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# Communicating Commitment: Public Administration as a Calling

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## Abstract

*Skepticism of government is an old, even honored American tradition. However the current hostility to government and politics is becoming overwhelming, ranging from the merely apathetic to the outright hostile. Holzer argues that by presenting evidence of public service as a "calling," undergirded by commitment and competency, we can reverse the negative, distorted stereotypes which are deeply imprinted in the public consciousness.*

## Introduction

The impetus for this paper is our frustration that the public sector is a productive, necessary and important part of our society, but does little to build grassroots support by providing evidence which might counter the stereotyped arguments of government's critics. Skepticism of government is an old, even honored American tradition, but the current hostility to government and politics is becoming overwhelming, ranging from the merely apathetic to the outright hostile. Rather than accepting that continuing deterioration of the civic "fabric," by presenting evidence of public service as a calling, and the commitment and competency which follow, we hope the strategy we propose will help to reverse the negative, distorted stereotypes which are deeply imprinted in the public consciousness.

## 1. Where Has Public Administration Been As A Profession?

### Public Service as a Calling:

Despite negative images, low pay and adverse circumstances, many people do choose to serve their fellow citizens in the spirit of the oath to public service first sworn by citizens of ancient Athens:

*We will strive unceasingly to quicken the public sense of public duty; That thus...we will transmit this city not only not less, but greater, better and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.*

The Athenian Oath

Today, the Athenian Oath is inscribed at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs of Syracuse University, and the notion of public service persists in daily behaviors by dedicated public servants, as well as in the context of political rhetoric.

### **Is There Still a Calling to Public Service? Disconcerting Images**

According to Herbert Kaufman (1981), the reality of government is not reflected by the dominant, negative image of public service: More and more people are apparently convinced that bureaucracy is whirling out of control and are both infuriated and terrified by the prospect...[but] the epidemic is more rhetoric than substance." Kaufman is right. No group is more maligned by the public than those who serve the public. Unfortunately, our society, which has an insatiable appetite for public services, is ceaseless in its slander of citizens who comprise the public service. Public servants are stereotyped as "bumbling bureaucrats." They are perceived as underworked and overpaid for jobs "anyone can do." And they are supposedly lacking in ambition, business sense and common sense.

The public is just as frustrated by its corporate bureaucrats--or "businesscrats"--in their daily dealings with banks, department stores and credit card companies. Their anger vis a vis bureaucracy, however, is typically and disproportionately directed against public servants. That bias against government's bureaucrats is reinforced daily by reporters, artists, and writers, who almost always accentuate the negative.

Many of those critiques are on-target. But many others are naive or reflect superficial, normative assumptions as to how the "system" should work. Virtually all rework stereotypes to excess: a torrent of unflattering images teaches the public only that its employees are incompetent, callous and corrupt. The composite image is vivid and powerful: in print, over the air, on the stage or the screen. From the relatively restrained New York Times to the tabloids, from the local newscast to the world news, the image is unmistakable and the language consistent. Government bureaucrats are "incompetent officials," "tangled in red tape," "uncaring." They incessantly

"shuffle papers," rendering "arbitrary decisions." The attack is ceaseless and merciless, and the only exceptions seem to be the obituaries, in which the deceased may finally (but futilely) be praised for "public service." Positive accomplishments by live public servants are usually considered neither newsworthy nor entertaining.

### **Bureaucracy vs. Individuality**

Unflattering images often bear on the unintended, pathological consequences of the bureaucratic structure. Critics argue that bureaucracy is epitomized by the sufficiency of mediocrity, by the adage "don't rock the boat," by a stifling loss of independence. Artists and writers effectively reinforce the contrast between the new employee's eagerness to serve and the incumbent's typical overemphasis on formality, on rules and regulations, on security. They sketch an organizational locale in which individuals become stifled, losing all sense of independence, pride and initiative. They seem to no longer care, only to go through the motions, only to countdown the years until retirement. For instance, Nathaniel Hawthorne's nineteenth century description of "The Custom House" forces the reader, through the author's role of detached insider, to recognize the encroaching listlessness of spirit, the sapping of intellectual vigor and individual initiative. (Holzer, Morris, Ludwin) Hawthorne clearly suggests that the loss of "capability for self-support" affects every individual who comes to depend on the public payroll for financial security. His characters symbolize the debilitating effects of a government organization, resulting in an employee's lack of physical or mental vigor.

That image continues to be imprinted upon the public consciousness. Recently The Boston Globe implored the "terrible deadness of spirit... the lifeless voice, the dull eyes, the person who seemed to be hoping for a reversal in evolution so that he or she could return to the sea as an amoeba...Maybe this is what's supposed to make a good bureaucrat. Maybe this is how the government's work must get done--unenthusiastically." (NCPP: "A Lifeless Voice, Dull Eyes--Must be a Bureaucrat." ) In Detroit ( NCPP: "Where Tax Angst Meets a Numbing Bureaucracy") a columnist complained that the recipient of her tax return, the Cincinnati Service Center of the IRS, is a "bureaucracy--acre upon stultifying acre of it." Describing its large work force:

"Some do nothing but monitor the mail flow in the sorting machines...Some do nothing but sit at peculiar, circular desks, tossing envelopes into bins. Some do nothing but walk a the aisles between desks, collecting empty envelopes. Some do nothing but pass envelopes over lights to see if they have removed everything. Some do nothing but control the flow of document-laden carts between stations. Some do nothing but...zzz.

The visual arts continue that theme of debilitation. Each week for more than five hundred episodes the most enduring of television series, M.A.S.H., highlighted bureaucratic nonsense in the military, with a substantial dose of sarcasm. Unthinking military bureaucrats--unnecessarily officious, obstinate and formal--were easily outmaneuvered, outwitted and outflanked.

Government's critics are equally concerned that the energies of workers and managers may be corrupted, rather than merely suppressed. Without the possibility of, or incentive to, solve problems of productivity, they direct energies to solving problems of personal promotion, to playing office politics, to abusing and discrediting fellow employees, to diverting resources.

In Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore, musical lyrics imprint negative bureaucratic images upon the public consciousness, first on the stage, then as the lines are replayed in the listener's mind. (Gilbert and Sullivan). That anti-organization message has been Sir Joseph Porter's boast that he rose through a hierarchy from office boy to the post of First Lord of the Admiralty by "going along," by identifying so entirely and predictably with the Navy's interests--regardless of whether truth or logic contradicted such interests--that he could safely be placed in command:

Stick close to your desks and never go to sea, And you all may be Rulers of the Queen's Navee!

After a century of performances, this theme still finds a responsive public, still pillories organization men or women who have willingly bartered all sense of originality and risk for security and promotions.

## Bureaucracy vs. Clients

Bureaucratic behavior is not harmless. Critics also argue that the unproductive forces of bureaucracy ultimately impact upon the client, that in many cases bureaucracy has degenerated into a vehicle which is too impersonal and too insensitive for effective response to public demands. The clerk who interprets a rule with unnecessary narrowness, and the official who mindlessly defers to the computer, are repeatedly cited as examples of the unproductive nature of bureaucratic thinking. They are the symptoms of a mindset which often enlarges rather than reduces problems.

Beginning with the earliest readers (or even non-readers) the cartoonist's assault on bureaucracy is incessant and devastating. Nationally-syndicated cartoons reinforce a negative image of public service daily in black and white, and in color in the Sunday papers: Broomhilda, for example, rails that "society is conspiring to dehumanize me." (NCPP) Citizens fight back against onerous paperwork in "Goosemeyer." Cartoons which accompany newspaper editorial and opinion pieces offer those commentaries to older readers, typically illustrating a "Bureau of Bureaucracy", "Red Tape", "The Runaround" or unintelligible "Government Speak." (NCPP)

Under the headline "A City Speaks its Mind About Federal Red Tape," U.S. News and World Report (Maloney) highlighted citizen's feelings in Kingsport, Tennessee. The frustrations with governmental paperwork and oversight that many people sympathize with but which few express so clearly were summarized as: "Unless they threaten to fine us or put us in jail, I won't fill out a form." In 1992 the "feeble, delayed" Federal response to Hurricane Andrew in Florida and Louisiana was widely blamed on bureaucracy. When a Radcliff, KY memorial to a catastrophic crash was removed by the state as a safety hazard, the Rev. Don Tennison of the First Assembly of God Church couldn't "understand why bureaucrats can't have more compassion." (NCPP: "Removal of Tribute to 27 Dead Stir Anger").

In some instances government's clients are not merely inconvenienced or discouraged. For many years some of the most depressing anti-client tales have been Kafka's, such as The Trial. (1954 ed.).

Perhaps the most recognized critic of bureaucracy, even to the extent of the generally-accepted adjective "Kafkaesque," Kafka suggests that the impersonal often shades into the unjust. In the contemporary press we find the same message: official indifference can obstruct or deny life's essentials ranging from medical care and decent housing to retirement benefits and vocational training. In New York: "Death by Red Tape" The Village Voice (NCP) argued that "HIV-infected children can't get AST due to staff shortages at public hospitals. Emergency funds to those hospitals have been tied up in bureaucratic snafus for four years." Under an identical headline (an unusual occurrence which only underscores how common this them is), the New York Times reported (NCP) that, according to the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality:

"...a (poor) pregnant woman must make nine different trips in six weeks just to begin prenatal care and receive Medicaid eligibility. There's one office to handle Medicaid applications, another for prenatal care, a third for Aid for Dependent Children coverage, a fourth for immunizations. The list is long, the barriers intimidating for a woman already overwhelmed by poverty. Many women never even start the process....Thousands of poor, low-birth-weight babies are alive because of gains in medical technology. Thousands more could be saved if America would only press for the same gains in medical bureaucracy."

And in Los Angeles, California: "Slain Woman's Son Faults Bureaucracy", the tearful son of a woman allegedly killed by her mentally ill daughter told a joint legislative committee Tuesday that he repeatedly tried to obtain treatment for his sister, but failed because the state's bureaucratic system would not provide it..."I tried everything. I called every agency. There was nothing--zero." (NCP)

Movies are even more powerful a vehicle than the stage, if only that the audience is much wider. For example, in "Ghostbusters," which underscored the popular image of "bureaucrat as buffoon," an official of the Environmental Protection Administration (E.P.A.) obnoxiously demands to inspect a storage facility for ghostly spirits. Rejected because he did not use the magic word "please," he returns with a court order. Told that his actions would surely endanger the populace, he opts for rules and regulations, ordering the facility to be shut down. Even as his actions almost lead to disaster, the agitated bureaucrat still clings to the letter of the law. He is finally removed by the mayor, who opts for live, grateful voters over

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mindless procedures. The message is that bureaucrats are dangerously incompetent. ("Ghostbusters").

The classroom, in particular, is often portrayed as suffering from the bumbling actions of educational bureaucrats. In "Stand and Deliver," a dedicated math teacher overcomes the skepticism of burned out colleagues and the harassment of the disbelieving, bureaucratic Educational Testing Service. Fortunately he prevails and his students succeed, but only due to his David-like efforts versus the bureaucratic Goliath. ("Stand and Deliver").

### **The "Public" Official**

The image of civil servants also suffers from guilt by association, from confusion with the misdeeds of political superiors. Although the public service in the United States is among the most honest in the world, the reputation of appointed civil servants is diminished due to inept or inefficient actions of elected "public servants." The press features charges of misconduct under headlines such as "Local Official Indicted" or "Public Servant Accused." But the official in question may have been an elected or appointed politician, not a civil servant. Such simple headlines taint the entire public service by association with their sometimes unethical political taskmasters.

A reinforcing problem is misapplication of the term "bureaucracy." In Boston, for example, the Globe reported that "A Simple Park is No Match for City Bureaucracy." Although years of delays in building a park were apparently blamed on the bureaucracy--implying career officials were negligent--a careful reading revealed that an elected official, City Councilor David Scondras, "was the cause of the delay because of some concerns he had." From Washington, D.C., a story headlined "Bush Transforms an Emergency into a Bureaucracy" dealt not with an agency action, but an environmental policy decision emanating from the White House. Another Washington report, "How Bureaucrats Pad Their Pensions" focused not on civil servants, but on pension laws passed by Congressmen in their own interests. And "Bureaucracy Stifles Biotechnology," argued that a major public organization was understaffed and underequipped with modern computers; but it was not well into the story that a reader could attribute those problems not to bureaucratic negligence, but to budget-cutting priorities in the White House and the Congress. (NCPP all cites).

"Public service" is also a term with misleading connotations. "Cashing in on Public Service," recounted how Ronald Reagan's wealthy California supporters expressed gratitude for the ex-President's "public service" by providing him with a multi-million dollar estate; Reagan also profited from lucrative speech making deals with the Japanese and others. According to author Haynes Johnson (NCP: "Sleepwalking Through History"), "when it came to cashing in on public service, Reagan, who more than any president in history railed against government benefits and spending, set the standard for all members of his administration. From Reaganomics to Reaganbucks, one writer note wryly." And a reporter in lesser-known Grants, New Mexico (NCP: "Rewards of Public Service Are Growing") chronicled a land deal in which the "honest graft" that Tammany Hall Boss and politico George Washington Plunkitt extolled in New York in the mid-1800s continues to thrive in the late 1900s among local elected officials in New Mexico.

Thus, as the press dutifully chronicles charges of misconduct against elected officials and politicians, it also unintentionally taints career civil servants. Broad labels suggest that all individuals who publicly aspire to the "calling" of public service privately aspire to private gain. The average reader is not likely to differentiate between elected and appointed public officials. Because corruption anywhere in government tarnishes the image of anyone in government, the reputation of civil servants is diminished by misidentification with less-than-ethical politicians.

Thus, public bureaucrats take a beating. Almost without exception artists and writers confirm a pessimistic view of bureaucracy's impact on its clients and even its own employees. Our society has established an image of public servants as untrustworthy and bumbling, entangled in red tape, failing to apply the common sense with which average citizens are endowed. The popular view of the public bureaucracy is a weak system which produces profoundly negative behaviors--stifling, demoralizing, corrupting, impersonal and unjust. And it apparently wastes a great deal of our resources, while producing only weak results.

Some of those complaints are valid and deserve attention; government must be improved--as should any organization. One obstacle to improvement, however, is that the attack on bureaucracy is ceaseless and unbalanced. Journalists, writers and artists have overworked and exploited

that image. Of course, it is only realistic to recognize that criticism is their job, that good management simply is not entertaining. It would be naive to castigate the government's critics for failing to seek evidence of excellent public sector performance. But we must also acknowledge that a "healthy cynicism" may contribute to, as well as call attention to, an unhealthy bureaucracy.

### **Committed Public Servants**

Yet, despite such negative images, low pay and adverse circumstance, many people do choose to serve their fellow citizens. As public servants they are responding to values, abstractions, or callings to serve others, to solve challenging problems, to improve the public welfare. They are dedicated to their clients. They put in long hours. They work under difficult conditions. Although their accomplishments are usually not considered newsworthy, those who have received formal recognition suggest a depth of commitment to the public service which the public rarely recognizes:

A recent Sloan Foundation Public Service Award recipient was Ed Wagner, an Assistant Commissioner of Environmental Protection in New York City, whose administration of the city's massive wastewater treatment and disposal system saved hundreds of millions of dollars.

The American Society for Public Administration honored Carol M. Fay, District Director for the Internal Revenue Service in Salt Lake City, for her leadership abilities and self motivation which had a significant impact on increased program effectiveness, the public image of the IRS, employee morale and agency productivity.

ASPA and the National Academy for Public Administration designated Gordon M. Sherman, Commissioner of Social Security's Atlanta Region, as a National Public Service Award Winner for instituting innovations that significantly increased productivity while saving taxpayers money.

Wagner, Fay and Sherman typify the sense of commitment that quietly pervades government. Most public employees are not commissioners or directors, but work "hands on" to improve the quality of our lives. They teach our children, assure our safety, distribute social

benefits, rehabilitate the disabled, drive our buses and trains, fix our roads, deliver the mail, defend our national interests and monitor the quality of our water and buildings. As teachers and social workers, police and military personnel, members of the fire service and of emergency services, they often do so for intangible rewards. According to the Public Employee's Roundtable, they place "a high value on commitment to public service and the rewards of seeing the consequences of one's efforts."

Social Worker Mary Virginia Douglass underscores that commitment: "We don't have plush office space like corporate America. For many years we weren't treated like professionals, but this office is very professional....We have to take everybody who comes here. Unlike private agencies, we cannot pick and choose our clientele. You've got to love it to stay....I've been here 25 years." Teacher Lynn Borg is typical of corporate executives who are willing to make less in the public sector: "It occurred to me one day that whether I saved the company several thousand dollars or hired 10 people tomorrow it wouldn't make a difference. Some people feel they were put here for a reason, and I guess I feel like that...This was the best thing I ever did. I wake up in the morning, and I can't wait to get there." Thomas Downs, who has headed several large public organizations, makes the argument for public service particularly compelling:

Only in public service can you find the sense of completion that comes from working on a successful program--to reduce infant mortality, for example, and then realizing that 35 more children are alive this year as a result of that effort. Only in public service can you participate in a process that helps move individuals from mental hospitals back in to the community. The opportunity to help solve a community problem and then to witness the changes that occur is the cement that binds us to public service...Public service is about babies living, fires being extinguished, garbage collected, crimes solved, people moved.

### **Individual Differences in the Public and Private Sectors**

As Douglass, Borg, Downs and thousands of other public servants typify, people who choose careers in the public sector are unique. They are dedicated to serving their fellow citizens and are motivated by the desire to, in some small way, make this world a better place to live. Public servants often make less money than their private sector counterparts, and many work in environments that challenge even the most optimistic, creative, and

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industrious personalities. What makes these people so different and what makes them want to serve the public?

The literature indicates that there is a significant difference in the characteristics of people that work in the public sector compared to those employed in the private sector. Wittmer (1991) cites numerous studies that indicate work-related values, reward preferences, needs, and personality types vary significantly between the sectors. Individuals in government organizations are different, in important respects, from those in private organizations. Because of self-selection, socialization, or some other factors, public sector employees care more about serving the public (Rainey, 1991).

In a comparative study of professional values, Nalbandian and Edwards (1983), found that although private and public administrators shared a common administrative orientation, private sector administrators place a higher value on efficiency, while public administrators valued the public interest to a much greater degree.

Cacioppe and Mock (1984) found that people working in public organizations were motivated more by factors such as providing a service or product that helps other people, or by self-development and self-fulfillment, than people who work in the private sector. Those in private organizations were motivated more by extrinsic factors, such as money. Their study concludes that certain personality types are attracted to the public sector. Empirical research supports their hypothesis that public managers are more concerned about social welfare, unemployment, and equity, and are less committed to the capitalistic system than private managers.

Rainey et al.(1976), in their comparative essay of the public and private sectors, cited individual differences regarding incentives and values. Public sector employees are motivated, to a greater degree than private sector employees, by intrinsic rewards such as helping others, doing something meaningful, "power and glory." Conversely, private sector employees are motivated by extrinsic rewards such as money and other material incentives. A 1982 survey by Rainey of 275 public and private managers found statistically significant differences on the importance of pay and performing meaningful public service.

Wittmer (1991) concludes that public sector managers and employees differ from their private sector counterparts in terms of work-related values, reward preferences, needs and personality types. Managers in government agencies that have both profitability and public policy objectives are faced with conflicting objectives. "There is some evidence that managers...develop a form of 'organizational cognitive dissonance'...This appears to be particularly problematic when government "instructions" on social objectives are vague, conflicting, changing, or implicit. It appears that many joint enterprises resolve the dissonance by concluding that profitability is not important" (Brooks, p. 36). In spite of the conflicting objectives, it is encouraging that social objectives are the dominant objectives.

## **2. Where Will This Current Path Lead Us?**

The hard evidence is somewhat ominous, suggesting a long, slippery diminution of support for, and interest in, the public service.

### **Polls and Surveys**

What impact do negative images have upon public attitudes toward, and support for, the public service? The current "rush to privatization" may, in part, be viewed as the logical extension of decades of weakened public support weakened by such a barrage.

In a 1981 Roper survey, only 5% held that government employees work harder, whereas 61% judged them to work less hard. (Roper, 1986). They were also considered more than four times less likely than private sector workers "to come up with new ideas for products and services, 50% to 11%. Even if they did come up with good ideas, their supervisors were considered less likely to accept them than their private sector counterparts, by a margin of more than five to one (50% to 9%). Four times as many respondents thought government employees to be overpaid than underpaid, (44% to 11%). Not surprisingly, almost twice as many people preferred private sector work to identical work "for the government."

In a 1980 LOS ANGELES TIMES poll, only 15% of respondents had the most confidence in government, as opposed to 41% for business and 31% for labor. (Roper Archives, 1986). Only 21% felt government was best able to get things done, as opposed to 39% for business and 30% for labor. Government did rank first in four categories:

1. responsibility for declining productivity (35% vs. 28% who blamed labor and only 18% who attributed such problems to business);
2. responsibility for causing inflation (52% vs. 18% who blamed business and 15% labor);
3. responsibility for causing unemployment (46% vs. 20% for business and 15% for labor); and
4. having too much power for the good of the country (43% to 20% for labor and only 17% for business).

The public was also of the opinion that business has the best leaders (40%), followed by labor (25%), and government(22%).

In another Roper Poll (1986), when asked to compare the efficiency of government and private corporations, 56% of respondents rated government less efficient, 21% more efficient. Only 20% judged the federal government to be "efficient and well-run," and only 34% that it was "responsive to people's needs," whereas large business corporations received approval ratings of 56% and 32% on those characteristics. Although 43% of respondents judged local governments as efficient, and 54% as responsive, 70% and 65% applied those characteristics to small business corporations. When asked to compare the efficiency of services provided by governments or corporations, the public sector was considered less efficient by a margin of 56% to 21%.

That same year, 1981, 47% approved of President Reagan's proposal to pay public servants 6% less than people doing comparable work in the private sector. (Roper Archives: ABC News/Washington Post). Some 78% blamed inflation on "too powerful" government. By a ratio of more than two to one, Gallup (1981) found big government was considered a bigger threat to the country (46%) than big business (22%) or big labor (also 22%). (Roper Archives) In 1982, ABC News and the Washington Post found that 57% of the public held that government was the most to blame for inflation in the U.S., as against 13% for business and 19% for labor. (Roper Archives)

In 1981 Roper found that a majority of respondents, 53%, felt that the federal government had too much influence in their daily lives; 33%

resented the influence of state government, and 20% of local government. Business was accorded "too much influence by 32%. In 1985 the Los Angeles Times asked which institutions should have their power cut back for the good of the country. (Roper Archives) The most popular selection was "government" (37%), followed by organized labor (26%), with business a distant third at 14%. Although, in 1987, Roper found that 55% of the public held a highly favorable or moderately favorable view of the Federal government, a substantial 39% were inclined to be not too favorable or unfavorable, with more than twice as many unfavorable as highly favorable. Thus, the positive "margin" of this survey might be recognized as disturbingly narrow, perhaps masking a substantial disappointment in government. That same year the Los Angeles Times (Roper Archives) found that the institution in which the public had lost the most confidence was the "executive branch" (24%), outstripping Congress (20%), big business (16%), and organized labor (also 16%).

These disconcerting conclusions are supported by surveys which track confidence in institutions over time. (Roper Archives) Between 1973 and 1986 those expressing a "great deal of support" for the executive branch of the federal government declined from 29% to 21%, with a low of 12% in 1980. Similarly, Lou Harris and Associates (Roper Archives) found that those with a "great deal of confidence" in the executive branch of the federal government declined from 41% in 1966 to 19% in 1985, with a low of 11% in 1976. Local government confidence eroded from 28% in 1973 to 18% in 1985, and state governments confidence from 24% to 16% in that same period.

Another 1987 survey (Roper: Hart Research Associates) underscored that lack of confidence. Reversing the narrow margin of the Roper data, Hart found that 36% felt America would be better off if government did less, as opposed to 33% who felt it should do more. Hart also found that 45% respondents believed that their generation did not want government involved in private business, as opposed to 25% of their parents' generation, suggesting declining support for government action. Similarly, distrust in elected office was up to 53%, from a perception of 29% in their parent's generation.

In 1989 Gallup also found a reservoir of cynicism: 41% of respondents did not believe that "the government is really run for the benefit of all the people," while 57% agreed that "the federal government controls

too much of our daily lives." Some 62% completely or mostly agreed that "people like me don't have any say about what the government does." Perhaps most damning vis a vis the public service, 67% completely or mostly agreed that "when something is run by the government, it is usually inefficient and wasteful." (Roper Archives).

In the most recent study, a 1998 Hart/Teeter poll of Americans 18-35 conducted on behalf of the Partnership for Trust in Government, the data indicated that young people continue to lack confidence in government and believe that government does not serve their generation as well as it did their parents' generation. The pollsters concluded that "much of the blame for the negative perception of government was placed squarely in the lap of the media. Fifty-seven percent of the young Americans polled indicated that they feel the media focus too much on the the negative aspects of government and not enough on its positive work." Among all young adults, attitudes toward the "most appealing features of a government service job" were mixed. Although "helping people and making a difference" was cited by 33%, economics was almost as important: 30% cited "good pay and benefits" and 20% "job security." Only 10% cited "service to community or country."

### **3. Where Does The Profession Need To Go In The Future?**

Public administration needs to emphasize the value of service as a form of "intangible income."

Douglass, Borg, Downs and thousands of other public servants are dedicated to serving their fellow citizens and are motivated by the desire to, in some small way, make this world a better place in which to live. Although many award-winning public servants work in environments that challenge even the most optimistic, creative, and industrious personalities, they are motivated by intangibles, by a calling, by a compelling desire to solve individual and social problems. Our goal should be to bring that sense of mission and commitment into the living room and the classroom, in order to give students and citizens at all levels a balanced view of public service, and then to create opportunities for interested students to sample public service through supervised, structured internships.

Public administration must attract the attention of government's critics (such as M.B.A.s) some of whom might approach temporary public

service in the spirit of the populist movement, which was based upon a healthy skepticism of power. While populists were suspicious of government, they were primarily concerned about powerful private institutions such as banks, railroads, political machines and corporations. They recognized that for individuals and communities to retain any real power in modern society they would need the help of an energetic government staffed with some of the country's best and brightest people, working in concert with an active citizenry in order to counter the power of these private interests.

The public service must communicate commitment as a series of positive images. By no means is the public sector "dead in the water"--there are many such images. In fact, public servants are typically productive, successful and professional, and when citizens are asked to evaluate specific public servants with whom they come into personal contact, they are generally complimentary. Negative images do not withstand careful scrutiny: government does a good job, often an outstanding job, in difficult circumstances. The public sector must present evidence that public servants function surprisingly well, and deliver a "basket" of critical services, despite the constant barrage of negative images, superficial criticism and minimal public support. We as a community must communicate how committed public organizations and public employees have developed systematic problem-solving strategies, and have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to be innovative.

Our "target" audience must be multifaceted. The primary goal should be to capture the imagination of present and future students in the field (graduate, and perhaps undergraduate, public administration, health providers, law enforcement, education, not-for-profit administration, etc.), with the goal of drawing more of the best and brightest to government service (career or civic volunteer) as society's most challenging service. Thus, this strategy could be adopted by M.P.A. programs for the typical Introduction to Public Administration course, as well as courses on Human Resources/Personnel and Public Management/Productivity. It could also be adopted by parallel undergraduate courses in departments of political science and public administration.

As implementers of those assumptions, in terms of a broader market we expect employees throughout the public sector will find our strategy of communicating commitment useful in defending their profession, and in

explaining why they are professional public servants rather than stereotypical "bureaucrats."

The proposed strategy also has as a goal the encouragement of an active and participatory citizenry. We propose to achieve this goal by using broadcast, computer-based and classroom resources to help secondary and college students become aware of models of excellence (dedicated public servants and award-winning best practices) within their governments and to participate--as interns, as members of the public service, as civic volunteers-- in producing better government throughout their lives.

#### **4. A Specific Strategy for Communicating Commitment**

##### **Good Programs /Best Practices**

By using cases of best practice from the Ford Foundation Innovations Program, the Exemplary State and Local (EXSL) Awards Program and similar public service recognition programs, we can communicate how the best public organizations and public employees have developed systematic problem-solving strategies, and have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to be innovative. By delineating imaginative approaches to capacity building by award-winning public servants and public organizations, we would hope to re-energize our youth to become a vital part of sustaining and improving our government and our political processes.

We should:

- Bring government leaders--award-winning, creative, dedicated public servants from all levels--into the classroom to communicate their sense of commitment and accomplishment. They could offer secondary (and then college) students positive, personal views of award-winning public service which they are unlikely to encounter in their schools or personal lives.

- Create many more opportunities for students to sample problem-solving public and community service through supervised, structured internships and mentoring relationships.

- Encourage students to become active participants in the democratic processes--from registering to vote and then voting, through

regular participation in citizen action groups, and on to active consideration of careers in the public service.

--Disseminate a national public service model as video, curricular, internship and electronic components are established. Although some relevant curricular development efforts have been attempted in a few public service academies, they are narrower and are not being disseminated.

In even more specific terms:

-- Development of curricular modules would focus on award-winning, creative, dedicated public servants in the classroom. Those leaders--ranging from direct service providers (i.e. social workers, police, teachers, public health doctors and nurses, etc.) to policy-level officials--can serve as role models and mentors to young people considering careers or volunteer activities in public and related not-for-profit organizations. Representatives of award-winning agencies and retired public service leaders should be identified by reputation and from award programs which are conducted annually by professional organizations, publications, and public service or best practice recognition programs at the city, state and national levels, including the applicants' national award programs. They would be asked to:

1. participate as classroom speakers and guest lecturers at the high school and college levels. Award-winning public servants interested in hosting/mentoring interns would be asked to speak to classes about the intangible satisfactions of public service and the specific functions and accomplishments of their agencies;
2. record insights on audio or video for a series of edited tapes, and for audio and/or video clips on the Public Service Web Site (see below);
3. conduct ongoing, on-line discussions with students via email linked to the Web Site.

-- Use of a range of technologies (i.e. broadcast video, World Wide Web sites) would offer secondary students an attractive view of public service through the airwaves, the Internet and in the classroom. A Web Site would be available to high schools and universities around the country to inform educators of the resources available in their communities or regions. It would include:

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1. A resource directory of selected potential speakers and internship possibilities drawn from award-winning best practices and exemplary public servants in government. For example, the National Center for Public Productivity and the Public Employees Roundtable have already established an online database of winners of several dozen best practices awards. Recipients of individual public service awards (such as the National Public Service Awards; the Isaac Liberman Public Service Awards for Career Civil Service Employees and the Sloan Foundation's Public Service Awards, both in New York City) are being identified in conjunction with the Roundtable and ASPA.

2. Short, personal statements of commitment to public service (i.e. as a "calling"), including development of an audio/video archive of public service highlights by leading retired public servants, capturing their stories, experiences and exposure to issues and leaders that they could not have gotten in any sector but the public sector.

3. Multi-media clips at different access levels: audio only; audio and a picture of the speaker; full-motion video. Professionally edited best practice and public service videos have already been identified from such sources as the National Center's Exemplary State and Local Awards Program, the Ford Foundation's Innovations Program, and public employee unions (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; American Federation of Government Employees; American Federation of Teachers; Civil Service Employees Association).

-- Fostering of mentoring relationships would encourage school-to-work internship opportunities, including resource directories of internship possibilities drawn from award-winning best practices.

--Informational modules would focus on examples of successful, creative, innovative, award-winning programs and processes now being used in governmental entities all across America from the smallest of local governments and non-profits, through to the counties, states, and then federal government. These programs and processes not only demonstrate the excellence of what exists today, but when more widely known and replicated will serve as catalysts to further speed the improvements in our

governmental services nationwide. These informational modules would be developed in a variety of formats to fit a range of outlets. A priority would be the creation of the first national public television series dedicated to exploring the best and the brightest public servants and public programs that American government has to offer. The same information will also support the various curricular efforts simultaneously being undertaken.

### **Conclusion**

This strategy is primarily intended to capture the imagination of present and future students in the field, with the objective of drawing more of the best and brightest to government service (career or civic volunteer) as society's most challenging service.

Such a strategy is not self-serving. Rather, it contributes to what is perhaps the most critical distinction between public and private administration-- that public administration is deeply rooted in public law (Moe and Gilmour, 1995). Public law, in an ideal world, provides the framework for the process and procedures of governmental organization and management.

The ideal of American democracy assumes a special relationship between the public servant and the citizens they serve. The assumption is that all public administrators will function within, and be guided by, the moral truths found in our constitution. As Woodrow Wilson wrote: "Liberty cannot live apart from constitutional principle; and no administration, however perfect and liberal its methods, can give men more than a poor counterfeit of liberty if it rests upon illiberal principles of government" (Wilson, 1887).

Broad constitutional values, robust individual civil rights and liberties, integrity and due process (Rosenbloom, 1990) should guide public administrators as they serve the public. However, constitutional values often conflict and frequently run counter to the values embodied in private sector management. Although efforts to serve the public more efficiently and cost effectively tout "efficient" private sector management techniques, the constitutional values of equity, fairness, and due process are often compromised when such techniques are introduced.

According to Rosenbloom (1993), sovereignty, which is the concept of supreme political power and authority, resides in the people who exercise

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it through a representative government. Public administration and public service are consequently considered a "public trust." As representatives of the sovereign, public administrators face situations that are considerably different than those faced by private sector administrators. "Public administrators are engaged in the formulation and implementation of policies that allocate resources, values and status in a fashion that is binding on the society as a whole. Their actions embody the will of the sovereign, which means that the actions of public administrators have the force of law and the coercive power of the government behind them" (Rosenbloom, 1993).

The distinctive character of the public sector is illustrated by its foundation in public law, its responsiveness to a "higher purpose," its sovereign role, its determination to see that constitutional rights are protected, its position of placing the public interest before personal gain, and its special relationship between the public servants and the citizens they serve.

Frederickson and Hart (1985) ponder the moral obligations of American public administrators and define what they view as the special relationship between the public servant and the citizens they serve as the "patriotism of benevolence:

"We define the primary moral obligation of the public service in this nation as the patriotism of benevolence: an extensive love of all people within our political boundaries and the imperative that they must be protected in all of the basic rights granted to them by the enabling documents. If we do not love others, why should we work to guarantee the regime values to others? ... the special relationship that must exist between public servant and citizens in a democracy is founded upon the conscious knowledge about the citizens that they are loved by the bureaucracy...The primary duty of the public servants is to be the guardians and guarantors of the regime values for the American public."

Thus, a century of considered dialogue concludes that the public and private sectors are different. Public law and constitutional values frame the process and procedures of government agencies and management. The multiple, diverse and contradictory expectations of the public sector create a complex working environment that is unequalled in the private sector, i.e.

the "patriotism of benevolence" should continue to attract individuals to the public sector who are driven by a desire to serve the public good.

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