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MAINE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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Cultural Change -- Just Do It!
John Metille, Jr.

Moderator: ...with someone from the CIA, and she just kept on staring at me. So I finally explained to her what it meant.

Our next speaker is John Metille. Some of you may know John. He's from the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. He is the chief environmental program administrator, but if you ask him, they did just advertise his job without telling him. So if you want to go to Kentucky, talk to John.

The cabinet has employed John for over 27 years, working primarily in the area of NEPA compliance -- yes, that's one of those acronyms we all with somebody would explain. For those of you that don't know, NEPA -- National Environmental Policy Act.

Over the past six years, he has been championing the cause of environmental leadership, the cultured change of the cabinet, commitmentn delivery, the CAP and contact-sensitive solutions. Through these efforts, John has enabled the cabinet to redefine its project delivery process, increase environmental sensitivity, use creative public outreach and involvement, and make all partners aware of expectations and commitments.

John is also involved in environmental project delivery, policy development, and environmental stewardship assurance. John has a BS in political science and geography from the University of Wisconsin La Crosse, and an MA in urban and transportation geography, with a planning emphasis from Kansas State University.

John received the 2003 AASHTO President's Transportation Award for the environment. In recognition of his efforts nationally and in Kentucky, he changed the manner in which we delivery projects, our business culture and engaged the public. If you ask, I'll be he'll tell you about his new granddaughter.

So please welcome John Metille.

Audience: [Applause].

John Metille: Thanks. I'm really glad to be here. When Judith asked me to do this, I said, "Man, it's a journey that we've been through since the first CIA workshop. Hearing the two gentlemen speak before me, the themes of opportunity, partnership, working together -- who is our customer? The public. We are public servants. So we have to work to really connect with them and work with them. Granted, the decision of what we do with our projects, often my rest with us. But it's up to us to get their input on the vision and goals and objectives that they have for their community.

I had the unique opportunity to go through a change within our organization. It's a tough journey. I'm going to try to capture that here, today. I will tell you that this is a death-by-PowerPoint. I want to warn you ahead of time. I got a lot of materials in here that hopefully will get us through the meeting minutes.

Everybody mentioned leadership, and how you have to be different. I worked with Secretary James Codell for almost six years on this journey. When he left, we had to maintain momentum. But he has stayed in contact to find out how we're doing -- are we moving ahead?

Recently, I received a phone call. I'm sitting in my office working away, and he called and said, "Hey! What are you up to, Metille?" I said, "Well, I'm just working on some policies and stuff." "Oh, really? You at the haven?" Because we had interacted quite a bit over those years. I said, "Yes. How about you?"

He had recently taken a job in my home state of Wisconsin. So, here he is, a contractor from Kentucky, going to Wisconsin to work. So I asked him, "Have you learned to whine and say your "no's" right, up there in Curdsville?" He said, "Oh, you haven't changed a bit! He said, Telly, what I called you about is I've got a project, here. I was talking to these people, and they've got some questions for you." I said, "Okay. Sure. I can try to answer." "Well, I've got them here."

He hands the phone off, and this lady starts talking. She's talking and all of a sudden, it hits me. I'm going, "Oh, my God!" It was my mother! He was in my parents' living room, in La Crosse, Wisconsin. He'd driven across the state, unannounced. He shows up at my parents' house, knocks on the door, and my mom sees this guy in a suit walking around outside. She thought it was a real estate agent.

Codell says, "Hell, they probably thought I was the Fuller Brush man." But he showed in terms of "people," how important people you are to be successful. And what it meant to him and to me -- of what we went through. Not only professionally, but personally, on that journey. He spend two hours talking to my parents.

To have the former secretary of your organization show up at your parents' house and report on your behavior is pretty awesome. They did say he called me a lot of names.

Audience: [humored]

John Metille: Over my career, I have been called the acronym king -- master of anomalies. Master of acronyms. But he called me Earth Shoes, Tree Hugger, Metallica, and also a TERD. T E R D. That's The Environmental Resource's Dude. Our journey -- the leadership he provided really set a direction of vision for how we're going to go forward.

I'm going to start with a quote that we use. "To get to the promised land, you have to negotiate your way through the wilderness." Really, it's a tough journey. It is a wilderness of change. It is a difficult journey. I think we've heard both gentlemen before me talk about that. It's not easy. But look at it as an opportunity. An opportunity to make a difference in how you delivery projects, and how you engage your customers.

A little bit of -- say -- our license plate... I'm just doing this for fun. We recently beat out Maine's. We had a fun thing here about the number-one best. Talking to Judith, "Well, we ran the newspaper articles. We really found out what your customers thought of that license plate." They thought we were advertising Wal-Mart, because it has...here... I'll show it here. See? It has a happy, sunshiny face. And there's a side business. If I don't get rehired -- because they advertised my job -- I'm going to print details that people can put over the smiley face, to really customize their license plates.

But really, it is your customers -- even down to your license plate. You have to know how you can connect with them. What I'm talking about is setting a vision. It's always going to be under construction, because the journey is never over. You're always going to be taking different paths as you go.

As I pointed out, Secretary Codell set this direction. I don't know how many of you ever -- if you get e-mails from your Commissioner -- you know -- e-mails that ask, "Hey. What's going on on this project?" Secretary Codell was deeply involved in the delivery of projects. We'd get shouting e-mails, capital letters, in red, asking people to take responsibility for their actions. You didn't want to get those e-mails. Of course, who was getting them? Right away, in the environment. Saying, "Hey, man, you guys are letting us down. We can't deliver projects."

The first CIA workshop held in Tampa lit a fire in me to really change how we engage our customers. So not only were we challenged with the delivery of projects, but also, "How do we engage projects?" At the time, we had a study going. "Reducing public opposition to highway construction." I said, "That's all wrong." It's how do you integrate the public into your decision-making and project delivery?

That was a challenge that I hit our staff with. In the long-range of internal efforts, one gentleman and myself -- not the secretary -- not Secretary Codell, but another guy -- said, "Are you serious about going on with this, that we have to go to a customer focus? That we have to engage the public in this manner?" "Hey. Do we have any choice? It's their road, their money, their environment, their community. They need to be there with us."

That's public expectations. They knew what we were up to. When they didn't like what we were doing, what did they do? They'd challenge us. They'd hit us with other things.

We started on this journey really just to improve on-time and within-budget delivery of our projects. As we went through with this concept of dad-versus-pop, which I'll get into in a little bit, it became our slogan for how we were going to change. I'll give Mississippi's here. I stole it from them. I heard it at a conference. I take notes like no one else has seen, and I use them. Because the best thing to do is learn. Because here, it's an opportunity to learn. Take these ideas with you. It may not be the time immediately to use them, but they will come into play, later.

When we look at our customers -- the public -- we're demanding it. We told them that it's the right thing to do -- the common sense thing to do. We just needed to improve the quality of our decisions and the projects that resulted from that. They had to fit the community. They had to meet the public's expectations to know what we're doing.

What did we use to do that? I'm going to be talking about all these other up there -- maybe just brushing upon them -- because there are a lot. But we use the "environmental" title to really attack what we thought was the culture and the ethic of our organization. We had culture talks, leadership, contact sense and design. This is just a list. I'm not going to go into it.

The most important one is that top one. What is transportation decision-making? Where does the environment fit in? In our agency, it didn't fit in. It was, "Hey. Get the right-of-way authorized. We need the document approved." What we came to grips with was, NEPA is transportation decision-making. It is engaging the public and the communities in the process. That's what we were working toward. Once we created the understanding, we were able to make a lot of changes, and are continuing down that path.

We had to attack the mindset. How our people were here to do more than just deliver roads. We're here to provide opportunities. Opportunities such as you heard from the gentlemen previously, to improve the quality of life. To improve economic opportunities. Really, to improve the "sense of place," that is out there.

We look at our way of doing business -- we had to provide more training. I'll get into this a little bit. We had gone 20 years without even offering training to our staff. And we were hurting. So we'll get into that. Then how do you institutionalize this? How do you get policies, projects and procedures there? And accountability was a big factor. Is the environment engaging the community? Just the practitioners in that area? Or is it accountable to everybody within your organization? That's where we were at.

Environmental leadership, as a vocal for moving along a path. This was a [Gene Kleckley] initiative. An introspective journey. In other words, you've got to look into yourself. It's easy to blame others for problems that result -- either internal problems or external. We were never at fault. But you had to come to grips with,

"Is it really us?" That's really what we came to.

So what you needed to do through this environmental leadership, are the items here. Granted, it lent an environmental flavor. So you had to have senior management commitment. You had to have policies in place in order to accomplish those visions, goals and objectives that you had. You have to have an ethic -- environmental ethic. An ethic for doing the right things for the right reasons. For the people -- your ultimate customers that you have.

You have to have communication and training. We're horrible, internally. We were at that time. Communicating to each other. We had to come to grips with that. Daily decision-making. It isn't just that NEPA document. It's the decisions you make throughout your daily activities -- whether in project delivery or your programs and other activities. [inaudible] I do have two awards that we give tonight. We give a stewardship award and we give a preservation award. The preservation award is for community value. We have a competition, and we use those to see if those [inaudible] projects [inaudible]

So through this effort, we're trying to figure out how do all the pieces of the organization fit the movement -- a movement with a broad base. A movement which transcends political boundaries. It's a movement that values people more than technology, people more than political boundaries, people more than profit. It's a "people" focus. That's who we serve. This is from 1969. It's a struggle that we've had.

So we held a series of workshops with [Gene Kleckley]. It started with upper management and worked through to the district level and the people that were out there delivering the projects. Through this, we have met the enemy; he is us. That's what we came to grips with. We were our worst enemy! Not only in how we worked internally, but how we worked externally. We had to find ways to connect with the people.

I was asked during these, and if you look at the face of the cat -- the first one of these meetings, they go, "Metille, how are you treated?" There I was, at the time I was an administrative branch manager in the Division of Environmental Analysis. All those dogs represent the big dogs in the organization. The secretary, deputy secretary, legal and all that. They put me at a table and said, "Metille, how do they treat you?" I'm looking around and thought, "Oh, God. These people can make my life heck." They said, "Come on." [Gene Kleckley] was great. He said, "They've been disrobed. They have no power." I go, "Well, they sure as heck have memories!" But we had to admit, I was treated like the little red-headed stepchild. I was not a part of the process. I was always the one blamed for our inability to deliver projects. So we had to change.

Some of our staff sent me this. "This is how John feels in his new job." It really sends a message, because I was amongst engineers. I am not an engineer. I was one of the first to be put in the State Highway Engineers Office that was a non-engineer. It really was a challenge.

Through these efforts, we came up with the obstacles. Like I said, I've captured each step of this, here. So I can't go into these in a lot of detail. But really, we had a lack of leadership. In other words, it was only environmental's thing. It wasn't anybody else's. So there wasn't any understanding across. The statement of the smokestacks is great, because I said we were silos. We had our stuff to do, and, "Hey. Throw it out of the silo; it's someone else's problem." That's what we had.

We really had to understand everybody. Not only what goes on in the environmental arena, but in the whole project-development arena. In other words, we had to talk. We had to communicate. Lack of environmental sense. We weren't delivering commitments. We would make commitments to build wetlands, and gave it to construction, but we didn't give them any guidance, and the Corps threatened to shut us down, statewide. We weren't delivering, so we had to do something. Our old culture was to build roads, and we had to do something different. We had to build communities. We had to build trust and credibility with our customers out there.

Again, we weren't a community; lack of trust. We didn't trust each other internally -- what did that do to us externally? We used to work in a building called the SOB. State Office Building. But we were SOBs when it came to our delivery of project. The people out there said, "You're just like that. You're just like the name of your building. Yes. That's how you treat us, and that's how your attitude is. We need something different." Now we're the TCOB. So I've got to come up with something different for that. We moved into a new building that the public calls the Trans Mahal, because it's so opulent. You can imagine how we deal with people.

Process-driven is what you're after, here. Don't be driven by projects. You're driven by a process to deliver what's best for your customers. Too often, we get caught up in the delivery of individual projects. You've got to look at the broader picture -- more holistically at what you're trying to do. The fragmentation of the process - I'll get into that here in a little bit. And the lack of a policy. We didn't have policies. We had a guidance manual that was out of date, and everything else.

Here are some more quotes that we used. [Jane Garvey] -- "One of the greatest challenges that the highway community faces is providing safe, efficient transportation services that can serve and even enhance the environmental, scenic, historic and community resources that are so vital to our way of life. Our way of life, our quality of life." We're in it together.

The thing is -- think about it. You live in a community. Think about how your project, when you deliver it to your community -- think about how it affects that. Are you doing it to yourself? That's what you have to come to grips with, in terms of how your projects interact with the community and the environment around it.

Strategies to overcome. We had to get out and communicate. We had to improve credibility and trust. We had to give them training opportunities. We really had to get out there and break down the barriers internally and externally. We had to come up with some policies. These are all just little bullets that we had. Culture. How'd we do all this?

That's another quote. We just had Secretary Codell communicating these to everybody. Look, guys! It's a great challenge. And we've got to redefine our vision and our way of doing business. That's what Tom Warner was talking about, here. It's more... We did a great job delivering the interstate system. But now, we've got a new mission that involves the communities and the other elements of the environment. We've got to do better, in terms of what we deliver.

We use these -- "Every day is Earth Day!" Corny as it sounds, it was a way that we'd tell guys, "The environment is important in everything that you do. You've got to do a better job." The public expects, demands and deserves to participate in transportation decision-making. I'll get into what our public involvement process was before here, in a bit. But really, those are things that are just simple statements though, that people were able to connect with, to create momentum.

This came out of the environmental leadership. But it actually came from some of the state highway engineers and some others. It's how does the environment and safety fit? Too often, safety was "over here." Safety is vitally important to what we do. But if we're going to adequately consider the human and natural environment in what we do, it's got to be at the core, too. It's not just in project development. You can see here, all those at the center there play throughout our entire process. But this was our first step at capturing, "What is decision-making? What's at the core of it?" That's what we used to really jumpstart.

There was a commitment by the secretary to go out and make a change. Well, we spun our wheels. We held the first Environmental Leadership and almost 9 months passed by -- we hadn't done a thing. We held all those meetings as a passing fad. What are we really going to do to change our process?

I get a call one day, "Hey. Get up here to the secretary's office. He needs to talk to you." I thought, "Uh-oh. What did I do?" Because I wasn't used to that one-on-one relationship. I'd never been called up into the secretary's office, before. He said, "We need to get in gear. I just had a meeting with the consulting industry, and I feel they're further along in customer satisfaction than we are! So we've got to do something to change how we do."

We traveled the state. We had two 16-hour talks, where we tried to get people to understand what strategic planning is. What customer focus we needed to have. We strategically planned and we ran them through it. What elements are applicable to their daily activities? Everybody was responsible.

This was a challenge! Secretary Codell -- first one of these we did -- he gets a call. "Does the governor what you're doing? Does he know you're trying to make an agency full of tree huggers?" But that wasn't what we were after. We were after people with sensitivities to the communities, and our customers. So it was questioned. We were challenged. Yet this set the stage for how we moved forward.

We were talking to a guy, and this guy built parts of the Alaskan Pipeline with Codell Construction. This guy was a highway contractor who admitted he had pillaged the environment. His job was to maximize his profits. So for him, this was a big challenge. He was turning his back on his very peer group, in this effort. Again, this is what I had up there. "Treat the public like you'd want to be treated. Treat the public like it's in your own backyard." This is Codell-talk. It was him speaking to his organization. He said, "Guys, we've got to do things differently. We've got to connect."

We were there, together. This is, again, ownership and responsibility for how we affect the environment and our communities in our daily activity. It must occur on every project. It must become a habit. It must become a way of life. That's how your change has to be. You have to have the champion -- the leadership champion -- and others, but it can happen at any level that you can push forward and take advantage of these opportunities.

We aligned with our path. That's something that at the time when we started, I didn't really link into the value of a "vision, mission," and the "value or the objectives" of that. But yet, when you see the power of those when they work together, and if you can tie your efforts -- we as community impact assessment professionals -- if we can tie our activities into the vision and mission of our agency, it's hard for our agencies to say no. Because we're trying to accomplish through our activities where they're trying to go. So if you align yourself with those, you can be successful. But it's hard.

We looked at customers and stakeholders. This was a very critical element of understanding how we connect. A lot of this -- like I said -- I can't go through this point-by-point, but this was our mission statement. We aspired to provide a safe, efficient, environmentally, fiscally-responsible transportation system which promotes economic growth and enhances the quality of life in Kentucky.

We do have a new vision with the change in administration. But these same elements are there. So how we move forward -- it's "dad and pop," as I pointed out before. It's what we use as our efforts. That is dad versus pop. How many of you out there have heard of "dad and pop," other than just those few of you? Really, it's decide, announce and defend our old behavior. We would say, "Here. We're going to move this project. We're going to do it." And what happened in those meetings? Boy, we were on the "reactive mode" throughout the whole process. Because we had already decided, and man, the public didn't like it because they didn't have an input on that decision. What we went to was publicly-owned projects, or public opportunity projects. In other words, engage them throughout, to get their input. So they have a sense of "ownership," and "responsibility," to bring issues to the table for us to deal with and deliver our project. On these, again, we use these thoughts just to plant this ethic. It had to be in there on a daily basis. It had to be a part of us.

So we created our own workshop after these four Kleckley workshops, where we had a team that went out to talk about public involvement, context-sensitive solutions, and decision-making that's a shared decision-making process. What it was there again -- the commitment of upper management. Both Secretary Codell and Jose Sepulveda, our division administrator, said, "We've got to do this. We've got to work together to make this happen." So they attended every one of these workshops and kicked them off. Federal Highways was a part of the training team, where we talked about how do we get to the interest of our customer? How do we connect? How do we deal with them?

The classes were all met [with caution]. It wasn't just environmental people. It was operations, construction, planning -- it was cross-cutting. So we had to go. We had a converted engineer -- Bill [Juleck]. He was here. He was one that changed his way of doing business. He was on that used to talk his way out of public meetings. If someone requested a public hearing, he'd do all that he could do to convince them, "You don't want to do that. What can we give you here to tell you?" "All right. I'll withdraw my request for a meeting." So he was one of those that converted to a new way of doing business. So we had one of their own there to talk to them and create that change.

Decision-making. We're all on the same team, together. Everybody achieves more. We want to really connect and get people to think as a unit. We talked about the role of protection of the community and neighborhood preservations. Really, we had to be sensitive to those. That's who we serve. What were the benefits of this? This is what you look for. Decisions that stick. Improved relationships, internally and externally, in terms of how we work together. Better decisions with better information. Efficiencies in how we deliver. Improved coordination. All these are the benefits. If you do this right, it will happen.

What I'm really proud of was public involvement, because public involvement was a challenge. We only did it because all the feds say we've got to hold the hearing, and that's all we're going to do. That was the mindset of our agency. When dad -- as we were talking about -- we had all the answers, and we talked our way out of holding the hearing. And did we listen? That's the key. Did you listen and respond and understand to what our customers were telling us, as we went about doing our public involvement?

We didn't react, we didn't respond. Actually, our process was to closer our eyes and ears. We didn't want to hear it. We were the transportation experts. We knew what was best for the transportation system. But did we know what was best for the community that's out there? Those were the tools that we had to develop to connect.

There really are expectations of the customers. How can we meet them? How can we find people to engage? Let's find the people out there that can really help you. You need champions both internally and externally, to be successful. So you've got to find the right people out there.

We put in a mandate that every project will have a public involvement plan. But we failed to give them the backing, in terms of how to accomplish that. So we had to bring in the tools. We brought in the federal highways and the public involvement course. We had it seven times. We need to bring it back again. But we still are lacking the tools.

We recently re-crafted our public involvement policy to be more sensitive to customer satisfaction. Because to have a memo -- our previous public involvement policy was stuck in the design manual. "You will hold a hearing. You will advertise in the paper. You will report it." You know -- all this stuff that... Where's the value in that? If it's supposed to be transportation decision-making, you have to show how you integrated it into your process. Not just that hearing, but in the planning and throughout, as you go.

You have to build trust and credibility. Remember -- we had a challenge. People questioned our motives, because of our past behavior. The "dad" stuff that we were. More often than not, we'd hold the meeting and

then we'd go away somewhere and then come back with the decision. So we had to find a way to really connect with them, to improve our credibility and trust. And how do we negotiate? How do we really bring it to define a collaborative process? That's a big challenge.

But when you think about it, whose road is it? Who do we work for? Isn't it the public? It's their road. It's their environment, their community, their money, their future. That's who we work for, as public servants. And they really need to be at the table. They must be at the table with you, as you work through your process.

To put it another way, everything matters in what you do. We as professionals -- yes, we can look it up in books and that. But the one-on-one contact, the interactions of the public in it will give you much more information than you can get out of that document record. They have so much to bring to the table, because it is their future. So to get to that information, you've got to engage the public as you go through.

As an agency, we've tried all these. These are techniques that you can use to engage the public. We've tried them all, but we haven't captured them in terms of the lessons learned. We're in the back of this presentation, and I probably won't be able to get to it, but there are examples of how we did that. I'll just point out really creative stuff out of the box. We went from over here to over here, in terms of how we engaged our customers. We went to truck stops. We went to county fairs. We go to local fire district meetings, now. We set up roadside hamburger stands with our crash dummies and Buckle-up Bear. Seat belt -- car seat inspections. Making multifunctions. We even have hand puppets that we use to connect to kids -- particularly on air quality issues. We've got Rosie the Skunk. I have a picture of that in here.

But it's something that gets people -- connecting to them. Your customers are of all ages. So you have to use a variety of techniques to connect with them. It's not one-stop shopping. You've got to find the context of your project, and then customize your public involvement to fit and to deliver with that.

Our whole process -- I've alluded to this before -- and I love the smokestack analogy that was used by Mr. Cole. Really, we were separated. You had smoke, and if the wind blew and particulate matter fell on the other silo, they got what you were doing. But if it didn't, there wasn't a lot of sharing across each other. We used silos. We were offline, if you look at this. We weren't a part of the mainstream process. Because it was an engineering-driven process. It was on project, not process. So everything flowed -- design, right away, construction and operations. It was just that. Environment was, "Well, let's get that done. Let's get that authorization." As I said before.

So we had to come to grips with what is really decision-making? And this process -- what did it foster? If you don't communicate and there's some [inaudible] -- finger-pointing. "You did this. Why did you do this to me? You handed me something that I can't do." So this finger-pointing is something that really did not do anything to build a sense of team and togetherness and partnership. Even internally. You were always, "Hey. I hope I don't get that Codell shouting e-mail. I hope it comes to them. I did all I can do. I gave it to them. I hope they got the red e-mail and I didn't." But we had to find a way to break down those barriers. Again, this is just another way two look at it. We were offline.

So we had to find how we could get into it. So we came up with shared decision-making. It's not an organizational chart. It's a decision-making process. How do we make decisions? Do we talk to our internal and external customers as we develop our project? It's a holistic way of thinking. And it's a continuous process. It doesn't stop on the delivery -- on the signing of a rod. It doesn't stop when you build the project and when you maintain it. It is a continuous process. You should always be looking at ways to improve. You should always be feeding the information across all those silos and smokestacks. You guys have got to be in it together.

That's where we were at. It's a decision-making process where we're all in it together. We're all dependent upon each other to do the best job possible.

The fabric of our organization -- we went through a series of really great meetings, where we would go off to a state park, locked up in a room late at night, looking at our process. Starting at the end, in terms of, "What do you need in operations," and working our way back to planning. Looking at customer relationships, internally. What we found was that there were core activities that crossed everybody's turf. So everybody had a shared responsibility.

Then we had other activities that were just theirs. But they had to find out how they could... That was the fabric of our organization and the fabric of decision-making. So we had to look at those inter-relationships and stress how dependent we were upon each other. But if you didn't communicate, and communicate properly, you were destined to fail. So we had to find ways to connect. To find out if we could do it.

The most important thing was in those meetings we had, what really happened that really pushed us into changing how we did it was an "aha" moment. When people who thought they knew how we did business all of a sudden realized, "Oh, my God. They do that? They do that? I didn't know that." We're talking career employees. New thinkers. Out-of-the-box thinkers. They often realize that, "Man, this is a big animal here that we have to attack. But I didn't know you needed that."

So what we've done is really "we-driven," not "me-driven." That old way was, "That's me. I've got to do it. I've got to get that doc." I mean, I was a NEPAphyte. I loved environmental documents. I reviewed 'til my eyeballs almost fell out. Anne Morris, who's out there -- we used to work together. She'd come into my office. Imagine an office 16 feet deep, 12 feet wide, 15 feet high with environmental documents. I could tell you... Amen! I could tell you what the cover color was on every one of those. I knew them inside and out. But did I know anything outside my box? Outside my office? Oh, no! My focus was on, "Get that environmental document off my desk!" It was project-driven; not process-driven.

I mean, it's tough to break out of there. When you have the opportunity -- you've heard of opportunities? Man - grab it and run with it. Because you can have fun with your job. I mean I had a lot of fun with my job, reading documents. But then when I realized, "Hey, there's a whole new world out there, I told Codell, "Well, once you let me out of the closet, it's great out here." Then they couldn't figure out, "How do we shut him up?" Because you've got to have someone who's been there in the trenches, also, so that people can relate. Yes. Upper management is championing it, but here's someone who's "been there" with us -- who has the vision and the direction to go there. But we had to sell it. So we really had to find a way to connect with them. And it's fun.

This project team is important. We've moved to a project manager system. The project manager is responsible for everyone and everything that's going on. Even in planning and environment; even into construction. But how can he do that if he's not engaged? How can someone in the district tell central office what to do?

So we had to change the mindset that central office is here to support the districts in the delivery of their projects. To provide the expertise for them to be successful. It's a support staff, and what we're going to be implementing is COSTs. Central Office Support Teams. Teams that are set up not based upon offices, but on functions -- to help the divisions -- the districts deliver their projects. That's where we're going with that. So it's pretty cool...

[tape turn]

...So it's really the right thing to do -- the common sense thing to do -- including all this in our decision-making. Shared decision-making is a work in progress. But where we've been successful -- I love what someone said earlier, "Make the idea become theirs."

In 1998, I proposed what was a shared decision-making process. Here I was, a little NEPAphyte. "Oh, this would be cool!" I wrote a little memo and Fed said, "Hey, that's cool," too. "Let's do it." It went out there to the masses; they weren't ready to receive it. It died.

You're going to be out there a lot of times when you feel -- I mentioned the [Lone Ranger and Tonto]. We had a lot of talks where, "Man, someone's sawing that limb behind us, there. What's going to happen when it hits the ground? Are we going to hit it running, or are we going to die?" No. We've got to do this. It is really important to our organization to make it happen.

Well, as we went through these leadership and culture talks, more and more people caught on to what shared decision-making is. And what customer focus is and how important it is. They were seeing little successes. They were taking ownership! All of a sudden, they're rewriting the design manual with the shared decision-making points that I proposed in 1998. They took ownership and they saw the benefits in changing their way of doing business.

Talk about awesome! Because we were shortchanging ourselves as to where we were on the journey of change. Yet, here they came back to us in these meetings we had, and they were preaching our own stuff back to us. And it's awesome when you see the power of that. Because they are the people that are out there daily, connecting with your customers. And really, we're changing.

You know, the environment is a round. It's an end-to-end thing. It doesn't stop. Just like money, stewardship, budgetary stewardship. It doesn't stop. Training is COSTs. You can put those as the cross-cutting items all in there with that environmental bullet. Because it's everybody's business and everybody's concern.

Again, the common thread is what we do. To some, change is difficult. Look at the guy over there. It's like, "Oh, my God. They're going to ask me to do that? Is my retirement here? Can I leave? I don't... They're asking me to deal with the public. They're asking me to deal with those environmental people." So really, you have to break down a lot of internal and external barriers.

This is what we came up with. What's cool about it is -- I don't know how many of you or when your best ideas come to you, but mine come at weird hours of the night. Actually, this idea, I was sitting on I69. It was a meeting in Memphis, Tennessee. They were running through the environmental process. I looked at the chart and I said, "That's wrong." They go, "What do you mean?" I said, "That's wrong. If we're looking at how the process works, what is it really about?" They said, "Well..." I said, "Let's talk about this later." "Well, on a napkin on the airplane ride home, we sketched out this process of looking at planning, in terms of conceptualizing your project. Your decision-making. Your follow-through or production, and then your operation. That's really what we're all about. It's decision-making.

Everything up to that point where the grey starts there -- that's the conceptualization. It's how we come up with our projects. How we interact. But then the rest of it -- that's the easy stuff! [Straight through] design is easy. Right of way isn't as easy, but... But those things are the easy things in the delivery of projects.

The hardest part is getting the ideas and getting the decision-making done. If we can get to that point, we can be successful. If you see where the right of way, utilities and final design -- where they're interconnecting it -- are we talking together? Are we doing...? If we change something in right of way, have we talked to utilities and right of way?

Then you look back at the environmental commitments. What commitments did you make to the community? Are we going to be able to deliver on it? That's what those points are there, in terms of how we move forward.

Actually, what's scary is right now, we're looking at reorganizing the Department of Highways under conceptualization and production. They're looking at the Division and going, "Uh-oh. Where am I going to end up?" Division heads are going, "Oh, my God! I could lose my job!" But if we're going to be a process-driven agency, with stewardship for fiscal resources, people resource, in the communities that we serve -- we need to go to that approach. They've just started that recently. I'm going to run through of that. But it shows that you've got to build momentum and you've got to maintain it.

We were one of the pilot states for context-sensitive design. We really ran with it, but it's not a process. It's actually a philosophy and a way of doing business. It's how you understand the context of your project, your community, where you're going to put it. And really, it's again in the leadership courses and the other courses we've had, we stress teamwork. Interaction with stakeholders. Optimized safety and mobility, with equal consideration to the natural and human environment -- even though it says, "National." I'm sorry about that. But it's really how we interact.

The core elements are how you communicate and how you participate. Liability issues are always going to be there. That's an important element of it. But really, it's how you engage the public. How you deal with environmental justice issues. So really, our course never was... It's continually morphing into something else as we come to grips with a better understanding of how we deliver projects, and how we engage people.

Ours was mandatory training. And it was really how we engage people. Really, how you engage people is critical. And I'll get to that. Training -- I did a fun training course, called "Highway Opposition 101." How to stop progress. I mean, why is the guy from the transportation cabinet out there telling people how to stop progress? Well, it was a great panel discussion with an attorney that explained the law. I explained how the public used the laws against you. And then we had another [inaudible] about how we prevail in court. But the message was, "You've got to be able to integrate those people in your process. Or you will be challenged."

I love acronyms. Ruth Rentch has been sending me some. Sometimes when you can't do public involvement -- when you're not doing it right -- people attack you at what I'd call a BOHICA moment. In a BOHICA moment, you're thinking, "Oh, my God. It's that DAD project." But BOHICA -- Bend Over. Here It Comes Again.

In other words, you're not really connecting with the people. And you're not really understanding the issues that they have to present. So really, you've got to move ahead. Context -- really, it's a lot of things. It's a physical environmental, social culture and aesthetic things. It's everything related to the people and place where your project is located.

So you look at this picture without interaction with stakeholders. You're going to jump to what's there. Without interacting with the public, you would not see this as an opportunity. This is an endangered species. [Edgar Sunflower]. And with Tennessee and several other Southern states, we've entered into management plants with US Fish and Wildlife to hopefully get this delisted in the future. It's really an opportunity. But you wouldn't get that if you just look at what you see. You've got to look at where we're at. Again, it's what you can see and what you can't see.

I love this quote. "All things are connected, like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life. He's merely a strand in it. What he does to the web, he does to himself." Powerful! That's where the stewardship role -- the role with the communities -- comes into play. I've done a lot of outreach with Native Americans, and what I like is, "We were the first stewards of the environment." This is Chief Seattle in like 1860-something. Powerful, but yet valid, today. If we realize what we do to communities we do ourselves -- particularly if we reside there -- it does. We're doing it to ourselves.

So context. Why do you need to understand the context? It's really to create an understanding. To help you identify issues. What is the appearance? What do you see? What do you not see? How can you fit? How can you build respect in a community if you do not understand where they're coming from? It also can be used to provide support for your decision and planning.

So what we talk about is we want projects that fit, that work, that look good and have balance. That balance with the community. Balance with true transportation delivery, in terms of, "Are we providing the value, need and service that the transportation network needs and the community needs?" They have to work together.

It's great -- the land-use and economic development -- that they're linked to us. So we've got to work together to make it happen. Our environmental policy, which I won't get into, was great. This was an effort that aligned itself not only with our strategic plans, but also with NEPA and all the other things that are out there. It's stewardship, leadership, partnership, practice and commitment. What we heard here is a lot of that, already. A stewardship role. A partnership role. A leadership role. We've got to provide it, and we've got to find those out there in the communities that can also bring those to the table, too, to help us make decisions.

I'm going to race through this training, because we did the leadership that I talked about. Both from a [Gene Kleckley] introspective journey -- in other words, "Who's the problem with [inaudible] testing?" Then we did our own. We did public involvement. Context-sensitive solutions. We trained over 1,200 people around the country in CSS. It's done by our University of Kentucky. We serve and help them with that training.

The one with construction was done with a partnership with the construction industry. We developed a course and went out to really stress commitment delivery to them, and public involvement to them. How it's important for them. NEPA training. Like I said -- we hadn't had it for 20 years. So we've been bringing... We've developed an environmental training program to really bring cross-cutting training. So people can be aware, informed and expert -- the three levels we're looking at.

I mentioned Highway Opposition 101. PPMA is our Pre-Conception Project Managers' Academy. More recently, it's looking like we've got to do that for construction, too. But again -- core elements -- understanding shared decision-making. How you react.

We actually have hired news media people to come in and interview our project managers and video-taping it. "See what you're looking like? Let's work on how you communicate and how you..." And it's pretty awesome. These are just some of the topics that are covered there, that I won't get into. But really again, you see the common threads in there in terms of role, division and strategic plan. The role of team-building and how all that happens.

And if you look at these -- what public involvement is and what NEPA is and what context-sensitive solutions are -- it's all of these. These elements. It's integrated. It's decision-making. It's quality of life. We've heard, "quality of life" spoken by both Federal Highways and the State of Maine, here as we get in it. Because we are in it together.

I love acronyms. The CAP that Judith mentioned before is Communicating All Promises. In other words, you make a lot of commitments, from planning through construction and operations. But how do you communicate that to other areas? We didn't have an effective tool, and that's where the CAP came into play. The fact is actually finding acceptable construction techniques, and I'll talk about that. Really, we had to come up with a way. We had what I called the PIP -- the Project Impact Profile sheet. The construction guys don't tell you. They wanted it to be the PIMP. P I M P. In other words, you PIMP your commitments. But it was Project Impact Mitigation Profile. I said, "No, no. PIP is better." It doesn't have that negative connotation. Really, we had to find a way to connect.

Again, it goes back. How do we put all the pieces of the puzzle together, so everybody understand those commitments? Because what happens if you don't deliver commitments? What happens to you out there if you go back to those people again? Are they going to trust you? Will you have any credibility of, "Oh, yes. We'll do that," and yet you burnt them previously? So it really is the future that you're doing this for. To build the credibility and trust -- to walk the talk about how you do it.

I used an internal blitz team. I got all the players together -- just like the other thing. "Okay. What did we do to each other, and how can we fix it?" It actually came out of the construction workshop. We did a series of memos. And actually at the Project Managers' Academy, given the tools necessary on our Oracle database to input data on.

Look at this picture, here. Real busy. But when you make a commitment, what do you think about? Anyone out there? When you make a commitment, what do you think about? Do you think about, "Is it legal? Can you design it? Can you deliver it? Can you maintain it? Do you have the time for it? Does it raise a red flag?" All those are just items that pop up. Look at the build -- the construct -- the core -- the design. You've got to talk to those guys to make sure you can deliver. That's the cost-cutting communication. That's what the CAP is. It's really communicating all promises throughout the process. And it's really a continuous feedback into the operations and then back into [client]. That's the loop we're trying...

A fact -- our construction people didn't like SWAT -- that's Storm Water Action Team that Texas does. That's too negative. Like you're going out there to SWAT them. So FACT became. We just did it. We looked at every job in the state on commitment delivery. I sort of got razed a bit, because it was my idea, and I didn't make it to any of the inspections. So here you are the idea man and you don't even make it out there.

But really, you're looking to improve the credibility with everybody out there. To achieve success together. So you want to have fewer surprises. If you talk and communicate across the lines, you will be successful. It's really a culture shift. You're never through on that journey. You always have bits and pieces to go. Your journey is never over.

But I want to stress here in closing -- I've got a bunch of examples that follow this. But what I'm stressing is that you've got to have fun on your job. You've got to go out there and challenge yourself and challenge your coworkers to engage the public. To engage the community. That's the only way we can do better in project delivery. I will say it's been fun, but it's also been challenging, and a commitment to do it.

You will doubt yourself. You will feel like you've been abandoned numerous times. But you've got to keep working toward that. You've got to have that greater vision. Because that's the only way we'll improve ourselves as an industry and improve our relationships with the people that are out there.

With that, I'll end. If there are any questions... I know I was long-winded, but it's really challenging. Guys, it's a lot of fun. It's hard to believe that we've been at it for six years. We're going through an administration change -- but what's encouraging is, they want to continue along that path. But the momentum we've lost, we've got to pick up. That's the challenge before us is to pick up that momentum and keep pushing the envelope. Thank you.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: John. John. And we'd like to thank John for his presentation. Hopefully, you'll all get a little inspired to change your own departments. Or wherever you came from.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: And from here, we're going to take a break. But before we do that, what we're going to do is there are going to be two sessions you can choose from, next. *Strings and Ribbon Techniques* will be in the adjacent room with Anne Morris from PBS & J Corporation, and Darla Zakaluzny -- close enough? From Volusia, Florida NPO. In this room, we're going to have Listen - Talk - Hear - Remember: Essential Skills in Community Effects Analysis, with Eileen Hughes from [Strough] Environmental Services, and Don Sparklin from Maryland State Highway Administration. So please make sure that you're in one room or the other by 10.45.