

## Dept. of Family Services

# HELP WANTED

## MGMT. STAFF FOR MR. MORTON

***Temporary position helping DFS Director dig his own grave. Applicant must be willing to sacrifice his/her own career. Must be compliant, sycophantic, willing to say "Yes, Mr. Morton" regardless of the question.***

BY GLENN CAMPBELL

We are only a month and a half into the temporary Morton Digression and already things are disintegrating nicely.

Reports are flowing into our War Room from many different quarters. The new Family Services director Thomas Morton seems to have offended just about everyone in one way or another. The staff is stupid. All current problems must be blamed on the previous administration (most of whom are still present). The boss is always right, and your opinion, if you dare to have one separate from his, will probably get you fired. He hasn't won an ounce of loyalty from anyone since arriving. Like Dr. Evil, he's surrounded by frickin' idiots and can't even manage to rule the world.

Tensions are high within the agency, and many good workers are fearing for their

jobs. One high-level manager has already been sacked, and another has resigned. No reason was given for the firing, even to the person fired, because Morton doesn't have to explain himself to anyone. Clearly, however, it was an issue of dissent: Morton won't tolerate any. Either you agree with everything he says, or you're the enemy.

Morton, who has advised public agencies but never actually run one before, seems the classic bull in a china shop. If there are toes available to step on, he will find them.

The director is successfully turning off the support community as well. At the Community Foster Care Committee Meeting ten days ago, Morton had a nearly perfect score, offending the entire room with one speech. He stated that the problems we are currently facing are the result of the last two years of poor agency management. He was perceived as extremely negative, and even some churchgoing ladies were heard using expletives about him.

People are getting frustrated. How do we know? The website hit numbers on our Morton Investigation pages have skyrocketed! More people have looked at these six pages in the past two weeks than in any other period of their 4-month existence, even though we haven't added anything new. We suspect that our readers aren't looking for good news about Morton; they are looking for an explanation for what they have now



directly experienced.

What is wrong with our man? We have tried to describe it before, but we had trouble getting people to listen. Thomas Morton cannot connect emotionally with others. It is almost a form of mild autism. He can spout the language of child welfare, but he has no intuitive feeling for his fellow humans and certainly none for children. He is driven by ego and narcissism and treats both his enemies and allies poorly. He lacks the critical gift of empathy, essential for any effective leader.

Without the skills of politics, diplomacy and gentle human persuasion, Morton can only "order" that things be done. How are we going to solve the foster family shortage?

Morton has ordered recruitment staff to produce more of them. He isn't interested in how it is done; he just expects someone to solve the problem.

Staff knows already that "Yes, Mr. Morton," is the only acceptable answer. Any other response gets you the cute little Elmer-Fudd-blowing-his-top thing, where the head turns beet-red and smoke blows out the ears.

In times of crisis, Morton vanishes, like he did when an infant died in Child Haven on Aug. 15. As the police investigation continued into the evening and the press circled the scene, Morton was nowhere to be found. It is clear that he prefers to deal with the press through his word processor. "A sad and tragic day" and "devastating loss to all of us" are easily pasted into press releases from his polished WordPerfect inventory. He prefers to "issue" his position without actually talking to reporters, because they might ask uncontrolled questions.

Foster children, it seems, are dropping dead at an alarming rate, but any solution to the current crises will have to wait for the Mother of All Reports, which our resident consultant is now preparing. It was supposed to be due in October, but now it's been pushed to November, and we're taking bets on sometime next year. Yes, sir, we are definitely planning to plan to make a plan, as soon as the studies are completed and the report is published. Until then, all leadership is on hold.

The Feds and the Youth Law Center aren't prepared to wait. Both issued final ultimatums to the county within days of Morton's arrival. Apparently, Morton is a known quantity to them, and they see no reason to give him a honeymoon period.

Morton has repeated over and over that the problems of the system can all be attributed to (A) the previous administration, which must always be spoken of in denigrating terms, and (B) "untrained staff." The latter is Morton's way of saying, "You people are stupid." Naturally, this doesn't sit well with those being insulted, but Morton is unaware of offending anyone.

In fact, the Mort-Meister is pretty much unaware of anything in his social environment. This is a man without "affect"—that is, without expressed emotion except frequent anger. He's a cold, isolated fish with no apparent connection to anyone. When he's nervous, he tells long-winded jokes that usually fall flat. There are no hellos to the staff when he arrives and hardly even a pretense of friendliness. Just rushing past, head down, into his office. Then at 5pm, regardless of the crisis at hand, he's outta here. (Hardly comparable to the 80-hour work weeks of his predecessor.)

This is not a guy who is going to ask

you how your weekend went. He isn't interested in your puny little family. Due to his disability, he can never acknowledge the feelings of you or anyone else—which is a dangerous position for someone upon whom so many lives depend.

In meetings, it is clear that diversity of opinion isn't welcome. In spite of his lack of experience, Morton already knows everything. (We still pine for Wayne Newton, who would at least acknowledge his ignorance and seek advice.) Morton expects this to be a top-down organization where he issues orders and everyone else jumps-to. He must have watched *Patton* too many times but overlooked the part about inspiring loyalty in the troops.

He doesn't want to hear that things don't necessarily happen just because he orders them. He doesn't offer solutions. He simply screams: "TELL ME HOW YOU ARE GOING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM! JUST GET IT DONE!"

If you do have ideas, however, he doesn't want to hear them. Your ideas are worthless because they didn't come from him. If, by chance, one of them filters through, he'll present it as his own and forget where it came from.

You've seen such bosses on TV, but you thought they were limited to sitcoms.

But now the director needs your help—or somebody's. He's got this position to fill, the one once occupied by that lady who spoke her mind. It is Division Manager of Caregiver Services, who is responsible, among other things, for recruiting foster parents. Morton, however, faces a dilemma: Who in their right mind will accept this post?

Internally, this is regarded as a no-win position. Since Morton himself accepts no responsibility for any bad news, the next level of management is going to be blamed for anything that goes wrong. This is the manager who will have to miraculously produce foster parents on Morton's orders. He or she will work within earshot of the boss, so accepting this job is a very intimate decision. It is like marrying E. Fudd or Mr. Magoo. Sure, they're amusing on the surface, but you don't really want this cartoon character to have any power over you.

Morton can always force an existing employee to take the post by threatening to fire them if they don't, but we suspect that he'll look outside the agency first. He has the discretion to appoint anyone he wants to this position, even that little guy from *Diff'rent Strokes*. If he wants a *qualified* candidate, however, it is a bit harder.

It would have to be someone from the tiny subset of the child welfare field that Morton hasn't already alienated. The

successful candidate must be willing to endure active personal humiliation, both public and private. (Yes, you *will* be screamed at.) It will probably be a candidate who Morton has prior experience with, who is comfortable being abused by him and who is maybe a tad dim. It is a very short list, but Morton's history suggests that such candidates do indeed exist. (One at least.) This is an appointed position with no job security, so when Morton departs in disgrace, this new person will be going with him, with a nice black spot on their resume.

We will contribute to the recruitment effort by thoroughly researching any outside candidate who Morton brings in. If it is "Joe Smith," we will create a special webpage just for him. We will be interested in discovering the past relationship between Morton and this candidate and what Morton's power strategy is in hiring him.

For Morton, who lacks the brain circuits for the social graces, it's all about power. Enemies of Morton must be purged and replaced by friends of Morton. The friends are a scary bunch: clueless at best, mercenary at worst. We expect clueless to be closer to the mark, but, hey, we have an open mind. We'll wait and see what our investigation turns up.

In all fairness, this whole unnecessary Morton Diversion is not his fault. He is who he is and cannot change. It is kind of sad and tragic. The fault lies in placing him in this position where he clearly doesn't belong.

The obvious cannot be overstated: Morton has never run a complex organization before—apart from his own failed consulting group and his disastrous participation in the National Resource Center program. His professional career is packed with childish interpersonal conflicts obviously initiated by him, and he has never remotely exhibited any form of leadership ability. Yet Clark County hired him anyway, based solely on the judgment of a frenetic county manager with a limited attention span who has since departed.

History will record this as a "Duh!"

—GC

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