

From: Tessmann, Shawn

Sent: Thursday, July 28, 2022 3:57 PM

To: #County Board Recipients <[mailto:County Board Recipients@countyofdane.com](mailto:County_Board_Recipients@countyofdane.com)>

Subject: Final thoughts from an exiting Director

Hello-

Thanks in advance for reading this long email and considering it. And please try to take at face value that I am reflecting honestly through the lens of appreciating the role and authority of the board. Please also consider these comments as coming from me as a private citizen, my views do not necessarily represent those of other members of county leadership.

You should know that a large impetus for leaving my position as Director is because of the current relationship with the board. I did not feel like I could be effective as a leader given the state of the climate being promoted between the Employee Groups and the board. Last Thursday was just the latest example. It baffles me that management is entrusted to make countless decisions every day that affect programming and services for our most vulnerable community members, and yet, management is treated like a passive and uninformed party in conversations about the work environment. Staff—those represented and those not—are of course going to have opinions. And certainly no working environment is perfect. But it is obvious to me that EG opinions are taken and revered as fact and treated as such without the benefit of hearing from management or considering that the EG opinion represents only one version of the truth. I believe you all have more intellectual sophistication than that. I'm not sure where or why things went off the rails in terms of the inherent mistrust and disrespect that now get routinely displayed, but I cannot emphasize enough how corrosive and caustic and demoralizing it is to the people who are leading county services. The dissonance between being entrusted with day to day administration of \$250 million in programming resources while also not being respected enough to be asked for an opinion on the department's attempts to diversity our staff is nothing short of stupefying. What and whose cause is being served here?

What I do know as fact is that staff and managers show up every day to do their best. To treat each other, their staff and our customers the best we can. To try to keep improving in the midst of incredible circumstances. After having watched my top leadership work 60 hour weeks only to be treated with derision at county board meetings is too much to witness as a leader. Where is the tolerance for ambiguity? Where is the compassion? Do you as leaders truly believe Dane County managers don't care about the well-being of their staff and are blind to the places where opportunities exist? If you believe that, how could you possibly trust the work that these leaders do in the service of our community?

The top of your agenda asks you to consider whose voice is not at the table. I can tell you with good authority who you are not hearing from. You're not hearing from the employees who disagree with the tactics of the EG (even as EG members!) because they are terrified to be targeted by their friends and colleagues. You're not hearing from the managers and supervisors who want to express their own opinion, but don't want the wrath of the EG for sticking their necks out and daring to challenge the narrative being put forward. You're certainly not hearing from the customers of our services who would feel more comfortable engaging with staff of color if provided that opportunity, but don't fully understand the constraints of county managers who have to navigate within the confines of county rules and procedures that are in DESPERATE need of overhaul if we're at all serious about equity in this community.

So-I implore you—as you begin to think about the budget discussions this Fall, CONSIDER THE SOURCE. The EG's have and will always have a place in the discussions, but they are not the sole authority. Their view is incomplete and—by its very nature—narrowed through the experiences of the rare missteps over the daily reality of the many.

Don't make decisions solely based on the opinions of the dozen or so who show up and carry loud voices. It's not the full picture at the very least, and it's not at all an accurate one in many cases.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as Director. I wish you all the best.

~Shawn Tessmann