

In-Service Training Award in Memory of Clarence E. Ridley



Larry D. Gilley

ICMA's In-Service Training Award is presented to the administrator or administrators who have developed and implemented highly effective in-service training programs for local government employees. This award was established in memory of Clarence E. Ridley, a pioneer in the field of local government management. This year, ICMA presents the award to Larry D. Gilley, city manager of San Marcos, Texas.

"Every employee counts" is the philosophy to which Larry D. Gilley has been devoted during his 24 years in city management. As city manager since 1988 of one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the nation, Mr. Gilley's leadership is focused on providing solid community services to San Marcos, Texas (pop. 39,871), and on motivating, educating, energizing, and rewarding the people behind those services.

When Mr. Gilley came to San Marcos, the city had only rudimentary training programs. Mr. Gilley worked proactively with the city council to establish a mission statement and goals at the beginning of the budget process each year. This effort has resulted in concrete support for the staff. He also worked closely with the human services department to develop training programs that would establish a consistently high standard of public service. "Every employee counts" became the core philosophy behind this program. Mr. Gilley's focus on staff development has resulted in sound employee orientation and customer service training programs, a strong safety education program, an innovative "360" employee evaluation program, tuition reimbursement, support for staff participation in professional organizations, employee recognition and awards.

New employees are introduced to Mr. Gilley's philosophy and high expectations the first day they walk through the door. As new employees come on board, Mr. Gilley imparts the essence of his outlook: ethical conduct and customer services. His training programs provide employees with a thorough understanding of the city's customer service approach, the individuals' communication style, and how others perceive each person's unique style. Employees learn how to effectively use their personal strengths. In a highly interactive session, participants are provided with tools and techniques to enhance listening skills and the overall communication process. Prior to the training session, a questionnaire is distributed to all participants. Each employee receives a customized report based on his or her responses, which allows the employee to understand his

own communication, service, and management style. Employees learn what unique behavioral traits will be strengths and which ones will be limitations in the municipal workplace.

The Safety Coach Leadership Program is designed to provide training for front-line supervisors and crew leaders to incorporate safety into the workplace. Topics include the philosophy of safety, sampling safe behavior, developing a vision and goals, providing positive reinforcement, and a host of other topics designed to help foster the leadership and safety skills needed by front-line supervisors. The Safety Coach Advisory Committee holds monthly meetings to discuss action plans for resolving safety issues, more informal "tailgate training" occurs on a daily basis, and an annual Safety Expo is held to raise awareness about safety issues among employees.

To help employees continue to grow, Mr. Gilley and his leadership team also revamped the evaluation system. They sought a system that would be tied to strategic plans, would provide a positive way to discuss sub-par performance, and would engage and energize participants. The resulting 360-degree evaluation plan involves multiple levels of evaluation for each department director. The process typically includes a self-evaluation, as well as feedback from supervisors and subordinates. The key to the instrument is that it focuses on the behaviors believed to be critical to the outcomes defined at the beginning of the project. The instrument also helps measure gaps between expected and actual behavior. The gap analysis helps the team customize the evaluation items to the particular needs of each person being evaluated.

Larry Gilley's leadership and his focus on the contributions, responsibilities, and development of each employee have made a dramatic difference. As a result of his programs, employees are better able to respond to the needs of the citizenry and implement the city council's vision and priorities. The philosophy that "every employee counts" has created a synergy that leads to innovation, pride, and accomplishment. ■