

09/07/2014

## IN-OVER-THEIR-HEADS

by Jim Duvall

What happens when you staff a business with people in positions they are not qualified to hold? Answer.....you increase the cost of doing business and likely position your business to fail in a competitive world.

The same can be said when unqualified individuals hold important positions in a government setting, but the consequences are different....citizens can't go somewhere else for their government services and are stuck until better choices are made.

Such is the current case in Elbert County where three recently hired department heads are "in over their heads."

The case has been made that cronyism has been the chief attribute on the resumes of these three, but let's look at the resulting costs of having the wrong people in important positions in Elbert County:

### Outsourcing

The Community and Development Services Department is charged with analyzing applications for land use changes AND applications for oil and gas development. The current director has chosen to outsource many of these functions to contract firms (very qualified firms, I might add) which only increases the cost of processing these applications.

The Information Technology Department has entered into several contracts with outside companies to perform functions of the department that are clearly in the job description of the director. The current director has chosen to outsource these jobs (including re-designing the county's website) to contractors....again, increasing the cost of this department in one area which takes away from the overall services the department can provide to the county. Interestingly, while not having the time or expertise to handle this function of the job, the current director has had time to co-own an outside business with one of our elected officials.

The Commissioners have entered into several outside contracts to do basic financial work that should be handled by staff. The contracts continue and have amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars over several years, taking away from other services the county could provide. In addition, for the past several years, the outsourcing of our day-to-day finance functions has caused the county to far exceed the projected budgets for finance expenses that have been submitted to the state. DOLA (the Department of Local Affairs) has stated that *we are the ONLY county in the state that outsources basic financial functions*. Hiring qualified staff would eliminate much of this outside expense.

The Assessor's office has contracted with an outside firm to do the work of valuing the properties in the county. This is clearly the function of the Assessor's office and is the result of mismanagement of the department for the past four years. In fact, when the chief appraiser retires in early 2015, the department will not have anyone on staff who will be a certified appraiser (which is required by state statute).

### OJT (on the job training)

We have witnessed several instances of additional time and re-do's as a result of learning on the fly. I am all for broadening one's horizons, but not when it comes to the basic job responsibilities of a leadership role. Costs increase, morale goes down, and the public is frustrated when a department head is inconsistent and has no clear idea of what they are doing and how they will get there.

The experienced staff of a department ends up carrying the load and covering for or actually doing the work of an unqualified department head (for no additional compensation). This has happened in Elbert County and has led to some staff leaving for other opportunities. The cost of hiring and training replacements takes away from other services that could be provided.

There are other costs of having the wrong people in positions of leadership, but you begin to get my point.....the bottom line is, as Forrest Gump said, "Stupid is as stupid does."

The responsibility for putting unqualified and in-over-their-heads employees in place lies at the feet of the hiring body.....the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).

The dollar cost of utilizing cronyism as a hiring practice is reflected in the most recent three year losses reflected by the county's financial reports for 2011, 2012 and 2013 of close to \$10 million dollars.

The solution is to elect commissioners who will hire employees of the county based on qualifications, not relationships past or present.

We can't afford any more county employees who are in-over-their-heads!