

## **Building Trust through Hard Work**

By Jason Green, Executive Director

With a new year upon us, is your water system personnel and board or council fully prepared for hard work with sleeves rolled up? Many times when a local governing body being responsible for the condition and future of a utility, encounters decisions and change, it is often met with question and possibly distrust. Questions are good and healthy and need to be answered truthfully; distrust may stem from many origins but if left to grow and not acknowledged and addressed can lead to disaster.

Due to many factors and often few, if any being the direct result of an existing board or council, the governing body is challenged with repairs, operation and the future of their customer's water system – none of which are easy decisions as all revolve around the health/ safety of the customer and the water you drink, staying within compliance and the valued dollar. In addition, your system is required by state and federal law to employ/contract a person holding valid state certifications in water system operations and preferably, one who has successful management experience.

Have you conveyed to your customers that your board or council has the system, its future and best interest as top priority? In order to stay within compliance and to better meet daily and future needs and planning, the board or council has hired the best possible operators and managers and keeps them trained through organizations such as OAWU. By keeping top-notch, trained and certificate holding employees, this enables the water system to meet state and federal requirements and also provides proper management over-site and planning for the present and future of the system.

Does your board of directors or council regularly evaluate proper operational and management practices, planning for the future of the customer's investments in the water system and building customer trust and relations? Is this an area that your system, manager and board or council could improve on?

After the question of "Is the water system in compliance?" being due to integrity of the source, piping, pumps, treatment and daily operation, then

the state and federal government is basically interested in three questions (though this simplifies each question, it does provide a starting point):

- 1.) Is the system able to meet the managerial needs necessary to safely and efficiently operate and plan?
- 2.) Does the system have staff with the technical ability to daily operate and plan for the future?
- 3.) Does the system have the financial resources for today and the future? Often, it seems that we overlook the basic foundations of our operations and responsibilities. Yes, we all have many areas we must and need to tackle and accomplish but review of the basics are essential for long term success. Whether it is looking into the physical makeup of the system, the operations, the staff and technical and managerial capabilities or within the board or council governing body and policies. All of these help build a better utility and service and also builds trust within your team and can improve relationships and trust with your customers. Take a look, think through them, note the needed changes and take action now while you can. Have a great year in service!