

## **King County Office of Emergency Management Podcasts** ***Disasters: Are you ready?***

### **Assertiveness and persistence**

As noted in a job description that was recently posted to our web site and the section “Jobs Eric has Heard About,” persistence is a quality that emergency managers need. The other quality that I talk about frequently is assertiveness. Both of these traits are ones that will help an emergency manager and really almost anyone, be successful.

However, there is an issue with these traits. Assertiveness can lead to being aggressive, and persistence can lead to insistence. When that happens what are seen as quality aspects of an individual’s character can quickly become significant detractors to being successful in your interactions with people.

The opposite end of the continuum is likewise a significant negative if you expect to be successful. Instead of being persistent, you quickly “give up” as soon as you hit an obstacle. How then can you expect to accomplish anything if for every “bump in the road” along the way to disaster preparedness you keep taking detours when people object to the path that you are recommending.

The meek and mild mannered emergency manager will have difficulty in being assertive, perhaps because of the fear of rejection.

Assertiveness and persistence can go hand in hand. Now here is the hard part, you cross over to aggressiveness and insistence is measured not by some known scale, but by the perceptions of each and every individual with whom you interact. One person may find you being “aggressive” while the person next to them, hearing the same words, will consider you only to be “assertive.”

This is where knowing your audience comes in. Elected officials, first responders, social workers, health professionals all operate in their cultures day-to-day. Each has an established norm, as would any other profession. What works with some people, doesn’t work with

others. And, within each culture there will be the same mix of personalities.

Certainly I have made mistakes in the past, and will make mistakes in the future in not “reading” my audience. I much prefer having face to face meetings so that I can “read the body language” in the people I’m talking to, especially when I’m bringing up a topic that requires them to perhaps take some action. Having the conversation over the phone, or via email brings with it some danger of miss-diagnosing to what degree you can be assertive or persistent.

In recent months I’ve had two people remark to me about my “persistence.” In one case it was my boss, who I think was wondering, “Why don’t you give up?” In the other it was the publisher of a regional newspaper who recognized that what I was seeking was not a mere whim, but something important to me.

In both cases I have yet to be successful in my goal. So, I’m committed to being assertive and persistent, and watchful that I don’t cross over into being aggressive and insistent.

I encourage all of you when you hit an obstacle in whatever you are doing to assess the situation and if you are sure of your end goal, plow forward, being watchful that you don’t cross over to making your efforts become a negative versus the positive that it might be.