Caught Between the Dog and the Fire Plug

or How to Survive Public Service

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Working with Politicians

Words of Wisdom

• You are never equal to legislative committee members.
• You are expected to tolerate the abuse and you must put up with it.
• Stay calm and in control of yourself.
• Show respect.
• Never appear arrogant.
more words of wisdom….

- NEVER give your personal opinion in public or in private.
- This will immediately undercut your agency, your board, and your job!
- Politicians become masters of trade-offs, at swapping, at making deals, and at compromise.
WHY Do They Do? What They Do?

- Need to impress their voters and their pleaders for special treatment.
- Looking for change and new accommodations.
- Prefer to sweep out the old and introduce something entirely new.
- Are performing for other politicians.
- They want to make a difference.
Public Servants Vs. Politicians

- Motivation
- Needs
- Target Audiences
- Agendas
- Balance is needed between the two camps.
Working with the Press

• Work closely with them.
• Always return calls from reporters.
• “go on background” and “off the record”
• Show your confidence -- advise a report about who holds another view on the subject.
• “quote conscious”

State cuts lone agent devoted to Bexar agriculture
By John W. Gonzalez – Express News
Published 10:18 pm, Friday, August 13, 2010
• You will be misquoted – rarely intentional.
• Know if the media are present when you are making a speech or giving a lecture.
• Don’t let the people interviewing you control the interview.
• Politicians pay more attention to the print media than TV (clipping service)
Learning from your Boss

To want to be a leader is a death-denying and death-defying obsession.

-- Kenneth Ashworth
## Dealing with Unpleasant and Difficult People

### Tapes difficult people play

- See people as manipulable instruments.
- They lack self-confidence.
- They see power as a *means* to leadership.
- They are not in error and are not doing anything wrong.
- Suffer from a deficit of attention.

### Action to take

A. Try to change the person

B. Make a record to dismiss such a person

C. Establish a standing grievance committee
Taking the initiative, or risk taking inside government

You can’t cross a great canyon in two small jumps    - David Lloyd George

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Taking the initiative...

• **Opportunism:** an effective approach to promote government programs and policies

• *How to create opportunities?*

Do not propose policy change as your personal idea

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”

Build opposition to an existing condition

This allows scope for modifications to policies
How to create opportunities...

Watch out for opportunities

• Could be in small things, not necessarily big nation shaking policies

• Be innovative and create new program

• Entrepreneurship

• Be quick to respond with short and convincing briefing memos

• Practice patience and perseverance
Taking the initiative...

• Alice Roosevelt Longworth’s philosophy on policy making:
  ‘Empty what’s full, fill what’s empty, and scratch where it itches’

• Primary responsibility of public servant:
  ‘Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable’
The kinds of pressures and influences used on you

Let a judge take but one bribe, but once execute a justice purchased, and all his words and actions forever after may justly be suspected, though never so uprightly done or spoke.

- Sir Edward Coke
Kinds of pressures and influences used

How is one influenced?

• Through threats

• Through bribery (wealth)

• Through Sexual favors (pleasure)

• Through bestowing of fame, honor, and prestige
Kinds of pressures and influences used

Target of Persuasion

• Being coerced into meeting and agreeing in general
• By agreeing to a general proposal, it is extrapolated to a specific proposal
• By bypassing other staff members’ analyses
  - “When the emperor is on the field, all the generals become privates.” *Old military saying*
Tips To Overcome Getting Compromised

• Acknowledge your temptations and weaknesses
• Take warning from that knowledge
• Keep yourself and personal needs out of the picture
• Be governed by your social values
• Avoid being misconstrued
  — “Yes, yes, yes by Franklin doesn’t mean he agrees. It only means that he is listening.” Eleanor Roosevelt to Winston Churchill
Relations with a governing board

To serve the public faithfully, and at the same time please it entirely is impracticable.

- Benjamin Franklin proverb
Relations with a governing board

Author’s advice:

• Talk directly to the person who has done research on the topic
• Promote an environment of open communication
• Start out like you can hold out, but also be ready to negotiate, compromise, and accept a modified solution
• When you win, don’t gloat
• Learn to back off and lose graciously if needed
Relations with a governing board

How to maintain relations with a governing board:

• Being able to take a position on every issue being faced
• Meet the expectations of the board & staff members
• Monitor the relations of your staff with the board, while avoiding “bottleneck control”
More on governing boards

If I agree with you, it’s administration, if I disagree, it’s policy

- A board member’s comment
Tips on working with governing boards

• Open doors of communication
• Take the extra effort of meeting new members
• First goal is to gain the trust of the new board members
• Be cautious of “turkeys” and people who take personal credit for actions of the board
Tips on working with governing boards

• Work with chair to organize board into several committees
• Create a strong and active advisory committee
• Understand that board members are always “more equal than you”
• Maintain a “passion for anonymity”
Tips on working with governing boards

• Be cautious about interjecting jokes & avoid sarcasm
• Never say more than you know
• Stay out of discussions until asked for an opinion or additional information

West Texas State University story: Board defends agency head
Bona fide bureaucratic behavior

People are tired of dealing with multiple bureaucracies. They want to deal with one bureaucracy. - Florida legislator

www.cartoonstock.com

cumberlandpost.blogspot.com
Bureaucratic Behaviors

AVOID

• Tendency to not respond to changes proposed by new young employees
• Tendency to protect status quo, and being bound by established procedures
• Propensity to propagate rules and regulations, and get carried away with jargon
• Propensity to misuse power or position
• Giving into “pleaders” and “creeping incrementalism” and “creative foot dragging”
Walking with kings

People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don’t believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for circumstances they want, and, if they can’t find them, they make them.

- George Bernard Shaw
Who can walk with kings?

• Knowledgeable far beyond their area of expertise
• Comfortable associating with people in power
• Used to making decisions
• Grasps situations rapidly
• Who seeks advice when needed
• With an eye on the big picture, and also capable of focusing on the issue at hand
Who can walk with kings?

• High aspirations and ambitions
• Effective Communication (oration and writing)
• Reading newspapers, journals, biographies, history, social sciences, and humanities
• Plan and work to fulfill expectations linked with next higher position
• Visualize how things are connected & think global
• Ability to envision investment opportunities for future growth
Delegating, or Working for Your Subordinates

Dear Kim,

I must disabuse you of a commonly held idea, that when you get to be boss everybody under you works for you. You will get far more done if you figure out a way to work for them.
Ethics & Morality in Public Service

• Experiencing self-repugnance can have a positive outcome. One of two things will happen to you.
  – You can become neurotic
  – You can make atonement for your sins against yourself and others
Ethics continued...

• “intrinsic conscience, a court of ultimate appeal for the determination of good and bad, of right and wrong.” - Maslow
Ethics continued...

• People live together most productively and harmoniously if four conditions are met.
  – First, if they have the opportunity and freedom to participate and be heard in setting the goals and purposes of their society.
  – Second, if they have the opportunity to share in the country’s productive capacity and to participate in the actions and work of their society.
  – Third, if they may share reasonably equitably in the benefits of their society.
  – Fourth, if they are free from oppression and unnecessary constraints on their mobility, thoughts, and other liberties.
Ethics continued...

• So if all else fails, remember in performing your public duties that disobedience and insubordination in a democratic government do, on occasion, have their place.
A Few Thoughts on Leadership

• There is no prescription for leading.

• There are only skills and techniques you can observe, study, and practice.
Traits of leaders

• More effective leaders decide very early in the process of dealing with a crisis about how they will resolve the issue.
• Less effective leaders want to gather and study all the facts before deciding what to do and taking action.
• Top leaders decide what to do, then consider the consequences.
• They often go with their instincts: they will make a decision based on rudimentary information and do not wait for careful analysis.
A paradox of leadership

• You must decide and you must direct, but you must also listen and take advice. You must not be deciding and directing when you ought to be listening and taking advice. And more importantly, you should not be listening and taking advice when you need to be deciding and directing.
Characteristics of leaders

• First, leaders care about their people.

• Second, leaders protect their people.

• Third, leaders have a lot of energy and they expend it in specific ways.
A Summing Up

• Sensitivity is a key element for future success.

• Disappointment and defeats bring growth and understanding.

• One final terrifying thought: You will hold a unique position, along with a small handful of other leaders out of all the population, to make a difference in how events play out.