



**Carl Vinson
Institute of Government**
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



GCCMA



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CITY-COUNTY
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

What I **Learned** from My Year Away

A City Manager's Journey to a Different Way of Living

March 7, 2025

Our Time Together

- 1. The Lead Up**
- 2. The Decision**
- 3. What I Learned**
- 4. How I Move Now**



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1994

2 books + 12 classmates + 4 values

4

Values of Public Adminsitration

Efficiency, Equity, Responsiveness, Rights

- Dr. John Nalbandian



Foundation

1. Representative democracy at the local level has the most satisfying problems to solve (and there's no better feeling than making the place you live/love better).
2. There is great power in people of good will working together to solve problems.
3. We can accomplish great things when we don't worry about who gets credit.

Skipping Ahead

2009-10 / 2010-11



(\$240)
million



And then.....

2013 – 2021



(\$60) / 40
million %



100 / 40 / 10

A matter of Trust

Financial solutions were more political than technical

The most important role of the CFO and budget officer was to be the 'source of truth.'

My role as City Manager was to:

- 1) Protect them when they told the truth, and
- 2) Find the functional space between the **technically necessary** and the **politically feasible**.

3

Guideposts for all Phoenix employees



3 Guideposts

*“Work Smart.
Spend Wisely.
Be Kind.”*

5 = 9

They're elected and I'm not



$$5 = 9$$

Unless $9 = 3+3+3$



2017 / 1

Equipt to Innovate



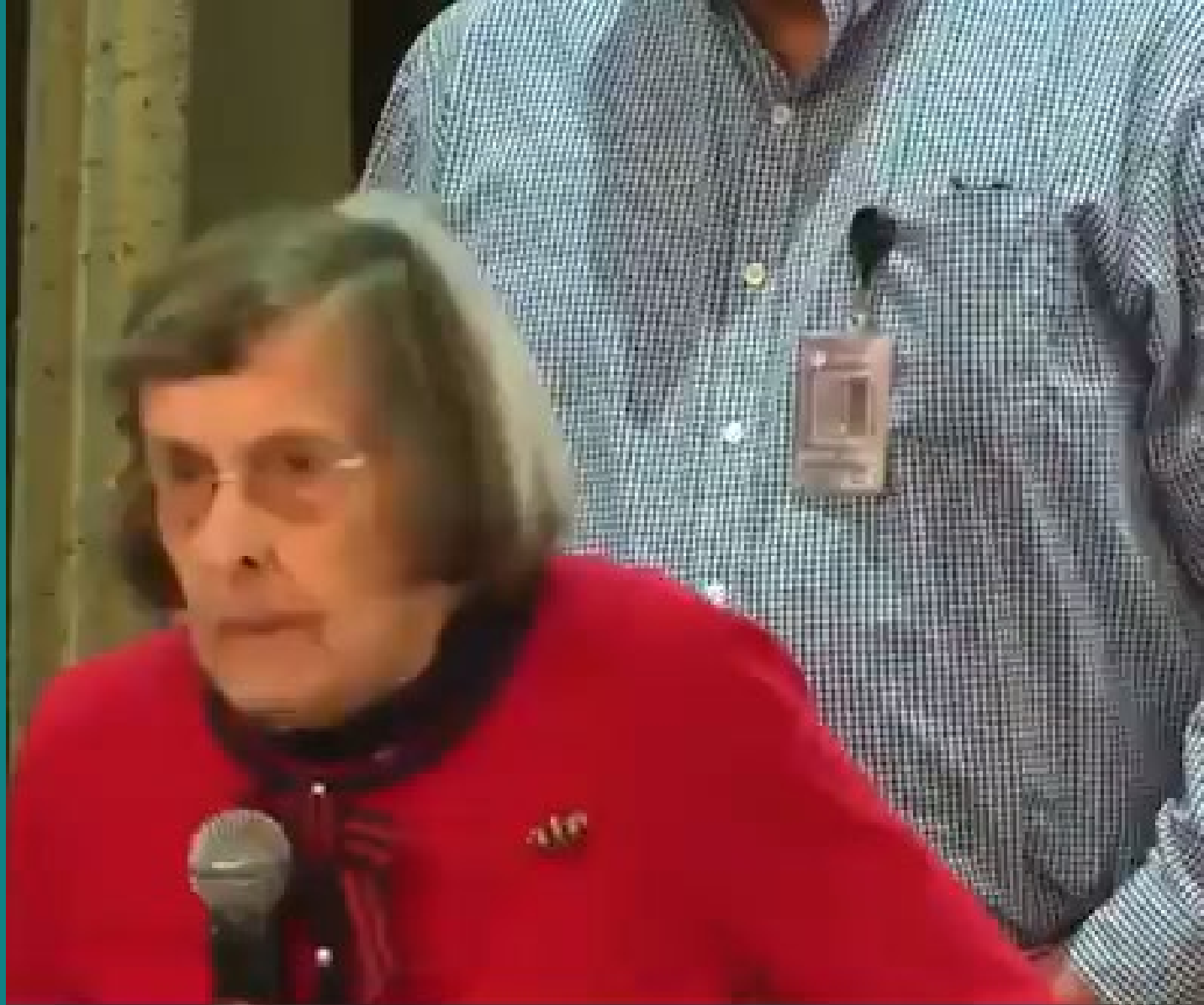
\$225M / 2

Go Suns!!!

or

Go, Suns.





Greta Rogers:
**Mr. Sarver has done nothing to improve this team
in the 14 years he's owned it.**

Via @NBAonESPN



\$225M / 2

PS: The Suns stayed and went to the NBA Finals

The owner left in 2023

The Arena has sold out 150 straight games

Greta called to wish me a merry Christmas.



By 2021...

\$32 / 70
million %

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19

Covid, that is



19 / 3+3+3

Covid

Council



19 / 3+3+3 / 0

Covid

Council

Gas left in tank



It was time...

There is a season for everything under the
heavens
- Ecclesiastes

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What I Did

What I Did

And then...

What I Did (in order)

1. Engaged an Executive Coach
 - Where were you when I needed you
2. Attended a Leadership Seminar
 - There's a big world out there
3. Hired a Personal Trainer
 - Stop putting it off

What I Did (in order)

4. Explored My City
 - Fall in love again

What I Did (in order)

4. Explored My City

- Fall in love again

5. Learned to Meditate

- Quiet the noise

What I Did (in order)

6. Re-engaged with Family and Friends

- Be present

What I Did (in order)

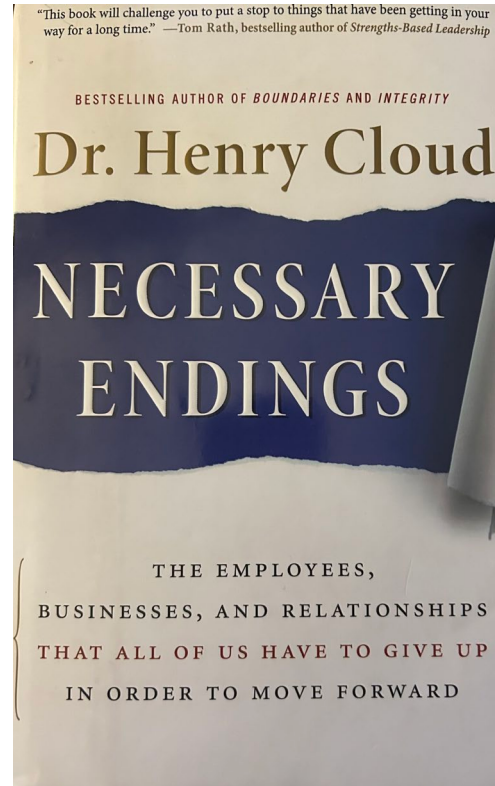
6. Re-engaged with Family and Friends

- Be present

7. Read Widely

- There's more to life than zoning cases

What I Learned from One Book



Necessary Endings

1. For new things to begin, old things must end.

“Endings are not only part of life; they are a requirement for living and thriving, professionally and personally.” — Henry Cloud

Necessary Endings

2. Growth demands movement, which means leaving something behind.

Necessary Endings

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“Without the ability to end things, people stay stuck, never becoming who they are meant to be, never accomplishing all that their talents and abilities should afford them.” – Henry Cloud



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Back to Work - What I Still Do

1. Work with a personal trainer
2. Engage differently with family and friends
3. Read widely
4. Work with an executive coach
5. *Examine my past behaviors*

The Lies I Told Myself

1. It all depends on me.
2. I have to make it all feel better.
3. If I work harder, bad things won't happen.
4. If my Council is uncomfortable, I didn't do something right.
5. I'm in this alone.

A Better Frame

1. ~~It all depends on me.~~

As the CEO, I create an environment that owns up to - and works to fix or address - issues that arise.

2. ~~I have to make it all feel better.~~

My job is to name reality and identify options for the Council to act upon. I do this largely by organizing the work of others and synthesizing recommendations.



A Better Frame

3. ~~If I work harder, bad things won't happen.~~

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I can't control or own how other people feel, but I can give opportunities for action.

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A Better Frame

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I can't control or own how other people feel, but I can give opportunities for action.

4. ~~If my Council is uncomfortable, I didn't do something right.~~

Bad things happen; how I address them is all I can control.



A Better Frame

5. ~~I'm in this alone.~~



A Better Frame

5. ~~I'm in this alone.~~
I need other people.



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Change is inevitable; growth is optional.

Ed Zuercher

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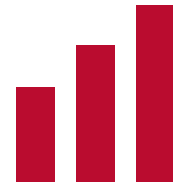


INFORM. INSPIRE. INNOVATE.

GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS)



DOWNTOWN
DEVELOPMENT



DATA ANALYTICS
& VISUALIZATION



CVIOG
DAWG
PROUD

FINANCE COURSES • GOVERNMENTAL PROFESSIONALS CERTIFICATION



STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

STRATEGIC  PLANNING



SCHOOL
LEADERSHIP

SURVEY RESEARCH & EVALUATION



ONLINE COURSES • LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT • ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

CUSTOM



APPLICATION
DEVELOPMENT

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



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COMMUNITY BRANDING



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PLANNING RETREATS AND CUSTOMIZED FACILITATION