

## **Transcript for The City Speak Podcast Season 4, Episode 2, “Failing Forward”**

[A message from a member of the League’s Business Leadership Council]

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[Podcast theme music begins]

### **Adriana Temali-Smith:**

From the League of Minnesota Cities, this is City Speak. I'm your host, Adriana Temali-Smith. We are back this week talking to city officials on leadership lessons, how we grow as leaders, and the times when we need to reflect and maybe do things a little differently. [Podcast theme music fades out] I'm super excited for our guest today. She is the city clerk in Baudette, where she has been since 2006. The League loves to connect new city clerks to her because she's one of the best and she has a wealth of knowledge, in addition to being super friendly and outgoing. So, Tina Rennemo, welcome to The City Speak.

### **Tina Rennemo:**

Well thank you very much, Adriana. I am so honored to be here. I always enjoy the League. I enjoy the people and so I'm super happy to join you today.

### **Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Well thank you, we're so glad that you're making some time for us. And we're gonna talk all about leadership today, so I want to know what are some lessons that you have learned about leadership in your time as a public sector leader?

### **Tina Rennemo:**

Well, I actually, I believe I learned a lot of my skills, my city office job, by failing forward. It was a position, I was very young, I came there right out of college. I've been at this a long time. And, so a lot of the things that I learned, I mean I wasn't even familiar with what cities do, right?

### **Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

### **Tina Rennemo:**

I had no idea at all what the scope of city, city offices or city government was. So I learned a lot of that on the fly. I learned it by failing, I learned it by messing up. I learned it in a way that I wouldn't mess it up again. But it was also very hard, right? There's a lot of responsibilities involved. A small office like I was in, it was just me, so I would go to work and when I was there, I was the only one. So, if I took days off to go to the League conference, or if I had things that I needed to take care of, like the office was literally closed.

### **Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Tina Rennemo:**

I mean there was nobody that stepped in. So I had nobody to lean on, nobody to really delegate to, or to cover those responsibilities, let alone to mentor me in that position. I think I spent one day with the lady that I replaced and she had been there for 40 years.

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Oh wow.

**Tina Rennemo:**

So it was pretty um ... you know, sink or swim kind of a deal [laughing].

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Absolutely. So, how has then that translated? You're in a, a bigger city now. You have staff that report to you. How has that translated into that sort of leadership role where you are overseeing others?

**Tina Rennemo:**

That was probably one of the biggest transitions of my career honestly, simply because when you are in an office like that and you're, you know, you do everything, you're accountable for everything, you know. It's ... once you adjust to it, it's a, it's a smooth sail so to speak. So when you move into an office where you have actually people that you can delegate things to, it's an awkward space. It's hard ... It's hard to do that and to share that responsibility with others without a little bit of apprehension, right? A little bit of concern. Probably because I was falling back into that fail forward space, you know? But, that would be one thing that I can say is that as a leader, I had to learn how to let others fail forward — like I had done — because those lessons don't always come without that hardship of failing first, right? You kinda gotta build on those building blocks.

**Tina Rennemo:**

So, that was a tough thing for me and I can share that. It's been actually most recently that it's been the hardest. I am replacing my deputy clerk, the new one has been in place now since, I wanna say like May 3rd. And she comes to me without any experience, much like I was at that age. Not really an understanding of what, what cities do. So, it has been a huge challenge to watch her grow, allow her to fail, while not losing, you know, my own sanity a little bit on things that, you know, need to keep clicking. So, it's going well, but it's a very good lesson for me to watch that process and to really kinda let things go to a space like I was, right? To a, to a young person that's learning like I was.

**Tina Rennemo:**

So, turning her on to all of the resources, you know, making sure she's aware that there's people to ask besides me, and there's groups, and getting her involved. Which is something that I wish I would have done earlier and more of, right? I could have saved myself a lot of tears [laughing].

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Yes. She sounds like she's very lucky to have both the space to grow and learn all of those things, and also have a person that you didn't have when you were new to your city. She's got people to help her point her in the right direction. But yes, I also can hear what you're saying, that idea of letting others grow themselves as opposed to us sort of swooping in and, and trying to save the day. That's a really difficult lesson for us all to learn, so I really appreciate you coming and telling us about that.

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

I wanna leave our listeners with a little message of resiliency. What do you do in the city of Baudette when things get hard, either personally or for your community? What's your, what's your sort of resiliency strategy?

**Tina Rennemo:**

Well, so the honest piece of this is that most times, people are surfacing with the negatives, you know? In the city of the office ...

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Tina Rennemo:**

... the majority of the feedback that we get is not happy stuff. It's not congratulatory — it's not "Attaboy, attagirl, way to go, you rock, you're awesome."

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Right. "Hey, my toilet flushed today. Thank you so much!"

**Tina Rennemo:**

[laughing]

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

That sort of thing, right? [laughing]

**Tina Rennemo:**

Have I told you lately how happy I am that I can turn the faucet on and there's water, or the switch and there's electric. Yeah, unfortunately, that, that really isn't our reality, and that's unfortunate. But that also gears me into more gratitude towards others in jobs that are similar, you know, to make sure that gratitude comes forward. But, for me, it's really the good stuff, you know? Even though it's few and far between, there are those people that go out of their way to put a note in their water bill, or to send a card that just says, "You know, we really appreciate what you did," or, "Your staff was amazing." And that, that's what keeps me in there. That along with watching Main Street revive, right?

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Tina Rennemo:**

Seeing planters go up, seeing new streets go down, seeing businesses added. I mean, that feeds my soul, right? I love watching this community grow. I love watching and helping to create a beach, you know? We're working on a beach project in our bay right now. And so I can see past a lot of that negativity just by focusing on all the amazing things that we are doing, that our staff is doing, you know? That the council is supporting ...

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Tina Rennemo:**

... and that keeps me grounded, you know? That keeps me in when it's like, "You know what? This is, this is thankless, like, oh my goodness." That ... the good stuff really outweighs the bad.

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

I love that. Tina, you bring such great energy and so much experience. Thank you so much for this conversation today. It's been really lovely.

**Tina Rennemo:**

Thank you for having me. I always enjoy these things and I enjoy sharing. So, I hope it's valuable and somebody can find something in it that helps.

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

Well listeners, that is the end of our episode and I very much enjoyed our conversation with Tina today. I heard her talk a lot about that notion that we all have to learn from our mistakes. She called it failing forwards, which I just love. And of course, we not only have to do that for ourselves but we have to do that with others. We have to let others grow and make their own mistakes as we become leaders and grow our teams. And I also really enjoyed the fact that Tina is that type of person who is able to see the positive in things, and she really gets that little bump of encouragement from all of the great things that she can see happening in her community as the result of the city, and the employees, and colleagues that she has around her.

**Adriana Temali-Smith:**

So, I wanna thank you all for listening, and I wanna thank our guest, Tina Rennemo. [Podcast theme music begins] And to all of you out there listening and doing the hard and rewarding work of cities: thank you — keep it up! You can find us in all the places where podcasts are found and you can rate and review us. Or, you can do it the old-fashioned way and tell a friend about The City Speak Podcast. And if you wanna get in touch with us, you have an idea for the show, or somebody you wanna recommend for us to interview, you can reach out at [podcast@lmc.org](mailto:podcast@lmc.org). Until next time, take care. [Podcast theme music ends]