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# THE SPIGOT

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from the NORTH DAKOTA RURAL WATER SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION

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## MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

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Assume that you are the mayor of a small town or water district. Your water system was built many years ago. After all these years, with little upgrading and spotty maintenance, your water system now needs serious capital improvements. Your rates are antiquated, too.

Why are you in this fix? Inertia. As any physicist will tell you, a body at rest will tend to stay at rest, a body in motion will tend to stay in motion, and a moving body will tend to continue moving in the same direction in which it is now moving.

You will tend to continue in the same direction you have gone before. "You," in this case refers to you personally, every individual in your city or district, and the whole community collectively. That is a lot of inertia to overcome. On the occasions you have bucked that system, you probably felt how strong inertia can be. As Richard Watson, CEO of Global Innovation Network says, "The main enemy of ideas is not risk but inertia." The fact that you haven't solved the problem yet may predict that you will not solve it in the future, unless someone or something big intervenes. We all want to evolve toward better, but it usually takes a revolution to get it done.

There is good reason why we are investing far too little money and upkeep in our water and sewer systems each year to keep them sustainable. We lack information for making good decisions, motivation to change, and locomotion to sustain the effort.



## **INFORMATION:**

### **Overcoming Inertia**

Information abounds, but you need to get the right information for your needs. Do not rely only on yourself, one assistance provider or one source of information. Multiple information sources will help you guard against making wrong choices and suffering from inertia. For example, when you need to make a major upgrade to your system, you will need an engineer to design it for you. However, and this is not a slight to the engineering community, you should ask your chief operator, your funding provider, your rural community assistance agency, your state's technical assistance program, and other assistance providers what they think of the design options your engineer is considering. Ask funding sources what they think it will cost. Ask rate analysts if they think the rates the engineer estimated seem reasonable. Better yet, have the rate analyst handle that part and ask others about the rate analysis they provided you.

Engineering is only one example concerning information. The same is true for your rate analyst, source of funding and any other service providers, free or otherwise, that you engage. Ask others if they think you are getting the right system, the right service, the right rates and the right answers to satisfy your needs. There are two things for you to keep in mind as you do this:

- Almost everything has been done before somewhere. You only need to find out where and talk to those people about how it was done.
- Know when to call it quits. Gather information only as long as you are continuing to productively learn how to solve your problem. Once that information seems to point to a good solution, stop studying and start doing.

## **MOTIVATION:**

### **Use Critical Mass to Your Advantage**

To change your status quo you must be motivated and motivate others. To their credit, enforcement agencies will eventually motivate you, but don't wait for external motivation. Get yourself motivated. Then motivate your whole community.

The fact that you have not yet motivated your community to make a change may indicate that you need help doing it. Consult many of the "information" people and assistance providers to get the motivation job accomplished. Informing people with the facts is important; it is the base upon which you can build.

However, a certain amount of salesmanship is usually needed, too. Find great champions and cheerleaders to help you with that aspect. People must be charged up about the changes they will be asked to make or pay for.

Don't be discouraged when visible movement does not happen right away. In the same way that an explosive volcanic eruption occurs, your critical mass may build gradually but when you reach it, action will occur with an explosion.

## **LOCOMOTION:**

### **Be Prepared for the Explosion**

Before the explosion happens, get prepared to move people, and keep them moving, in the right direction all the way to completion. Before the ball gets rolling, identify those who can help you and get their commitment now to help.

Building a new treatment plant or analyzing and adjusting rates can be likened to going to war. You better figure out how to win that war before it starts. Otherwise, you may lose.

Proper goals and tactics can help you complete your project. Good organization is a plus. However, time is a formidable enemy. Take too much of it and people will run out of steam. Your project could die from apathy or fatigue. Once your project dies, it is harder to bring it back to life than it was to give it life the first time. It took good will, motivation and energy to get started, but once you have used up that energy, it is not available for a second try.

Locomotion is the final and most critical stage. Getting the right outside help at the right time will be the key to your success. Find those assistance providers who have successfully been through this before because they will know what to do and when to do it.

Success is built on these keys: Get informed, get motivated, get moving, keep moving and do not slow down until you are done.

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