



A book of advice AND quotes



COSCA

Conference of State Court Administrators

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Welcome to COSCA!

Congratulations on your appointment as State Court Administrator. Your colleagues, past and present, have shared some of their thoughts and advice on how to succeed in this challenging position. This information has been collected and shared in the following document, which I hope you will find helpful. As you begin your new career, I wish you much success, and I hope that your membership in COSCA will prove to be beneficial.

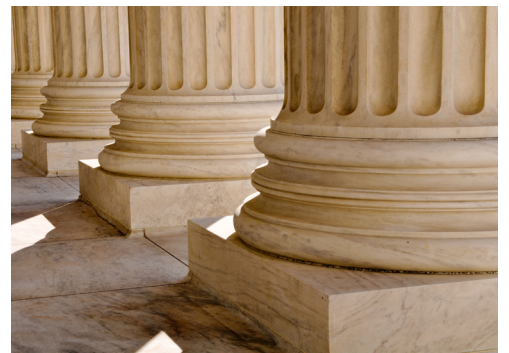


KARL HADE

Virginia

Chair, COSCA Services to New Members Committee

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Section 1

Becoming an outstanding state court administrator

“Never forget that you are a public servant. Ours is important work but we are no more ‘important’ than the next person. Everyone, including those that make your life a nightmare at times, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.”

“Court administrators should be leaders, models, and organizers for their staff. Your job is getting the right people, doing the right work, and providing them the right amount of direction and support. Their success will go a long way in defining yours.”

-DAN BECKER

“It’s OK to say, ‘I don’t know.’ However, it should be followed by ‘But I will find out and let you know.’ There will always be parts of the day-to-day management or new projects that you don’t know. That’s why we hire great staff. Don’t be afraid to ask for help when you don’t know something.”

-CALLIE DIETZ

“Opposites attract. Make sure you surround yourself with people who are different from you. If you are not a visionary make sure you have some on your staff. If you are not generally empathetic get some ‘feelers’ on your staff.”

-JEFF SHORBA

“Stress to your department heads and staff the importance of teamwork and their service to the judiciary. Quoting a football coaching legend, Vince Lombardi, ‘Strive for perfection and settle for excellence along the way.’”

-KARL HADE

“Don’t neglect the business management functions of your organization because innovation cannot thrive if the basics aren’t running smoothly.”

-SALLY HOLEWA

“Surround yourself with people with different backgrounds and experiences. Diversity in an organization promotes more thought and the likelihood that most or all issues will be addressed.”

-CALLIE DIETZ

“You don’t have all the right answers. Don’t promote an ‘emperor has no clothes’ work environment. Allow your staff to challenge you and be open to conflicting ideas. The end product will be better if all voices are at least heard and considered.”

-JEFF SHORBA

“What is my authority over staff? Do I have authority to hire, fire, discipline? What staff do I actually have authority over?”

-MIKE BUENGER

“Listen more than you talk as you learn the inner workings of the administrative office.”

-KARL HADE

“Have weekly or every other week meetings with your administrative office of the courts management staff. It’s important for both you and them to understand what problems and successes individual managers have had. Also, quarterly meetings with all administrative office of the courts staff help reduce the silo effect.”

-DAN BECKER

“Don’t limit your trust to a select few employees. Part of our job is to uncover those hidden gems working in our courts. Understand the ever-changing generational ideals and differences of your employees and get to know what makes them tick.”

-JOE BAXTER

“Building relationships is key. Find people who can facilitate introductions with key external actors.”

-TODD NUCCIO

“Learn to delegate. Unfortunately, you cannot know everything. That is why you have experienced and knowledgeable staff around you.”

-JEFF SHORBA

“A major role of the state court administrator is to gather information and to serve as a connector between ideas and the people who can implement them.”

-SALLY HOLEWA

“Develop a complete understanding of the judicial budget and budget process. You will undoubtedly face fiscal challenges, and this knowledge will be invaluable in negotiating with your governor and legislature.”

-KARL HADE

“Don’t micromanage. It sends a bad message to your colleagues as to your faith and trust in their abilities.”

-JOE BAXTER

“Start succession planning early. Identifying key leaders and staff with great potential is great. Loss of institutional knowledge can devastate any organization. Preparing for change or loss will help everyone keep the core functions running and know what progress has been made on new projects.”

-CALLIE DIETZ

“Do your best to absorb the failures and hits along the way but be quick to spread the accolades for all success achieved to those around you.”

-JOE BAXTER

“Never forget that you are a public servant. Ours is important work but we are no more ‘important’ than the next person. Everyone, including those that make your life a nightmare at times, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.”

-CALLIE DIETZ



Section 2

You as a state court leader

“No one can be a leader if they are the only one with the vision. Provide everyone with an opportunity to contribute what they have to make a project successful.”

“Develop a reputation for being a problem solver. If you’re not viewed a problem solver, you’re likely viewed as an obstacle. People try to work around obstacles, and that can be deadly for someone who is responsible.”

-DAN BECKER

“If a new member has prior experience working in the court then they will understand the culture. I think it’s important to understand the general culture of the courts and the more specific culture of the particular institution. If they are new to the courts, the first thing they need to figure out is the culture.”

-MIKE BUENGER

“When possible, meet with people in their building. It makes them more comfortable, and it gives you precious time while driving to think about a few of the many things that need thoughtful, uninterrupted consideration.”

-ARTIE PEPIN

“In any meeting you attend, listen more than you speak. Every person in the meeting will be an expert in his or her own field. Learn from them.”

-SALLY HOLEWA

“Effective communication is the means to establishing effective relationships.”

-DAN BECKER

“Remember to thank people as often as you can for a job ‘well-done.’ Everyone likes to be remembered and appreciated and no one feels they are thanked too much. This goes for everyone.”

-CALLIE DIETZ

“No one will care about your education, skills or ideas if they don’t believe you are a trustworthy person.”

-SALLY HOLEWA

“Learn that criticism is not personal. It may come across that way, especially if you are challenging the system to change a longstanding way of doing business. However, learn not to take it personally.”

-JEFF SHORBA

“Don’t overextend.”

-TODD NUCCIO

“Relationships are everything. You don’t have to be friends with your bosses and coworkers but it helps if there are some personal connections. Ask about family, understand their workplace challenges, offer to help. If you have established some personal connection, it will help build some trust, and when concerns arise maybe, just maybe, they will pick up the phone and call you first, before assuming the worst intentions.”

-JEFF SHORBA

“Develop a reputation for advancing continuous improvements in an inclusive way. Be a risk taker. Celebrate success. Learn from mistakes and move forward.”

-DAN BECKER

“Never let treating the manifesting symptoms of the illness (administrative and efficiency problems) keep you from the ultimate goal of curing the disease (providing justice in the individual case).”

-ROB BALDWIN

“Don’t have meetings just to meet. Make sure the purpose and agenda are known ahead of time.”

-CALLIE DEITZ

“It’s okay not to know the answer to every question and to say such.”

-TODD NUCCIO

“Since you can never please everyone, focus on the things that you can control such as:

- Never put your own interest above others.
- Work hard.
- Treat others as you would like to be treated.
- Spend the state’s money as if it were your own.”

-ROB BALDWIN

“Rely on committees for developing policies, programs and proposals, not only to get varying perspectives but to create broader ownership.”

-DAN BECKER

“No one can be a leader if they are the only one with the vision. Provide everyone with an opportunity to contribute what they have to make a project successful.”

-CALLIE DEITZ

“Establish your foundation of values and always make decisions and take actions on the basis of those values rather than on the expediency of the moment.”

-ROB BALDWIN

“Prioritize the future. Your job is to plan for the future. Where is the organization going? How we will deal with future challenges? How can we prepare? ...Make sure you continue to explain the ‘why’ behind changes but do not be satisfied with the status quo. As the world around us constantly changes, we must as well.”

-JEFF SHORBA

“Think before speaking or acting.”

-LARRY POLANSKY

“When all else fails, smile and ‘bless their hearts.’ It’s all in the tone!”

-CALLIE DEITZ

“Do the right thing, and do it right.”

-ROB BALDWIN



Section 3

Working with your chief justice

“Remember that although your official boss is the chief justice, you are really serving the best interests of the people of your state.”

“Who exactly do I report to on a daily basis? ...It’s important to get that down straight so when Justice A says go here and Justice B says, no, go there, the state court administrator knows where to go to get matters resolved. This is easier said than done, of course.”

-MIKE BUENGER

“Buy a flak jacket! Not kidding. That advice is shaped by the fact that during my first year, my chief justice got into a war with the governor over juvenile justice reform ... Looking back, I am not sure how I survived! But translating that to more general advice, I would say make sure you and your chief justice are on the same page.”

-DAVE BYERS

“State court administrators are paid to give their leaders advice, but the leaders are not paid to take it.”

-TOM DARR

“Always, without exception, tell your boss the honest truth. Unless he or she can’t handle the truth ... If the chief justice has trouble accepting bad news, figure out how to motivate him or her to get where you need to go. Some need to get information in small bits over time. Some need to yell and let off steam before moving through the stages of grief leading to acceptance. It is a real test of your agility to learn what will do the trick but you have to figure it out because you need your chief to succeed. It is hard for the state court administrator to survive and hard for courts to thrive if the chief justice fails.”

-ARTIE PEPIN

“Meet with your chief justice and let him or her know that you feel it is important that the state court administrator and chief justice work as a united team.”

-KARL HADE

“Learn how to ‘manage up.’ You will be working with judges who have full-time jobs ‘judging.’ Sometimes they want to be full-time administrators. You need to be able to set those boundaries and understand which decisions are yours and which require consultation with the chief justice or other governing bodies. Don’t give up too much authority.”

-JEFF SHORBA

“If the leadership is made of seven justices, always be able to count to four. When you can’t count a majority in your support, life can become very difficult, very fast.”

-TOM DARR

“Set up a fixed schedule for meeting with your chief justice every week. This is your most important relationship and your interaction needs or be part of an established routine for both of you. Even if there is nothing pressing, you should meet for the purpose of building and maintaining that relationship. Meeting only when there is a problem is not a good way of doing business.”

-DAN BECKER

“Discuss with the chief justice his or her preferred communication means, and ask if you can establish a regular meeting schedule to review project status and/or other major administrative issues.”

-KARL HADE

“Remember that although your official boss is the chief justice, you are really serving the best interests of the people of your state.”

-LARRY POLANSKY

“Develop relationships! Certainly, the key relationships within the judiciary include the chief justice, other members of the court, your leadership team, and for me the presiding judges and trial court executives ... Within the executive branch, I developed relationships with the governor’s office, and the directors of corrections, juvenile corrections and health and human services.”

-PATTI TOBIAS

“Seek as much as possible to get a consensus from the court on your responsibilities, accountabilities, and authorities. Certainly, this changes over time. But at least initially this conversation needs to occur early so that everyone is clear of the ‘paint’ on the road.”

-MIKE BUENGER

“Become familiar with your judicial governing committees, and determine your role in that process as well as how they can support your mission.”

-KARL HADE



Section 4

Your colleagues in COSCA

“Get involved right away with COSCA. If you wait until you think you have time, you will find that time will never come. The involvement with COSCA will provide access to contacts and information that will benefit you immensely.”

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-GREG SATTIZAHN

“Become involved by joining the COSCA committees that are of interest to you. Remember only 55 other people hold your position in the United States and its territories. Most of them will be at these conferences and they know and understand the responsibilities and challenges of your position better than anyone else in the country. These conferences provide you with an excellent opportunity to develop new professional relationships and learn from their collective experiences.”

-KARL HADE

“I appreciate the backup that COSCA provides in terms of knowledge of issues, frankly because it is hard to keep up with all that goes on in courts across the nation.”

-TOM DARR

“You are not alone. Between their mentor, NCSC, and COSCA, someone can help with virtually any problem they confront. Just ask.”

-HUGH COLLINS

“Attend COSCA meetings and become active in a committee or two. These people have probably seen before whatever you are seeing for the first time. Very often they have good ideas. In addition, they are great people, great friends, ready to listen sympathetically to things you are unable to complain about at home, and they are really dedicated to the same things that drove you to get involved with this work.”

-ARTIE PEPIN

“Constantly review and analyze what other state court administrators are doing in their states and appropriate the best for your state.”

-ROB BALDWIN

“Attend the NCSC orientation in Williamsburg to learn about the many resources and support that are available for you to access as a member of COSCA.”

-KARL HADE

“The mentoring program is very good for new COSCA members. A new state court administrator should spend a couple of days with an ‘oldie.’”

-JIM THOMAS

“New member orientation was really helpful, including the mentor. Also, the annual and mid-year meetings are chock full of very helpful information.”

-RANDY KOSCHNICK

“Be inspired by your COSCA colleagues. The first few years in COSCA I was frankly intimidated by the knowledge and accomplishments of my COSCA colleagues. As time went on, I became inspired by what I learned at each annual and mid-year meeting. I came home after each meeting with long lists of ideas and opportunities to improve the courts in my state. And by listening and learning and being innovative, we were able to accomplish many of the great ideas and work underway in so many of the states.”

-PATTI TOBIAS



Section 5

Relationships with trial courts

“Reach out to your judges, clerks, magistrates, and others to establish communication lines with them. Listen to their concerns and issues and work to resolve them where possible. Maintain an open and ongoing dialogue with them.”

“See and be seen. I toured each of the 44 counties in Idaho in my first year. I relied on the trial court administrators to schedule the tours in each of the courthouses, arranging meetings with judges, clerks of the court and deputy clerks, prosecuting attorneys, public defenders and county commissioners. I found it so valuable and rewarding, and I received such great feedback that I repeated my 44 county tours with each new chief justice that was willing to do so. In all, I visited all of the 44 counties at least five times.”

-PATTI TOBIAS

“Reach out to your judges, clerks, magistrates, and others to establish communication lines with them. Listen to their concerns and issues and work to resolve them where possible. Maintain an open and ongoing dialogue with them.”

-KARL HADE

“Use other judges as allies when dealing with judges. You may know the message or content you want to convey, but it is much better coming from a judge to a judge.”

-JEFF SHORBA

“Take the time to build and maintain good relationships with key trial judges across the state. They need to know you at a personal level and have confidence in your decision making. When difficult issues arise, and they will arise, it is much more difficult for them to dismiss you or your opinion, if they have a personal relationship with you.”

-DAN BECKER

“I will be going to all courts this year. I’ve already received positive feedback and I think it will make a big difference in my experience as state court administrator.”

-NANCY COZINE

“Have regular, set times to meet with senior trial court administrative staff from across the state. Again, establishing working relationships with trial court executives and clerks of court is important to reducing the amount of ‘us versus them.’”

-DAN BECKER

“Spend as much time out of your office as you can. Outreach to your constituents – judges and staff – is a crucial part of your job. Make sure you make it a priority whether through in person visits and meetings (the best) or some virtual communication.”

-JEFF SHORBA

Section 6

The importance of other branches

“Develop relationships with key legislative members and the staff that handle the judicial budget.”

“Make friends with legislative staff. A few minutes invested during their down time will pay great dividends in the last days or hours of the session as disaster looms and you need to rescue an appropriation or bill. If you are among the lucky few who do not deal with legislators, good for you.”

-ARTIE PEPIN

“Get yourself appointed to executive branch committees and boards in order to develop relationships and routine interactions with other department heads. This is particularly important for committees and boards that have responsibility for disseminating federal funds.”

-DAN BECKER

“Educating the legislature requires extraordinary personal commitment and time to build your credibility, but if done correctly and continuously, will provide immeasurable benefits to your courts.”

-PATTI TOBIAS

“If the expectation is that you work with the legislature, what exactly does the court expect in terms of the boundaries of that work? Some courts want active participation, some want more passive participation. It’s important to understand that.”

-MIKE BUENGER

“Develop relationships with key legislative members and the staff that handle the judicial budget.”

-KARL HADE



Section 7

Taking care of yourself

“Develop a healthy work-life balance. Take care of your mental and physical well-being. You have a very demanding and stressful job, which can become all consuming...”

“Coffee. Dark, rich, smooth and unadulterated by cream, sugar, or whatever syrups they add at Starbucks. That steaming mug and the ritual of making it in my office refreshes and grounds me (pun intended). Yours may be a yoga class, a walk at lunch, or playing chess on your phone with your friend who lives far away. Whatever it is, find something to give your brain a rest so you can attack the next tornado twisting its way toward your desk. It is difficult to be an effective leader if your brain turns to Jell-O because you never give it a break.”

-ARTIE PEPIN

“Remember that being a state court administrator is a great job so enjoy it.”

-HUGH COLLINS

“Think about care and consideration for yourself and others in all your dealings. If you don’t take care of yourself, you won’t be any good to anyone else. Self-care can be neglected, and everyone in your life (especially YOU) pays the price. Family and friends will be there after the job is finished. That doesn’t mean they should wait for your time and attention while you are in it. Family first.”

-CALLIE DIETZ

“Develop a healthy work-life balance. Take care of your mental and physical well-being. You have a very demanding and stressful job, which can become all consuming. Learn to triage the work coming across your desk. Decide what you must handle personally and delegate the rest to your hard working and competent staff so that they may showcase their talents and skills. You cannot do it all, nor is that best for the organization.”

-KARL HADE

“For God’s sake, GO HOME! There is always more than enough to do on any given day, but don’t shortchange your inner peace, or give up time with family, friends, and hobbies to get it done.”

-SALLY HOLEWA

CONFERENCE OF STATE COURT ADMINISTRATORS

The Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA), established in 1955, is dedicated to the improvement of state court systems. Its membership consists of the state court administrator or equivalent official in each of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands.

COSCA is composed of the chief executive officer representing each of the state court systems. COSCA is committed to strengthening the judicial branch by improving the quality of the state courts. COSCA accomplishes this by developing best practices for improved court administration; identifying, researching and finding solutions to issues that affect our courts; and working closely with our colleagues in the legal and government communities to improve the justice system. By establishing more efficient and effective courts, COSCA strengthens the public's trust and confidence in the justice system, which forms the foundation of a peaceful, civilized society.

MISSION STATEMENT

"The mission of the Conference of State Court Administrators is to provide a national forum to assist state court administrators in the development of a more just, effective, and efficient system of justice, by:

- Identifying and studying issues and, when appropriate, developing policies, principles, and standards relating to the administration of judicial systems.*
- Providing an effective network for the exchange of information, ideas, and methods to improve state courts.*
- Facilitating cooperation, consultation, and exchange of information by and among organizations directly concerned with court administration.*
- Assisting in the formulation and implementation of national issues that affect state courts.*
- Establishing and maintaining an organization that is open, inclusive, participatory, dynamic, and responsive.*
- Offering educational opportunities."*



COSCA

Conference of State Court Administrators



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