

As former Mayor Charles Royer, the man who appointed her, tells it, Anderson has "completely turned around" Seattle Center, and hasn't been afraid of a little confrontation: "Virginia doesn't suffer fools gladly, but she also knows how to negotiate."

A public servant who reports directly to the mayor, Anderson presides over 300 full-time employees and 500 more part-timers, and a budget of \$35 million. She has a formidable mind that stores up every imaginable statistic, and when she speaks, the phrases pour out of her as if she had been born on a speaker's rostrum — no "ums," "ers" or "you-knows."

She faced a Seattle Center in disarray and a demoralized, angry staff when she arrived in 1988. Anderson addressed what she calls "terrible union and racial relations" among staffers with her open-door policy, frequent meetings, disciplining of "unacceptable behavior" and straight talk. (One feud ended when Anderson took two directors out and told them, "I don't care about your history. This is over by Monday.")

Anderson doesn't negotiate by confrontation; neither is she a consensus-seeker.

"I'm comfortable without consensus," she says firmly.

"A few days ago, I got an e-mail that was being circulated regarding recommendations I had made about the monorail, asking 'What kind of crazy nincompoop would say that?' I responded, 'I am that nincompoop. And sometimes I am wrong; when I am, I admit it. But I am the director. If you are the director, you can do something different.' I try to respect all people, but I don't always agree with them."

Now Anderson has worked with four different mayors. None has wanted to replace her at this highly visible post.

"I think that speaks well for her people skills," says Royer. "She came in at a difficult time for the Center, and developed such a passion for the place."

That word "passion" comes up regularly when people talk about Virginia Anderson.

Norm Rice, who followed Royer as mayor, calls Anderson "just one consummate pro. I've never seen anyone so committed to the love and majesty of the Seattle Center, or anyone who has stayed on task so remarkably. She's a true, passionate visionary, and she should be treasured by this city."