



from your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

The Top Ten Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me

IN 2017, there were more than 2,000 brand new elected township officials. This was pretty close to what we had thought but from conversations I thought it would be higher in terms of turnover. In the summer of 2017, TOI held newly-elected officials “Boot Camps” and almost 700 officials attended. At those meetings, I was surprised by the questions being asked. It sure proved to me that newly-elected officials ARE eager to learn.

The same thing was proven 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 each of our recent educational meetings a favorite question was “What advice do you wish someone had shared with when you first became an elected township official?”. Some of the answers given by vet-

eran officials who were helping with the presentations were very interesting.

Being a former township clerk and supervisor myself, I thought I would search my files to share with you some of the things I wish someone had told me. I found several things, but something I had from a counterpart in another state township association 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

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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 blindsides 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 the law.

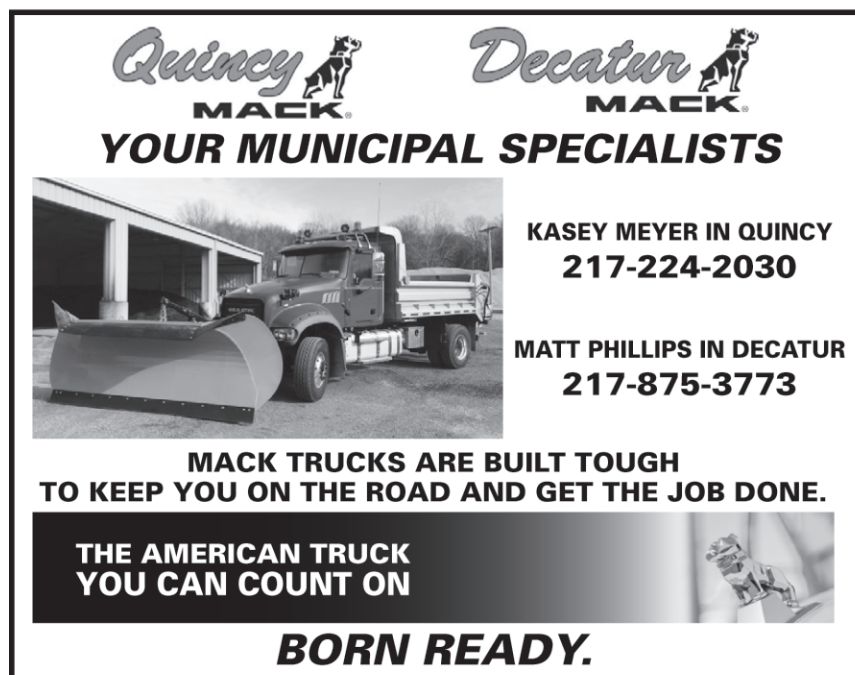
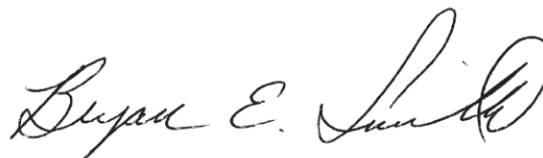
4. AVOID CONFLICTS OF INTEREST. The law clearly spells out where township officials can have pecuniary interests in contracts. Make sure you acquaint yourself with the law or consult your township attorney if you have concerns.


3. DON'T STOP LEARNING. Open your *Township Perspective* each month and read it. Attend educational seminars sponsored by TOI, your division, or 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! Happy 2018!



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