



Focus on the Future

Guest Predictions: Carolyn A. Kirk

Guest Predictions is a regular feature in which we ask leaders in a number of professions questions that affect us all.

Carolyn A. Kirk, the first woman popularly elected as Mayor of the City of Gloucester, MA, is currently serving her second two-year term. Prior to being elected Mayor, Mayor Kirk served two terms on the Gloucester School Committee. Mayor Kirk came into office during turbulent times in the city. Her experience as a management consultant enabled her to implement the need for reforms, and regain fiscal control. She is now focused on addressing the City's aging infrastructure. Gloucester 2020 is the economic development plan for attracting jobs and investment to the City with emphasis on the fishing industry, the maritime and visitor-based economy.

Mayor Kirk spent 20 years as a management consultant, specializing in customer relationship management, and financial services. She was employed by Fleet Financial Group and IBM Global Services as an Executive Consultant in the 90's. before starting a consulting practice which allowed her to spend more time with her family, and launch her political career. She and her husband Bill have two children, Sam, 13 and Baylee, 10. A graduate of the Boston College, Mayor Kirk was born and raised in Clinton, NY and moved to Massachusetts to attend college.

Q: What changes in your professional environment in the past 3-5 years have you found to be the most beneficial?

A: In many ways, municipal government is the slowest to adapt to change. We are just now migrating to online payments, but there are still hundreds of taxpayers who like to visit the collection window at City Hall and hand their check to a real person. Technology continues to bring about the most beneficial changes.

Q: What changes have been the most troubling to you?

A: As unemployment has risen, and the recession has taken hold, there is much resentment towards workers in the public sector. In Massachusetts, we are subject to collective bargaining with unions, and at the municipal level, we just do not have unilateral authority to make wholesale change. The battle over public sector unions being waged recently in Wisconsin and other states has been long- simmering.

Q: How will globalization affect your professional area in the near term?

A: The greatest impact will be on commercial development in the city either through foreign credit for projects or real estate acquisition.

Q: What significant challenges might be anticipated in your professional area in the next few years?

A: Balancing municipal budgets is difficult. Expenses are rising faster than revenues resulting in cuts in services to education, public safety, and public works. We need to constantly redefine the role of local government, and focus on core services. Local government needs to be more nimble but we are constrained in many ways making progress slow.

Q: What are the greatest challenges confronting young professionals in Western culture today?

A: Young professionals need to remain connected to the face-to-face world. Old fashioned networking remains the best way to advance a career. In the world of social media, you don't want to be just another Facebook friend or Tweet.