



From Your Executive Director

What I wish
someone had told me

IN 2009, there were more than 2,000 brand new elected township officials. This was pretty close to what we had thought the turnover rate would be.

In the late spring and early summer, TOI held its Education District meetings, as well as Newly Elected Officials workshops. More than 900 officials attended. At these meetings, I was surprised by some of the questions being asked. It sure proved to me that newly-elected officials ARE eager to learn.

The same thing happened again this past November when TOI held its Annual Educational Conference in Springfield. New officials (and returning veterans) were there in force, eager to learn and asking questions.

I always enjoy answering questions for new officials and at one of the Newly-Elected Officials workshops, a favorite question was “What advice do you wish someone had shared with you when you first became an elected official?” Some of the answers given by veteran officials who were helping with the presentation were very interesting.

As we begin a new year, I thought I would search my files to share with you some of the things I wish someone had told me. Being a former township official, I found several things, but something I had in my files from a counterpart in another state really said it all so I’m sharing with you those things and I’ve added a few of my own.

So, here they are, in David Letterman-style ...

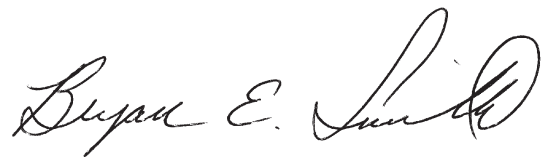
The Top 10 Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me When I Was First Elected as a Township Official

- 10. YOU WILL NOT MAKE EVERYONE HAPPY.** Many issues you will face over your term of office will lack a single answer to which all your citizens or even board members will agree.
- 9. THE LAW MATTERS.** The Illinois General Assembly has given township officials a framework in which to govern and administer their duties. Sometimes laws get in the way of what elected officials want to do. You may not think that ignoring a state statute will result in legal action, but this cavalier attitude really creates a slippery slope that township officials will eventually regret. Perfect compliance is darn near impossible, but a good-faith effort to comply with the law is not.
- 8. EVERY VOTING MEMBER ON THE TOWNSHIP BOARD HAS EQUAL WEIGHT.** Every voting member of the township board has the same duties and responsibilities for governance of the township as the others. Allow everyone to have their say by respecting their right to disagree but in the end, the majority view will prevail.
- 7. TREAT OTHERS AS YOU WANT TO BE TREATED.** Don’t blindside your fellow township officials. Deliberations on issues can sometimes become very “spirited”, but don’t allow disagreements to become personal.
- 6. DON’T VIOLATE THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT.** If you are not aware of the Open Meetings Act, get acquainted real quick! Violating the Act can cause some terrible public relations problems and potential legal ones. Just don’t violate the Act.
- 5. SPEND THE TAXPAYERS’ MONEY IN A MANNER CONSISTENT WITH THE LAW.** Remember, townships can only spend money for public purposes. The township money isn’t your money. It belongs to the taxpayers.

You have been charged with using it in the best interests of the township and for purposes allowed by law.

4. **AVOID CONFLICTS OF INTEREST.** The law clearly spells out where township officials can have pecuniary interests in contracts. Make sure you acquaint yourself with the law or consult your township attorney if you have concerns.
3. **DON'T STOP LEARNING.** Open your *Township Perspective* each month and read it. Attend educational seminars sponsored by TOI, your division or your county association. Take all possible measures to understand each duty and issue as much as possible. Call TOI. We have lots of information and are always willing to help you try and find the answer.
2. **DON'T FORGET WHO'S THE BOSS.** It's the citizens (voters) of your township who placed their trust in you. They are the "boss" and you should always remember that they are who you work for.
1. **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.** There is much to enjoy in public service as a township official if you keep your priorities straight. Try not to lose sight of what is important and why you wanted your township position. Don't forget your family obligations and your spiritual needs. Laugh freely at yourself or a situation, just not at others.

You may think these things are pretty easy to figure out, but sometimes we forget the simple things. I hope these are helpful to you as we begin 2010. Happy New Year!



Illinois Local Government Week March 7-13, 2010

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Local Government Week provides opportunities for public participation in local government. It enables elected officials to educate the community about the importance of the services that local government provides.



The Partnership for Local Government Education is a collaboration formed to increase interest and involvement in local government in Illinois. It is composed of the Illinois Association of County Board Members and Commissioners, Illinois Municipal League, Township Officials of Illinois, and University of Illinois Extension.