




# **THE 19 UNDENIABLE LAWS OF SITE SELECTION**

Ron Kitchens & Carla Sones



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**WE ARE FASCINATED BY ATTRACTING  
AND RETAINING COMPANIES AND, MORE  
IMPORTANT THAN THAT, THE INCREDIBLE  
IMPACT THEY HAVE IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE  
AND COMMUNITIES.**

Throughout this book, we share what we have gleaned from our experiences in business, government and economic development as well as our relationships with some of America's greatest site selectors. We trust these 19 rules, if put to good use, will empower you to bridge the gap and move you and your community always forward.




## **THE GREATEST FORCE FOR CHANGE IS A JOB – BUT THAT DOES NOT HAPPEN WITHOUT REMARKABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS.**

We understand the life of an economic developer because we live it every day. We know the pressure and pleasure of this industry. We know the hard work and the hustle that it takes to be elite in today's economy. We understand the complexities of the work and we know that it requires passionate and engaged leaders to navigate this profession. These are just a few of the many reasons that we feel so honored to serve on the leadership team at Consultant Connect.

Consultant Connect is committed to bridging the relationships between site consultants and economic developers, ensuring that both are more successful at serving the needs of their clients, and together creating stronger communities. Consultant Connect was **created by economic developers for economic developers** because we know most

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of you are thirsty for knowledge, opportunities and access to mentors and experiences that will achieve the real results required of their work.

Over the course of the past five years, we have been privileged to personally interview and work alongside some of the most trusted site consultants in North America through our Summit Series events, annual conference called Economix, and the America's Jobs Team podcast. We are incredibly grateful for their willingness to share their knowledge, mentoring and leadership on this journey.

The site selection process has always been a bit of a mystery and this publication was created to shed some light on the most important factors to consider when working with site consultants. We trust that these 19 Laws will empower you to bridge the gap to success and move you and your community always forward.

*- Ron & Carla*

**19**

**UNDENIABLE LAWS OF  
SITE SELECTION**

RULE  
001

## IGNORANCE IS THE ENEMY.

The challenges with gathering, maintaining and providing current, relevant data is monumental. The struggle is not in finding data — though it takes research, data is everywhere, and the struggle lies in providing *valuable* data. Competitive communities provide data that is proprietary and is only available because they are engaged with the community and the companies in their region.

Economic developers must be fluent in the data regarding their existing and available workforce (including in-demand skills, etc.), industry clusters,

**The struggle is not in finding data — though it takes research, data is everywhere, and the struggle lies in providing valuable data.**

local incentives, educational and training

opportunities and, of course, sites and buildings. With the increase in access to national data services, technology has leveled the playing field in the site elimination process. The true value add for economic development organizations is to bring real-time, relevant data that public and peer-based sources cannot provide.

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RULE

002

## **COMPANIES WILL NOT SOLVE YOUR POLITICAL PROBLEMS.**

Today's political environment creates significant challenges for partnership in economic development and job growth within communities. Many local and state municipalities are not seen through a lens of cooperation, trust and partnership; rather, they are viewed as vehicles of obstruction, confusion, mistrust and misplaced ego.

Successful communities have done the work in advance to know what the community's political leaders will support and invest in; long before the jobs creation opportunity even visits the region.



RULE  
**003**

## **STICKS AND STONES.**

Second only to people, sites and buildings are the single most requested asset from a community. Too many economic developers lack the depth of knowledge regarding their

**Successful communities anticipate the possible uses for sites and buildings.**

sites and buildings allowing their resources to go underutilized.

Successful communities anticipate the possible

uses for sites and buildings and pre-address all permitting, surveys, land use, utilities and timelines for occupancy.

RULE

004

## **ANSWER THE PHONE.**

When surveyed on their biggest pet peeve, site selectors tell us that failing to be on time and responsive to their requests is their number one issue. Companies have a heightened sense of urgency when making decisions about where to place their new investment, which creates compressed timelines and never before seen requirements of economic development organizations. The relationship between economic developers and site selectors is long-term and, to be effective, it must be built upon trust which is founded in consistent and dependable communication.

RULE  
**005**

## **TELL THE TRUTH.**

Credibility is paramount to successful economic development and site selection partnerships. Business moves and grows no faster than the pace and depth of trust. It is hard to fathom there would be a rule about honesty, but to our dismay, site selectors report that on a regular basis they see data and presentations from

**Business moves and grows no faster than the pace and depth of trust.**

communities that are not accurate. Many times, communities are trying to position themselves in a way that is not authentic

to who they really are. This puts both the site selector and the company in a very difficult position; it places economic developers and their communities in a light that significantly reduces their chances of ever being considered for future projects.

RULE  
**006**

## JUST ASK.

Leadership is not about having all the answers, but rather asking the right questions. Economic developers are apprehensive of asking too many questions of site selectors fearing it would lead

**Economic developers are apprehensive of asking too many questions of site selectors fearing it would lead to elimination.**

to elimination.

This is not true.

Site selectors are committed to getting accurate information for

their clients. It does not benefit the site selector or economic developers to be uninformed or confused.

RULE  
007

## IT IS PERSONAL.

Economic development is dependent upon relationships. Although technology and immaculately designed marketing pieces have become a focus, there is still much of the site

**Economic development is dependent upon relationships.**

selection process that is built on personal relationships and the ability to

communicate as colleagues. Today, trust is at a premium in the decision-making process; the more you invest in relationships with site selectors, the more trust and credibility you build in the marketplace. Trust translates into opportunity.

RULE  
**008**

## THE POWER OF ONE.

Every project has its own set of unique characteristics. In fact, every project presents its unique life, culture, challenges and requirements. Even with this amount of diversity, many communities still send the same exact packet of information for every project.

The communities who are winning projects are creating custom responses that reflect and express the various assets of their community

**Every project presents its unique life, culture, challenges and requirements.**

in the RFI's (request for information) requested format. The site selectors want to see what

makes the community the best fit for their specific customer, not what the community wants to sell.

RULE  
**009**

## **PREPARATION SAVES FRUSTRATION.**

Business retention and expansion is a basic function of economic development. In today's growing and ever-changing economy, knowing the companies in your region and the challenges of those businesses is the minimum requirement if you want to pursue new investment.

What are existing employers saying about the workforce? What common challenges are companies facing? What does talent attraction look and feel like for existing companies? The answers to these questions and many more will certainly better prepare and equip economic developers and communities to compete for new projects. If communities are intentional about connecting with existing leaders and businesses, those companies will become some of your most effective advocates for new businesses coming to the area.

RULE  
**010**

## **YOU AND THE MAYOR ARE NOT YOUR COMMUNITY'S BEST SALESPEOPLE.**

Existing companies in your community are the best salespeople. A continual request site selectors bring to us is their clients wanting

**When company leaders talk to their peers about their experiences in the community and the support they have received, their voices speak volumes.**

to talk to other business leaders in the community. Economic developers and elected officials are great salespeople;

however, the bias for the community leaves room for discrepancy between fact and favoritism. When company leaders talk to their peers about their experiences in the community and the support they have received, their voices speak volumes.



RULE  
**011**

## **SHRINK TO GROW.**

The world is shrinking and the interconnectivity of economies is critically important to the conversation about jobs. Economic development leaders can no longer afford to only understand their local economy. They need to understand the global economy and how global trade and supply chain impact the businesses within their communities. An understanding of what happens with the Japanese yen, for example, and how that affects a local employer is critical to the ability to serve companies.

RULE  
**012**

## **DON'T STRIKE OUT BEFORE YOU SWING.**

In reality, the process of attracting new investments to communities is a site elimination process, not site selection. Too many communities are eliminated before they ever know they were being considered. Site selectors report many economic development

**Too many communities are eliminated before they ever know they were being considered.**

groups have not updated their data or websites in years. When exploring the

'contact us' section on the website, there is often a web contact form that must be filled out only to send an email to info@yourwebsite. So what's the simple fix? Add a direct phone number and email of the attraction leader or CEO to your website. In doing so, you make it clear to the company representatives they are a priority and the information is up to date.

RULE  
**013**

## **YOU ARE NOT THE ONLY PLAYER IN THE GAME.**

Great business and economic development organizations have an ongoing analysis of their peers, both real and aspirational communities,

**It is crucial to know the community's competition.**

and understand intimately where they stand. If you have not identified those

communities, ask a site selector if they know the types of communities that are landing the type of new investments you want in your community. It is insufficient to look at the data in a vacuum, and crucial to know the community's competition.

RULE

014

## THE REAL WORK BEGINS.

The hunt for jobs is exciting. Landing a new investment in the community not only grabs the headlines, it often secures the economic development leader in their career. Nonetheless, from a site selector's perspective,

**The sign of a great economic developer is the ability to sustain the support, attention and response to the company after the honeymoon of the project has worn off.**

the sign of a great economic developer is the ability to sustain the support, attention and response to a company after the honeymoon of the project has worn off.

After the ribbon cuttings and the job fairs, do companies thrive with the support of economic developers? That is the real measure of success.

The short-term adrenaline rush of landing the 'big one' is often swallowed up in the realities of workforce, local politics, economic shifts or in pursuit of the next project. In many

RULE

014

(CONTINUED)

communities, as companies transition from projects to existing industry, so does the level of service and responsiveness. Economic developers who are respected and called upon by the site selection community are those who are equally passionate about retention and expansion of companies as they are with the companies they woo into the community.

RULE  
**015**

## 190 B.C.

In 190 B.C., the Ports of Rhodes and Delos squared off in the first use of economic development incentives. More than two thousand years later, incentives are still with

**Incentives cannot make a bad deal good, they only have the ability to make a good deal better.**

us and not going away. But incentives won't overcome a bad fit. Remember, Rhodes

and Delos needed ports before the incentives could close the deal. Site selectors always say that incentives cannot make a bad deal good, they only have the ability to make a good deal better.

RULE  
**016**

## **RAPID RESPONSE.**

The pace and expectation of action has shifted dramatically over the last decade. The anticipation of rapid turnaround of both proposal and salient community information is at an all-time high. In order to be successful, economic development groups must have a rapid response team attitude.

Great teams include relevant, decision-making partners such as government officials, philanthropic donors, business leaders, investors and workforce agents. All leaders should come together on a regular basis ensuring up-to-date data and strategy for incoming projects. The differentiator between winning and losing a project often has everything to do with the ability to respond. The response and reaction are the things that matter most.

RULE

017

## ROCK THE BOAT.

Chances are there is no one in your community who has the capacity to inform elected or appointed leaders how their decisions impact the ability of the community, region or state

**You must find a way to burden them with knowledge regarding the impact their actions have.**

to compete for job creation projects — except economic developers. You must find a way to burden

them with knowledge regarding the impact their actions have on providing or eliminating jobs for those they are sworn to serve.



RULE  
**018**

## IT'S A WAR OUT THERE.

According to Jim Clifton, Chairman of Gallup, there are five billion people of working age on Earth. Of that group, three billion say the most important thing to them (above food, shelter, clothing, safety or education) is a good job for

**Great communities know they are competing every day for the planet's most precious resource: jobs.**

themselves or their children. The problem: there are only 1.3 billion jobs

on the planet. The war for jobs is real. Great communities know they are competing every day for the planet's most precious resource: jobs. Great communities understand we must invest today for the jobs tomorrow.

RULE

019

## **EVERYBODY SELLS.**

Look at your community through the eyes and ears of a visitor: what do the cab drivers have to say? How clean are the restrooms in the airport? How does City Hall treat a visitor with zoning questions? If you do not know the answer to these and hundreds of other questions, you are at risk of losing before you ever knew you were in the game. A sales force of hundreds beats a lone voice every time.

## SITE DECISION INFLUENCERS

Merriam Webster defines mentor as “a trusted and wise counselor or guide.” We are eternally grateful to the mentors who have served as wise and trusted guides alongside Consultant Connect. For the past three years, you all have provided the insights that allowed us to put these 19 Laws together.

Adam Oxman	<i>Cushman &amp; Wakefield</i>
Alex Frei	<i>CBRE</i>
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Dan Levine	<i>Oxford Economics, Inc.</i>
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Joe Suppers  
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Kathy Mussio  
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Michael McDermott  
Mike Divorsak  
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Rose Burden  
Sam Lee

*VisionFirst Advisors*  
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*Colliers International*  
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*Ernst & Young*  
*Site Selection Group*  
*Kate McEnroe Consulting*  
*Atlas Insight*  
Crowe  
*Newmark Knight Frank*  
*WRE Consulting*  
Savills  
*American Corporate Location Services*  
*Quest Site Solutions*  
*The Austin Company*  
*Avenue Advisory Group*  
*Deloitte*  
*Cushman & Wakefield*  
*The William B Hare Company*  
*True Partners Consulting*  
*Mohr Partners*  
*Ernst & Young*  
*Site Selection Group*  
*Newmark Knight Frank*  
*Ernst & Young*  
*Euclidean5 Advisory*

Sara Fredericks  
Sara Maffey Duncan  
Scott Kupperman  
Thomas Pearson  
Tim Feemster  
Tim Rehbock  
Tim Schram  
Virginia Rounds

*Newmark Knight Frank*  
*Edgewood Strategies*  
*Kupperman Location Solutions*  
*Colliers International*  
*Foremost Quality Logistics*  
*Barnes & Thornburg LLP*  
*Grant Thornton*  
*German American Chamber of Commerce*



## **SPECIAL THANKS**

A special thanks to the 347 economic development organizations that have joined us on this journey to bridge the partnerships between site selectors and economic developers. Because of you, your communities are better and lives are impacted. You are the heart and soul of this work and the reason we do what we do.

To all our partners and champions, thank you for the support, encouragement and partnership. These established organizations and leaders provided insight that is nothing short of amazing. Collaboration is key and we are honored to serve alongside these trailblazers.

## GET PLUGGED IN:

- To stay up to date on the latest best practices from around the country in economic development tune in each Wednesday for the *America's Jobs Team Podcast*.

Looking for more development opportunities?

- Need help facilitating events? Find our upcoming events and services offered at [consultantconnect.org](http://consultantconnect.org). We are here to serve you!

Speaking of events, ECONOMIX is Consultant Connect's annual conference. Designed by economic developers for economic developers, you will have the opportunity to take your leadership and community to the next level. Find out more at [ECONOMIX.me](http://ECONOMIX.me).

Are you in need of growth as a leader? Each Monday Ron (and Carla) tackle tough topics on the *Always Forward Leadership Podcast* and Thursdays on the *Always Forward Leadership Blog*. It comes directly to your inbox (no travels involved!) filled with ideas and insights focused on organizational excellence, community growth and leadership. Subscribe and find out more at [ronkitchens.com](http://ronkitchens.com).



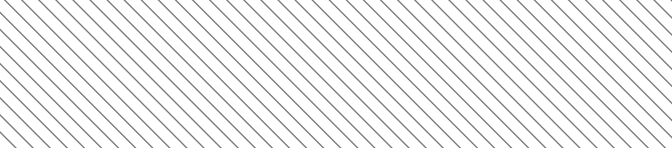
## **RON KITCHENS**

Ron's focus is to lift up leaders by accelerating their impact, influence and well-being in career, family and community.

Ron is the senior partner and chief executive officer of Southwest Michigan First, an economic consulting firm, which has grown compounded revenue at 20% annually during his 14 years as chief executive officer. In addition, Ron leads Consultant Connect and is the publisher of 269 MAGAZINE, a board member of Impact Athletic, the past chair of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts and a Trustee of Western Michigan University.

Ron is the founder of the leadership conference Catalyst University and the co-founder of NEXT, an invitation-only leadership symposium for global economic development leaders. He previously served on the staff of U.S Senator John Danforth, and he was an elected Alderman at age 21.





Ron and his teams have been extensively featured in over 100 national and international media outlets including The Wall Street Journal, Fast Company, CBS, NBC, Fox, USA Today, Forbes, Fortune, The Economist and National Public Radio.

In 2018, Southwest Michigan First has been recognized by Best and Brightest Companies to Work For and Outside Magazine as the best place to work in America.

Ron is author/co-author of three books, including the bestsellers Community Capitalism and Uniquely You, and speaks globally on leadership, creating thriving, engaged, multi-generational teams and entrepreneurial cultures. He blogs and podcasts at ronkitchens.com and can be found on Twitter @ronkitchens.

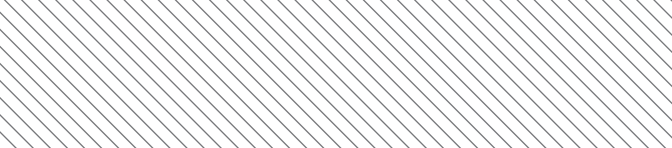


## **CARLA SONES**

Carla Sones serves as the managing director of Consultant Connect. Prior to joining Consultant Connect, she served on the Business Attraction Team for Southwest Michigan First where she became skilled at the art of building relationships with site consultants and managing a portfolio of projects.

Today, Carla serves as the face of Consultant Connect where she brings over fifteen years of experience championing community development. This experience, coupled with her experience as an economic development professional, makes her a force to be reckoned with in the industry. Her combination of knowledge, skill and passion allows her to connect communities and economic developers with the resources they need to succeed. From forging relationships across the world to bringing everyone under one roof she is highly skilled at recognizing and responding to customer needs in order to help find solutions together.

Carla has a particular knack for focusing on work with site consultants representing multiple industries



ranging from small, privately held companies to large, Fortune 100 companies. She continues to draw upon a variety of cross-industry experiences in each sphere of her work.

In addition to managing the day-to-day operations of Consultant Connect and a team of five, she also provides personalized consulting services to economic development professionals that need additional assistance with planning trainings, familiarization tours and other special events. Carla's attention to detail, energy, creativity, leadership and years of experience provides economic development clients with the opportunity to maximize their influence without worrying about the details. Her impact both locally and nationally is unparalleled.

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