



WYLIE'S SUCCESSION PROGRAM PROVIDES SELF-SUSTAINING TALENT POOL

By **Mindy Manson**, City Manager
City of Wylie

Wylie High School graduate Brent Parker may not have known he would someday lead Wylie Fire Rescue. In fact, as he accepted his diploma, he was trying to decide whether to pursue a career in firefighting or agriculture education.

Happily, he chose the former. I'm particularly proud of Brent because I watched him begin his career as a typical, green recruit in 2001 and, through growth and development, move up the ranks to become our fire chief in 2014.

Recruiting and keeping valuable personnel is one of the goals of Wylie's succession planning program – Individual Career Advancement Navigation (ICAN) – which we've offered since 2011. Chief Parker was a member of the inaugural class.

The eight-month program is dedicated to identifying, encouraging, and training future leaders to help them step confidently and competently into expanded roles. We embrace the concept of succession planning for many reasons. For one, the management team realized we were roughly the same age and would be retiring within a few years of each other. With the support of our city council, we devised a plan that would educate individuals in our organization about what it takes to assume leadership roles. After studying programs in other cities, we put together one we felt would fit the culture of our organization, now and in the future.

To consistently meet the missions and goals of our city council and provide exemplary customer service to our citizens, we believe it's essential to foster strong, committed leadership. If those leaders are developed from within the city's ranks, they are up-to-speed more quickly than those who are not yet acquainted with the city's history, culture, and challenges.

Chief Parker followed in the footsteps of his well-respected predecessor, Chief Randy Corbin, who retired in 2014. The Corbin-to-Parker transfer of leadership was a seamless transition and followed the model that is the intent of the program.

ICAN assists in the development of useful skill sets, such as public speaking and knowledge of other departments, and demystifies such concepts as budget preparation. Seeing how quickly participants grasp these concepts and adopt these skills is helpful in identifying future leaders.

The program's goals include determining which areas and positions require succession planning; the development of a mentoring program; and providing training in supervisory and leadership skills, general management, human resources management, and budgeting. The number of participants can vary in each class. There have been as many as nine and as few as six. Applications are carefully weighed and participants carefully selected.

ICAN Components

Under the direction of Human Resources Director Lynn Fagerstrom, ICAN includes team projects as well as individual projects.

Team Projects

Teams are assigned by random drawing and undertake two projects: a municipal cost-cutting proposal and a review of the employee handbook for enhancement opportunities or potentially problematic areas. The degree to which teammates work together offers extraordinary insight as we seek future leaders.

Chief Parker said ICAN's team component was among its most valued. He embraced the chance to develop a broad spectrum of relationships with individuals from other departments – many were colleagues whose areas of responsibility were unfamiliar to him. Inter-departmental knowledge continues to be key to the program. We encourage all employees to reach beyond the walls of their "silo."

At the conclusion of the projects, participants present their findings to city officials. Their level of comfort and confidence in presenting to an audience can be another indication of their future leadership capabilities.

Individual Projects

Book Club

Participants are responsible for meeting the individual program component requirements. One of these is participation in a book club, facilitated by Assistant City Manager Jeff Butters. Class members select a book from five titles and read it from a leadership perspective. They look for examples of exceptional leadership, consider how they would have acted in similar circumstances, and reflect on their personal development and lifelong learning. The ICAN students give brief class presentations about the books, which serve to share useful information as well as to garner public speaking experience.

Mentoring

Those taking part select a city official or department head to act as a mentor, preferably one whose responsibilities are in an area other than their comfort zone. Mentors act as guides throughout the ICAN process. It is our hope a strong relationship will develop and the mentor will continue to inspire and provide guidance after the program ends.

Shadowing

ICAN members shadow a senior City of Wylie employee, observing his or her leadership style and behavior, and experiencing the day-to-day interaction with those in upper-level management. ICAN students attend meetings with their role model and assist him or her with activities that are outside the scope of the participant's duties.

Self-Development

With a goal of implementing skills learned in ICAN and gaining



Fire Chief Brent Parker touches base with his mentor, City Manager Mindy Manson.

a better understanding of the community, class members are encouraged to become involved in the community by participating in the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary International, Lions Club, Toastmasters International, or other civic and community organizations.

Meetings

ICAN class members are invited to observe bi-weekly city management staff meetings, attend at least one city

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council meeting, and attend one of the annual city budget work sessions. I'm also pleased to have the opportunity to meet one-on-one with each, becoming better acquainted with the future leaders. I encourage them to bring me their concerns – it's their time to use as they wish. Some bring two pages of questions, and some have little to say. Again, this provides a glimpse into their leadership potential.

Programs

In addition to the self-paced work, we schedule a variety of programs featuring in-house and guest speakers.

Presented are overviews of Wylie's public services, park and recreation, engineering, planning and zoning, and the city secretary's office. Police Chief John Duscio speaks about emotional wellness, and we have an overview of HR and payroll practices, purchasing, and open records. ICAN includes a presentation skills workshop, with instruction in the operation of audio-visual equipment, how to create presentations that meet objectives, and effective delivery skills, including eye contact, voice, and movement. Our public information officer presents a session on dealing with the media, the executive director of the Wylie Economic Development Corporation speaks about city growth and development, and fire and police chiefs present overviews of their departments.

My portion includes a local government class explaining best practices, how roles and tasks are delegated at the city level, the city's role in the community, creating a caring culture, and discussion about ways to ensure departments' engagement. Participants discuss the "two-minute elevator speech," or a 250-word description of our city roles one might share with a fellow elevator passenger.

Faculty members from nearby Collin College also present informational and motivational programs.

Field Trips

The class visits such locations as the public works service center, parks service center, animal control, and our 911 emergency communications center. A trip to Coventry Reserve, a local facility where adults with varying disabilities are taught to create pottery and other life skills, is included, and ICAN members serve lunch at the Wylie Senior Recreation Center's monthly birthday celebration. In ICAN's early years, representatives from local charities and organizations came to speak to the group. We've found, however, that volunteering in the field is more informative and engaging, so a shift at the local food pantry - Wylie Community Christian Care Center - is included one month.

Minimal Investment, Great Results

Our ICAN is very do-able without a huge financial investment. The time commitment, especially by the participants, is the largest challenge – there are projects to complete, books to read, and meetings to attend. We're committed, however, to providing a program that will push and challenge, not just be easy to complete.

Graduates continue to be a valuable resource. Recently, one of our departments needed to conduct research and lacked the personnel to accomplish it. After reaching out to the ICAN alumni, a group formed that was willing to take on the task and see it through to completion. I am excited that we now have a pool of committed and knowledgeable employees we can call upon to make things happen.

A Source of Pride

Chief Parker told me recently he feels it is the duty of all city employees to mentor those coming along in the organization to ensure successful operation. About ICAN, he said he appreciated Wylie's willingness to recognize those employees with potential and to invest in them.



The first ICAN class was held in 2011, and members were recognized at a Wylie city council meeting.

With programs such as ICAN in place, I'm confident we can continue to pass the baton as generations of leaders step up to carry on our culture of excellence. As city manager – which, incidentally, Chief Parker would like to be some day – it gives me an almost maternal feeling of pride to watch the process unfold. ★