

# TRANSFORMING COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Navigating the *Leading from the Helm* model creates a performance-based culture of trust.



## THE OPPORTUNITY

When Crow Wing County faced dramatic financial challenges following the recession of 2008, County leaders sought changes that would not only get them through the hard times but support sustainable change far into the future.

## THE SOLUTION

County leaders turned to *Leading from the Helm*, Dr. Robert Sicora's research-based program designed to create a foundation for cultural change out of the one ingredient the county needed for lasting transformation: trust. The collaboration between Sicora Consulting and Crow Wing County has been truly transformative.



*“We’ve gone from, ‘I work for the Crow Wing County Auditor’s Office’ to ‘I work for Crow Wing County.’ Robert helped us look at processes from the customer’s perspective instead of our own internal perspective, and that made all the difference.”*

*Deborah Erickson, Administrative Services Director*



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## How to create a performance-based culture of trust

Tami Laska is Crow Wing County Director of Human Resources. “We started by asking, “What do we stand for as an organization? What is our purpose? Early on Robert had us discuss the competencies that defined our organization, and we learned that we valued results and results and results—and that maybe we were a little out of balance.” The sessions helped teams identify how much they valued relationships, working with customers, having good work processes, solving problems, and being recognized for their contributions.

“They were amazing sessions,” Tami said. “Whereas before everyone was thinking separately about their own goals, after those three days we began to understand how many goals we had in common.”

“We’re more preventative than reactive now,” said Highway Maintenance Supervisor Jory Danielson. “Our new five-year gravel plan maintains roads in a way to avoid big variances in their condition.”

“Robert’s emphasis on understanding personalities was a critical foundation for realizing our vision for a culture of continuous innovation,” according to Tim Houle. “The real magic of what we’re delivering is our alignment—commissioners, senior leaders, front line supervisors get it, employees do, too. We’re all playing from the same page.”

*“The results included something that has never happened before in the state of Minnesota--something that shows how managing a culture of high performance is a good return on the investment: First, our customer satisfaction surveys show 95.8% satisfaction with County services, and second, we have a reduced property tax levy for the last 7 years.”*

*- Timothy Houle, County Administrator*

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A neutral facilitator with a holistic balanced approach to cultural transformation is central to an organization’s goal of energizing individuals and teams around a core vision.
- Building trust is foundational to organizational change and sustainability.
- Building tolerance for individual differences and instilling consistency is foundational to building trust.
- Innovation must be invited, welcomed, and supported with planning and accountability.
- Culture change does not happen through flash-in-the-pan or management du jour initiatives.
  - It happens through a clear long-term vision; time-tested management tools consistently applied; patience to stay the course through adversity; critical mass being accumulated positive experience by positive experience; and building alignment throughout the organization from the top to the bottom on the who, the what, and the how that is the organization’s mission and values.



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