

## **Transcript for The City Speak Podcast**

### **Season 4, Episode 7, “Mistakes Are Just Part of the Job”**

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

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[Podcast theme music begins]

#### **Adriana Temali:**

From the League of Minnesota Cities, this is City Speak. I'm your host, Adriana Temali. Well, thank you for coming back and joining me again today listeners. I am very excited to be back for another episode of The City Speak [podcast theme music fades out], where we are talking to city leaders about leadership — how we grow, the mistakes that we make, and how we get through those tough times.

#### **Adriana Temali:**

I'm delighted today to be joined by mayor Jim Weikum. He is the mayor of Biwabik, where he's been mayor since 2008. And before that, he served one term as a city council member. In his day job, he's also a local government leader where he's the executive director of the Arrowhead Library System, a system that he's been a part of for 29 years. He knows just a ton about leadership and about local government, and he's here to share a story with us today about one of those times when he had to learn from a small misstep.

#### **Adriana Temali:**

Well mayor Jim, I'm so excited that you're here on The City Speak podcast today. Thank you for joining us.

#### **Jim Weikum:**

Thank you for inviting me today.

#### **Adriana Temali:**

We are here talking about leadership lessons that we have learned through our experience as city leaders. And so, I want to start out by asking you about a time that maybe you've made a mistake or learned a lesson from a misstep that you might've had at some point during your leadership career as an elected official.

#### **Jim Weikum:**

Of course, I feel like mistakes are just part of the job, especially in the role of mayor where you're juggling the needs of the councilors, the needs of the audience the people who are attending, running the meeting, and following the agenda.

#### **Jim Weikum:**

The instance that comes to my mind, I was serving on one of our standing committees and brought back a recommendation to the council. We were feeling pretty pleased with ourselves because we felt that it was a reasonable recommendation. And not surprisingly — I think for a lot of elected officials — the full council decided they didn't like the recommendation and they basically sent us back to the drawing board.

**Jim Weikum:**

And it really gave me pause; one, what was wrong with the recommendation? But what was also wrong with my own thought process where I hadn't prepared myself for this? And I realized that the recommendations that a committee or an individual councilor brings forward need to keep in mind the needs and the perspectives of all the other members of the city council. And again, doing a little bit more homework and being a little bit more thoughtful about the process and to reflect on what I should anticipate when the recommendations are made. And that's been very helpful for me. I think we all learn from our mistakes. That was a good mistake to learn from.

**Adriana Temali:**

And so, have you had chance since then to put forward a recommendation, as an individual or as a committee, where you've been able to put that into practice and see that sort of flourish?

**Jim Weikum:**

On multiple occasions. And it's also helped me as I mentor or advise incoming elected officials, particularly in our city council, that, be prepared for these types of situations and what you can do to avoid that — again, to look at the broader picture not just your own needs or your own preferences.

**Adriana Temali:**

You mentioned trying to ensure that you have an understanding of some of the perspectives of the council. What are some of the tactics that you have used to ensure you're able to maybe gather and reflect those perspectives of your fellow council members?

**Jim Weikum:**

First of all, getting to know the individuals. Oftentimes, the elected officials are people that are — newly elected officials — are people that we already know in our community.

**Adriana Temali:**

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Jim Weikum:**

And, just having a little bit of awareness of their background and their interests, and what kind of work they've done. One of the most successful tactics that any elected official, or any leader, can have is really honing their listening skills. I've really worked very hard throughout my career, and particularly as an elected official, to try and listen and try and get to the heart of what somebody is really saying. And I consider it a work in progress, at least in terms of myself, because there's always room for improvement.

**Adriana Temali:**

So, mayor Jim, we have been talking at the League about the fact that resiliency is this buzz word that we hear everywhere right now. But we do know is that things have been hard, and people keep going through the hard, whether or not want to call that resiliency or not. And I'm curious to know when things get hard as mayor in your city, what is the thing that keeps you going?

**Jim Weikum:**

A couple things. One is to stay focused on why I ran for this office in the first place, which is about loving the community I live in and wanting it to move forward and to thrive. Colleagues over the years have

often said "Well, I'm not doing this or that for myself, I'm doing it for future generations." And that's really important to me.

**Jim Weikum:**

I have three adult children, and now four grandchildren. When my time is up as mayor, I want the community that exists, or I leave behind, to be as good as — if not better than — the one that I inherited when I took office. And then, of course, my innate stubbornness that I don't like to be told no, or I don't like to run into roadblocks that I can't figure out a path around. So, I think all those together just kind of keep me going.

**Adriana Temali:**

You called it stubbornness, but I would call it problem solving. I know that we've been lucky enough to have you as part of a panel that spoke at our annual conference this year, about your COVID relief taskforce in your area in your community. And that seemed to me like really great problem solving, so don't sell yourself short on that stubbornness piece.

**Adriana Temali:**

I'm really, really happy to hear that you're a future thinker. You're thinking about the community 20 years down the road. I think we need more people like that and so, anything that people can learn from you in the way that you're investing in the future of Biwabik is just tremendous. I want to thank you so much for being on the podcast. It was really delightful to have you, and we're also just so grateful that you are a board member here at the League as well.

**Jim Weikum:**

It's been my pleasure. I look forward to following some of the other podcasts as well, because there's always learning to do and hearing from other elected officials is very helpful to me.

**Adriana Temali:**

Well that was a really terrific conversation with mayor Weikum today. Just a couple of things that I wanted to pull out 'cause they're so important to learn from those lessons when others share with us.

**Adriana Temali:**

One of the things that I heard mayor Weikum talk about was that ability to invest in the perspectives of others. That is something that's gonna help you get things done. Another thing that I heard, we hear this a lot, we say this a lot, but the ability to listen and, and listen with the intent to actually understand, is something that's gonna go a long way for city leaders. And the last one is that notion of really committing to your why. Why are you an elected official? Why did you run? Why are you there? How does that help drive your leadership values and your leadership goals? That was something that I thought mayor Weikum talked a lot about and really drove home that notion of we're all here for a reason. We all want to help our community and make it better, make it grow.

**Adriana Temali:**

Well, that is it for our show today. I want to say another thank you to our guest [podcast theme music begins], mayor Weikum, from Biwabik, and to all of you out there listening and doing the hard and rewarding work in cities. You will find us in all the places where podcasts are found. And you can rate and review us, or do it the old fashioned way and tell a friend about The City Speak podcast. And if you do want to get in touch with us or have an idea for the show, you can reach out at [podcast@lmc.org](mailto:podcast@lmc.org). Until next time, take care.

[Podcast theme music ends]