

# Replacing the police chief



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Case 1 Replacing the Police Chief This case study examines the predicament of a city manager Will Spanning whose selection of a most experienced and qualified replacement for the chief of police faced stern opposition by a majority of an agenda-seeking city council who had the power to confirm or reject the appointment. Question 1: What were the advantages and risks involved in pursuing Spanning's recruitment plan? Spanning's recruitment plan was a thorough, comprehensive, and systematic strategy to procure the most appropriate and qualified individual for the position of police chief.

It was a plan that provided checks and balances, allotted for contingencies and was multi-tier in evaluating each candidate's experience and background. It consisted of four stages of consideration. The first of these was an initial screening of respondents to the advertisement to identify candidates with the most potential and promise. Spanning had assembled a review board consisting of five professionals in the areas of management and law enforcement and those selected from the initial screening were interviewed and ranked by the board.

Based on the review board's rankings, Spanning then personally interviewed the finalist with focus on issues of compensation and more importantly compatibility between he and that individual. This was important because Spanning and soon to be resigning Police Chief Johnson had previously formed a healthy professional alliance that encouraged compromise and negotiation in matters relating to municipal issues and resource allocation rather than conflict and cut-throat politics.

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In addition to Spanning's personal interview, he also conducted a comprehensive background check of the candidate and subsequently offered them the position. Finally, the appointee would be interviewed and later confirmed by the city council or the search process would begin again at square one. The process was advantageous because it not only reduced the opportunity for political agendas to influence the decision but also created a more democratic and objective method of selection by the manager as he did not bear the sole responsibility of appointing a candidate to the position.

By the same token, Spanning's strategy faced the uncertain climate of split ideological and decision patterns by two opposing subgroups within the council. Question 2: As a city manager, Spanning exercised administrative authority of Police Chief Johnson. Would it have been proper for Spanning to seek to delay the arrest of Randy Redmond until after that night's council meeting? What would be the benefits and risks of such a strategy?

A decision by Spanning to exercise any influence on the matters of an impending criminal investigation or arrest would be an unlawful and unethical misuse of his authority as city manager. Although delay of the arrest would certainly temporarily reduce the complications involving the son of one of his advocates in the council, exerting this kind of influence would be a risk of his own professional credibility and an abandonment of the commitment to excellence and ethical fairness in local governance as described in the ICMA Code of the Ethics.

Even if it meant risking his job in the short run, caving in to the pressures of outside influences would be even more detrimental to the character of his

leadership and would contradict any personal valuation with regard to justice and fair ethical treatment for all. Question 3: What, if any would be the ethical implications of action to defer Redmond's arrest? Given the existing threat to Spanning's effectiveness as city manager, if not to his job, would it be appropriate to put these ethical considerations aside?

Given the importance of the appointment to the community's welfare, would it be appropriate to put these ethical considerations aside to secure Warren's appointment? In their simplest form, the concepts of best ethical practice and best possible outcome for the community are both highly subjective depending on the ideology of the individual making a decision. However in this case, there exists a standardized and published code of ethics created by the ICMA to provide consistency and uniformity with regard to professional local government management.

In an evolving and contradictory political climate such as that which existed in the town of Dover, the principles expressed in this code of ethics serve as a fair and objective guideline by which difficult decisions can be based on. Therefore, there should generally not be circumstances where ethical considerations are sacrificed on the basis of a given individual or group's perception of the best possible outcome for the community. Much like a constitution, the ICMA Code of Ethics gives decision makers a tangible reference and provides a scale of ethical justice on which conflicting opinions can be weighed against each other.

Question 4: Apart from any action on the arrest, should Spanning have contacted Redmond prior to the meeting to discuss his family's problems?

Spanning was described as someone who coming in to the job of city manager for Dover, work hard to establish a decorated and accomplished career in municipal government. That being said, while employment opportunities come and go, a reputation of standing firm by a strict code of ethics is an invaluable feature of one's professional profile.

Although most anyone would prefer employment separations to be matters of personal choice rather than termination, someone with Spanning's resume would be well qualified and prepared for other positions of power in local government or at higher levels. However, if there arose speculation that he was participating in any kind of unethical racketeering with regard to personnel appointments, or if perhaps his alliance with Redmond were not as strong as he may have thought and word of such contact were to spread, he would risk forever damaging his professional reputation and public image.

Therefore under no circumstances should he have contacted Redmond about his son's arrest. Question 5: If Spanning decided to delay the council meeting and seek a compromise, what kind of compromise might achieve his purposes and be acceptable to the council? The only way Spanning could safely suggest a delay of the council meeting was if, due to the circumstances of his son and wife's arrest, Redmond could not be present for the meeting or if he somehow would not be able to objectively make a decision regarding matters of police while both his son and wife faced consequences of the criminal justice system.

Then perhaps he could argue that holding the meeting at that time would not be in the best interest and safety of the community. Otherwise, there is

no other way Spanning could accomplish a delay without appearing to be acting with a personal agenda. Question 6: How might a compromise be initiated by Spanning? What would he need to do to execute a compromise without appearing weak or contradictory in the public eye? Spanning would need to be aware of the code of ethics that he subscribed to and was expected to uphold as the city's manager and how violating them would impact his professional reputation and personal values.

It would be important for him to consider how his decision might contribute an already hostile and divisive political culture in the town of Dover. The most important factor that he would have to evaluate would be his continued ability to efficiently and effectively perform the duties of his position as manager should he allow myself to be bullied by the old guard city council members featuring an agenda-seeking politician. He would have to determine if he were willing to swallow his personal pride and relinquish his authority to make decisions in all personnel matters all on the basis of shady political influence.

Question 7: What would be the long-term effect on Spanning's management ability and his authority if he sought a compromise at this point? The textbook references tenet 10 from the ICMA Code of Ethics, which reads: "Resist any encroachment on professional responsibilities, believing the member should be free to carry out official policies without interference, and handle each problem without discrimination on the basis of principle and justice" (Banovetz, Page 224). This tenet alone provides the ethical foundation for his course of action.

While Spanning clearly had legitimate concerns about the council's confirmation of his selection for chief of police, exercising a compromise would be in direct violation of another tenet, #11 of the ICMA Code that was pointed out in the study which requires him as manager to "handle all matters of personnel on the basis of merit so that fairness and impartiality govern a member's decisions pertaining to appointments, pay adjustments, promotions, and discipline" (Banovetz, Page 224).

Such a decision would have costly ramifications on Spanning's ability to manage the city because by seeking a compromise he would be succumbing to an intrusion by the council members on his authority to govern personnel decisions. Conceding in this way could undermine his ability to exert his authority over other municipal matters that might arise in the future, as he would have already shown a tendency to fold under political pressure.

Question 8: What should Spanning do? Why?

Despite the fact that he faced immediate opposition from members of the city council, and despite his efforts to choose a qualified and capable applicant for the police chief position, ultimately, it is hazardous to the welfare and safety of the community to have divisiveness and anarchy from within local government and certainly from within the police department. Therefore, ethical concerns withstanding, the course of action that would have brought about the best outcome for the city would be for Spanning to allow the criminal justice process to take its natural course.

Should doing so create an adverse effect on the confirmation of his preferred choice of replacement for the police chief, then the selection process would

simply have to be repeated as provisioned by the recruitment plan he himself designed. Works Cited Banovetz, James M. Managing Local Government: Cases in Decision Making 2nd edition International City/County Management Association. , Washington, D. C. , 1998.