

# Is board/council micro-management an issue in your system?

**Y**our KRWA office receives many calls from staff members and board/council members in small water systems. The calls range in issues from technical to management. In some cases, they are complaints about board or council members' micro-management of staff. Micro-management by governing body members is a concern by many operators or administrative staff and there seems to be a higher incidence of complaints from smaller rather than larger systems. It's far easier for everyone to accomplish daily work and meet overall goals when people work with the cooperation of the board/council, fellow employees, engineers and others.

Micro-managing has the same effect as adding a 100 pound weight on a person's back. Not true you say? Take one operator in east-central Kansas. He has worked for a small town for 12 years and was doing a good job. All required tasks were performed, which included maintaining the water system with several wells and a pump station, a wastewater system, streets, city park and the various other duties that would routinely come up. A new mayor was elected and suddenly the operator is no longer able to determine what is needed or when to do it. The new mayor would set the schedule for the

day's activities of what he wanted done and in what order to do it. It wasn't long before the operator found a new job.

For board/council members it is it may be sometimes necessary to remind the mayor or chairman as the case may be, that the

managed is this – the overwhelming “feeling of not being trusted.” As one system employee said, “When this occurs there is added stress and worry and then the employee is more prone to making mistakes.” Another seasoned operator put it

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operator was hired by the board or council to perform the duties as set out in the job description and to make sure the system is operating as efficiently as

this way, “It is easier to look for another job than to deal with the stress of being micro-managed.”

Board/council members should note the feelings of many



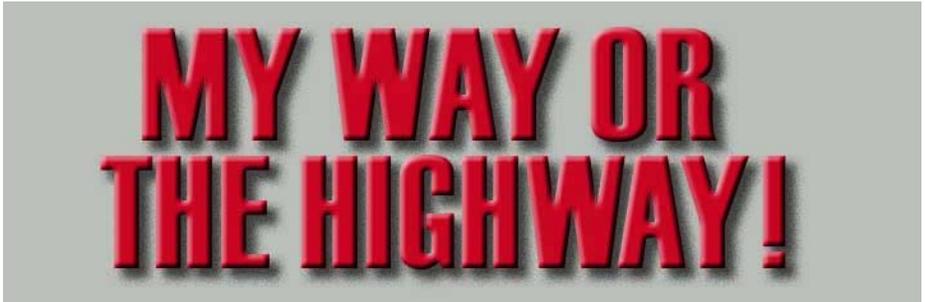
*Greg Duryea  
Tech Assistant*

possible. The mayor does not need to be commanding daily work orders to staff.

I know of several utilities in Kansas where employees and governing body members meet for an hour a day to determine what is going to be accomplished that day. To me this is a total waste of time and productivity.

While visiting with employees it is easy to see that the biggest complaint about being micro-

managers, “If you don't trust the person who has been hired, then it's time to find someone else.” But honestly, will the mayor or council member feel the same way about next employee? I'd bet that that's the case, unless someone is hired who is related to a board/council member. This would tend to lead an employee to think that this was the reason for the micro-management in the first place.



### Recognizing micro-management

First the board/council needs to recognize micro-management on their part. This may sound like another 12-step process to help people but its not! Understanding it is the key to fixing a problem.

The board/council hires employees to perform jobs to ensure efficient utility operation. The operator is expected to implement policies, advise the governing body of upcoming regulations, requirements and the associated costs. They will also provide information, assure cost-effective operations and many other managerial duties.

The board/council should set policy, delegate responsibility, be receptive to recommendations, study issues to understand



ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA WINDLER, THOROUGHbred COMPUTER SYSTEMS

information received, participate fully by asking questions, perform annual evaluations and understand the basic fiduciary role of the board or council. Conversely, managers should not control boards/councils.

People are not always going to agree or get along all the time. Having sound policies is the surest way to help combat lack of agreement. One city clerk confided in me that, "Having written policies that are adhered to consistently is very beneficial to the performance of my job." Not only do employees need to consistently adhere to written policies but the board/council should also follow the policies. Not following policies or codes consistently is a recipe for a lawsuit.



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**Is there board/council . . .**

It can be extremely difficult for a board/council to perform duties correctly or even adequately while being encumbered with the added negative effects of the board's micro-managing. If board/council members have the wrong-headed idea that employees will not be able to operate efficiently without being told what to do, defeats the purpose or desire for any employee of a system to improve.

**Try KanCap**

Kansas has a unique program to help boards/councils in these areas. It's called KanCap. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) is willing to work with rural water districts and cities by providing training for board/council members and employees to improve the management of their utilities. KanCap was designed and developed by KRWA in response

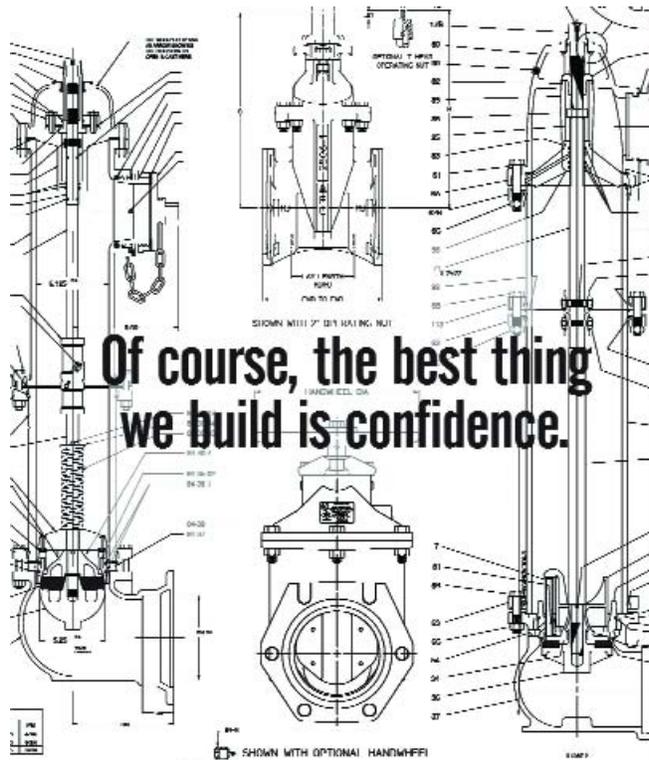
to numerous organizations suggesting that a board/council training program was a high priority. KanCap presents three segments of training: managerial, financial and technical. KDHE

to complete. These are fun, interactive, training sessions that provide excellent information for all attending. To schedule training for any system, city or RWD, call KDHE, Cathy Tucker-Vogel at

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and other training providers will schedule meetings at your system location to provide training on each segment. Each segment takes approximately three hours

785/368-7130. Watch for KanCap training sessions at the 2007 KRWA conference in Wichita.



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