

Mark Aesch

Author of *Driving Excellence* and Former CEO of the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority

Mark Aesch, the former CEO of the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority (RGRTA), has nearly two decades of strategic leadership experience. Under his leadership at the RGRTA, deficits were eradicated and replaced with surpluses, reliance on taxpayer subsidies was reduced, demand for service increased, and in an unprecedented move, the fare was actually lowered after remaining stable for over a decade. Aesch is currently a thought leader at the Boston Consulting Group, an international consulting company. In his presentations, Aesch addresses his management and business strategies and his turnaround story.

Leadership Lessons from a Successful Turnaround. When Aesch became the CEO of RGRTA, the company had a \$27.7 million budget deficit (with a total budget of \$70 million), and he was told that the company would not survive unless he did all of the following: raise fares 40 percent across the board, reduce service by 65 percent, double fares on the disabled, and axe a quarter of the workforce. Aesch, however, did none of those things. Mr. Aesch focused on transforming the business from the bottom up, creating buy-in among the employees and treating the riders like customers instead of mere passengers. By doing so, he eliminated the deficit and instead created a \$34.5 million surplus, grew the organization (the budget is now \$85 million), increased the number of passengers by 20 percent (a rate which is 50 percent higher than the national average), and *lowered* fares to \$1.

Aesch's efforts to affect industry change by operating government more like a business has been covered in the *New York Times*, *Governing Magazine*, and on National Public Radio and other traditional and electronic media. Aesch is also the author of best-selling *Driving Excellence*, a book on successful high-performance public sector management.

Taking Business Expertise to the Community. Aesch has taken a strong leadership role in the wider community, having established and now serving on the board of directors for the Greater Rochester Community Transportation Foundation, which provides transportation services to more than 2,500 disadvantaged children every year. He also works with the HONOR (Helping our Neighbors with Options for Rides) Foundation, which subsidizes public transportation for economically needy disabled people. Aesch serves on a number of boards and advisory groups, including the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Board of Directors, the APTA Framework for the Future Taskforce, and the Transportation Cooperative Research Program Performance Measurements Taskforce. He is also on the State University of New York, College at Brockport Foundation Board of Directors and the Strategic Advisory Board for AM&M Financial Services. Aesch is an adjunct professor at Keuka College (Keuka Lake, NY), and is an active member of the Young Presidents' Organization, a highly influential group of over 15,000 CEOs.

He also recently led a U.S. delegation of 15 members to Southeast Asia, meeting with industry leaders abroad, to analyze and share information related to strategy development, measurement systems, and performance based management.