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Let new manager do so

The Polk County Board of Supervisors has hired a new county manager. Now, let him manage.

Polk County does not have a good track record on this subject. The supervisors gave the idea a try a few years ago, hiring the first county manager, but they later fired her and abolished the position. Many duties of a county manager were assumed by the board's staff director, but some supervisors still think they need to have their fingers in all county operations. Michael Freilinger's departure for a new job in Florida gave the supervisors the opportunity to start over with the clear intent of re-establishing an office of county manager to provide professional, non-partisan, management.

It will work, however, only if the partisan board is willing to listen to advice from an independent professional who oversees day-to-day operations. The board's decision last week to hire **Ronald Olson** for the job is a sign it is serious about doing that.

A graduate of Brigham Young University with a bachelor's in business management and political science and a master's in public administration, Olson has 30 years of experience in city management, with an emphasis on government finance. His current job is as deputy city manager in Arlington, Texas. He is certified by the International City Management Association, a group with high ethical principles.

Others interviewed for the job were William Vaughn, a 30-year veteran of the Polk County Sheriff's office who has been working as interim county manager, and Patrick Bloomingdale, assistant county administrator of Douglas County, Neb. The supervisors could have defended choosing any of the three. The board's choice of Olson suggests the supervisors want to bring strong management to the county with an administrator who can hit the ground running.

While professional management is a tradition in city governments, that's not so with counties. That's in part because much of county government is run not by the board of supervisors but by a row of officers - the sheriff, treasurer, auditor, attorney and recorder - who are also independently elected. Still, county government in an urban area such as greater Des Moines needs the skills and experience of a professional administrator to give advice and guidance to all county officers.

It appears the supervisors have found the person for the job. Now, it should let him do that job.