



Urban Municipal Administrators Association of Saskatchewan

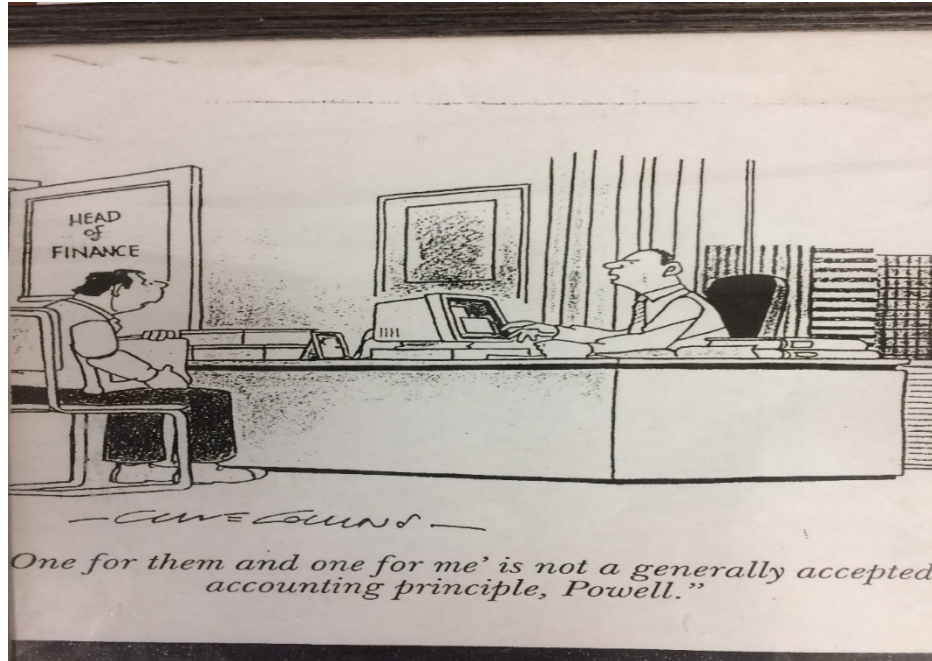
"Building Saskatchewan Towns & Villages"

Attracting and Retaining Municipal Administrators



Urban Municipal Administrators Association of Saskatchewan

"Building Saskatchewan Towns & Villages"



UMAAS is a professional organization composed of Urban Municipal Administrators which strives to maintain the highest possible standards of municipal administration by providing professional development and promoting continued education and career advancement.

Retention Strategies: What Does Your Prospective or Current CAO Value?

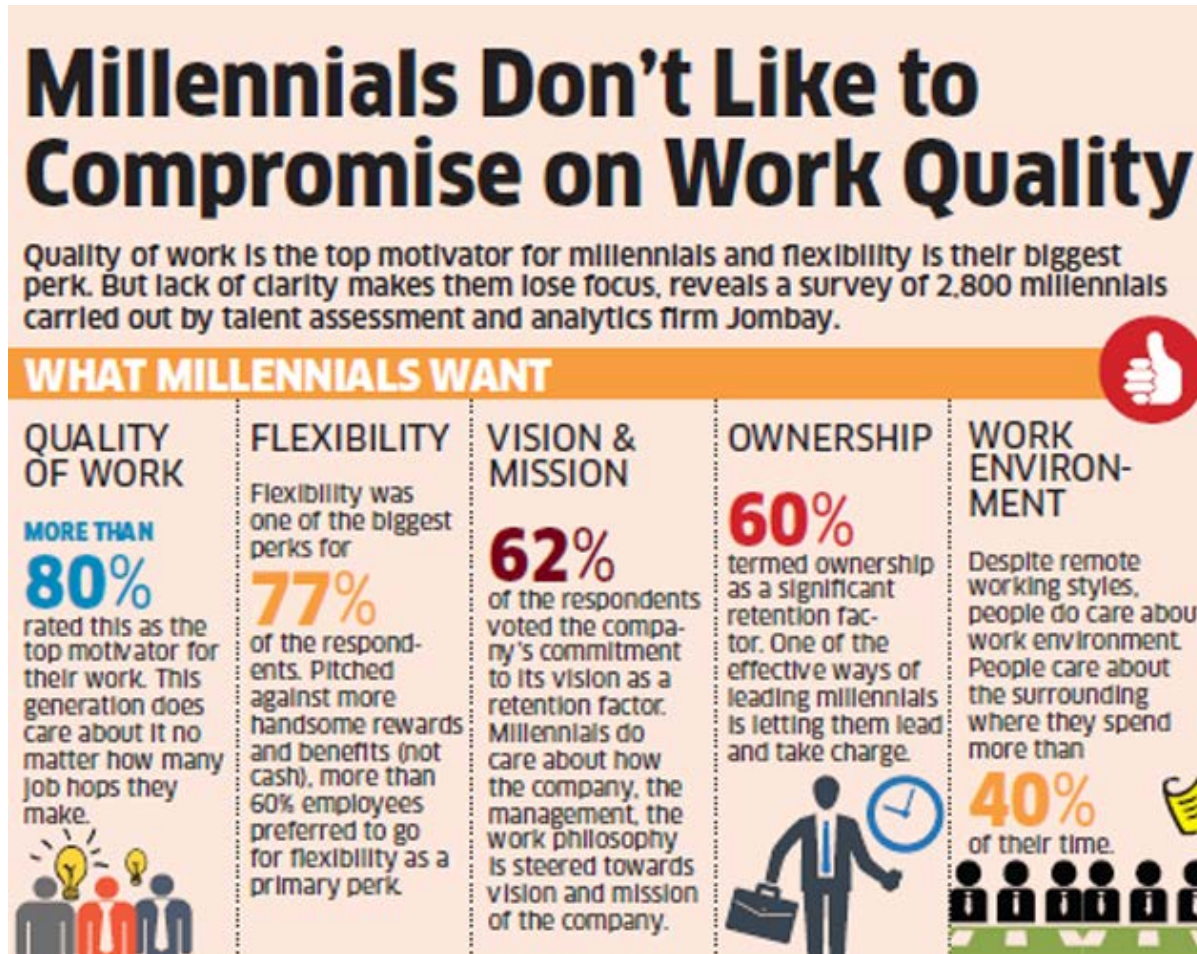
- Different people value different things at different stages of life:

- Those with young families may value flexibility and work-life balance
- Others may value compensation, community location, etc.
- Your single workaholic may someday start a family and their wants may change



Communicate with your CAO about how well you are meeting their expectations in addition to how well they are meeting yours and make a point of doing so on a regular basis

“Everyone Hates Millennials!”



But they are here and you had best learn what they value if you want employees in the future (everyone retires eventually)

Retention Strategies



- Base Strategy on CAO Values:
 - Flexible Schedules
 - Ability to leave work to watch swimming lessons or teach hockey practice may mean more than money to those with families
 - A short day each week to go golfing or the like may make up for overtime on other days and can prevent employee burnout
 - Spousal relationship will greatly affect whether your employee stays - keeping the spouse happy by ensuring your employee isn't constantly at work will go a long way
 - Ensuring your employee has enough time away from work to try and find a spouse in your community may be what changes their career plans from short-term to long-term
 - Hard to offer flexibility in offices where your lone office person is your CAO, but not impossible
 - Highlighting Applicable Community Strengths in Interviews and Ads
 - Small communities may appeal to families – safety, high teacher to student ratios, affordable housing, etc.
 - Outdoorsmen may want maintained sled trails, good hunting and lakes which many small communities have nearby
- Obviously, monetary compensation is a good way to be competitive, but it can save you a lot of money if you are able to compete in other ways
- Determining if your prospective or current CAO's hobbies and wants align with what you can offer can be a good indicator of your ability to retain them long-term

Question



- What are some of the most common reasons employees leave an organization?



3 Common Reasons for Quitting

1) Don't like the boss



2) Money

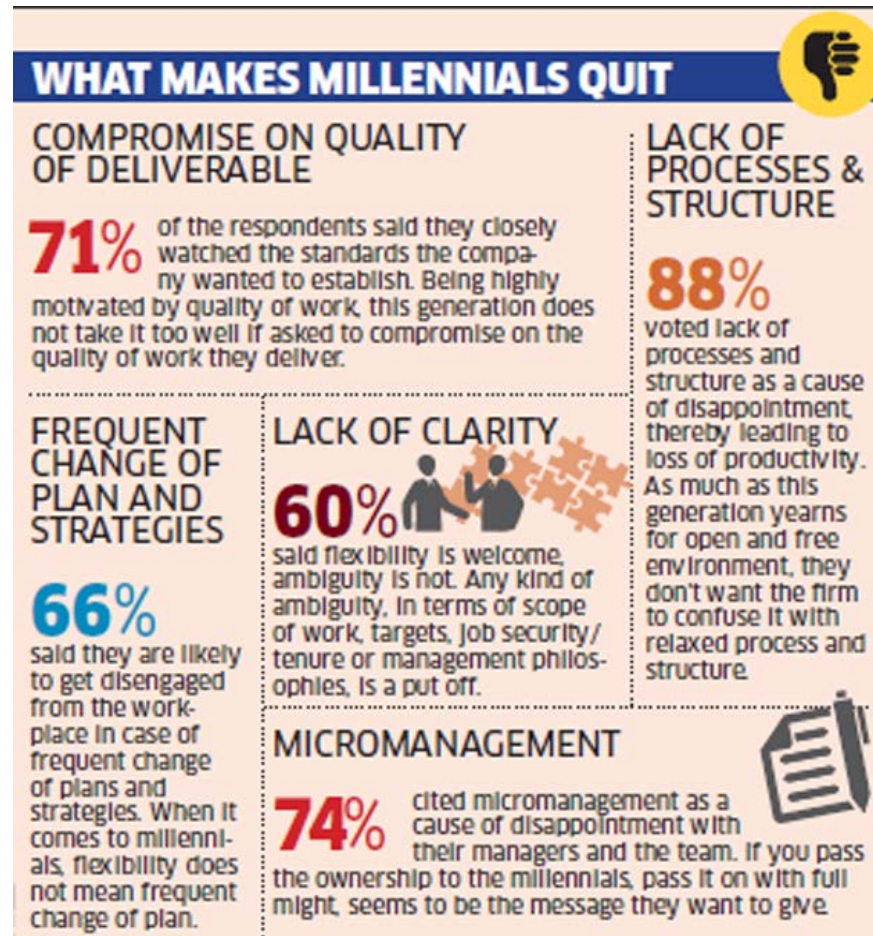


3) Don't enjoy the work

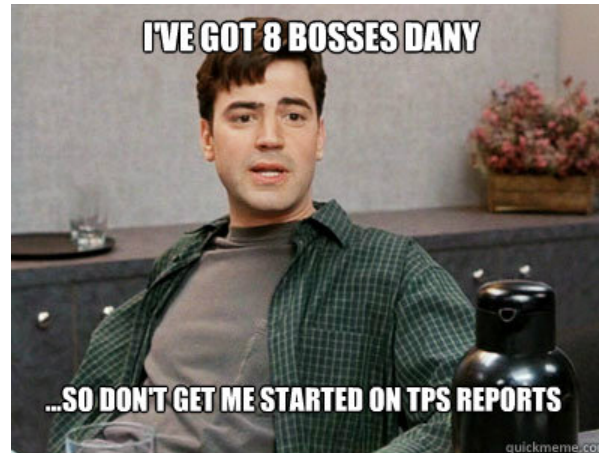


Source: <http://fortune.com/2015/10/11/common-reasons-for-quitting-job/>

“Everyone Hates Millennials!”



Retention Tips: Don't Like the Boss



- Having several bosses can be a source of stress
 - Getting 7 visits/phone calls from your bosses over the same issue may add to stress unnecessarily
 - Pick your battles and make a big issue out of the things that need to be brought up - try to avoid making minor issues into major ones
 - Try to communicate with your CAO in an official setting at the council table rather than separate individual visits

Retention Tips: Don't Like the Boss



- Keep your cool!
 - Things go wrong and understand that when they do, it is as stressful for the CAO as it may be for you
 - If you know you are the type of person that needs to “vent”, consider venting to your spouse (or someone else confidentially) to cool off first
 - Don't vent to the local newspaper about your CAO – handle issues and any disciplinary matters privately and if an official statement is required, agree upon one as a council
 - All councils expect the CAO to deal with others in a professional and respectful manner so be sure to set the same tone as a councillor

Retention Tips: Don't Like the Boss



- Don't Micromanage
 - Don't directly involve yourself in the management of the organization as this can pull the organization in opposing directions, causing confusion and morale issues
 - Set direction through policies and bylaws at the council table, not through private conversations with staff
 - It can be frustrating for the CAO if individual councillors are directing staff, especially when this is opposed to direction already given
 - If staff quit, it will be the CAO that has to deal with it, so it will be less stressful if you allow them to do their job without your direct participation (and thereby be held accountable for the result)

Retention Tips: Don't Like the Boss

It is very important that all councils set clear and realistic expectations for the CAO

- Clear expectations: communicate effectively to your CAO through written policy and annual performance evaluations
- Realistic expectations: evaluate your goals and expectations against your staffing levels and capabilities



Money: Know the Market

- There is presently a shortage of administrators so if you have a strong one, treat them well
- Refer to the UMAAS Salary Guideline when determining the compensation ranges you are willing to offer a prospective CAO
 - If you know you are offering a competitive salary, state your range in the advertisement
 - Understand there are outliers beyond the ranges of the UMAAS Guideline and you may have to pay above that if your target CAO is one of those
- Adjust your expectations based on the quality of the applicants at the salary offered or else adjust your salary to get the type of applicants you require
- Understand the difference between price and value – a strong CAO can pay for themselves in increased efficiencies and revenue streams
 - An unqualified CAO will increase the cost of your audit and various other line items, lose you thousands in missed grants, and limit your ability to be an effective councillor due to a lack of accurate financial reports



Retention Tips: Don't Like the Work

“I had no idea I'd be doing this!”



- If your CAO has previous work experience, they likely won't quit because they don't like the work (they would have realized that already) unless the expectations of council for the position are much different than their own
 - Make a point of determining what his or her expectations are regarding CAO duties prior to hiring
 - Setting clear and realistic expectations for the CAO starts with the interview process

Retention Tips: Don't Like the Work



- If your CAO is new to the profession, there is some potential they will not enjoy the work
 - A thorough interview process and experience in similar positions can help mitigate this somewhat
- Employee sharing agreements with other municipalities can allow your staff to specialize and increase the likelihood that each is, at least more often, doing the type or work they enjoy and feel most qualified to perform

Retention Tips: Don't Like the Work Environment



- Because people know who works for the town in a small community and tend to discuss town business with the CAO at any place (grocery store, etc.), the whole community is, in a sense, the work environment
- There will always be people that have something negative to say about your CAO
 - If your CAO becomes aware that they are being portrayed negatively, it could affect their morale
 - Do what you can to dispel rumours and unfair comments
 - If the CAO feels unsupported by council or that some councillors themselves are “out to get them”, they will likely leave your organization

Common Complaints to or About the CAO

- “Our CAO doesn’t live in town!”
- “Our CAO doesn’t shop local!”
- “Our CAO wasn’t there!”
- “Our CAO just loves to ‘act like the big dog’!”
- “Our CAO is never at community events!”
- “Our CAO doesn’t volunteer enough!”
- “That ____ is paid for with my tax dollars!”
- “Our CAO wants a raise! Every year it’s the same thing!”
- “Our CAO doesn’t do anything! We’ve never had so much staff!”



In addition to being the first person everyone complains to about council decisions:

- “The town is so stingy – it’s my money!”
- “The town is so loose with my money!”
- “My property taxes are ridiculous!”
- “Really? Another water rate increase?”

“Our CAO doesn’t live in town!”

- A new CAO may not immediately move to your town:
 - This will often have nothing to do with their perception of your community
 - May have to do with their kids being in school where they live presently, their spouse having a job going the other direction, a mortgage term/withdrawal penalty and a house to sell, etc.
 - Home ownership is particularly risky in a small town as many have slow housing markets and a new CAO will want to be sure they aren’t going to be stuck with a house they can’t sell
 - In small towns, there is often a limited variety of housing available for rent or purchase and building new is too risky financially (many lose on resale)
 - Concerns will exist that they or their spouse will not like the community, work environment, etc. and this may exist for some time
 - The longer any employee stays in your employ, the more likely it is they will relocate to be nearer to work (though in some cases it won’t ever happen)

“Our CAO doesn’t shop local!”



- All small communities depend on local support to keep businesses alive and all can appreciate that it looks bad when the CAO doesn’t support them
 - If this is going to be important enough to you that it’s going to affect your entire perception of whether or not that person is doing their job, you should make sure that shopping preferences are a question you ask during interviews
 - Practice what you preach – if you set a good example at the council level, others will follow

“Our CAO wasn’t even there!”

“Our CAO is never at community events!”

“Our CAO doesn’t volunteer enough!”

- The CAO cannot be at every single meeting of every community organization or every community event – if your expectation of your CAO is that they will work 50+ hours every week and also volunteer as secretary-treasurer of the Kinsmen, Museum, Rink Board, and on and on, you will have a hard time keeping anyone
- Some small town CAOs complain about being in public because they never escape town business – the grocery store and most every other location becomes a forum for people to raise a discussion about town business – home can be a reprieve for an exhausted administrator

“Our CAO just loves to ‘act like the big dog’!”

- Enforcement of council bylaws and policy frequently puts the CAO in an uncomfortable position
- When someone criticizes your CAO for doing their job, ensure that you show them support



Otherwise:

- You can expect your bylaws and policies to be weakly enacted, greatly affecting your ability to do your own job as councillor
- You will also create a morale issue with your CAO because of the uncertainty you’ve created over which bylaws to enforce or not enforce and when

“That _____ is paid for with my tax dollars!”

“Our CAO wants a raise!”

- There will always be people who feel the personal purchasing decisions of the CAO are their business and, in a small town, many pay close attention to how the CAO appears to be doing financially
- Annually evaluate your administrator’s salary against the UMAAS Salary Guideline
 - We have a 60% response rate on our salary survey, which is very high for a survey, and the guideline is based on this survey
 - Outliers on the high end are often excluded as they would distort the guideline and hurt its credibility; however, you should know that outliers do exist
 - SUMA annually reviews and endorses the guideline and because this endorsement is important to UMAAS, care is taken to ensure that the guideline is strongly supported by data

“We’ve never had so much staff!”

- If you are finding that your staff levels are growing, consider the possibility that council decisions or other factors may be driving that need
 - Some council or other factors which may require more staff:
 - A strong website, social media presence, and other public correspondence (newsletters, etc.)
 - Complicated administration or economic growth incentives (e.g. abate 50% of taxes year 1, 25% year 2, 10% year 3)
 - New subdivisions and large numbers of building permits
 - Construction projects
 - New operating activities (e.g. municipal businesses such as pools & campgrounds, inherited buildings which require maintenance, etc.)
 - Growing numbers of staff, loss of experienced staff, etc. can be a drain on CAO time as more time is spent on HR issues, training, and reduced efficiency related to inexperience
 - Higher frequency of billings
 - More reporting to Council
 - High number of meetings (and therefore meeting preparation)
 - Changes to the status quo generally can increase staff time, at least initially due to retraining of staff and ratepayer discussions
- Consider the possibility that policies of higher levels of government may also be driving that need
 - More reporting requirements or legislative changes (e.g. requirement to develop an asset management plan) require people to do the work
- To then complain to the CAO about growing numbers of staff may seem unfair from his or her perspective



All this in addition to being the first person everyone complains to about council decisions

- Therefore, I'd encourage you not to also make every interaction with your CAO a form of criticism
 - Telling staff when they did something well can go a long way towards morale and costs you nothing
 - Often we only tell people when we are dissatisfied and this can greatly affect morale
 - Low morale costs you in higher salary expectations and staff turnover

Finding a New CAO: Know Your Target and Community Needs

- Some feel a specific skillset and experience level is needed due to the demands of the community
 - Understand that it will cost more to entice an experienced administrator to move and take a risk on an unknown community/council
- Some places are too small to put together a compensation package to entice an experienced administrator to move
 - May have to start with someone less experienced – i.e. “train and retain”
 - May have to try to compete on other levels – flexible schedule, work-life balance, attractive management structure (i.e. one employee system), good reputation of council (administrators talk!)
 - Face reality – in many instances the only viable option for smaller communities is to look at joint administrative options or even restructuring to join up with surrounding RMs and/or other towns and villages
 - Practice damage mitigation:
 - Standardizing operations by having checklists and detailed instruction manuals can help – makes you less dependant on individuals
 - Be aware of the resources that already exist (Administrator Calendar, etc.)



Finding a New CAO



- The **most important thing** you can do to ensure you retain your new CAO is to ensure, during the interview process, that your CAO is qualified for the job
 - Look for relevant education and experience in similar communities (i.e. level of development, number of staff, similar operating activities, etc.)
 - If you have a capped number for what you are willing to pay and are unwilling to budge, you will have to adjust your expectations to reflect that number

Finding a New CAO

Aside from that, some skills that will be valuable for all CAOs include:

- Ability to handle stress
- A calm disposition
- Thick skin



As well as a variety of other skills that depend on the number and capabilities of support staff at your office, strategic priorities of Council, amount of new development, etc.

Finding a New CAO: Look for Opportunities Within



Consider if you have administrative support staff that may be willing and able to step into the position (given your community needs and council expectations)

- Knowing there is opportunity for advancement can help retain support staff
- Every community has unique bylaws and circumstances that these people are already familiar with
- Even if not ready to move into the position, these people can buy you time to find the CAO you require – it is an important decision you don't want to have to rush – so there is always value in having support staff
- If you cannot afford support staff, consider sharing resources with your neighbouring municipalities in order to build your capacity
 - Two part-time positions could be one full-time position shared between two municipalities – you may have an easier time retaining staff under such an arrangement by turning a part-time position into a full-time one

After Hiring



- Sign an employment contract with your CAO
 - This can help ensure you don't have to rush when searching for your next CAO (e.g. specified notice period when quitting, etc.); and
 - Clearly sets expectations and avoids future disputes.
- Don't overwhelm your CAO with unrealistic expectations
 - If your office has been without a CAO for a few months, there is going to be a huge backlog of work to catch up on. The CAO will also need to learn your bylaws and deal with a number of unresolved staff and other concerns; and
 - Don't be upset if the CAO doesn't immediately move to your community – likely has more to do with present circumstances (kids in school, spouse's place of work, etc.) than it does with your community and the longer they remain in your employ, the more likely it is they will relocate.
- At some point, start succession planning
 - Support staff are not only important for ensuring your CAO can take holidays and have some degree of flexibility (and quality of life), they are important for ensuring your CAO can be replaced, at least temporarily, should anything change.

Questions?

