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Just when you think you've learned it all...

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Vice Mayor



I had hoped that by finally reaching my present age, I had learned everything that there was to know. Each time I attend the League of Cities annual conference, I sit through sessions given by people with many more letters after their name than I have, so

it pays to listen more attentively.

This year I went to one called "Ethics and the City Official." With all that is going on in our local cities I thought this would be a good take. The speaker was John G. Hubbard, an attorney very much experienced in these matters.

His first bit of advice was to always make sure that your town's interest came before your personal gain. This should be a no-brainer for anyone seeking elected office, but obviously this is not always the case. I also learned a new legal term, *De Minimus*. (Google it for a thorough explanation.) It interested me because there have been many frivolous complaints made to our local ethics commission which even they thought not worthy of their time. *De Minimus*).

Later that day, we had the privilege of hearing Gov. Rick Scott speak on the usual topics of more jobs, etc. I haven't quite made up my mind about our new governor, but he seems to be trying his best. He did say that he answers all phone calls and requests, so I handed him a copy of a letter that I sent to one of his subordinates to which no response ever was received. As of this writing I am still waiting to hear from the governor. I promise to let you know the results.

The next session dealt with communicating your city's budget to the public. This is a tough one. When we in government review our respective budgets we are handed a plethora of numbers and figures in various columns with descriptions that are sometimes hard to follow if you are not an accounting major. We still have to make proper judgments in order to allow our towns to grow and prosper.

Everyone in the public has his/her own ideas on how our money should be spent, and it doesn't always agree with the decisions that we will be forced to make. Witness what the Miami-Dade County mayor has been going through. Everyone wants more police protection, better libraries, more parks, etc., but "don't raise my taxes."

In my years of public service, no one has ever called or written to me suggesting that I raise their taxes.



One of the suggested solutions to this dilemma is to convey the benefits that the people will receive for their dollars spent. Simply saying that we will add more police or firemen won't do. It would be more important to show how response times and training of the new additions will make our lives safer and healthier. This is not an easy message to convey. We must do a better job of communicating.

One of the speakers at this meeting was Scott Payne, who also has a whole bunch of letters after his name, and writes for several magazines that I read. He recently wrote an article advising public servants to maintain an overall view of their communities and vote on what is best for everyone with an eye to the future. This is not always an easy thing to do — the popular thought being to try to remain as popular with the local public as you can. If you place popularity over true needs of your town, you could be making a huge mistake. Thank you, Scott.

One of the last sessions truly gave me a headache — in a nice way. The speaker was Eric Qualman, PhD, author, etc., etc., who wrote a book called *Digital Leader*. I suggest you read it. He explained how social media transforms the way we live and do business. Just what I needed to hear!

I am still in the early stages of understanding Twitter and Facebook. At first I thought they were a fun way to post pictures and make ridiculous comments. Now he states that they are the secret to business and political success. That might be fine, except that I also learned that there are over 200 social media networks that are absolute musts or you will pass away never leaving what is called

your "digital legacy." How horrible!

We were told that that everyone has a digital signature and that anyone can be searched online to gather all kinds of information about us. Children, now have their own digital signatures and unborn children, too, are now on the Internet with postings of their sonograms. How important is that?

How many more years must one live before truly saying that he/she has learned everything there is to learn? Attending the League of Cities conference, I believe, is one of the most valuable things that we public servants can do. The sessions themselves are always educational but sitting around and talking to people from different parts of the state and learning of their problems and how they relate to what we do every day is extremely valuable.

Everyone you speak to will tell you that they all have those five to 12 people who claim to be speaking for the entire community and have all the answers. Their advice: "sign-up, have your signs made and go out and campaign for office." Another thing learned, although it is a tough lesson, is that in replying to emails from constituents, which I always do, you should limit the response to the original email and don't — I repeat, don't — continue into a dialog. My chief of staff has been telling me that for years. I think I have finally learned the lesson, but please don't stop communicating with me. I need and value your input.

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