



# Leadership and Chess: A Kind of Genius

By Otis White

*Editor's note: We first published this article in 2015. It is still one of our favorites, well worth sharing again with all of our readers.*

What the best public-sector leaders do doesn't sound very exciting. It helps to be great at chess.

Twenty-five years ago, as I was growing interested in how cities produce leaders and leaders shape cities, I heard a state business association president define leadership. A leader, he said, "is someone who helps people get where they want to go."

He was speaking to a community leadership class, and I could sense the audience deflate. That's it? Help people go somewhere? Like a bus driver? What about organizing constituencies, offering a vision, and persuading the public? What about standing up for people—or standing up to the powerful? What about holding office?

And, yet, I had to admit he was on to something. Organization and persuasion are skills. Visions can be supplied by others. Standing up to the

powerful and holding office are roles. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that helping people get where they want to go (and, one hopes, need to go) isn't a bad definition of what leaders do. It's just . . . incomplete.

So allow me to complete the definition. A leader is someone who helps people get where they want to go . . . by seeing the opportunity for getting there.

Seeing the opportunity—the narrow, sometimes temporary passage through which change can happen—is the genius of leadership. And herding people through that passage is the practice of leadership. What the genius and the practice require is a sense of how things fit together, a tactical vision, a willingness to learn from experience, and a saintly patience with people—but a patience that's bounded by the resolve to do something meaningful.

If this sounds abstract, trust me; there are examples all around you. Here in Atlanta, I've seen these traits in people who nurtured projects great and small, from the creation of the BeltLine, a circle of parks and trails that's transforming entire



neighborhoods, to the building of a roundabout that fixed an impossible intersection at the gates of Emory University and breathed life into a small retail district. In both cases, the leader was someone who recognized the value of these projects, sized up

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Harold Structures Eastbound Re-Route Project  
MTA Construction and Development Contract No. CH058B  
Bid Date: April 16, 2021

**Description of project:**  
The work involves design-build of a new tunnel and approach structures for a grade-separated crossover, including modification of the underpinning pier(s) and construction of new pier(s) for the existing Honeywell Street bridge, demolition of existing track work and installation of new track, including special track work, and demolition of existing and installation of new traction power elements such as the cabling, contact and messenger wires, feeder cables and their supporting structures. The work will be performed in an active railroad interlocking and will require close coordination with the ongoing train operations and force account work performed by Amtrak, LIRR, and other East Side Access contractors.

**Many bidding opportunities are available:** trucking, soil hauling and disposal, containers, excavation, structural concrete, precast concrete, standpipe, utilities, MPT, electrical, catenary, miscellaneous metals, steel, pile driving, micropiles, line striping, rebar furnish and install, waterproofing, demolition, support of excavation, precast barrier, trackwork, track removals, third rail, concrete ties, rail, fence, erosion control, trailers, cleaning, environmental testing, fill material supply, contaminated soil, geotechnical instrumentation and monitoring, survey, photography, rodent control, castings, monitoring wells, dewatering, material testing, temporary steel.

If you are interested in bidding on this project, please contact Skanska's Outreach Coordinator: Rosemary.Nagle@skanska.com • EOE/M/F/Vet/Disabled

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New Jersey Department of Transportation, Pulaski Contract 8B  
NJDOT Contract No. 054123300  
Bid Date: April 22, 2021

Subcontracting opportunities include but are not limited to soil erosion and sediment control, traffic control, pipe/drainage structures, earthwork—excavation, earthwork—embankment, asphalt/pavement, fence, sidewalk and curbs, traffic railing, traffic striping, traffic signs, electrical, landscaping, engineering, demolition, hazmat, paint, foundations/piles, reinforcing steel, concrete—structural, waterproofing, steel repairs, bearings, joints, concrete deck, and jacking systems. Please see contract documents for further opportunities.

Interested firms please contact john.papagiannakis@skanska.com • EOE/M/F/Vet/Disabled

NORTHEAST EVENTS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

2021

**PPP Forgiveness Webinar**  
Tuesday, April 13, 2021, 11:30 am–1:00 pm  
Online  
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration  
Contact: Susan Mazza, 802-828-4422, susan.mazza@sba.gov  
Fee: Free; registration required

The SBA Vermont District Office hosts a free weekly webinar from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm Tuesdays to discuss Paycheck Protection Program forgiveness. Topics include criteria, the process, changes, and more. To access the webinar by phone, call 1-202-765-1264 and enter the code 986 011 495#. For more information, email susan.mazza@sba.gov. Webinar direct link (copy and paste link into browser address bar): http://ow.ly/uj2850DRyxt The SBA Vermont District Office provides financial services, consulting, and educational assistance to the small business community throughout the state.

**Selling to the Federal Government Webinar**  
Thursday, April 22, 2021, 1:00 pm–4:00 pm  
Online  
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration  
Contact: George Tapia, 610-382-3086, george.tapia@sba.gov  
Fee: Free; registration required

Did you know that the federal government is the largest purchaser of goods and services in the world? Interested in learning how your business can market your services or goods

to the federal government? Register on line at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/how-to-sell-to-the-federal-government-tickets-120255610769 SBA helps to ensure small businesses get fair opportunities to share federal government prime contracts. Topics will include: How to Register, Small Business Certifications, Finding Opportunities, Marketing Your Firm, Federal Supply Schedules, Getting Paid, Tips to Prepare Your Offer, How to Seek Additional Assistance. Please note all training sessions are held via Microsoft Teams Meeting. Participants must ensure Microsoft Teams is functioning correctly prior to attending the scheduled class.

**SBA and SOS Monthly Webinar**  
Thursday, May 6, 2021, 9:00 am–11:00 am  
Online  
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, New Hampshire Secretary of State Corporation Division  
Contact: Miguel Moralez, 603-225-1601, miguel.moralez@sba.gov  
Fee: Free; registration required

Starting a new business? Looking for capital and finance options? Looking for general advice on starting or maintaining your business? Hear from representatives from the local SBA office and the New Hampshire Secretary of State Corporation Division. This workshop (currently held online during the pandemic) is offered on the first Thursday of every month. To join this free webinar, copy and paste the link below into your browser, then register for tickets for the date of your choice to receive the access code. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/monthly-workshop-on-sba-programs-resources-at-sos-tickets-138501643143

