

# Introduction

This is a book for practitioners of business district management and for those who hope to be practitioners. It is both a pragmatic, how-to guide to effective downtown leadership and a group of essays on more theoretical and conceptual aspects of downtown and community development. It will serve as an always-handly desk reference for the downtown or business district CEO or executive director; it will be an important compendium for board members of these organizations as they seek to understand in more depth and in context what downtown organizations, business improvement districts (BIDs), downtown development authorities, and community development corporations are trying to achieve; and finally, it will provide a thorough introduction for students in planning, economic development, public and business administration, architecture, social work, marketing, and other academic programs who see a potential future in downtown management and leadership.

As far as we know, no college or university currently offers an entire degree program in downtown management. As a result, downtown organization staff members come from virtually every undergraduate discipline. The ranks of downtown executives and staff are peopled with former bankers, lawyers, planners, journalists, social workers, accountants, artists, engineers, and architects, to name a few. This mixture certainly has contributed to the richness and texture of thought and practice among downtown managers; however, the absence of an academic “road map” into the field means that many people find their way into this profession almost by accident.

What those entering the profession of downtown management find in terms of roles and responsibilities, skill sets and practices, can be confusing and daunting. At any given time, a downtown manager may be called upon as an expert in real estate development, civil engineering, transportation, marketing, finance, retail management, office leasing, human resources, workforce development, social work, architecture, planning, urban design, and any number of other professions. It often seems as if this is not one job but ten, and there is no predicting on any given day which hats the downtown professional may be called upon to wear.

Imagine what a typical day might be like. On her way into the office, the CEO of a downtown organization notices that several lights are out in the public parking garage and makes a mental note to call the director of the parking authority so replacement lighting gets ordered and installed. Walking from the garage to her office, she encounters a homeless panhandler and directs him to a drop-in center where he can begin the “continuum of care.” Her first meeting of the day is with the mayor and a couple of city council members to decide on a strategy for funding streetscape improvements on the downtown’s main shopping street.

After the meeting, she gathers her marketing and events staff to review final implementation plans for the upcoming arts festival that her organization sponsors and manages. By midmorning, she’s out with a local developer who wants to convert an empty warehouse into loft condominiums and wants the backing of her of her organization. After touring the building, she meets the police chief for lunch to secure a commitment for more beat officers on downtown streets.

Her first appointment of the afternoon is with her board chairman, who wants to review the agenda for the next board meeting and work out a strategy for expanding the business improvement district. Midafternoon finds her taking a few minutes to return calls and e-mails, and toward the end of the day she participates as a member of a panel reviewing designs for a new downtown library. Finally, after a quick dinner with colleagues, she heads over to the office of a nearby neighborhood association where she is the featured speaker for the monthly meeting.

During the course of one day, she’s engaged top-level public and private officials, helped make decisions that will shape the course of the downtown and the city for years to come, and forged positive relationships with neighborhood residents as well.

The question is not how does one person wear so many hats, but how does one person do so effectively and successfully? In the world of downtown management, with boards of directors made up of bottom-line-oriented businesspeople, one has to be able to perform and produce results.

This book will not provide all of the answers. What it will do is provide students and practitioners with a guide to how some of the best professionals in the downtown management and leadership field think and act. It will be useful for anyone who wants to understand and work for a downtown, business district, or community development organization; but it will be especially so for anyone who has management aspirations.

Although we know of no university degree programs in downtown management and leadership, we are aware that several universities are beginning to offer courses in this subject. We hope that faculty members teaching courses in this area, whether in business administration, public administration, planning,

social work, or other areas of study will find this book to be a great resource. *Making Business Districts Work* represents the work of more than thirty professionals who are respected for their work and their knowledge, not only in their profession but in their communities.

When the International Downtown Organization (IDA) decided to undertake the creation of this book, it was with the realization that while there were many experts within the association, no one person was an expert in everything related to downtown management and leadership. Thus as a reader, you'll benefit from the collective wisdom of each chapter's authors.

The book is organized in nine sections. Part I introduces the field of downtown leadership and management, and offers some perspectives on how the profession has changed and continues to change.

Part II focuses on the downtown organization itself. It addresses some of the most important issues: its structure, governance, resources, and accountability. Without downtown organizations it is further doubtful that the remarkable renaissance of older business districts would have occurred.

Part III examines the environment in which downtown leaders and the organizations they command operate. In the context of systems theory, downtown and business district organizations are part of large and complex systems that include public entities, private companies, individuals and groups, all of which influence and are influenced by these downtown organizations.

Parts IV through VI discuss what downtown and business districts do. For example, what problems are they trying to solve? What are some of the more important programs and activities that these organizations undertake? How do they communicate with downtown users and constituents? What kinds of experiences are they seeking to create for downtown users? What resources, both human and financial, do they seek to secure, and toward what ends are these resources committed?

Part VII explores the growing trend toward town center organizations and business improvement districts outside of North America. Although the United States and Canada still boast the largest concentration of such organizations, regions such as the United Kingdom have seen explosive growth in the past five years, and many other areas of the world are experiencing the birth of similar organizations.

Three case studies are presented in Part VIII. Two of these represent examples of leadership and management in North America's two largest cities—New York City and Los Angeles—and they tell the tales of how downtown organizations responded to crises of major proportions. New York City, the Alliance for Downtown New York was at the center of the disaster when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center Towers on September 11,

2001. The response of this organization and its leaders is one of courage, intelligence, and coolness under fire.

In Los Angeles, a crisis of a different sort has been brewing for many years, but became nearly unmanageable about five years ago when homeless individuals became so numerous on the streets of downtown's various districts, that businesses, customers, residents, and visitors reacted first with alarm and then with thoughtful determination. Their actions not only alleviated undesirable conditions for businesses, but brought renewed focus and increased help for the area's thousands of homeless persons.

The final case study looks at a much smaller town—Kalamazoo, Michigan—and its persistent efforts over more than twenty years to rebuild and remake a downtown that suffered from being in a floodplain. This not only caused physical damage to buildings, but meant that development in the north half of downtown was impossible due to restrictions on financing and insurance. Kalamazoo's success in overcoming these challenges has won it a number of awards and national recognition.

Part IX is devoted to a look backward and a look forward. Downtowns and business districts have grown, declined, revived, and blossomed during the past fifty years. New forms have emerged, in new towns and suburbs. However, as population characteristics, working patterns, and consumer desires change, what does the future hold? This section examines some of the many possibilities we might see.

The co-editors and IDA are deeply indebted to the authors of the many chapters that make up this unique book. Some authors have spent all or most of their careers in one community; others have had more nomadic existences, serving downtowns in many places. Some are downtown CEOs, some are consultants, some are academicians. Together, they represent knowledge, wisdom, and experience. IDA and our readers around the world can be thankful that they have given us their time and effort to create this unique collection of perspectives.