

Survival Tips for Municipal Officials: 60 Tips in 60 Minutes

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Municipal officials today face enormous challenges juggling the increasing demands of public office. Six veteran municipal officials shared their Survival Tips with MML convention attendees during this fun and fast-paced session. Panelists were Westminster Mayor Kevin Dayhoff, Annapolis Mayor Ellen Moyer, MML Past President, former Bowie Mayor and Prince George's County Councilwoman Audrey Scott, Maryland General Assembly Delegate and former Berwyn Heights Mayor Tawanna Gaines, Seat Pleasant Mayor Eugene Kennedy, and MML Past President and former Frederick Mayor Ron Young were also challenged to limit the presentation of their tips to 60 minutes—there's something about giving an official a microphone! Enjoy their words of wisdom.



- 1. Have very good people work for you, the kind that get things done.** There are really only two things you need to fix anything—duct tape and WD-40. If it moves and it shouldn't, use duct tape. If it doesn't move and should, use WD-40. The same is true in politics. You need to get things moving when they are hopelessly snarled. And you need adhesion to pull things together when it seems you are herding cats. *(Ellen Moyer)*
- 2. Be prepared to meet constituents everywhere you go.** Have a smile ready and a small notebook to take down names, phone numbers, and concerns. *(Audrey Scott)*
- 3. Always, and I mean always, do what you think is right and in the best interest of your city/town.** *(Ron Young)*
- 4. Return telephone calls.** *(Eugene Kennedy)*
- 5. Build relationships within the community.** *(Tawanna Gaines)*

6. **Always build relationships *before* you need them.** *(Kevin Dayhoff)*
7. **Do it NOW.** This is a shameless rip-off of William Donald Schaefer. But, it is one of the things that made him successful, and it applies to anyone with an agenda. Just because the voters gave you four years, it doesn't mean you have to spend the first three of them talking and planning projects. Do it NOW! *(Ellen Moyer)*
8. **Set your watch 5 to 10 minutes fast.** A small cushion of time will help you arrive to meetings on time. *(Audrey Scott)*
9. **Don't just campaign at election time.** As Louie Goldstein once said, "You campaign all of the time." *(Ron Young)*
10. **Do not make promises you cannot keep.** *(Eugene Kennedy)*
11. **Build good relationships with other elected officials.** *(Tawanna Gaines)*
12. **Prepare today for tomorrow.** *(Kevin Dayhoff)*
13. **Be pragmatic.** We are all idealistic. We stick by our principles. We dare greatly, and sometimes we fail in the arena. But that doesn't mean we can't change direction. There are some times when the people know more than we do and we have to learn to do things their way. Learning to work with political adversaries isn't the same as selling out. I t's pragmatic. I t's life. *(Ellen Moyer)*
14. **Write or call thank you for favors done.** *(Audrey Scott)*
15. **Don't tell people different stories.** *(Ron Young)*
16. **Make yourself accessible to your constituents.** *(Eugene Kennedy)*
17. **Take care of yourself.** You can't help others if you are hurting yourself. *(Tawanna Gaines)*
18. **The problem is important, but it's the response that counts.** *(Kevin Dayhoff)*

19. **Don't get caught up on who you are, how important you seem, or how great people say you are.** This perspective comes from Donald Rumsfeld. You aren't indispensable! There was someone filling your position before, and there will be someone succeeding you. As Charles De Gaulle once said, "The cemeteries of the world are full of indispensable men," and women. *(Ellen Moyer)*
20. **Grooming really is important!** Women — keep a spare pair of pantyhose, a sewing kit, lipstick and comb nearby. Men can skip the pantyhose and lipstick, but should carry a nice clean shirt and tie in the car if possible. *(Audrey Scott)*
21. **LISTEN!** *(Ron Young)*
22. **Include citizens in city/town projects.** *(Eugene Kennedy)*
23. **Know who your constituents are and what their needs are.** *(Tawanna Gaines)*
24. **Flexibility is the key to survivability.** *(Kevin Dayhoff)*
25. **Think outside the box.** It's become a cliché, but I like to think that I was approaching public service that way before it was even called that. It's another way of looking at innovative, creative and imaginative ways to approach challenges and opportunities. Some people thought my plan to use transition teams and 120 volunteers to set the agenda for my administration was screwy until they saw what the teams came up with! *(Ellen Moyer)*
26. **Put old shoes in the car.** That "situation" your constituent wants you to see will no doubt involve hiking through mud or fields or woods. Your heels or wing-tips won't do! *(Audrey Scott)*
27. **Do your homework!** *(Ron Young)*
28. **Show yourself to be friendly yet professional.** *(Eugene Kennedy)*
29. **Always behave like someone is watching.** Don't embarrass the institution or the citizens that you represent. *(Tawanna Gaines)*
30. **Trust your instincts — when in doubt, don't!** *(Kevin Dayhoff)*

31. **Look for and demand good ideas — then use them.** Leadership is finding talented people and proving to them that ideas will be tried. It empowers them. And it makes you look good. *(Ellen Moyer)*
32. **Take your work, not yourself, too seriously.** Maintain a sense of humor. *(Audrey Scott)*
33. **Remember, you don't own the city/town!** You just have a contract that gives you the privilege to run it for a while. *(Ron Young)*
34. **Be sensitive to the issues that affect your constituents.** *(Eugene Kennedy)*
35. **Remember that public office is a commitment.** If you're not prepared to take on the responsibility, don't take the office. *(Tawanna Gaines)*
36. **Look for ways to reinvent yourself and your city or town.** The effort will keep you and your city/town vibrant and meaningful. *(Kevin Dayhoff)*
37. **Be appreciative.** Not just to the people who work for you, but the voters who put you where you are. It is a great honor to be able to serve. It's easy to express appreciation. And it is, in itself, greatly appreciated by those who are valued. Besides, it feels good! *(Ellen Moyer)*
38. **Get to know your colleagues and do what you can to become a team.** It's much more effective than working as an individual and a necessity for success. *(Audrey Scott)*
39. **Remember that the people that come to your meeting on a controversial issue are usually those against it.** *(Ron Young)*
40. **Accept suggestions from your constituents and be willing to let go of your point of view.** *(Eugene Kennedy)*
41. **People will tell you that you are good — you shouldn't have to sell it.** *(Tawanna Gaines)*
42. **Always adapt to the context in which we serve.** *(Kevin Dayhoff)*

43. **Have fun!** Enjoy what you do. If you're not doing what you enjoy and do not like working with and for the public, you shouldn't be in public office. Enjoy and take pride in what you are doing and you'll find you draw energy from it that you can put back into being more effective. *(Ellen Moyer)*
44. **Be kind and courteous to your municipal staff.** They really are your greatest allies, and they have *your* success as their primary goal. *(Audrey Scott)*
45. **Never take sides on an issue until you have heard both sides.** *(Ron Young)*
46. **Know how to network.** *(Eugene Kennedy)*
47. **Know the process and rules of the institution and follow them.** *(Tawanna Gaines)*
48. **"Opportunities multiply as they are seized," Sun Tzu** *(Kevin Dayhoff)*
49. **Have a positive attitude.** There is always a way to make even the most hopeless situation better. Keep the attitude upbeat and surround yourself with those "can do" people. Get rid of the "nattering nabobs of negativism." If you can't, then isolate them. Don't let them contaminate your energy field, or poison your well. *(Ellen Moyer)*
50. **Women — don't wear flashy, long dangling earrings or patterned prints to televised council meetings.** They distract from your words. *(Audrey Scott)*
51. **Don't mess with peoples' dogs, garbage or parking!** *(Ron Young)*
52. **Work closely with your council.** *(Eugene Kennedy)*
53. **Respect your colleagues, superiors and the process.** *(Tawanna Gaines)*
54. **"Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible," St. Francis of Assisi.** *(Kevin Dayhoff)*
55. **Be tenacious.** As a child, I was inspired by Robert Bruce and the spider. "If at first you don't succeed, then try, try again." And in adversity,

remember Winston Churchill. "Never give up. Never give up. Never, never, never." (*Ellen Moyer*)

56. Remember to set aside time for your family and friends. You'll want them there long after you are no longer an elected official. And besides that, they'll allow you to "let your hair down" which from time-to-time you'll need to do. (*Audrey Scott*)

57. Treat people like you would like to be treated. (*Ron Young*)

58. Be a leader. (*Eugene Kennedy*)

59. Assume nothing and assume everything all at once. (*Tawanna Gaines*)

60. "In a democracy, the highest office is the office of citizen," Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter. (*Kevin Dayhoff*)