

## FIRST PERSON

# It's Time for a Change

by Richard H. Hoffman, CAE

The mass appraisal and assessment business has markedly changed during my twenty-five-plus years in it: new systems have developed, computer-assisted mass appraisals have become widespread, multiple regression and feedback are now accepted tools, and a panoply of other interesting and exciting items are now indispensable parts of the assessor's standard operating procedure. There is one important area, however, that has not changed. And I believe it's time that we, as leaders of the assessment community, take positive steps to change it in our lives and the lives of those we serve.

## Attitude Is Everything

The thing that has not changed is the attitude we hold about our jobs as assessors. It is time for a new attitude toward the assessor and I believe *we* are the people who must make this change happen. We've been our own worst enemy. We have accepted the stereotypical role of the "bad" tax person. A great many of us have focused on the *half-empty* glass of assessing. We've failed to recognize the wonderful contents that the *half-fill* portion of that same glass holds. It's time for *us* to become our own public relations person, our own cheerleader. It's time for *us* to sell the value of what we do to our unit of government and to our customers.

As things now stand, if you go out gathering data on a particular parcel of real property you're fully prepared for that property's occupant to be reluctant to have you visit or give you information and for that individual to have the general demeanor that the "bad" tax person is here. *Au contraire.*

*We need to make a change in our attitude will spill over to our customers' attitudes.* That is, they should be leaping with joy that the "good" tax

person is here. Why? Because that person is the only individual standing between them paying only their own share of taxes *or also* paying their neighbor's share of real property taxes.

## We Were Using TQM before There Was TQM

It's been my experience that the average assessor has three basic goals:

- Achieving fairness
- Arriving at property value that is, given all of the available facts, reasonable
- Improving the quality of the work delivered to the taxpayer

The assessing industry was using total quality management (TQM) long before TQM became a catch phrase. The quality of what we do is much like the quality of the payroll department—no one complains unless there is a mistake. Consider the average amount of data handled during a project—whether it is an update of real property values, the preparation of the annual tax roll, or one of the hundred other tasks assessors provide, including furnishing tremendous amounts of information about property values [both real and personal] and service to citizens, realtors, and our own units of government. Our mistakes are few and far between.

## Soul-Searching

During the next thirty days, take a few minutes out of your busy day and begin a "book of good deeds." Write in it all of the good things you have accomplished in the past twelve months and, in a second column, the times you have assisted people. For examples, honestly recall and estimate

- The number of taxpayer questions have answered
- The number of people who regularly visit your office
- The number of telephone calls you handle daily
- The field inspections have made
- Your speech opportunities
- The amount of data on each property record card versus your records' accuracy versus the total number of parcels in the county

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*Richard H. Hoffman, CAE, is president of Appraisal Research Corporation, Findlay, Ohio, [dhoffman@appraisalresearch.cc](mailto:dhoffman@appraisalresearch.cc)*

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Now begin sharing the information in your little book with your fellow officeholders and others in your local unit of government, as well as with the people having legislative authority.

Why is this inventory important? Let me share a story with you. Several years ago, I had the opportunity of working with a client developing a taped slide presentation titled *A Tour of the Assessor's Office*. He used this presentation when asked to speak to public service groups and members of the community. One day he took the presentation around to all the other offices within his unit of government to show them what he does. He was *amazed by* their positive reaction. The average individual was astounded at the number of functions, duties, and responsibilities the assessor has and, also, the lack of monetary support the assessor receives from local government. This assessor's job is much better today than it was in the past. He now finds little, if any, opposition to his budgetary requests. He also finds he is now accorded substantially more respect than he received before this experience.

## **Begin Anew**

I urge you to begin today with this new attitude toward our profession. Carry it over to your staff, to those other people you interact with, and to the people you serve. Begin each day with these resolves:

### **The Assessor's Creed**

- I am an assessing professional and I am truly proud of it.
- I have been called to one of the most important functions of government.
- I carry out my job with pride and excellence.
- I serve all people fairly and equally, regardless of who they might be.
- I show no favoritism.
- I do what is right.
- I do what is responsible.
- The wheels of government turn better because I am here.