



**Rana Florida**

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## **Your Start-Up Life With Governor O'Malley: Never Give Up and Keep Moving Forward**

Posted: 06/14/2012 8:57 am

*Thursdays at the Huffington Post, Rana Florida, CEO of the [Creative Class Group](#), will answer readers' questions about how they can optimize their lives. She will also feature conversations with successful entrepreneurs and thought leaders about how they manage their businesses, careers, and more. Send your questions about work, life, or relationships to [rana@creativeclass.com](mailto:rana@creativeclass.com).*

**Martin O'Malley** (born January 18, 1963) is the 61st Governor of Maryland. A two-term mayor of Baltimore, *Esquire* magazine named him "**The Best Young Mayor in the Country**" and *TIME* magazine listed him among America's "**Top 5 Big City Mayors**." Now in his second term as Governor of Maryland, he has been named **Public Official of the Year** by *Governing Magazine*. His public service both in Baltimore and now Maryland have been dedicated to improving schools, reducing crime, expanding health care and maintaining fiscally responsible budgets in the most challenging times. Married to **Katie O'Malley**, a district court judge, the two have four children. O'Malley is a talented musician, and is still able to find time to occasionally perform with his Celtic rock band, **O'Malley's March**, often for charity events (and recently at the White House) in the D.C. and Baltimore area. Governor O'Malley is often mentioned as a likely presidential nominee in 2016.



*Photo credit: Jay L. Baker*

*Q: What was your first job and what were some important lessons you learned?*

I worked for a dental supply company, called Lockwood. I would work summers in a warehouse, loading in dental supplies off of trucks, and then putting together thousands of items into individual boxes that would then go to incoming classes of dental students. Hot, sweaty, monotonous work that confirmed my desire to go to law school.

*Q: A lot of inspiring leaders have asked for tips on juggling priorities. How do you prioritize when there are so many important initiatives, such as schools and education, crime and safety, the environment and the economy?*

By setting a few key strategic goals with deadlines, and measuring performance openly for all to see. We sit down every other week with the individuals who oversee these goals and find out what's working, and what isn't -- and then we have to have the flexibility to adjust our approach according to what we learn. That process keeps everyone in this \$35 billion a year enterprise focused on our most important priorities.

*Q: How do you motivate your team?*

We motivate people by helping them to see they are a critical part of a much larger mission. For example, the [Department of Public Safety and Corrections](#) must find ways in conjunction with their core mission to simultaneously improve the skills of our people, to improve the health of our Bay, to improve the health of our people. Similarly, [Department of Natural Resources](#) must also find ways to improve public safety, to improve the health of our people, and the skills of our workforce. Creating new jobs in this new economy is all about innovations and collaborations to improve Skills, Security, Health, and Sustainability.

Progress on one front requires progress on all. It's not about the department, it's about connecting the department to the larger mission.

*Q: What motivates you?*

Knowing there is suffering in this world, in my state, in my city, in my community and knowing I can do something to alleviate that suffering is what motivates me. Making progress is what makes me happy.

*Q: How do you get people to rally around your vision for the future?*

By being open and direct about the challenges we face, and the choices we must make to move forward. By broadly sharing information with the citizens of Maryland about the challenges we face and the progress we've made together. And by openly sharing the goals we've set for ourselves through our website and always looking for new ways to maximize citizen engagement.

*Q: What leadership books are you reading now? Any great takeaways?*

I'm not sure if these qualify as 'leadership' books, but I'm reading *Living Buddha, Living Christ* by Thich Nhat Hanh, *Six Frigates* by Ian Toll, and *The Common Good* by David Hollenbach.

I also recently read *The Price of Civilization*, by Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, where he gives us what he calls his seven habits of highly effective government. Some of the themes it touches upon are the importance of setting clear goals for the future, making government work for the people it serves again, and decentralizing silos of information and expertise to more effectively utilize the collected knowledge of our workforce. These are concepts that can be applied at any level of government and will bear fruit for the people we serve.

*Q: Most people think government agencies are large bureaucratic organizations that don't engage in fresh and innovative thinking. How would you address that?*

Without goals, performance measures, common platforms for collaboration, and leadership, they are right. Bill Bratton's latest book, *Collaborate or Perish* makes this point -- "people make it happen, platforms make it possible." I would add that goals tell us where on the horizon "it" is. That's why we created *Citistat* in Baltimore and then adapted that process to bring *StateStat* to Maryland. To promote innovation and better performance, we believe in openly setting goals and measuring performance, broadly sharing info rather than hoarding it, and changing course when necessary to move our graphs in the right direction.

*Q: As a leader in a powerful position, whom do you look to for advice or best practices?*

We consider ourselves card-carrying "kleptocrats," meaning that when we see another good idea in a city, state or country, we steal it. *Citistat* and *StateStat* were borrowed from New York City's *CompStat* initiative, which helped the NYPD drive down crime significantly in the Big Apple. I'm constantly learning something new from mayors, governors, former governors and all those who are doing innovative things to govern in ways that achieve results.

*Q: Often in your position, you have to make decisions on the fly. How can you make such important decisions in a high-pressure rapid fire pace? Are your reactions intuitive?*

The pros and cons of any decision, the risks and rewards, are really things that I depend upon a capable staff and cabinet to develop for me. The final decision is mine, and however crazy my personal schedule, the advice that goes into those decisions comes from smart, well-grounded people, who share a commitment to making decisions based on science, timely data, and the best available evidence.

In addition to being the final arbiter, our team relies on my judgment to manage the politics and the timing -- both of which, I suppose, are intuitive by now: intuition informed by the experience of countless mistakes and failures along with the successes.

*Q: What advice would you give job seekers graduating college?*

I'd tell them not give up, and to remember that it is always easier to get a better job when you have a job. These are changing and challenging times. There is dignity in all work. Your first job will not be your best job. Keep improving your skills, broadening your experience, your knowledge, your ability to think and work with others, and never give up. Damn the headwinds, keep rowing forward.

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