

# Transformational Leadership

*Developing the Vision for a Systemwide Change*



# CASE STUDY



JACKSONVILLE  
TRANSPORTATION  
AUTHORITY



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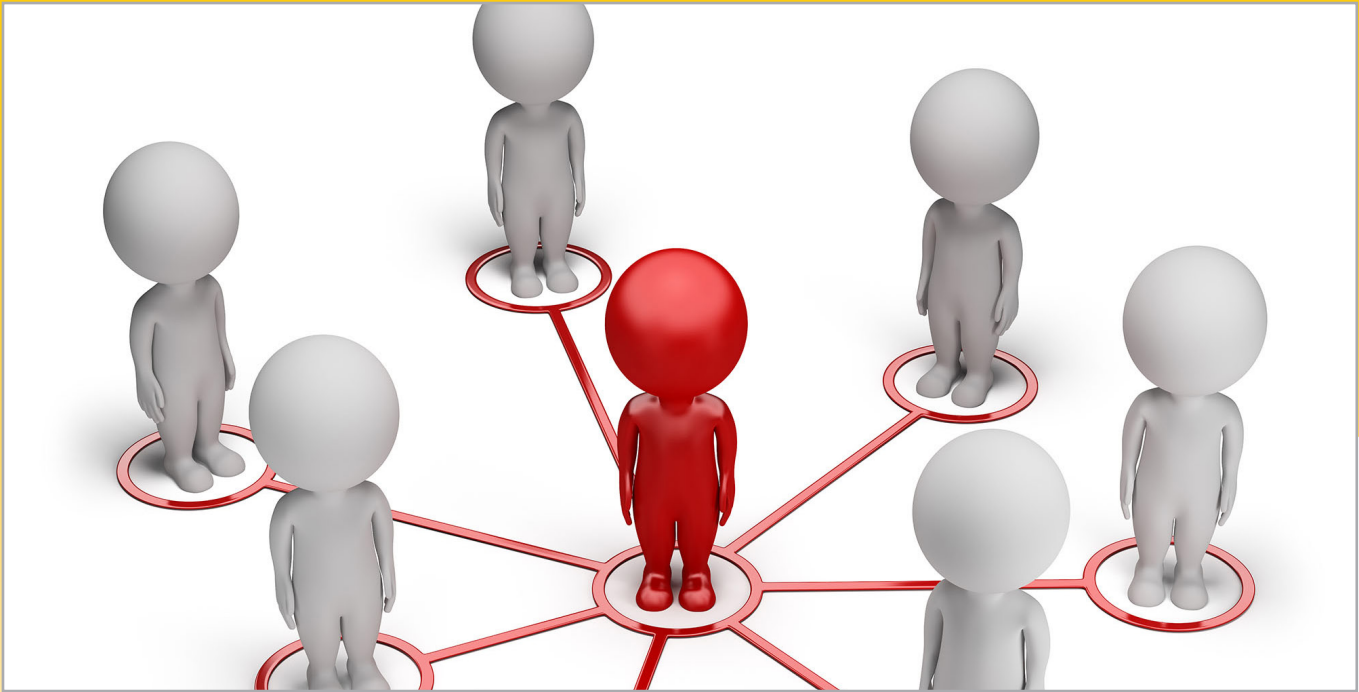
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Developing the Vision | 1 |
| Selling the Vision    | 2 |
| Leading the Charge    | 5 |

*"The single biggest way to impact an organization is to focus on leadership development. There is almost no limit to the potential of an organization that recruits good people, raises them up as leaders and continually develops them."*

**- John C. Maxwell,  
The 17th Irrefutable Laws of Teamwork**



## DEVELOPING THE VISION

In October 2012, the Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA) hired a dynamic, contemporary and energetic new chief executive officer, Nathaniel P. Ford, Sr., to replace the JTA's outgoing CEO who had resigned after over 30 years of service including 10 years as CEO. While Ford has led two of the nation's top 10 transit agencies - the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority - he welcomed the opportunity to join a mid-size organization such as the JTA to take it to the next level from good to great, as he had been asked to do by many of the City's key stakeholders.

Although Ford's official start date was not until December 2012, he wasted no time doing his due diligence to assess the organization he had just been appointed to lead. He began by spending time with the outgoing CEO to get his view on the history of the

organization and his thoughts on future potential. Ford also spent time with JTA Board members, both individually and collectively, to hear their vision and goals for the Authority. Several conversations were had with employees, executive level staff, bus operators and customer service representatives to assess the Authority's internal and external performance and the role they played in it.

Ford's assessments didn't end there. He held "listening" sessions with external stakeholders such as past JTA Board members, customers and local, state and federal elected officials. He attended Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club meetings and met with JTA consultants, vendors and suppliers. Ford conducted a media audit to determine what the press was saying about the JTA and the issues the Authority grappled with before he arrived.



*"The greatest impediments to improving the Authority's performance are its existing organizational structure and leadership culture."*

**- Nathaniel P. Ford, CEO**  
(January 2013)

Meanwhile, prior to his arrival, the Board of Directors contracted with an outside consultant, TransTech, to conduct its own independent assessment of the JTA management and organizational operations. The findings of the assessment revealed there were several areas that required improvement. The areas of focus range from outdated technology to staffing levels, poor customer service, conflicting internal and external communications and an inaccurate standard of measuring on-time performance for bus operations that gave a false sense of how the system was doing.

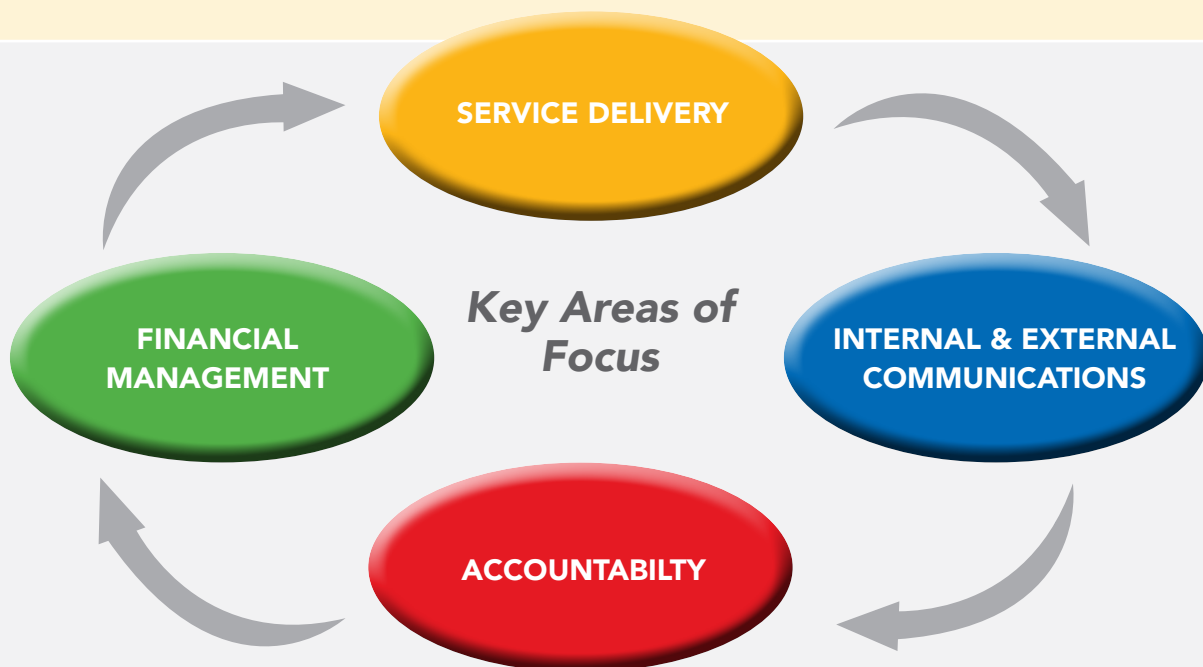
The political climate in Jacksonville was also shifting around the time Ford came to the JTA. The Better Jacksonville Plan, a referendum passed by voters in 2000 which allowed for the financing of nearly 1,800

miles of roads and highways, ended in 2007. A proposal to extend the local option gas tax to continue to fund a large portion of JTA's operations and to generate funds for more road projects needed champions from the public and private sectors to secure passage from City Council. Federal funding for "Map 21," an omnibus infrastructure transportation funding proposal, was uncertain in Congress.

The time was ripe for the JTA to establish a leadership role in the region's transportation structure by expanding its footprint in Jacksonville, Duval County and Northeast Florida. However, to be successful would require a seismic shift in the JTA's leadership culture and reputation.

# SELLING THE VISION

Armed with the findings of his assessments, Ford identified four key areas of focus that would define the JTA's focus for the future. Those areas were:



To enhance customer service, improve internal/external communications, increase accountability among executives and managers and ensure sound financial management of the JTA required employees with a high degree of professional skills who could get the job done and raise the confidence level of JTA stakeholders.

It would have been easy for Ford to come to the JTA with his own team already assembled, but that was not the approach he took. Instead, the administration hired C Robinson Associates, which specializes in organizational development, to lead the restructuring in a fair and democratic manner.



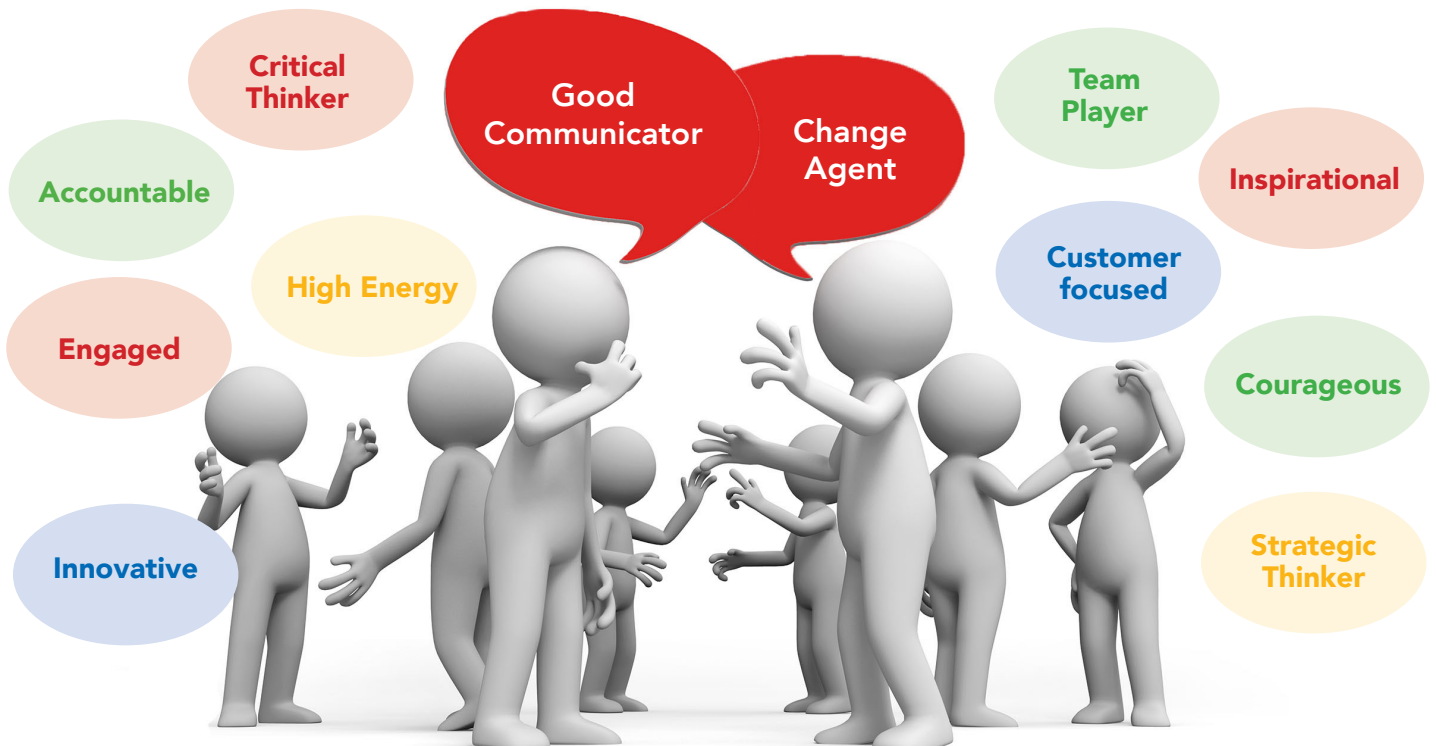
## Reorganization: Phase 1 Timeline (2013)



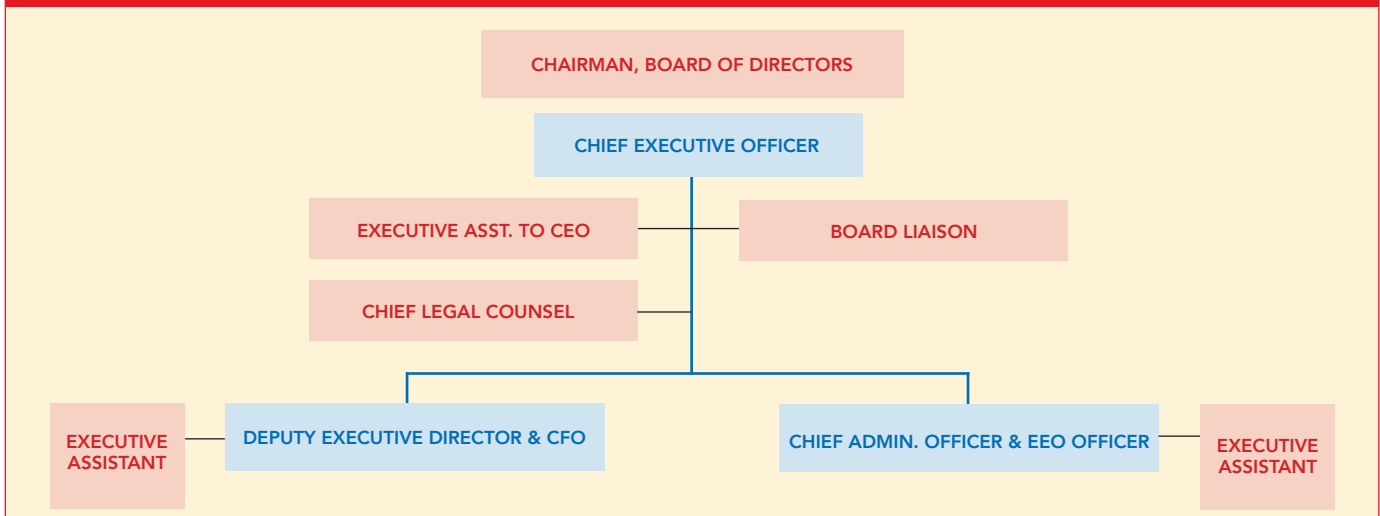
### Candidate Characteristics

Positions for the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) were posted on January 31, 2013 with new, more comprehensive job descriptions. Interested candidates were asked to conduct self-evaluations to determine if they possessed the characteristics that the new JTA leaders needed to transform the organization from good to great. The traits were:

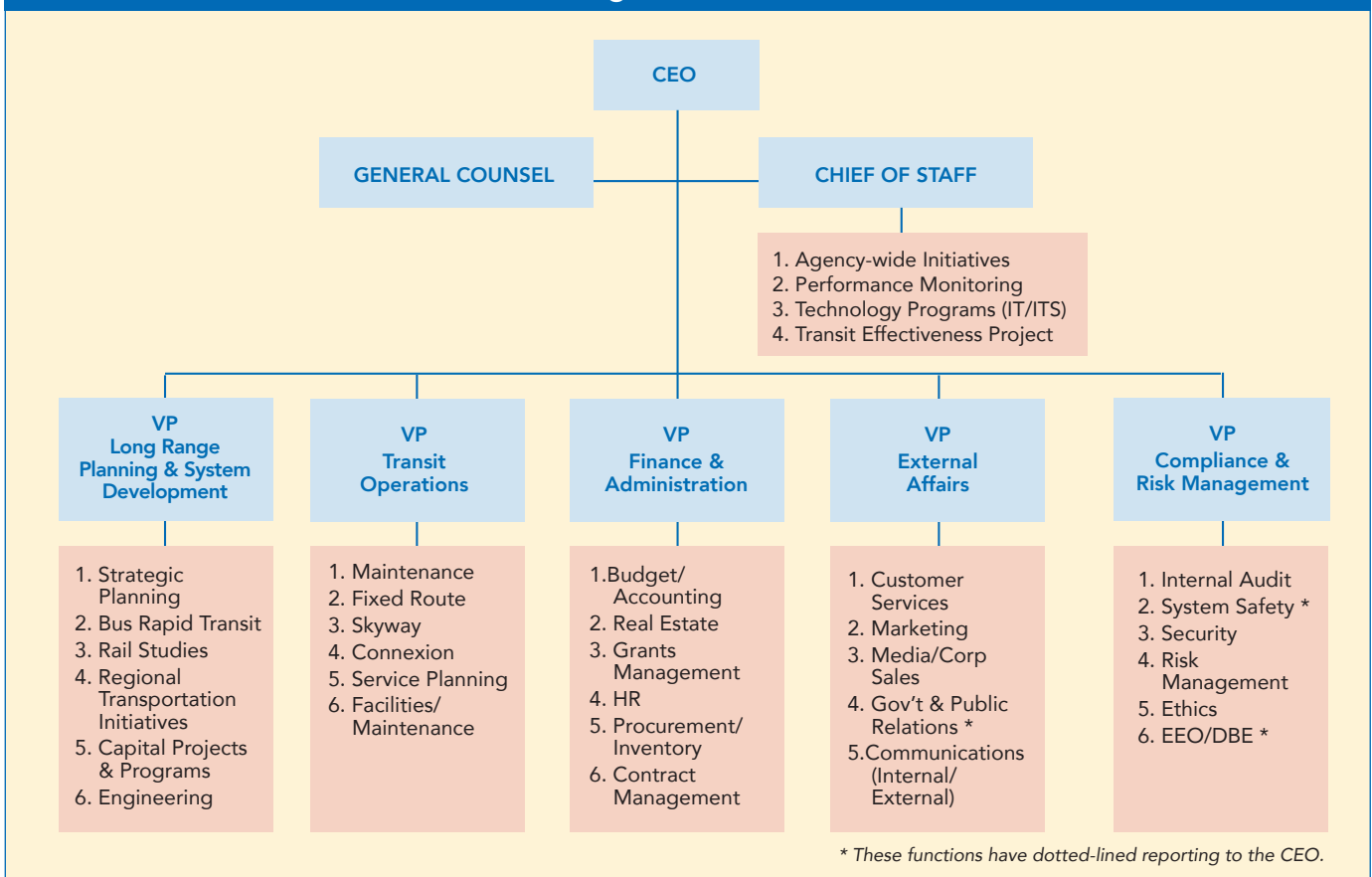
These same characteristics were used throughout the hiring process for the leadership team and managers. Encouraging candidates to make introspective evaluations before they applied for posted positions brought to the surface only those executives who believed they had the chutzpah to perform the herculean tasks that would be expected of them in a new and improved organization.



## The Old Organization Structure



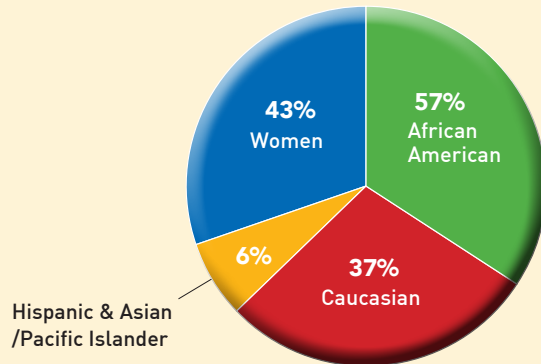
## The New Organization Structure



To enhance the professionalism of the executive team, prerequisites for leadership positions required college degrees, a solid work history and key performance indicators that demonstrated an ability to bring change. Interviews began February 7, 2013. By March 4, 2013, just six weeks after new positions were posted, a new leadership team was in place and the number of team members was reduced from nine to six. The new organizational structure also:

- Created a chief of staff and five vice presidents
- Decreased levels between the CEO and his executive team
- Appropriately aligned job functions, responsibilities and resources
- Created clearer lines of accountability and expedited decision-making
- Established safety and compliance as one of the JTA's core values and
- Added employee development as a core value

## The JTA's Diverse Team



**Ford's new team represents Jacksonville's diverse community. For example, of the 37 executives and managers at the JTA:**

- 57 percent are African American
- 37 percent are Caucasian
- The remaining 6 percent are Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander
- 43 percent of the ELT are women

# LEADING THE CHARGE

With his Executive Team in place, Ford gave his direct reports the latitude to assemble their own teams using a similar process. In order for the new ELT to expedite their knowledge of the organization's operations, each of the previous managers were asked to present their functional responsibilities, their team's skill set, strengths and opportunities for improvement. On March 21, 2013, following manager presentations, the transition team held a retreat with the ELT to assist with the structural design of their new Divisions. Once again, areas and functions were assessed and new positions and job descriptions were posted using the same leadership characteristics. Interviews were conducted where candidates were asked to make stand-up presentations about how they would approach a proposed job.

One of the key elements to the success of the organizational restructuring was communication. No employee had to guess what was coming next or what the intent was in moving the organization forward. At every turn, direct communication from Ford was documented across the organization with status updates, expectations and next steps. By April 30th, the second phase of restructuring was complete. At the end of this phase the JTA had fewer leadership positions and a decreased budget for salaries. Overall, the approximately \$132,000 saved on salaries does not compare to the efficiency improvements and professionalism that this restructuring brought to the organization.

The on-boarding process for the new management team was critical. Each new department manager was required to attend a one-day retreat prior to their start date to meet the CEO and the ELT to discuss the following:

- JTA History and Overview
- Vision (Positioning the Authority)

- Five Year Strategic Plan
- Annual Operating Plan & Budget
- Performance Reports

The restructuring effectively changed the culture at the JTA. Executives had a higher level of education, skills and experience than their predecessors. Collaboration between departments and managers was not only encouraged, but expected. For the first time, engineers and planners worked together, managers owned projects from conception to completion, and the External Affairs Department made public outreach and enhancing the JTA brand a priority.

### **JTA executives were empowered to:**

- Develop and translate the Authority's strategic vision into plans for implementation and execution;
- Enhance internal communication
- Establish and evaluate priorities
- Develop/implement strategic goals and objectives
- Work collaboratively to enhance the JTA's reputation for excellence through best practices, reviews, accountability for performance and continuous improvement

Ford successfully reorganized the JTA using proven transformational leadership principles: he first identified the needed change; created a vision to guide the change through transformation; and executed the change with the commitment of his team. This extensive reorganization was accomplished without any litigation, employee complaints or grievances, a factor the JTA attributes to conducting a transparent process that was clearly communicated both internally and externally. Over the next 24 months, with the right team in place, the JTA advanced a strategic plan of transformative initiatives that restructured the Authority more than at any time in the organization's recent history.



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