Executive Summary

A small team of skilled, motivated employees made a sweeping change in their organization for the betterment of all. Management empowered them by enabling their talents and reliable decision making to have a “free hand” in the process. The task at hand was not one that could favor some department or function over others, so the process was not hindered by internal strife, but only ignorance. As we have learned to say there was a classic PEBCAK to blame: Problem Exists Between Chair And Keyboard. By eliminating the barriers and pushing positive innovation on traditional entrenched processes, the organization eliminated its own bottlenecks without the assistance of any outside efficiency experts or consultants. The little City of Stuart has what larger cities can only try and buy because the investment is made at the employee level. When you have the tools and the talent, all goals can be achieved.

Background

The City of Stuart is located on the east coast of Florida parallel with the northern tip of Lake Okeechobee—the big lake in the middle of Florida you can see from space. That puts
the city about 120 miles north of Miami. The city was incorporated in 1914, and is currently the county seat of Martin County. Stuart was at one time located in Palm Beach County, but rumor has it, there were so many outlaws in Stuart, they let the city go to another county. In fact, one of Stuart’s most notable facts of history is being the hideout location of an infamous bank robbing gang in the early 1900’s. On a lighter note, Stuart is known as the Sailfish Capital of the World also, for the many record size sailfish and marlins caught just off the zipcode here in the Atlantic.

Stuart maintains a full-time population of approximately 16,000, but that increases to over-stuffed proportions in the winter time with an influx of “snow-birds”, always signaled by an increase in the traffic accidents, and wait lines at local delis for lunch. This is spread out over a jurisdiction of 6.4 square miles. That area is a mix of new Florida modern construction, and old Florida “quaintness”. Employees can still be stuck everyday coming and going from work by the original Florida East Coast Rail Road tracks outside of City Hall’s front parking lot, as the trains hauling supplies traverse the state.

The city has been considered an affluent community with upper-scale living for predominantly older, retired persons. Nestled on the water of the Saint Lucie River, attached to the Atlantic Ocean inter-coastal waterway, Stuart is a mere two-minute drive from the ocean and beaches. Several smaller exclusive communities border Stuart, where movie stars and various artists maintain residences. So, as in most communities of this nature, the demand for service is high, but the willingness to pay wages is low. The tax base is still primarily commercial however, since few of the residents actually live in the city limits. The most recent taxable value was $1.5 billion.

From that value, the city maintains a general fund budget of $17 million dollars and $36 million all funds. The annual fiscal budget is adopted by a five-member council from October to September, with totals by fund, and budgetary controls at the department level, though still reporting all activity by categories within the departments. This is overseen by a city manager, or weak mayor-form of government. The primary sources of revenue for Stuart are, of course, Ad Valorem revenues, or property taxes, franchise fees assessed on certain utility and service providers, utility taxes charged on the sale of services in the city limits, building permits, occupational licenses, ambulance service fees, and utility charges assessed for the public utilities provided by the city.

Stuart provides potable water, sanitary sewer, wastewater treatment, residential and commercial garbage pickup, stormwater management, fire service, ambulance rescue service, and police force services. Stuart also maintains parks and recreation facilities in conjunction with several water-related amenities. These services are provided throughout the city from various locations such as the water treatment plant, public works facilities, and the public safety complexes. These responsibilities, all reporting to the city manager, are parsed up among 27 departments and divisions. Encapsulated in those is an outstanding group of about 250 full-time employees, varying in ages, skill level, and personalities. And, out of the 250 employees, they have divided themselves up into no less than three unions, one pseudo-union group, and then finally the union of non-union employees. Now all that said, Martin County is still considered to be a “back-water” county and Stuart for years was seen as a “good-ole-boy” network. Great strives have been made to escape that image and reputation, quite successfully under the current administration.
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