

**New Role Orientations for U.S. EPA Officials
in the
Next Generation System of Environmental Protection**

Gregory G. Ondich

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Joseph V. Rees, Chair
Charles T. Goodsell
Gary L. Wamsley
Orion F. White
James F. Wolf

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(ABSTRACT)

At the start of the twenty-first century, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials can look back on nearly thirty years of meaningful accomplishments. Toxic releases are down, the air and water are cleaner, and waste disposal methods are greatly improved. Although this is a record of which EPA officials should be proud, is it sufficient to carry them into the next century? Conventional wisdom among scholars, environmental policy advocates, and even EPA officials indicates that it is not.

The new century is bringing complex challenges and, in some cases, the changing conditions are threatening the progress EPA has struggled to achieve. Some of the tools and approaches this agency has relied upon historically, such as notice and comment rulemaking, single stakeholder consultations, and positional leadership, are no longer adequate to address existing environmental challenges and new emerging environmental problems.

The Common Sense Initiative (CSI) was launched by EPA in mid-1994 as a fundamentally different approach to environmental protection. Its sector-based, multistakeholder, consensus decision-making process was counter to EPA's traditional command-and-control approach. CSI was created with the intent to heal the growing dysfunctional relationships that exist among government co-regulators (i.e., EPA and state and local agencies), the regulated industry, and non-governmental organizations (i.e., environmentalists and environmental justice organizations). Even though EPA officials realized the limitations of the existing regulatory approach, they had trouble "giving up control."

Nonetheless, during the four-year history of the CSI process, EPA personnel had an opportunity to see themselves in a different light and to operate in a new organizational regime. Rather than being just regulators, they were able to become solvers of environmental problems. Rather than being position-oriented, they were able to become person-oriented. Instead of seeking ownership and control, they were able to obtain leverage through partnerships and collaboration. In short, EPA officials were building social capital and a new style of management—facilitative leadership. A facilitative leader leads without controlling, communicates without being condescending, and uses synergism to help groups achieve "win-win" results. This new paradigm has the potential to help EPA better adapt in the next generation system of environmental protection.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my father, George Ondich, who was only able to complete elementary school but very supportive of higher education and learning throughout his life, and lived to see his seven children receive their college bachelor's degrees. Unfortunately, my father died before I was able to complete this project but his spirit was always with me and he was a constant source of inspiration for me. Thanks Dad for encouraging me and showing me the value of a thirst for knowledge.

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