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Musing: On Coaching in Government

By Mike Jay

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MUSING

Coaching In Government

BY MIKE JAY

I'm going to keep this musing short and sweet but hope you will get some real value in a very short period of time. My experience with coaching In government has been interesting over the years. First, it depends on whose government. I'm wondering whether or not in the "government-themed" issue, how many different governments have been identified in the pages of this issue?

In my experience, it's a lot different coaching a Central Banker in Indonesia than it is coaching a GS 15 in the US. How about the government of Russia, Switzerland, India, or Mexico? Having experience with coaching people in all these different places, I can honestly tell you *the government is not the government*. So that's my first muse in today's musing.

In Mexico recently, meeting with a non-government official, a very high and important one, he asked me (referring to his Governor's office), "How can I affect things if no one will take my call?" And that's my second muse...*in government, things are not like in business*.

In business, where everyone is afraid that someone knows something and you better find out who and what it is, people will take your call if you've got rank. In government, there are very specific silos and often power, accountability, authority and responsibility (what I call PAAR) are not available to you. In other words, *in government, you could be entirely isolated from decision-makers* and that's my third muse.

One obvious concern that is often overlooked is how do I get paid? Now, that's on our minds, right? You finally land this serious inquiry about your coaching and you talk to everyone involved and they really want what you have. Then, the question appears...how do I get paid? Well, all I can say is *this is why you need reserves in your cash flow*, and that's my fourth muse for coaching in government.

Now, once you get past these four, let's get down to some real work with your client. Soon, you will realize that your client, depending on how far up the food chain they are, can't change anything. Your coaching devolves to how they can cope and improve their work-life balance. In the end, you are left trying to help your client deal with issues that would have them visit the dentist because they are grinding their teeth in their sleep.

Yes, coaching in government. I'm sure those of you who do this as the main staple of your practice have taken all this in stride and are now able, through thick and thin, to navigate the waters of governmental coaching. In fact, I'm positive that some coaches will rave about coaching in government, but as for me...coaching in government is not for me.

Aside from all of the above, I really wonder how people can tolerate the idea that no matter how hard you try, the best thing for you to do is hunker down, don't make too many waves and wait for

the pension and benefits to accrue to acceptable levels. You can't get out. Once you start working for government, the "switching cost" is too high. Unless, of course, you are at the very top and you can easily swap your government pension for one at a think tank or a firm that trades in influence...now that's where I want to go coach!

I almost made it into that circle once. But I found out, as my ivy-league trained daughter so diplomatically told the nurse during the birth of my first grandson this past week, "Don't worry about my dad, he's *socially unrefined*." No kidding! I thanked her for the way she couched the subject. As many of you who know me realize, those were kind words...and that's my last muse. *If you don't have a lot of patience and are not politically refined, then coaching in government is not for you.*

Mike Jay

Resource Center for Professional Coaching in Organizations

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