

Opinion: S. Tahoe council meeting another disappointment

By Kathryn Reed

Telling your boss how you feel, what you believe and how to do things differently is never easy.

I know. I've been fired for having a contrary opinion and refusing to change my ideology.

I know what it's like to wonder how the mortgage is going to get paid. I know what it's like to wonder how to get a job in a profession that just keeps cutting positions.

I admire the people who spoke at Thursday night's special City Council meeting about the 2011-12 budget. It's never easy to talk in public, and even harder to do so in such a contentious atmosphere and before people who can eliminate your job.

But shame on them for waiting until now to voice their concerns. And it's even more shameful the council did not insist a session on the budget be conducted more than 16 days before the document is supposed to be the law of the land.

Yes, budgets are fluid and can be changed. But fundamentally they speak to the desires of the council.

No one still really knows what those five stands for or wants in this document. We know they don't like making cuts. It would be a bit scary if they did get pleasure out of doing so. After all, we are talking about nearly two dozen people who could be without a job in a month.

No one wants our city's 16.4 percent unemployment rate to grow.

But something or someone has to give.

Listening to the nearly 30 who spoke Sept. 15 I heard conflicting thoughts. On the one hand, employees-retirees expressed an overwhelming sentiment to preserve that sense of community they feel. And on the other hand, they seemed to expect others to preserve it; that by adopting the proposed budget, it would be lost.

Where is their sense of responsibility to the community beyond showing up to work every day? They are not talking at council meetings – I'm there to know. They are not writing letters or guest columns to/for *Lake Tahoe News* to share with others what is going on, their thoughts, desires and vision. They may be writing comments on *LTN*, but without using their name, is anyone really paying attention or caring?

Employees sounded a bit like victims last night. That's too bad.

I'm a firm believer the person on the front line knows best what needs to change in an organization. Speak up. If management doesn't listen, go to the council. If council doesn't listen, go to the media to reach taxpayers. You may not get your way, but everyone deserves to be heard.

But as the cliché goes, if you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem. It will be interesting to see what solutions, if any, are forthcoming by the staff in the next week.

The council on Thursday sounded like any other elected body about to level the ax – we're sorry, we have to do this.

Come on you five – we expected change, we expected leadership. Stop being so disappointing. Stop looking like you are led by staff and instead be the leaders. Remember, you are the boss of the city manager – not the other way around.

Nothing on Thursday indicated this is the budget you want. If it had been, you would have adopted it and ideally said why.

Management has done its job. Whether you agree with it, well, that's another story. But they were tasked with closing the budget gap and did so. Kudos to them.

The council will likely adopt the budget Sept. 27 at the 6pm special meeting. Between now and then is when people better start coming up with solutions for the financial problems as well as speak up. And not just employees. That budget is for the whole city – every resident of this town. Whining taxpayers who don't speak out are even worse than employees who don't speak.