

PENNY A RIPPERGER

pripperger@icloud.com | 701-212-8710 | Dousman, WI

COMMUNICATION & PEOPLE MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP THAT DRIVES RAPID ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH AND IMPACT

Communication expert, strategic and visionary executive, relied upon to tackle the toughest—and very diverse—program management and operational challenges to address organizational and community issues. Rapidly promoted for programmatic excellence: secures major funding and builds programs from the ground up. Personable spokesperson who deftly manages controversies and wins respect of friends and foes alike. Builds collaborative partnerships and drives innovative initiatives while managing multi-million dollar budgets. Leverages excellent leadership and communication skills to drive transformative change and create nationwide impact. Proven record in change management and transforming organizations.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- **Solicited and secured \$1.6M grant funding**, providing Child and Youth Program outreach to military families, assisting with substance abuse and employment issues.
- **Currently manage highly complex budget exceeding \$8 million**, allocating funds to state and federal employees and contractors; consistently maintains balanced budget.
- **Projected to secure \$30M+ of Air Force innovation funds** within three years of implementation.
- **Reduced annual suicide deaths to zero in 2023 and 2024** through Suicide Prevention Program; the first zero since 2015.
- **Attained 100% adoption rate of Wisconsin's inaugural Comprehensive Integrated Prevention Plan (CIPP)** after submission to National Guard Bureau, currently serving as a national rollout template.
- **Led partnership discussions** between Wisconsin National Guard, Papua New Guinea, and Australian military leaders to support international wellness and diversity initiatives.
- **Held highest federal communication position in the state, deftly managed statewide crisis communication**, leading response to COVID, civil disturbances, F-16 fighter jet crash, and election support efforts for the entire state.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

WISCONSIN NATIONAL GUARD | Madison, WI

March 2017 – Present

Director Of Wellness & Resilience, June 2021 - Present

Director of Innovation, December 2021 - Present

Direct five division directors and spearhead a team of 75 professionals supporting continuity of Service Member, family and youth community outreach initiatives.

- **Successfully oversee multiple state-level programs**, including Sexual Prevention & Response, Integrated Primary Prevention, Warrior Resilience & Fitness, Life-Cycle Support Services, Reintegration Programs and Comprehensive Health & Wellness.
- **Spearhead robust Child & Youth Team** that orchestrates 25 youth events a year to include 15 camps and outreach efforts. Implemented drill weekend childcare program, making WI one of the first pilot states nationwide.

- **Selected by Adjutant General to serve as a Wisconsin ambassador** for Women Peace Security, an international DoD initiative that advocates for full participation of women at all levels of peacebuilding, security and decision-making efforts.
- **Lead change management and communication initiatives**, increasing staff morale and efficiency and facilitating uninterrupted service delivery. **Successfully steered organizational restructuring**, doubling size of the division within a year.
- **Built comprehensive health effort from ground up**, leading to 685 counselling sessions, 17 training events, 72 military unit visits and leadership courses.
- **Developed strategic operations plan for Wellness and Resilience Directorate**, ensuring successful rebranding and rollout of new Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce.
- **Established and spearheaded a state innovation office**, providing a platform for service members to submit process improvement/innovation ideas to include reducing administration costs and increasing donation transparency, securing \$30M in innovation funds within first three years of implementation.
- **Cultivated community relations with stakeholders**, fostering partnerships and directly securing grant opportunities with the Air Force and DoD.

State Director of Public Affairs, March 2020 – June 2021

Orchestrated crisis communications strategy, commanding a vast state's external focus to create positive perceptions from external stakeholders.

- Prepared personnel, facing a mob of people through media training to create positive public interactions during civil unrest/protests statewide.
- **Spearheaded daily communications strategy** and implemented social media campaigns, combating misinformation during the 12+ month COVID-19 crisis.
- **Directed and managed messaging for 10,000 service members**, streamlining operations and ensuring program efficiency through excellent service delivery.
- **Designed strategic direction and program management** for communication, media operations and community relation events, **maximizing outreach and awareness**.
[Reason for position change: internal promotion]

Director of Personnel (Human Resources Director), May 2019 – March 2020 Force Support Squadron Commander, August 2017 – December 2021

Recruited and trained new talent, ensuring progressive organizational development. Supervised staff to ensure alignment with organizational goals. Readied troops for deployment.

- **Spearheaded outstanding recruitment and retention; maintained 104% of recruiting and retention goals.** Implemented comprehensive staff development programs that boosted employee growth and development.
- **Achieved 90% program efficiency and high-quality service** while leading oversight of family programs, food service operations, fitness and wellness.
- **Received prestigious Kenneth Disney Award in 2019** for management of food service for 1,500 people on monthly weekends.
- **Led and managed over 100 service members. Supervised base-wide programs**, including education, training, feeding, lodging, and morale welfare and recreation functions. Promoted from Military position and commander to the full-time Director of Personnel.
- **Directed workforce and human resources functions**, enhancing readiness and accountability.
[Reason for position change: lead statewide communication efforts during pandemic crisis]

Chief of Public Affairs, March 2017 – May 2019

Managed Wisconsin Air National Guard communication team with diverse specialties. Represent unit to media and shape stories favorably. Organized and facilitated public speaking events.

- Involved with organizing and planning in devising **internal and external communication strategies**, optimizing public engagement and media coverage.
- Created robust tour program and public awareness events.
- **Secured F-35 fighter mission, leading WI National Guard in competition with other states.** Managed Environmental Impact Statements. Diplomatically dealt with negativity in community's perception of military and fierce opposition to F-35 jets.

[Reason for position change: promotion to lieutenant colonel, serve as HR leader in organization.]

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

CORELINK ADMIN SOLUTIONS | Communication & Change Management Director (2013 – 2016)

- Internal communication position within an IT health insurance, led massive change management efforts and culture change initiatives

FARGO VA HEALTHCARE FACILITY | Communications Specialist (2010 – 2013)

- Implemented innovative healthcare communication technology to include patient secure messaging and online tools to meet healthcare needs, responsible for website and social media

North Dakota Air National Guard | Public Affairs Officer (2006 – 2010)

- Led statewide communication efforts and internal change management strategies during mission change from a fighter mission to unmanned aircraft, led crisis communications during numerous natural disasters within state

MICROSOFT BUSINESS SOLUTIONS | Services Marketing Specialist (

- Worked directly with sales teams to assist with marketing services to enhance sales processes

EDUCATION & CERTIFICATION

- University of Mary, Fargo, ND, **Master's Degree**, Strategic Leadership | December 2013
- North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, **Bachelor's Degree**, Business Admin | December 2002
- Defense Information School, Fort Meade, MD, **Military Public Affairs Certification** | 2007
- Air War College & Air Command & Staff College, **Professional Leadership Training**, ranks of Lieutenant colonel and colonel
- Community College of the Air Force, **Associate's Degree** – Hotel, Restaurant & Fitness Management
- **Prosci Change Management Certification** | August 2014

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

- **2022 Meritorious Service Medal/Officer Rating:** Recognized for outstanding leadership for five years; rated as #2 squadron commander
- **2019 Kenneth Disney Award:** Recognized for exceptional customer service in entire Air National Guard (first in unit's history) & awarded Work Center of the Year
- **2017 Meritorious Service Medal:** For outstanding service as a Public Affairs Officer
- **2014 Traveled to Ghana** to assist with the country's disaster preparedness plans
- **2011 Recognized as one of North Dakota's Top 40 under 40 professionals**
- **2012 Radio Co-Host of the Veteran's Hour:** Co-hosted radio show
- **2009 YWCA Woman of the Year:** Communications Category
- **2008 Military Journalist of the Year:** Third place award from National Guard Bureau, V.A.