

# *POLITICAL ACUMEN TIP SHEET #5*

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## *10 THINGS A NEW SENIOR LEADER MUST KNOW*

WRITTEN BY INGRID BERGMANN

As an Executive Coach I have been a partner to my clients, leaders in the public sector, for over 20 years. I have observed many patterns, obstacles and successes that are common to this group. It occurred to me that these observations might be of interest to those of you who are new to, or aspire to, these senior jobs.



" Find as many things as you can to love about the work your unit is doing and then find a way to express it. If you can stay in love, you won't feel as afraid. "

**#1**

The work that you have taken on can't be done alone, and it might feel very lonely at times. You need to surround yourself with the best advisors you can find and also include people who fit in the following categories:

- **A confidante** - someone with whom you can privately pull your hair out and engage in a rant in exchange for returning the favour, and who will tell you when you are losing it or when your behaviour is rubbing others the wrong way (and getting in your own way).
- **A coach** - someone who can become your objective thinking partner and sounding board, the person with whom to practice what you are learning until it becomes effortless and the next lesson appears.
- **A couple of wingmen** - those who can see what lies outside of your peripheral vision and can outline the wider playing field for you.
- **A couple of contrarians/dissenters** - those who don't agree with you and see things very differently, whose opinions you respect and who will help you 'prosecute' your ideas.
- **A mentor** - someone who has held the job before and can tell you which way to turn when the wind changes.

**#2**

Learn to manage conflict so that those who are party to it, including yourself, are safe from passive retribution such as shunning or some form of direct retribution such as shaming. Root this behaviour out wherever you think it exists even if you just have an inkling – listen to your gut. It can be malignant, and you can stop it.

**#3**

Conflict can occur when opinions differ. When you see things differently from your boss or when your colleagues/staff see things differently from you – listen. Rather than only asking yourself 'how can I succeed in changing their minds' ask also 'what is it I could know, should know or don't know?' Find out what you are missing. Practice changing your mind elegantly and with curiosity. Rigidity can be perceived as weakness and in extremely complex situations, flexibility is the greater asset.

**#4**

When you make presentations, even small ones and even when you are sending an email to a group, consider the perspective of each recipient/audience member. Some value action, some need to hear the history and the facts, some are considering the impact on others and some want to know what the future holds and who is being included/excluded. One sentence that shows you understand their point of view will help the message translate.

**#5**

The tone for your organization is set at the top – people will try to model your style. And while you might think ‘who am I to be so powerful?’ you are it; you model the desired behavior in your organization and determine what can be ignored.

**#6**

You will experience wilful blindness, the inability to see the obvious – it is part of the human condition i.e. it happens to us all. But awareness may help you avoid it. It can show up when you:

- Can't see what you haven't seen before
- Have the desire to obey
- Think of yourself as a bystander
- Are too far removed from the action
- Begin to worry about money or security
- Are tired or hungry (treat your body well, it has wisdom)
- Are in love with an idea or a person
- Have the urge to move quickly

**#7**

If something is going wrong with your team, consider this diagnostic. Are people upset because they don't feel: Respected, Heard, Included, Informed or Valued? Once you discover the root cause of the problem, it is easier to find solutions.

**#8**

Become an expert in noticing your mood, know when you are becoming overextended. Get to know your triggers – what gets up your nose and causes you to react. Look at your calendar regularly and anticipate those situations in which these things could occur. You may think people can't tell but most will know something is wrong and it won't be the time to make the best decisions.

**#9**

Get some feedback – the kind that helps you understand your “street cred” within the larger organization because managing your reputation/brand is essential to everyone's success.

**#10**

Understand and practice explaining what you are taking into account as you make decisions or choosing not to make them. This will provide greater clarity and make it easier for people to follow your lead. Remember that a diverse team is the strongest team.

And when you have mastered all of this begin to pay it forward. Again, you may think ‘Who am I to influence others?’ While it's true that you don't have to do this, you are anyway so why not be more deliberate in carving the path for those who follow?

Sincerely,

*Ingrid*

WHO WE ARE

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The Public Sector Leader offers online, mentoring programs designed to explore the unwritten protocols and grey areas that leaders in today's public service need to navigate in an environment of increasingly centralized decision making, a stronger political service, permanent campaigning, big data and a 24/7 news cycle.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The "**Political Acumen Accelerator**" is our signature mentoring program. Using an interactive, storytelling format, our Master Mentors share experiences and advice on how to develop and fine tune this important competency to help them overcome many of the complex challenges that

public sector leaders face today across all orders of government.

## MASTER MENTORS

Our faculty of 42 Master Mentors come from a distinguished cadre of former Canadian provincial, national and municipal politicians and bureaucrats, who are excited to 'pay-it-forward' and share their experience and hard won lessons. They are joined by top academic and media experts sharing their knowledge and perspectives on what it takes to succeed in government today.

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Strategic Agility, Anticipation & Situational  
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