



**Mike Mucha**, GFOA's deputy executive director, spoke with **Christine Brookshire**, the deputy finance director for the City of Centennial, Colorado, about the value of being a mentor and a mentee, developing leadership styles, and working as part of an effective team.



**Mike: I understand that you are relatively new to the City of Centennial. Please tell us about your new role.**

Christine: As a deputy finance director for the city, I support the finance director in overseeing the financial management of the city. For me, this includes financial reporting, auditing, budgeting, and accounting. I also assist in compliance with local, state, and federal financial regulations, and participate as a member of the audit, budget, and investment committee. When I started here six months ago, I ended up spending more time on the audit. Now, the role has changed a bit, and I enjoy working as a liaison to other departments.

**What's it like working for the city? Is it much different than your previous position?**

Before coming to the City of Centennial, I was at the Town of Parker in Colorado, and before that I worked at a few cities in Texas. Centennial is a little bigger and is also organized differently. For a city of more than 110,000 in population, we only have nine positions in finance. The city operates under a unique model that emphasizes contracting core services such as public safety and public works while strategically investing in its internal workforce. A key part of that investment is the use of the Gallup Strengths Model, which helps develop employee potential and foster a supportive, strength-based culture. The city places a strong emphasis on work-life balance, recognizing that investing in employees is essential for long-term organizational success,

retention, and satisfaction. Centennial is also a relatively new city, having only been incorporated in 2001.

**That is unique, and it's great to see that Centennial is investing in its employees. Would you recommend the Gallup Strengths Model for other finance departments?**

I would. I'm still relatively new to the city, but I genuinely love being part of the Finance Department and working with that team. I believe the Gallup model has helped make our collaboration more effective. This approach allows us to align tasks and responsibilities based on everyone's unique strengths, rather than just titles or job descriptions. It creates a dynamic where everyone is doing what they do best, which not only increases efficiency and productivity

but also builds trust and respect among the team. It helps create a positive, supportive environment where people feel valued and empowered.

**Can I ask what the model identified as your strength?**

My top strength was belief. At first, I was surprised, but I think it really fits and aligns with a public service role and one where work needs to align with my values.

**Did you always know that you wanted to work in local government?**

Actually, no. My entire family worked in healthcare, so that felt like a natural path. I initially studied nursing but eventually switched my major to accounting. I still wanted to make a difference in people's lives, which is why I pursued a master's in health administration. I thought combining my analytical skills with a service-oriented field would be the perfect fit. However, once I entered the healthcare industry, I found it increasingly difficult to fulfill that desire to help others. The constant churn from mergers and acquisitions brought frequent administrative and technological changes, shifting policies, and leadership turnover. It felt like I was always adapting to new priorities rather than growing in a meaningful direction.

My transition into government finance happened almost by chance. I applied for an accounting position with the City of Tomball, Texas, where I met Glenn Windsor, the first finance director I worked for. Glenn became a key mentor and encouraged me to get involved with the Gulf Coast Chapter of the Texas GFOA. At this time, I also was able to learn from George Shackelford, the city manager for the City of Tomball, about budgeting and how it can connect directly with the community's priorities and perceptions. I was able to grow my technical skills and started to become more familiar with other areas of government finance, including capital assets, procurement, budgeting, and auditing. While numbers are important, I realized that government work goes beyond the numbers. I love seeing the

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outcomes of my efforts—for example, seeing a new bridge built, new programs for the community, or knowing what it took to put on a community event. You gain a sense of pride knowing you were part of this, and so I fell in love with working for a government.

**You mentioned starting your career in Texas. What brought you to Colorado, and was it easy to transition to a government in a different state?**

I'm a native Coloradan, but I spent much of my early life on a military base in Korea. My family moved to Texas during my senior year of high school. Although I initially planned to return to Colorado for college, I chose to stay in Texas to remain close to my family. After I left the City of Tomball, I worked for the City of Katy, which was truly one of the best professional experiences I've had. The city's leadership, vision, values, and goals aligned closely with both my personal and professional aspirations. I wasn't looking to leave, but becoming a parent shifted my priorities. I realized my kids needed a specific environment that could best support their growth and well-being. That ultimately led our family back to Colorado. I was lucky to find an opportunity working for the Town of Parker. A few years later, I decided to explore the opportunity with Centennial, since geographically it was closer to where I lived. What immediately stood out was how closely Centennial's culture aligned with those of the City of Katy. Because I had such a positive experience in Katy, I knew right away that Centennial was the right fit—and I'm grateful I followed that instinct.

**Are there any major differences between working in Colorado versus Texas?**

In Texas, sales tax is collected at the state level and then distributed to local jurisdictions. In Colorado, municipalities, especially home-rule cities, collect their own sales tax directly, which adds a layer of complexity. This requires a strong understanding of local tax codes and administration.

Colorado also has a unique constitutional amendment known as the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR), which limits how much revenue state and local governments can collect and spend. It requires voter approval for any new taxes, tax rate increases, or even for governments to retain revenue above a certain threshold. Property assessments also differ. In Texas, property is assessed annually, while in Colorado, assessments are conducted every two years. That biennial cycle can create more variability in revenue projections, especially when preparing multi-year budgets or long-term financial plans.

I've enjoyed learning and getting to better understand how each state approaches public finance.

**I want to come back to the topic of professional development and, specifically, how finance professionals can pick up leadership skills. You seem to have been able to acclimate to a different technical environment while also establishing yourself as a leader in each organization.**

I believe leadership training is essential for finance professionals. We are no longer just number crunchers. We are expected to be strategic partners, communicators, and leaders in policy discussions.

That broader role has reshaped how we train, lead, and contribute to the mission of local government. I think mentoring is critical to developing in this expanded role, and it's important for both mentees and mentors. As a mentee, participating in leadership development has helped me better understand the responsibilities and strategic goals of my supervisors, city management, council, and the mayor. It gave me context for the decisions they made. As a mentor, leadership training has guided how I show up for others. It has helped me recognize the importance of setting an example, communicating effectively, and supporting team members who are still developing their skills and confidence. Leadership isn't just about titles. It's about influence, clarity, and accountability. I always try to remind myself that it's important that I always take on the role of mentor and mentee.

**What's the best advice that you've received from a mentor?**

The best advice I've received in my career is captured in a simple mnemonic: "My Reports Remain Transparent," or MRRT. Each part reminds me of a core principle in public finance.

- **M – Master** the fundamentals but stay curious. Always build a strong technical foundation but continue learning and adapting.
- **R – Relationships** matter, both internal and external.
- **R – Regulations** evolve, so stay current. Compliance is critical, so keeping up with changes in standards ensures accuracy and integrity.
- **T – Transparency** is everything. What we do must be clear, honest, and ethical.

When I was working for the City of Katy and considering going for president of the Gulf Coast Chapter of the Texas GFOA, I admitted to Andy Vasquez, the finance director for the city, that I was scared and leaning toward not pursuing it. I will always remember what he said and how beneficial that advice was. Andy said, "That means you need to do it. You need to confront those fears and take

as many of those opportunities as you can, so your fear begins to fade." I ended up serving as president in 2021, and the whole experience taught me that growth often lies on the other side of discomfort.

**While most are lucky to have one good mentor, you seem to have had a few. What do you look for in a leader?**

When I think about what I look for in a leader, I often reflect on the qualities I most admire in the individuals who have shaped my own career. There are four key figures who have served as the foundation of my professional growth: George Shackelford and Glenn Windsor from the City of Tomball, and Byron Hebert and Andrew Vasquez from the City of Katy. Each one has a wealth of experience and unique approach to solving problems. I often ask myself what they would do in certain situations. They taught me how each decision influences public perception and carries real-world consequences. I credit much of my success to these gentlemen and am deeply grateful for the knowledge and wisdom they've shared. Their mentorship has inspired me to invest in the development of the next generation of leaders. There will always be more to learn, and that's what is exciting about where I'm at. I'm looking forward to learning as much as I can from leaders here at Centennial, and working to build those relationships.

**It seems like there are always things to learn about leadership. At GFOA, we've tried to focus on defining finance professionals as leaders and building capacity through our research, education, and volunteer positions. How would you approach leadership training at GFOA if you could develop a program?**

GFOA has an important role in developing the next generation of public finance leaders. I believe there are many options to strengthening leadership development. One idea is for GFOA to create a state-level leadership portal that fosters cross-jurisdictional collaboration. This platform could help connect finance professionals across local governments to share best practices, mentor one another, and tackle shared challenges. Another

option could be hosting a GFOA leadership retreat. This would be a dedicated space for emerging and mid-career professionals to build leadership skills, engage with peers from across the country, and learn directly from experienced public sector leaders. I think so much of leadership is building relationships, and GFOA is in a great position to continue doing that. When GFOA and local governments work together, they can create a more dynamic, inclusive, and future-ready leadership pipeline.

**Taking into consideration your training and past experience, how would you describe your unique style of leadership?**

My leadership style is centered on leading by example. I believe that true leadership starts with showing what it means to be committed, reliable, and supportive. There is no task I consider beneath me, and I consistently step up to volunteer or assist wherever needed. This approach builds trust with those above me and reassures my team that I am fully invested and right there with them, especially during difficult times.

I also lead with authenticity. I'm not afraid to admit when I've made a mistake, and I hold myself accountable. I've found that allowing myself to be vulnerable fosters a culture where others feel safe to take ownership, grow from challenges, and collaborate more openly.

**How does your style of leadership help you and your team approach the challenges the city is facing?**

I don't think this challenge is unique to Centennial, but we need to balance limited resources with new compliance requirements, demands for transparency, and overall growing public expectations. We are tasked with maintaining long-term fiscal health, while also investing in infrastructure, preparing for emergencies, and dealing with rising costs. There is also pressure. In the public sector, there's little room for error—missing a payroll, delaying a bond payment, or mismanaging grant funds can have serious consequences.

**I would agree that budgeting in today's dynamic environment is not easy.**



The City of Centennial has received the Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award for the last eight years, which recognizes organizations that invest in the engagement and strengths of their people to achieve organizational change.



**That's been part of the motivation for GFOA's "Rethinking Budgeting" Initiative. In your opinion, what is difficult for governments, related to budgeting, and what can we do to fix it?**

One of the most difficult challenges governments faces when it comes to budgeting is balancing long-term strategic goals with short-term political and operational pressures. Budgets often become reactive rather than proactive and often focus on maintaining the status quo instead of evaluating what truly delivers value to the community.

Another major difficulty is communicating the purpose and impact of the budget in a way that resonates with those who aren't fluent in governmental finances. Without clear, outcome-driven narratives, it becomes harder to build consensus and trust around financial decisions. In my opinion, rethinking budgeting requires making it a tool for transformation, not just a document that supports compliance.

**If you could transform government or public finance in one way, what would you do?**

I would make it more transparent for individuals who don't have detailed knowledge of government or finance. I wish that more people understood how tax dollars are used and what impact those dollars have on their communities.

**We've found that providing information is different from true transparency,**

**where the public understands that information. Would you agree?**

Yes. When people see clear connections between funding decisions and tangible results like parks, trails, streets, working traffic lights, or cleaner parks, they're more likely to support initiatives and trust the process. By involving the community more directly in budgeting and prioritization, we can drive smarter policies and ensure that public resources are used in ways that truly reflect residents' wants, needs, and goals.

**So, how do we get there?**

That's a good question. I don't think it's that difficult for the public to understand, but they need to want to know, or we need to be able to tell a more compelling story. People are busy, and I think traditional forms of reporting don't lead to answering quick questions. I think communicating the right information and what it means to the community is important. For example, I see some of my friends who don't work in local government taking an interest in government when it's time to pay their property tax bill or when they are considering moving. I also seem to get a lot of questions about road construction timelines. When government starts to inconvenience my friends, they seem to take an interest.

**Lucky for your friends, that they have you to make government more transparent. Speaking of life**

**outside of work and life at home, is it difficult to separate the two?**

To some extent, the roles are similar. Being a mom is similar to being a deputy finance director. I enjoy being that person behind the curtain who is supporting those on stage and making sure that everything is taken care of. At times it can be stressful, but it's also pretty rewarding.

Overall, I think it's important to have balance in your life, especially if you have a family. I try to be able to show up and be present for my team at work, but that also means that I need to be able to dedicate time to my family where that is my sole focus. I appreciate being a part of a team. I like to put myself in a position to help, but I also know that I can count on my teammates, both at work and at home. I have two young boys, and my husband and I are also a team. He knows that I truly love what I do at work, and with the job comes a need to occasionally work late. He is always there to support me, and I try to do the same for him in his profession.

**OK, last question. If you had two weeks where your team could handle everything and you could do whatever you wanted, what would we find you doing?**

If I had a two-week vacation to do anything I wanted, I'd head straight to the beach. My husband and I were married on the beach in Hawaii, and I still think about the crystal-clear water and fresh pineapple. It was heaven on earth and absolutely beautiful. With two rowdy young boys now, the idea of simply sitting on a quiet beach with a good book, no laptop, no shoes, and no problems sounds like the perfect escape. 🌴



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