



THE FUTURE OF GOVERNMENT: ME and MY CAREER

By Patrick Ibarra, The Mejorando Group

Gaze into your crystal ball and what do you see as the future role for the public sector professional? Is the rapidly evolving role for government imminent? What impact will that have on your career? Do you have a job or a role? What's your personal brand? How are your organization's leaders adapting to a changing workplace? These are just a few of the questions being confronted today as the public sector – at all levels – experiences unprecedented transformation. Government is indisputably the protagonist for a better quality of life for citizens, but the issue remains: to what degree will it execute that role? How elastic will it become?

Change has been endless and sometimes volatile in the world of government, but that has always been the situation, hasn't it? The velocity of change has for generations affected the sometimes hurriedly, while other times incremental, role of public sector, though this time it seems different - substantially different.

Over the previous few years and into the probable future, the public sector will endure transformational change. Today's workplace is inundated with a wealth of trends that include elastic regulations, unsettled public policy, increased public scrutiny, a stronger emphasis on reducing costs including the expanded use of shared services, shifting workforce demographics, emerging technologies, and rising expectations about the need for transparency. The potential impact of these trends can generate massive ambiguity to cause even the most seasoned government veteran from moving forward. Needless to

say, business as usual is over and has been for some time and the business of government will remain volatile as the rate of change continues. Playing it safe is no longer playing it smart!

The convergence of the forces for change present the public sector professional another in a series of opportunities to redefine him/herself. The question is what are the capabilities and competencies that comprise this redefinition? Here is a recommended blueprint for designing and building a recession-proof future.

• **STRENGTHEN YOUR PERSONAL BRAND** – Brand is nothing more and nothing less than your reputation. Right now, take out a piece of paper and write in 10 words or less what the attributes and characteristics that accurately describe your brand. Did you capture the conventional types – hard working, a people person, loyal, dedicated – to name a few? All of these are wonderful, but not distinctive. Work from the outside in. In other words, speculate about the emerging needs of what government agencies need from its workforce and then fuse that with the skills and capabilities you should develop. A personal brand must highlight your special strengths, yet at the same time it also must not be too self-promotional, an all-too-common error. It must make you a team player who undeniably adds value to your current employer while simultaneously letting you transition seamlessly into the next one. The focus should be on developing yourself, not promoting you. So be vigilant in strengthening your personal brand and lubricate your mind by participating in focused development and training activities that are designed to enhance your skills and capabilities. Besides attending conferences and webinars, consider specific development tactics like a stretch assignment or engaging peers in a book club.

• **CONVENE A CAREER BOARD OF DIRECTORS** – Assemble a group of your most trusted advisors to be members of your Career Board of Directors. The people you choose should help you raise your level of self-awareness, so their candor and possibly, bluntness, should be appreciated. Navigating one's career can be a series of non-linear steps but the key is that an upward trajectory is always achieved. A personal board of directors can be of great benefit to those young and even not-so-young professionals.

• **SERVE AS A CHANGE ADVISOR** - Operate from the maxim, "change is a process, not an event," and become fluent in understanding the finer points of designing and implementing successful change initiatives. All too often, leaders and managers falsely assume the merit of their latest change initiative is the key component to assuring a successful execution. Quite the contrary, organizations of all sizes have a cemetery where many great ideas go to die. Your fluency in change will enable you to navigate the uneven terrain associated with building, and sustaining, a high performing organization.

• **HEIGHTEN YOUR POLITICAL ACUMEN** – Possess a thorough understanding of the interpersonal and political dynamics that organizational structures create and know how to make things happen within this context. Thus, the critical skill necessary for leading today's collaborative teams is that of influencing others or political acumen. These skills include understanding political power in an organization, being able to frame and sell ideas, influence others, negotiate, persuade, build networks, initiate and manage change and effectively manage organizational crises.

• **BECOME AN INNOVATION ARCHITECT** – We are way past the time to discard the "we've always done it that way" practice so prevalent in government, and replace it with a "let's try it and see" approach. Public sector professionals should be on the forefront as the igniters for actively chasing innovation within their organization helping transition from best practices onto "next practices." Innovators recognize that "doing things different and doing different things" is a prerequisite for innovating and creating a climate that can permeate the traditional risk-averse culture that limits the progressive

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thinking desperately needed today. Outside-the-box thinking is not even an option because there is no box! Read my article “Running Government Like a Start-Up” for a set of fresh ideas that are practical, tactical and impactful in accelerating government’s entrepreneurial approach to improved services and better social outcomes.

- **WORK AS A LEADERSHIP FARMER** – Live the following - “Leadership has little to do with titles, and everything to do with behaviors.” Create an effective leadership profile comprised of the specific actions and behaviors you have observed of the successful leaders you have observed, your own insights, and information you have read or heard from speakers.

Now, use this as a framework to guide your growth and development. Leadership capital is fundamental to influencing positive outcomes, which regardless if you are an extrovert or introvert, is the true measure of a high performing leader. Consequently, accrue leadership capital by demonstrating those behaviors outlined in your Success Profile. Finally, refrain from the “leadership by best seller” trap that so many people fall into; searching for the ever-elusive silver bullet. Remember, many of the authors of those best sellers, offer helpful ideas on how to improve your leadership performance and that of your organization, but their books are not a cook book, merely the ingredients, so utilize these sources wisely.

- **DEEPEN YOUR SUBJECT MATTER**

- EXPERTISE** – Increase your body of knowledge about those areas becoming increasingly important to public sector organizations – financial analytics (translate the numbers into a compelling story), sustainability measures (and not just for the green movement), social marketing (everything social media related to building more engaged citizenry), and strategic planning (as a management tool, not simply a forecasting device). While expanding your knowledge base, also recognize that as you promote into higher level positions, the criticality of your subject matter knowledge lessens as your ability to coordinate and ensure timely, desired results increases.

- **BE A TALENT MANAGER** –

- Recognize and leverage the rapidly emerging trends occurring in the workplace about shifting workforce demographics, notably that candidates of all ages seeking a mission-centric organization where their primary purpose is to have a positive impact and the enormous power social media is having on attracting qualified applicants. Your organization has an Employer Brand and it either helps or hinders its ability to hire and retain top performers.

The role of the public sector professional is at a precarious moment: try to hang on to the past and risk becoming marginalized, or embrace a new and different future that requires different capabilities. There is a clear

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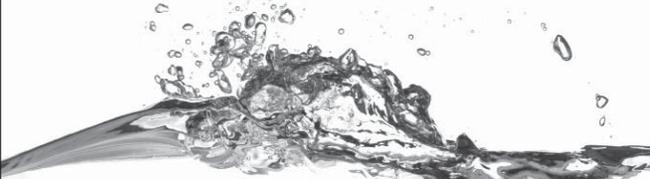
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and unambiguous imperative confronting your future: rethink and refresh your role to adapt to changing circumstances and add value to today's, and tomorrow's organizations or suffer the consequences.

The future has arrived and with it, an emerging role for you. Increased scrutiny, higher expectations and a shifting political landscape add up to a valuable opportunity for you to activate change, drive innovation and successfully lead your career towards a better future. Growth and comfort don't co-exist. Are you ready?

Patrick Ibarra, a former city manager, owns and operates an organizational effectiveness consulting practice, The Mejorando Group (www.gettingbetterallthetime.com), and is one of the country's leading experts on optimizing the performance of public sector organizations. Mejorando is Spanish for "getting better all the time," and Ibarra's firm brings fresh thinking, innovation, and new ideas to help governmental organizations succeed in the 21st century. Ibarra is a noted author, speaker, blogger and educator who translates the headwinds leaders are facing into a tailwind with practical, impactful and sustainable results. For those seeking additional information, Ibarra can be reached, either by phone at (925) 518-0187, e-mail at patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com or Facebook. ■

Be sure to catch Patrick Ibarra in action as he presents two sessions at this year's General Manager Leadership Summit, June 22 -24 at the Resort at Squaw Creek: "Your Leadership Playbook" and "The Future of Government: Me and My Career."



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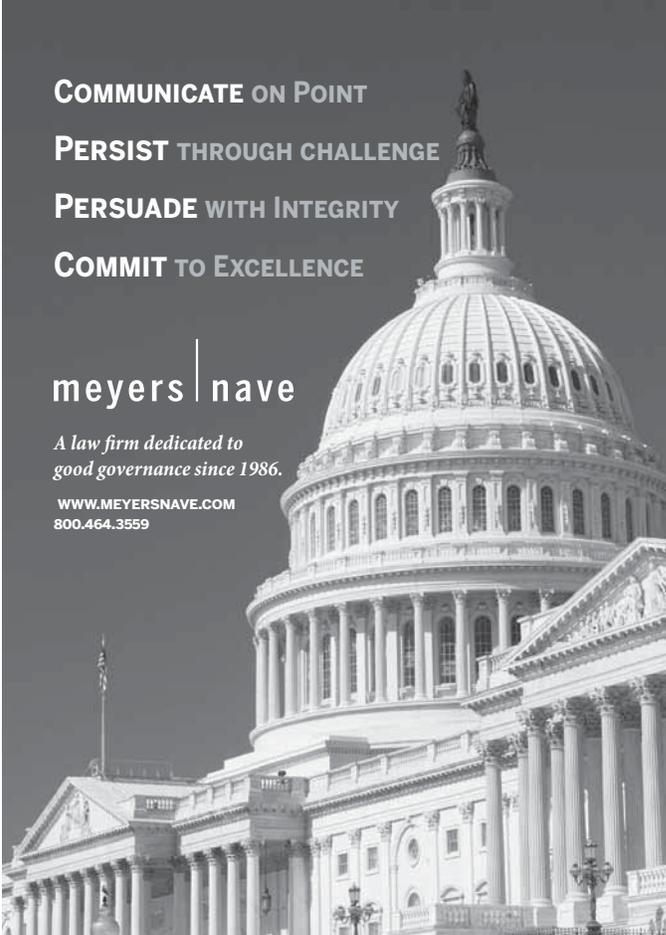


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