

# BECOMING A MULTI-SECTOR STEWARD



Building Bridges  
Breaking Barriers  
Planting Seeds

BECKY MORGAN



Dear Colleagues,

In our divided times, stewards are needed more than ever.

By “stewards,” I mean people who care about their regions as a whole and work with a marvelous blend of courage, conviction, and skills. Stewards are “get-it-done collaborators” with an ability to move beyond easy solutions and feel-good speeches to get down to specific and measurable action. Such work is always difficult and sometimes downright messy.

My career has been in the public sector as a school board member, a county supervisor, and state senator. I’ve also been fortunate to have spent time in the business and nonprofit sectors. Through trial and error, I’ve gained experience in getting people to work together for the benefit of their broader communities. I’ve come to understand that stewardship involves three core elements — building bridges, breaking barriers and planting seeds — which are the three topics I outline here. I’m including several examples of each from various points in my career. Some of these experiences stretch back a number of years, but I think you’ll see that often the same problems get recycled: although times have changed, the problems and the principles remain surprisingly similar. We’ve made progress, but not nearly enough. To move forward in collaboration will continue to take humility, planning and effort.

I’m hoping that this booklet will further thought-provoking conversations with those around you. Maybe you’ll get an idea or two that will advance your work on behalf of your region and your state. Your generation has inherited the state’s most challenging problems, and most of them are interconnected. This is why it’s useful to learn how to employ the triple bottom line — Economy, Environment, and Equity — as a framework for creating lasting change, how to act inclusively, and how to navigate the many hard tradeoffs that come with this work so that your region can thrive.

This work has never been easy, but after decades of a commitment to regional stewardship, I assure you that it’s worth the effort.

Onward!

Becky Morgan

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# BUILDING BRIDGES

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## HOW DO YOU START BUILDING BRIDGES FOR SOLUTIONS?

Bridge-building always starts with knowing your audience: both your internal audience of collaborators and your external audience—the broader community. In the early 1990s, business leaders in Silicon Valley joined together to form what became Joint Venture: Silicon Valley. It was an early regional effort in multi-sector work: getting business, government, education and union leaders together to jointly plan for and take action on the most pressing problems of the time. We were intentional about recruiting board members from across sector, racial and generation lines. We were equally intentional about selecting board members who were able to work collaboratively for solutions.

Together, we conducted surveys and held discussions. As a result, 72 community-generated ideas were honed down to 15 initiatives. Given “improving education” was a top priority, we brought resources to the schools and convinced elementary, middle and high school leaders to work together on what we called “vertical slices”: K-12 curriculum pathways by subject matter. Other successful initiatives included getting 27 cities to agree to streamline and harmonize their regulations, bringing the local trade association into the partnership with federal agencies,

setting up a business incubator to accelerate the formation of new companies, and introducing environmental solutions into schools and communities. It was a busy time!

Curiosity is another part of the bridge-building mindset. During my county supervisor days, the worst advice I ever got was from another supervisor: “You shouldn’t ask questions that you don’t already know the answer to.” I disagree! What’s the purpose of meeting if you already know the answers? When asking questions, I paid attention if someone was not answering with facts, was rambling, or had nervous body language. All of these were signals that a person might be avoiding honest answers. I also encouraged my staff to stay curious, listen well, and talk with me openly about what they were hearing from constituents.

Bridge-building continues with doing your homework. I am a big fan of having meeting agendas well in advance so staff could prepare me with the information or the perspective that I need to make decisions. I also spent a great deal of time asking questions of those “on the ground,” closest to the issue. At various points in my career, this meant visiting classrooms, talking to people at the county jail, polling business leaders or interviewing environmental experts. Likewise, staying up to speed on what regional leaders are saying is important. For example, setting up a business advisory committee when I was a senator helped me better understand the importance of research and development (R&D) for Silicon Valley, and made me a better advocate for R&D tax credits when in the state legislature.

A breadth of perspectives is important for generating support and buy-in, too. When Governor Deukmejian wanted to close the rail service between San Jose and San Francisco, I recognized that the stakes were very high for my constituents and we needed to act decisively to save CalTrain. Here are the bridge-building steps we used to get to a solution that worked for everyone and saved the train service:

- 1. Clearly identify the need.** Be very specific about what could be lost. We had a growing region, expensive real es-

tate, an existing transportation system that—once gone—couldn't be replaced. The only possible alternative if those tracks were lost would have been to fill the Bay, and I wasn't going to support starting all over again or damaging a resource as valuable as the San Francisco Bay.

- 2. Reach out to experts of all kinds.** For this project, we enlisted content experts who knew transit; elected officials in all three counties affected; Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, who leveraged his connections to get us the needed support, and a lawyer.
- 3. Think expansively about solutions.** We set up a special Joint Powers Authority (JPA) since this was a multi-county effort. While this was not a multi-sector solution, it did involve three levels of California government: local, legislative and gubernatorial. It also required a bridge be built between Republicans and Democrats.
- 4. Run processes simultaneously.** This requires good juggling skills, since timelines on some processes don't match up. For this project, that meant negotiating with Southern Pacific on buying the right-of-way and developing a budget that could be drafted into a joint powers agreement (JPA), negotiating with legislators for support, working with a lawyer to draft the JPA and, at the end, generating the necessary buy-in from county supervisors before going to the legislature for approval.
- 5. Focus—and keep re-focusing—on facts to bring consensus.** In June 2025, with its new electric trains, Caltrain served over one million rides, instead of those same people sitting in traffic and contributing to more air pollution. Concentrating on consequences for both people and the planet can rally the votes for approval, much as I had to do with legislators. Happily, Caltrain has been a regional transit solution for decades since.

The issues are going to change, so being knowledgeable on the issues today doesn't mean you are necessarily going to be knowledgeable tomorrow. When I was in Sacramento, Assemblymember (later US Congressman) Jackie Speier and I were often the last ones out of the garage because we were prepping for the next day. I've always believed that opportunities come to those who are the most prepared. I do, however, understand today's challenge of politics.

— Reflection Questions —

- What steps can you take to gather information from a diversity of people and perspectives?
- Do you typically review agendas well in advance of meetings in order to prepare well?
- What information are you hearing that suggests a new direction is needed?

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## WHAT'S THE SECRET TO CRAFTING THE BEST REGIONAL SOLUTIONS?

The bottom line is that all sectors are important. Balancing the business, civic/government, education, union, and nonprofit perspectives helps build the bridges that will lead to better overall solutions. Many people who choose public service are interested in maintaining the status quo, and therefore are not the most entrepreneurial in their thinking. Former secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, founder of Common Cause, and Stanford professor John Gardner advised me to always keep the business sector engaged when doing regional work because they have a bias

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for action (it also helps business people understand that there is more to business and regional success than making money alone). Broader perspectives on what's best for the whole community from an equity and an environmental standpoint often come from the nonprofit and civic sectors. The often-forgotten secret sauce is having someone in the middle: a neutral party that listens, convenes, holds all the perspectives together and drives the group to joint action. This "backbone" or facilitator function is essential. Joint Venture: Silicon Valley served as that backbone during my time. Members of the California Stewardship Network and other experienced conveners in your region can play this role.

Backbone organizations are able to work effectively by bringing everyone together to prioritize and coordinate important tasks at a regional level. Equally important to multi-sector input is having people who have a selfless "whole community" perspective and will ensure that the hard conversations about trade-offs happen fairly, with facts and evidence behind them.

Upon learning about the challenges that city leaders have doing cross-jurisdictional work because of the competitive nature of zoning and financing, I hired one such "whole community" person years ago: Connie Martinez.

Building codes are updated every three years at the state level. If you don't keep them updated at the local level, the system breaks down and you've just drawn out by months (or more) the length of any given building project. Connie was effective in bringing 27 cities together to align the building codes and accelerate both housing and corporate construction. She was equally masterful in navigating a lot of tension between cities that had sales tax revenue from auto dealerships and the ones who didn't. A neutral, experienced facilitator, she brought about agreements that allowed all parties to have input in the design of a solution that could work for them.

— Reflection Questions —

- Which sector’s representatives most often get left out of conversations in your region?
- How can you ensure that they are included and that their voices are heard?
- Who in your region is known for bringing together disparate groups?

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**WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT MOVING FORWARD AUDA-  
CIOUS PROJECTS, WHAT LESSONS FROM THE “SCHOOL OF  
HARD KNOCKS” CAN YOU PASS ALONG?**

Above all, develop patience. It takes a long time to learn about the complexities of some projects. Knowing how decisions are made is important, as is developing trusted relationships. Finding champions of what you’re trying to do is crucial.

During my first month in the Senate, the Trust for Public Land brought me a plan. They wanted to convert old coastal ranchland into a combination of parks, agricultural land and a conference center. This made sense for the people I represented. There was no conference center for the 70 coastal miles between Santa Cruz and San Francisco, and they’d identified a developer who had done a nice job on an eco-conference center in Arizona. I thought it was valuable to preserve park land. As a farmer’s daughter, I also cared about saving farmland, so it seemed like a win-win. However, multiple jurisdictions needed to approve this proj-

ect, including the Parks and Recreation department, the city, the county and even the Coastal Commission. Ultimately, despite our best efforts in outreach, this triple bottom line project was blocked by a few strong objectors in the environmental community. Meanwhile, the developer went bankrupt. In hindsight, I've wondered what additional conversations we could have had to get to success on this. I was in my first year as a senator. Would it have made a difference if I'd called on more experienced legislators? My lesson: not all hard-fought projects succeed.

Collaboration across sectors is a slow, time-consuming process. One size does not fit all. That's why building flexibility into solutions is important, whether those solutions are local or legislative. At the state level, the tension is often between the perceived need and desire for local control. You can't ignore that tension—you have to work with it and through it.

### — Reflection Questions —

- Who are the specific allies you need to call in to gain broader support?
- Who will be in opposition?
- Are there possible compromises?

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## HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT GOOD SOLUTIONS HAVE STAYING POWER?

First, throwing money at ideas isn't a complete solution. One of the pilot programs that I initiated as a state senator in the 1980s was to set up

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ten school districts with computers (this seemed groundbreaking at the time!). However, we later found out that the computers at three of the schools sat in boxes, unopened. Despite strong support, we discovered the schools lacked the technicians who could set up the systems and get them working! My takeaway from this was that you need leadership in place at all levels and you need to budget the adequate resources not only for launching ideas, but for implementation and for follow up. On my end, it would have been good to have had enough staff to inquire about whether the computers were being used, and then follow up with the superintendents.

Most improvements will eventually trigger new challenges. For example, economic growth brings more pressure on traffic and transportation, housing and healthcare. Thinking about issues regionally and holistically will benefit those in the future who will inherit those challenges. Throughout my career as an elected official and then later, as CEO of the newly-formed Joint Venture: Silicon Valley, I worked hard to consider all of the angles of a challenge and to identify the larger systemic forces that were holding the problem in place. I made decisions only after thoroughly examining current and future financial, logistical, and legislative impacts.

— Reflection Questions —

- What are the resources needed to give your good idea staying power?
- Which financial, logistical and (if necessary) legislative resources might you need to draw on to keep this on track over time?
- How can you develop ongoing champions of the solutions you wish to build?

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# BREAKING BARRIERS

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## **HOW DO YOU GET DISPARATE GROUPS TO COME TOGETHER FOR SOLUTIONS?**

Working through differences isn't a luxury; it's a necessity for better solutions. Be a consensus builder by starting with areas of agreement among groups and people with very different viewpoints. I value the opinions of people who are very different from me because I've seen how it helps me understand all sides of an issue and avoid being stuck in an "echo chamber." When people don't agree with me, I don't argue. Instead, I ask, "Why?"

When issues are complex or contentious, come to meetings prepared with evidence that's both qualitative and quantitative. At a Senate meeting on childcare centers, one childcare operator commented, "The State comes out to inspect and they're more interested in a chip on the toilet seat than the curriculum we're teaching." This person's testimony caused me to take a deep look at the curriculum used to teach our children. When I wanted to break that regulatory barrier and focus attention on early childhood legislation, I presented facts that put childhood issues into a larger societal context, including fiscal details. I kept reinforcing the respected research findings that every dollar invested in young children represented a \$7 savings down the line in the medical, justice and educa-

tion systems. Using relevant facts and evidence caused decision-makers to pay attention.

Unite people by having a reputation for integrity. Growing up in a small town, if I misbehaved, some neighbor would tell my mother. Keeping this “small town” lens on accountability has helped me commit to transparency and honesty throughout my life. Throughout my career, I’ve had to make some tough decisions about cutting programs, closing schools and balancing budgets. I’ve often wrestled with feeling like I was being asked to “play God” with people’s lives. When you’re in your neighborhood and running into people in the supermarket who are displeased with your decisions, this can be challenging. However, if you are known for being someone whose word is consistent, and someone who thinks logically and fairly about issues, even dissenters may accept that you truly have the greater good in mind.

– Reflection Questions –

- What steps could you take to improve your consensus-building skills?
- Which of these needs extra emphasis in your work: the “soft skill” of relationship building, or the “hard skill” of data analysis?
- Which factors contribute most to a reputation for integrity?

## WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON BREAKING GENDER BARRIERS?

Learn how to advocate for yourself. I was only the fourth woman ever elected to the California Senate, so there were some big gender barriers to break. A lobbyist speaking to the Energy and Public Utilities committee I sat on continued to address us as “Gentlemen of the Committee.” After the third such reference, I said, “Sir, are you so sure of your votes on this committee that you don’t need mine?” The lobbyist chose his words carefully after that!

In the 1980s, my legislation was not the only thing that got me national press—the media was shocked that I was the first woman to wear a pantsuit on the Senate floor. Frankly, I did not realize that I was breaking a barrier, but have been appreciated for doing so. Sadly, women’s wardrobes often still get more attention than their accomplishments, but the biggest barrier for women in general is access to information. If you’re a woman, think about what you need to know, and then find out where to get that information. Create your own informal networks and even new power centers, if necessary. I helped start a bi-partisan Women’s Caucus in the legislature. Be willing to share your experience with other women who are a couple of steps behind you, career-wise.

It’s important to push back in a way that gets noticed if you feel you’re being disrespected because of your gender. We held a press conference to announce that I was becoming the CEO of Joint Venture Silicon Valley. I talked about my experience in elected office and my knowledge of the business community. Afterward, three female reporters came up and asked, “Do you think you got the job because of your husband?” I asked, “Are you at all familiar with what I’ve done in my life? Take a look at my record.” Times may have changed, and I hope that something like this wouldn’t happen today, but I fear there are still some barriers to equality that need to be broken.

Finally, think about what your title communicates. The board of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley was adamant about giving me the title of Presi-

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dent/CEO instead of Executive Director because they felt it lent credibility. When we started our family foundation, the title I felt best summed up what I wanted to do was “Community Catalyst,” so that’s what was printed on my business cards for a while. However, I changed it to President because I realized that it communicated a certain level of credibility and authority in circles that I hoped to influence.

— Reflection Questions —

- If you’re a man, what can you stop, start, or continue doing to create an atmosphere where women thrive and succeed?
- If you’re a woman, in what contexts do you see gender barriers appearing most often?
- What can you do to create new or different approaches to power structures?

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## HOW DO YOU INFLUENCE FROM A NON-MAJORITY POSITION?

In the 1980s, I was in a bind being a Republican and fiscally conservative in a Senate that was neither. I was also seen as pro-big business because of my husband’s career. Rather than overemphasizing any particular loyalty, I decided to be strong on issue areas. This helped others see beyond labels, which made my super-minority status (woman, moderate, Republican) less of an issue.

Occasionally, I was willing to take on my own party. The governor, with whom I shared party affiliation, disagreed with the effort to save Caltrain.

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He was a “roads man,” and didn’t think the state should get involved in “transit.” However, this was an important issue for my region, so I stood up to him and made the case for my constituents. On another occasion, I voted my conscience and supported legislation for protection of natural resources and against fossil fuel consumption. This is admittedly more difficult in today’s hyper-polarized political climate, but if you’re widely regarded as an independent thinker, it’s easier to work across the aisle. Assemblymember John Vasconcellos was a liberal Democrat and I was a moderate Republican, but I welcomed his forward thinking and he appreciated my integrity and openness to ideas. We ended up being most unusual allies. I hope this could happen today.

Break through uncomfortable barriers by finding non-career ways to get to know people of differing opinions. When I was a senator, my ability to ski and play tennis enabled me to get to know all sorts of people across the political spectrum. This made it easier to get a hearing on my projects and made me a more effective advocate.

Be willing to champion others’ good ideas. Long before cell phones were around, there was no way to get help if your car broke down on the freeway. One senator from San Diego had told me about a pilot in his area where they’d installed emergency call boxes on the roads, and it seemed like a good statewide solution to prevent stranded motorists. After confirming that he didn’t want to carry similar legislation for the state, I did. I wanted to make sure that we had a way of paying for it, so I advocated for a small fee on driver’s licenses that would cover it. We addressed the issue of keeping the boxes working by moving them from battery-operated to solar-operated. Some of my friends referred to these as “Becky boxes,” but it was really taking someone else’s good idea and scaling it. With the advent of cell phones, even a good idea had a short life, but it’s still advisable to look for ideas everywhere and adapt those that fit the current situation.

– Reflection Questions –

- Are you willing to be a change agent, even if it means crossing ideological lines to support smart solutions?
- Why or why not? How might a commitment to partisanship or a certain ideology limit your effectiveness as a change agent?
- From where could you “source” and integrate new ideas?

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## HOW DO YOU REDUCE BARRIERS AT TIMES OF CRISIS?

In crisis situations, there is often no playbook that you can use. In the wake of a tragedy, leaders need be seen as dealing with the problem, even though it probably won't happen in the same way again. When I was a county supervisor, we were faced with a tragic shooting in the social services department. Authorities confirmed that the chances of another shooting happening in the exact same place in the same manner were slim to none. However, we were still obliged to meet the needs right in front of us, and some of the most important were supporting our employees and helping the public feel safe. So, we put in high-grade locks and instituted security cards. Unfortunately, such crises still take place, and additional solutions are still needed.

As a school board member, I had to vote to close beloved neighborhood schools because of enrollment that had declined from 16,000 students to 8,000. This was one of the most emotional decisions I had to make in public service. Neighbors became angry. I kept channels of communication open by regularly outlining plans, being clear about details as they

changed. This lowered people's resistance to change and kept two-way channels of communication open. Communicate regularly. Talk with—not at—both supporters and the opposition. Be patient!

In crises—big or small—choose the right people to help you problem-solve. Look for open-minded people who have experience breaking barriers. Look for people who have overcome obstacles and pulled themselves out of tough circumstances, since they know how to be resilient.

— Reflection Questions —

- What type of crises are you prepared for?
- How will you learn rapidly and communicate what you know to others?
- To manage through a crisis effectively, what skills and experiences are essential in the staff or consultants you're bringing to your team?

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# PLANTING SEEDS

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## **WHAT ROLE CAN EMERGING REGIONAL STEWARD LEADERS PLAY?**

Just plunge in, but be ready to ask for help. I didn't have official mentors, but each of my experiences as a campaign volunteer for an elected official, a banking executive, PTA president, school board member, county supervisor and then state senator built on my knowledge of the ever larger community. Building a pyramid of experiences is good preparation for success.

Be an astute observer of how things function. I learned what's required to get the word out, as well as how to organize precincts, how to create structures so that people work together well, and how to hire qualified people. Each experience prepared me for what I needed to know to be ready for the next opportunity.

Hopefully, having a strong work ethic and a commitment to excellence will get you noticed. Be intentional about capturing the value of every situation and every stage of life. Taking even small jobs seriously and doing an excellent job at each level allows you to get the support of people who could be helpful later on.

Set measurable goals for what you want to accomplish. Show the value of the work and the results. It helps recruit others to this important work, and helps with fundraising.

Seek out opportunities to meet people. Be active in your community. As your network expands and matures, you'll be able to tap a ready source of partners when you need them.

### – Reflection Questions –

- Which life experiences do you see as the “seeds” of your current career?
- Are you afraid to start or try something new?
- If you were to make a “sum total” of your life experiences so far, which leadership roles and what type of skills are you uniquely prepared for?
- What strategies do you have for intentionally maintaining and growing your network?

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## WHAT MINDSET SHOULD YOU BRING TO REGION-BUILDING?

I've always looked at myself not as a radical point person, but as more of a facilitator, an implementer and a networker. There's so much to be done, and who better than you to do it? Dreamers and strategists are useful to regional stewardship. However, I suggest that to succeed, you need to spend 10% of the time planning and 90% of the time implementing.

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As you face a challenge, think of the Cherokee parable: in a storm, be a buffalo who turns its head into the storm rather than a cow who turns tail to the storm and gets attacked by the wolves.

I think of myself as a farmer. There's a saying in farming that the grass grows greener where the farmer treads. This isn't micro-managing; it's being attentive to the people, the mission, the culture.

Planting seeds takes purpose, preparation, and patience – just as in a garden. Give ideas a chance to grow. Fertilize and nurture them. Be patient and watch for progress. Nothing's worse than pulling up a carrot to see if it's growing. It usually kills it.

The idea of giving back is big for me. Show up for your community. Be visible and lead by example. Actively look for possibilities to move beyond griping about what's wrong and gather allies to get things done. Plant seeds that have the possibility of growing into wonderful improvements in the region.

Always look for opportunities to replicate yourself and your ideas. Growing up on a farm, it was always possible to see the work that needed to be done. Today, technology has created different kinds of work. Suburban and urban kids don't see the tangibles on a daily basis, so I don't think the possibility of what can be done is as clear to them. We do well if we show younger generations the possibilities of what can happen with time, patience and hard work. Bringing along the next generation in the work you do will ensure that your work is long-lasting.

### Reflection Questions

- Can you think of situations where your region could be improved if two leaders or organizations were working more closely together?
- What seeds that you've planted recently need patience and time to grow?
- How might you invest in inspiring the next generation of regional leaders?

## About Becky Morgan



Becky Morgan served in the California Senate from 1984 to 1993. Her areas of focus were education, transportation, and taxation. She is best known for carrying the legislation that saved Caltrain, the San Francisco peninsula commuter train, from being closed down. Her focus on early childhood continues.

Becky is currently President of the Morgan Charitable Foundation, founded in 1993. The foundation's grant recipients work in the areas of youth programs, education enhancement, the environment and preservation, and stewardship of regions and organizations. She is the founder of California Stewardship Network, a consortium of corporate, public and civic members in regions throughout California developing solutions to pressing economic, environmental and community challenges.

Becky and her husband Jim Morgan are co-founders of the Northern Sierra Partnership, dedicated to conserving bio-diverse lands, water and resources in California. She is both a founder and a passionate supporter of Shine Together, a California nonprofit helping young, underserved mothers and their children become educated, self-sufficient, and valued members of society. Becky is also the former President and CEO of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley (1993-1998).

Prior to the California Senate, Becky served in elected office on the Palo Alto Board of Education (1973-78), the Santa Clara Board of Supervisors and the Santa Clara County Transit District (1981-84). She had been a teacher and a bank officer with Bank of America. Becky has a BS from Cornell University and a MBA from Stanford University. She is married to the former CEO of Applied Materials, Jim Morgan, and has two adult children, five grandchildren, and a great grandson.



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