

WILEY



Teamwork without Politics

A Success Story featuring :



## Transforming a city government into a cohesive team.

John Kessel, City Manager of Schertz, Texas, faces the same dilemma every November: working with a new city council. While that doesn't sound like a big problem, building a team from scratch every year can be time consuming and stressful. He has to oversee a wave of newly elected city officials—each with individual preferences and talents—and expect them to work together directly after the elections process. The frequent change in leadership has prevented the city government from building a foundation for teamwork. Kessel, along with Schertz Mayor Michael Carpenter, have set out to make a change and transform the next city council into an effective team.

### MORE THAN A WORKSHOP

With a new city council in place, Kessel and Mayor Carpenter sprang into action. They sought out the expertise of Davis Success Solutions (DSS) to help turn their political, and sometimes confrontational, atmosphere into a productive environment where city leaders can work together as a team. The newly elected officials began building teamwork through a unique team development program: The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team™.

Based on New York Times bestselling author Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, The Five Behaviors™ program helps teams understand how to become a high-performing team. Additionally, the program pairs The Five Behaviors model

with a personality inventory to highlight the impact of personality on team development.

The program is “not a one-time training event, but an ongoing organizational development process,” says Roy Davis of DSS. “We don't just give them a workshop and some takeaways. It's not us doing the work; it's them. We have to plant the seed and allow the conversations to emerge.”

Davis took the elected council through a two-day off-site immersion focused on how the five key behaviors of teamwork—Trust, Conflict, Commitment, Accountability, and Results—are interrelated and essential in leading a team to collective success. Participants were organized into teams by function: development, operations, services, administration, and city council. To start, everyone completed The Five Behaviors assessment, which lets individuals evaluate their strengths and challenges and identify changes they want to see on their teams. The results indicated that Trust and Conflict were the most problematic behaviors for each of the teams.

### DISCOVERING THE POWER OF VULNERABILITY-BASED TRUST

“Before you can gain the public trust, you have to demonstrate and earn the trust of your own colleagues,” says Kessel. To begin building trust, the foundation of The Five Behaviors™ model, Davis asked each person



to share something personal about themselves and how it affected their professional lives. While being vulnerable is not always comfortable, the teams experienced the transformational power of vulnerability-based trust through this simple exercise. Davis created a safe space that brought out the human side of the city officials who were then able to share and connect with their colleagues on a deeper level.

“Adding vulnerability as a leadership quality at appropriate times can change internal team dynamics in ways I am just discovering,” Mayor Carpenter reveals. While trust doesn’t happen overnight, a focused approach to building trust is the exact push the Schertz city leaders needed to bring them one step closer to cohesiveness. Taking the time to strengthen and deepen the relationships on the team helped set the foundation for teamwork.

### THE POSITIVE SIDE OF CONFLICT

To explore conflict, Davis had the teams write down behaviors that would be acceptable or unacceptable during team discussions. Each team revealed different levels of tolerance for conflict. Some were comfortable with addressing disagreement head-on, while others wanted to avoid confrontation and maintain harmony. By setting boundaries around conflict, they created an environment where conflict was a critical, constructive part of conversations, rather than a threat.

“All the participants signed their handwritten sheets. Then we had the sheets laminated,” explains Kessel. “Today, the signed posters hang on the walls of their offices as constant affirmations.” Establishing team expectations challenges the natural tendency to avoid conflict and encourages healthy, productive conflict based on ideas. Team members now refer to their sheets regularly and address conflict themselves.

### LEADING WITH TEAMWORK

As the facilitator, Davis noted the teams’ progress. “They make better, faster decisions, leverage the skills and perspectives of all members, and waste less time and energy on the misdirected priorities and destructive conflict that often define a political organization.”

After the program, the teams took a survey in which 90 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their team is stronger

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for going through The Five Behaviors™ program, and 100 percent believed that the program would be beneficial across the organization. Police Chief Michael Hansen called the process “without question the most enjoyable team session that I have attended. It enhanced the team and my perception of the members.”

The Five Behaviors experience united the city officials which allowed them to start off the

new term with a fresh perspective. “Now, I suspect that we will see...our very culture permanently and positively changed,” says Mayor Carpenter. With a renewed culture and insight into their new colleagues, the Schertz city leaders could demonstrate the value of teamwork and effectively work together to lead their city.