

## Pennington on Leadership

By Randy G. Pennington



*Texas Town & City* is proud to introduce a continuing series written by a longtime and greatly admired friend of the Texas Municipal League. A frequent speaker at TML education events, Randy combines more than twenty years of front-line leadership and consulting experience with extensive research and writing to deliver practical ideas that can be applied at many levels. His expertise has made him an internationally respected guest commentator, with appearances on CNN, PBS, Fox News, the ABC Radio Network, and the BBC. He is also a prolific writer, and his ideas have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Entrepreneur*, *Executive Excellence*, *Training & Development*, numerous newspapers, and many professional/trade association journals.

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## Stupid Has Its Own Momentum

“Sold to the gentlemen at table five.”

In minutes, two people engaged in a casual conversation about the fun of owning and showing a horse became the proud owners of an Arabian yearling.

The charity auction organizers were ecstatic. Stupid has its own momentum. I know. I wrote half of the check.

### Defining Stupid

Fourteen partners at Arthur Andersen decided that they could maintain their independence despite the prospects of \$100 million in annual revenue from Enron. That was not a stupid decision. That was a greedy decision.

### The distinction is important.

For this discussion, “stupid” is defined as a bad decision stemming from a well-intentioned idea when the facts and consequences (intended and unintended) are not adequately considered.

### Minimizing Stupid

We have all seen and/or participated in an experience similar to my purchase of an Arabian horse. More important, we have witnessed the result of a well-intentioned idea gone bad in the communities and organizations we serve. Stupid – once in play – can take on a life of its own.

It is impossible to eradicate stupid decisions. They can be minimized by taking three steps when the little voice in your head is screaming, “I feel stupid coming on!”

- **Define and discuss the goal.** What is the real problem you are trying to solve? What is the real opportunity you want to exploit? Investing time in clearly articulating the desired outcome helps keep your eye on the desired prize.
- **Consider the implications from all sides.** The potential for a bad decision increases when everyone shares the same world view. Actively consider opposing views. Gather input from a broad range of constituents. Big decisions require big steps to build consensus.
- **Project success and failure into the future.** The frustrations in your community today are likely the result of a decision made 15 – 20 years ago. Explore the implications of success and failure, and recognize the possibility that today’s excellent choice could be tomorrow’s stupid decision.

Leaders are evaluated by the results of their decisions not their intentions. To quote the philosopher Forest Gump, “Stupid is as stupid does.”

So remember – ***stupid has its own momentum***. It’s your responsibility to prevent as many well-intentioned but flawed decisions as possible

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