Turning Conflict Around: Maximizing Moments of Leadership
2016 City Summit

Trainer(s):
Dr. Scott C. Paine
Director, Leadership Development & Education Florida League of Cities
Turning Conflict Around: Maximizing Moments of Leadership

Dr. Scott C. Paine
Director, Leadership Development & Education
Florida League of Cities

#NLCU

© 2014, 2016 Florida League of Cities University.
All Rights Reserved.
Agenda

• What is a Moment?
• The Formal Public Moment
• The Informal Public Moment
• The Interpersonal Moment
• The Personal Moment
• Concluding Thoughts/Takeaways
What is a Moment?
A Little Physics – The Moment of Force

• Force
  “any influence which tends to change the motion of an object”
  http://hyperphysics.phy-astr.gsu.edu/hbase/force.html

• The ‘moment’ of a force
  “a measure of its tendency to cause a body to rotate about a specific . . . axis”
  http://web.mit.edu/4.441/1_lectures/1_lecture5/1_lecture5.html
So a ‘moment’ is . . .

The likelihood that the application of a particular force will turn something around
What do we know about the moment of force?

- The moment of force is greater the farther out one is from the axis of rotation
- If too much force is applied too quickly, one may cause damage
- If force is applied in the wrong direction, one may cause damage
Direct Opposition or a Need to Turn?

• In political settings, we often perceive the different parties to be in direct opposition to each other (citizens vs. staff vs. elected leaders vs business vs environment)

• However, with careful thought and creativity, what seems to be direct opposition can be re-envisioned as ‘turning’
Moments of Leadership

• Imagining difficult situations in public leadership as situations requiring the right ‘moment’ of leadership to ‘turn things around’
Applying the Lessons of Physics . . .

• The moment of leadership may prove more effective the more we stay away from the ‘axis’ of controversy

• The force we apply must be appropriate to the need

• The force we apply must be in the right direction
The Formal Public Moment
Roll the Tape
What Pushes Buttons at Public Meetings?

- Political/partisan differences
- Differences in policy preferences
- Differences in professional judgment
- Differences in private interest
- Personal animosity/distrust
Maximizing Moments of Leadership: Changing the Fight

**Do**
- Emphasize data and analysis
- Entertain questions and comments
- Draw distinctions
  - 'no objection'
  - 'recommendation'
- Support the team

**Don’t**
- Personalize
- Dismiss questions or comments
- Blur the lines
- Get positioned into conflict
Roll the Tape
Living in a Glass House

• Public records and public meetings laws force what otherwise might be private into the public spotlight

• Public interest in scandal drives media attention and coverage

• Media skepticism (or cynicism) creates large hurdles to overcome in difficult situations
Living in a Glass House

Everyone has vulnerabilities:

- ‘Youthful indiscretions’
- Experiences and choices
- Career challenges
- Financial difficulties
- Personal tragedies and old wounds

These vulnerabilities can be:

- Exploited by adversaries
- Triggered inadvertently by neutral parties . . . even allies
Maximizing the Moment: Setting a Standard of Transparency

- Defining a prudent standard of transparency helps set expectations
  - Among colleagues
  - Among citizens
  - Among reporters and the press
- Living by that standard establishes the integrity of the process
- Ensuring a prudent standard protects against unnecessary exposure
Maximizing the Moment: Setting a Standard of Transparency

Do

• Set explicit expectations for transparency
• Live by those expectations
• Protect against intrusiveness

Don’t

• Promise access to everything
• Fail to be transparent as expected
• Exploit vulnerabilities through intrusive revelations or demands
The Informal Public Moment
Roll the Tape – Dallas Town Hall on Police Shootings of Residents
Us versus Them

• Members of the public may see government officials as adversaries, even enemies

• As long as we are perceived in this light, our ability to work with the public is seriously limited
Maximizing the Moment: Identification

• We respond better to those with whom we have something in common

• Nearly all of us have *something* in common

• To be effective, such commonalities must be:
  • More than superficial (to the audience)
  • Relevant in some way to the conversation
Maximizing the Moment: Identification

**Do**
- Listen to and learn about the audience
- Point out relevant commonalities
- Speak from those commonalities

**Don’t**
- Assume we know all about the audience
- Make a big deal out of inconsequential commonalities
- Pretend that a commonality means we ‘know how they feel’
Roll the Tape – Nothing to Say
What did you see?
There’s Nothing I Can Say . . .

Origins:
Expressions of Pain/Grief
• Pain and grief
• Fear
• Confusion
• Manipulation

Origins:
Expressions of Anger
• Righteous indignation
• Frustration
• Protection of self or others
• Manipulation
There’s Nothing I Can Say . . .

- Distinguishing authentic emotions and purposes from inauthentic ones isn’t easy

- What we know is true is that the emotion is being expressed

- One usually can tell whether the emotion expressed resonates with the audience
Maximizing the Moment:
What to Say When There’s Nothing to Say

• We need to deal with the emotion, whether or not it is grounded in the reality we see

• We need to work from ‘negative’ toward ‘positive’

• We need to work from ‘isolating’ toward ‘shared’
Maximizing the Moment: What to Say When There’s Nothing to Say

**Do**
- Acknowledge the emotion
- Accept its ‘truth’
- Respond to the emotion with emotion

**Don’t**
- Ignore the emotion
- Refute the emotion
- Respond to the emotion with cold rationality
Maximizing the Moment: Under Attack (Without Getting Personal)

• Accept that we will be treated unfairly

• QTIP it

• Turn attacks into moments of professional grace
Maximizing the Moment: Under Attack (Without Getting Personal)

Do

- Acknowledge the speaker’s experience and feelings
- Show respect even if not given
- Move on, only correcting factual issues and only if necessary

Don’t

- Express frustration with the speaker
- Engage in personal attacks
- Fight every battle in the public session
The Interpersonal Moment
Interpersonal Moments in Public Service: Examples?
Using Improv to Learn How To Maximize the Interpersonal Moment

• The Four Cs of Improv (Boston’s National Touring Company)
  • Creativity
  • Critical Thinking
  • Collaboration
  • Communication

• All are skills needed to create positive interpersonal moments
Using Improv to Learn How To Maximize the Interpersonal Moment

• Let’s try it out: “That’s right, Bob”/“That’s right, Barb”

• What’s required?
  • Always agreeing with your partner
  • Selling the idea
Maximizing the Interpersonal Moment: Lessons from “That’s right, Bob”/”That’s right, Barb”
Maximizing the Interpersonal Moment


**Do**
- Be ‘in the moment’
- Use supportive words
- Focus on interests
- Invent mutually beneficial options

**Don’t**
- Be distracted
- Use abusive or exaggerated language
- Focus on positions
- Get stuck in winning and losing
The Personal Moment
“Oh Lord, It’s Hard to be Humble”

- “The Honorable”
- Places of honor
- Recognition
- Frequent (and often false) praise
Maximizing the Moment: Practical Humility

**Do**
- Modestly accept praise
- Praise others for the good they do
- Emphasize what the community achieves together

**Don’t**
- Insist on being praised
- Praise our own achievements
- Act as though we get things done alone
“We Have Met the Enemy, and It is Us”

• All of us have character flaws

• There is a natural human tendency to protect ourselves from exposing those flaws
“We Have Met the Enemy, and It is Us”

• When challenged at our vulnerable point, we are likely to become defensive

• Such defensiveness tends to reveal even more of our fundamental weaknesses
Maximizing the Moment: Facing Our Demons

• There is something tremendously disarming about an apology from someone with power

• There is something even more disarming when a powerful person asks for forgiveness
  • Not as a show or a necessary political maneuver
  • But as a sincere acknowledgement of his/her own failings
# Maximizing the Moment: Facing Our Demons

**Do**
- Acknowledge (some) of our weaknesses
- Apologize when we have been less than our best
- Ask (under the right conditions) to be forgiven

**Don’t**
- Pretend to be strong where we are weak
- Refuse to admit we failed
- Act as though no one was hurt
“It Doesn’t Really Matter”

• Some of the most important issues in our communities are also the most challenging to address

• Our power to address these issues is frequently very limited

• Our influence over those who can help address these issues is limited as well
“It Doesn’t Really Matter”

• We often turn away from the most difficult challenges
  • To avoid failing
  • To avoid appearing to fail

• We often rationalize this behavior by focusing on what we cannot do
Maximizing the Moment:
We Won’t Go Down Without a Fight

• Fighting for some things, however difficult, should be worth everything we have

• Leadership, in these moments, is about changing the terms of decision
  • Still intent upon winning
  • But willing to fight, win or lose
Maximizing the Moment:
We Won't Go Down Without a Fight
Maximizing the Moment: We Won’t Go Down Without a Fight

**Do**
- Acknowledge the difficulties
- Claim a higher purpose
- Invite all to join in common cause

**Don’t**
- Pretend it will be easy
- Boil things down to selfish goals
- Exclude *anyone* who is willing to join
Concluding Thoughts
Your Takeaways?
Your Takeaways?
Our Takeaways

• Move away from the ‘axis’ of confrontation

• Look for moments of leverage to turn a situation around
Turning Conflict Around: Maximizing Moments of Leadership

Dr. Scott C. Paine
Director, Leadership Development & Education
Florida League of Cities

© 2014, 2016 Florida League of Cities University. All Rights Reserved.