the development of an assertive style of behavior, based on personal integrity and a confidence in one's own ability, also leads to the development of other factors vital to the ability to motivate others. These factors – respect and trust – are closely related. He provides the following tips for developing trust:

- **Knowing your people.** This also involves the understanding that you may not know what will be perceived by another person as a positive commitment to trust until you understand that person.
- **Little things matter.** In relationships, little things to you often are big things to someone else. Small acts of courtesy and understanding therefore are very important. However, small discourtesies and little forms of disrespect can become a major barrier to developing trust.
- **Keeping promises and commitments.** Keeping a promise or commitment is a major contributor to trust – breaking one is extremely negative because next time a promise is made, it will not be believed.
- **Openly defining expectations.** Many expectations can be implicit rather than explicit – they have not been explicitly stated or announced but they are nevertheless part of a person's "portfolio." The reason for this reluctance to be "up front" may be through shyness, embarrassment, or an inability to be assertive of personal interests. If you aim to develop trust, you will need to bring these expectations into the open – to make them clear and

explicit at the beginning. This may take real investment in time and effort up-front, but will save great amounts of time and effort later.

- **Maintaining personal integrity.** Personal integrity in the way that you always deal with other people generates trust and is at the core of developing any working relationship. Lack of integrity can determine almost any other effort to create high trust.
- **Apologizing honestly and sincerely.** When you act in a way (sometimes because you may have to) that could lead to a loss of trust in others, it is important to apologize sincerely and as early as possible. This may sound easy, but it takes a high strength of character to apologize!
- **Communicating to build trust.** Good levels of communication are an important factor in developing trust – the higher the trust, the higher the co-operation, leading to the development of a synergy that makes communication more effective and deepens the trust relationship.

1.10.050 MENTORING. The most important value a leader can provide is to identify, nurture, coach, and empower future leaders. This calls for the ability to mentor, i.e., helping others to grow to their potential and then encouraging them to fly on their own. People with the potential for leadership exhibit signs that aid in recognizing them. Future leaders will probably:

- Challenge authority or the ways things have always been done.
- Come up with a steady stream of new ideas.
- Keep the mission first in their minds and remind others of it.
- Question EVERYTHING but not in a negative way.
- Take risks and respond to challenges.

The leader, whose role is one of coaching, and offering guidance where appropriate, supporting, and occasionally nudging, usually initiates mentor/mentee relationships. The true test comes when the mentee becomes a colleague who may even surpass the reputation and accomplishments of the mentor. How the leader responds to this shift in positions is critical, both to others mentees, and to the previous mentee's own potential for future mentoring. Mentors are critical to the development of future leaders. When done well, and kept in perspective, the development of future leaders can be listed among a leader's greatest accomplishments.

1.10.060 SELF-CARE. A good leader understands that effective leadership requires staying in the best possible shape, physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. Accomplishing this balance gives the leader the strength, insight, stability, and courage to go about leading others. In understanding the importance of wellness, leaders:

- Learn to communicate clearly.
- Work on good general health.
- Relax and know how to play.
- Keep things simple and in balance.
- Initiate positive self-talk and avoid negative messages to themselves.
- Have great integrity and act ethically.
- Use humor to relieve tension and put things in perspective.

- Are in touch with their spiritual side and nourish it regularly.
 - Enjoy relationships.
 - Celebrate successes!
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Chapter 1.12 Policies and Procedures

Sections:

1.12.010 Definitions

1.12.020 Suggested policies and procedures

1.12.010 DEFINITIONS.

"Policy" means:

- A plan or course of action, as of a government, political party, or business, designed to influence and determine decisions and actions.
- A course of action or guiding principle, considered to be expedient, prudent or advantageous.

"Procedure" means:

- A way of performing or affecting something.
- A course of action.
- A set of established forms or methods for carrying on the affairs of a business, legislative body or court of law.

1.12.020 SUGGESTED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES. Following are listed activities for which policies and procedures should be established:

- Accounting (set out in the BARS Manual; however, personalized (entity specific) would be helpful for non-accountant staff)
- Accounts Receivable
- Adjustments
- Boards and Commissions (generally set out by ordinance or resolution)
- Bidding
- Budget Process
- Change Funds
- Charges for Services
- Code Enforcement
- Collections
- Debt Management (payment of P&I etc.)
- Deposits
- Expenditure Reimbursements

- Fixed Assets
- Hosting
- Inventory
- Investments
- Licenses and Permits
- Loans (Interfund)
- Local Improvement Districts
- Mail
- Payables
- Payroll
- Personnel
- Petty Cash and Revolving Funds
- Postage meter records
- Public Disclosure
- Purchasing
- Receipts
- Records Management
- Refunds
- Reporting
- Risk Management
- Signatures - (Warrants, Checks, Documents, Facsimile, Stamp, etc.)
- Social Media
- Technology -Use
- Telephone (Personal Use of)
- Taxes
- Transfers
- Utility Billing
- Vehicles - (Personal Use of Government Vehicles)
- Website

Sample policies and procedures are available from the Municipal Research Services Center or the IIMC.

Chapter 1.16 Follow-Up Systems

Sections:

- 1.16.010 Systems and procedures
- 1.16.020 Council pending items
- 1.16.030 Tracking/Reminder system
- 1.16.040 Community calendar
- 1.16.050 Internal calendar

1.16.010 SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES. An important function of the clerk is to maintain a system or procedure for notifying staff of due dates of reports and expiration dates on various matters. It is best not to try to rely on your memory, but to follow-up procedures which will work for you. This section gives suggestions for systems which can be adapted to your personal needs.

1.16.020 COUNCIL PENDING ITEMS. A separate process should be maintained for matters requiring the attention of the council. While many municipal organizations are now using electronic meeting management software, setting up an organized folder system with the software made available to you can be just as effective.

Create an "Agenda" folder on your network, with corresponding files or sub-folders for each of your meetings throughout the upcoming year. An agenda template can be created and also placed in each folder with the corresponding meeting date. As potential agenda items are identified, the item can be added to the agenda and/or related materials can be placed in the appropriate file or folder.

As public hearings are advertised, the affidavit of publishing, case file, or backup material can be placed in the appropriate meeting folder. If your council takes the same action at the same time each year, i.e., levying assessments for districts, or adopting the tax levy, you can place the matter on the agenda in advance to assist with agenda development throughout the year. This also allows for a departmental reminder early on so there is less last minute work to be done.

If this type of system is utilized, when it comes time to prepare an agenda, the clerk would verify all supporting documents have been received for the items placed on the agenda prior to final approval or packet creation.

1.16.030 TRACKING/REMINDER SYSTEM. With so many termination and expiration dates an effective tracking/reminder system is a good method to keep track of items, such as contract/agreements, insurance certificates, leases, commission/committee term expirations, special events, documents sent for recording, etc.

Word processing and data base management of the "tracking/reminder" is probably the most common system. With the "Search" and "Sort" features of a computerized system, items can be found by due date, date adopted, date requested, etc.

It should be noted that some items, such as leases, insurance certificates, and some agreements may need as much as a three-month lead time to negotiate new ones.

The systems mentioned in this section are merely suggestions and could be modified to meet individual needs. Any system should be kept simple and workable, and everyone in the department should be trained on use of the system so it will work in the absence of the clerk.

1.16.040 COMMUNITY CALENDAR. Some clerks maintain a community calendar as a public service. This type of calendar could have all meetings and events of community-wide interest, including council meetings, board of education meetings, chamber of commerce meetings, and

any event of interest to the general public. The community calendar should be disseminated publicly, as well as posted in various places in the city.

This type of calendar may be more appropriately maintained and distributed by the chamber of commerce or other community organizations.

1.16.050 INTERNAL CALENDAR. This calendar should list all meetings including council, board, committee and commission meetings, as well as outside meetings of interest to the governing body and department directors. The calendar should also include other events of possible interest to the governing body, staff, and the public.