

Transcript | Confessions & Career Lessons from a Senior Civil Servant

1

00:00:15.670 --> 00:00:34.789

Keri Landau: Hello, and welcome to this lightning talk, Confessions and Career Lessons from a Senior Civil Servant. My name's Kerry Lanzo, and I'm Head of Government Partnerships here at Apolitical. It would be really great to hear from you all, so do post in the chat where you're joining from, what organization you work for, and if you'd like to, what time it is where you are.

2

00:00:34.850 --> 00:00:51.630

Keri Landau: Today we're going to be covering the ground that formal training, so often missing... so often misses, hearing insights gained from decades working in government, which will help you work more effectively, build better relationships, and stay energized for working in demanding environments.

3

00:00:51.630 --> 00:00:55.010

Keri Landau: For those of you who might be joining us for the first time, welcome.

4

00:00:55.010 --> 00:01:14.660

Keri Landau: Apolitical is the largest community for government. It's used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policymakers from more than 170 countries. Our mission is to make government smarter, and we do this by equipping public servants worldwide with the knowledge, skills, and networks they need to lead the change.

5

00:01:17.930 --> 00:01:22.629

Keri Landau: Okay, I can see. Thank you, we're having lots of, intros joining.

6

00:01:24.110 --> 00:01:33.089

Keri Landau: Okay, nice connections. We have people from Canada. I can see lots of different people joining, thank you, from Edmonton, Newfoundland...

7

00:01:33.480 --> 00:01:42.199

Keri Landau: And then back to the UK, Scotland, South Wales, we got fantastic, distribution, and I can't wait to see what everyone else is joining.

8

00:01:42.960 --> 00:01:59.680

Keri Landau: Great, so if you keep adding in the chat, we will proceed. But yeah, thank you so much for making the time. This is going to be a short event, so we want to make the most of it. If you have joined an apolitical event before, welcome back, and if not, we're delighted to have you here. This event's going to be a little bit different.

9

00:01:59.680 --> 00:02:10.040

Keri Landau: To the way we normally run things, so it's not an hour. Today's session is going to be a compact 30 minutes. We know that as civil servants and public servants, you're likely short on time.

10

00:02:10.039 --> 00:02:24.580

Keri Landau: And we want these events to suit your learning needs and work with your schedules. We're going to get into the presentation very shortly, but before we do so, I'd like to extend an invitation for you all to join Apolitical's Career Development Community.

11

00:02:24.580 --> 00:02:39.929

Keri Landau: This is a space for public servants to share questions, insights, and resources on the very challenges we'll be discussing here today. So if you'd like to continue the conversation, here is the perfect place to do it. A link should pop up at the bottom of your screen now.

12

00:02:40.680 --> 00:02:49.920

Keri Landau: If you click on it, it will take you to the community page, and my colleague will also post that link in the chat to make it easy for you. You'll see it there now.

13

00:02:51.540 --> 00:03:08.239

Keri Landau: Secondly, I must let you know that this event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website. Please don't record it yourself. Contact details for privacy concerns are in the Apolitical homepage footer. Closed captions are also available and can be toggled on in your screen settings.

14

00:03:08.300 --> 00:03:11.850

Keri Landau: Some of this information will be posted in the chat as well.

15

00:03:11.920 --> 00:03:28.399

Keri Landau: Now, to the best part. To introduce our speaker, we are extremely fortunate to have Neil Bauer joining us here today. Neil is a professor of practice at the Max Bell School of Public Policy, and former Vice President of the Canada School of Public Service.

16

00:03:28.400 --> 00:03:33.869

Keri Landau: Over his career, he's held senior roles across many federal departments and agencies.

17

00:03:33.870 --> 00:03:49.440

Keri Landau: Including the Treasury Board Secretariat, Natural Resources Canada, Privy Council Office, and more. You can read the full bio by visiting the Resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom and heading to the Speakers section.

18

00:03:51.270 --> 00:04:06.940

Keri Landau: Neil, it's such a pleasure to have you here with us today, and I'm really delighted to be interviewing you for the next 15 to 20 minutes about your career and the lessons you've learned. And then we're going to have a few minutes reserved for questions and answers for attendees.

19

00:04:06.940 --> 00:04:12.419

Keri Landau: So, everyone in the room, please do submit your questions for Neil in the Q&A tab.

20

00:04:15.480 --> 00:04:17.970

Keri Landau: ... Okay.

21

00:04:19.329 --> 00:04:25.320

Keri Landau: So... Remember to kill... Sorry.

22

00:04:26.300 --> 00:04:29.329

Keri Landau: Getting used to our new, formats.

23

00:04:33.560 --> 00:04:43.810

Keri Landau: So, we won't make it through all these questions, but I think, Neil, I am going to hand over to you. So, floor is yours, and please keep everyone else keep adding questions in the chat.

24

00:04:44.300 --> 00:05:02.650

Neil Bouwer: Thanks, Carrie, that's amazing. So, first of all, it's great to be with a community of practitioners. Obviously, my experience is from the Government of Canada, but, you know, through discussions with public servants from across the world, really kind of really understand how similar the challenges and the triumphs

25

00:05:02.650 --> 00:05:27.440

Neil Bouwer: and the strategies that sort of exist across government. I mean, at the end of the day, we're all motivated by the same things. We're trying to make our countries and our communities better. We're trying to deal in large organizations that are complex. We have tensions between, sort of, the forces for change and the forces for the status quo. We all have faced transparency and accountability to our people, which sort of makes the public service environment

26

00:05:27.620 --> 00:05:42.669

Neil Bouwer: very different from the private sector, and also at the same time, there's lessons to be learned from that. So it's great to be able to talk to it. Just to give you a quick sketch. So, I'm just out of the public service after about 30 years and more.

27

00:05:42.810 --> 00:05:52.359

Neil Bouwer: Most of that time was spent in central agencies, but like most people, you know, I worked my way up as an analyst in different departments, and I moved around and got different experiences.

28

00:05:52.360 --> 00:06:06.849

Neil Bouwer: And then I've sort of collected things. I've got some bruises, and I've got some badges, and I'd love to talk about that and share that with, with everyone in the hopes that it will inspire people to do and to be successful.

29

00:06:14.790 --> 00:06:29.559

Keri Landau: Great. Thanks so much, Neil, for that. And I guess, just kind of looking back, given all the moves that you've had, and you've had so many interesting transitions, what's the one piece of advice that you just wish someone had given you when you first started out?

30

00:06:30.080 --> 00:06:37.099

Neil Bouwer: Yeah, well, I... I wish at the beginning... at the beginning, I was very consumed with my job and my tasks.

31

00:06:37.140 --> 00:06:52.499

Neil Bouwer: and my, sort of my small unit. I wish that someone had really encouraged me to build an architectural curiosity, so a curiosity about things that build and builds and builds my own professional kind of repertoire. And by curiosity, I mean

32

00:06:52.500 --> 00:07:16.939

Neil Bouwer: curiosity about the country, about the economy, about communities, but also curiosity about ideas and about people. And just to give you a quick example, I used to work for a woman who had on her shelf these little cardboard boxes of different sort of concepts, like social capital, or business innovation, or Indigenous reconciliation. And in those days when we used to keep paper on shelves.

33

00:07:17.100 --> 00:07:34.870

Neil Bouwer: she would carry those with her from job to job over the span of her career. And it was just, to me, a really visible symbol about how when you invest in ideas, with the idea of building over time, not just for the job that you're in, or even for the organization you're working for, but as part of your, sort of.

34

00:07:34.870 --> 00:07:43.259

Neil Bouwer: intellectual capital and public service capital that you're going to use throughout your career. So I... I kind of wish someone had set me on that path early in my career.

35

00:07:44.460 --> 00:07:55.820

Keri Landau: Thank you, that's helpful, isn't it? People often, kind of focus on the job or the tasks, and actually, this relates to another question that we had pre-submitted, so you might want to build on this.

36

00:07:55.930 --> 00:08:05.939

Keri Landau: But what kind of mindset shifts do you think are important for, kind of, a thriving long-term career in government? How would you explain that?

37

00:08:05.940 --> 00:08:15.879

Neil Bouwer: Well, I mean, first of all, I would say that, I think that no matter what you're working on, you should have an idea of what future-oriented excellence looks like.

38

00:08:15.910 --> 00:08:34.309

Neil Bouwer: So, maybe you're working in the grants and contributions program, or a service delivery program, or a regulatory program, or policing, or a corporate, area. I think it is good to have sort of a stylized idea in your mind about what this... what success and excellence in this function looks like in the future.

39

00:08:34.309 --> 00:08:43.470

Neil Bouwer: Rather than just in the moment, if you know what I mean. So, it's sort of the old saying about Wayne Gretzky saying, you should go to where the puck's going, not where the puck is, sort of thing. It's...

40

00:08:43.470 --> 00:08:48.789

Neil Bouwer: It should be so with the functions of government. So that's one mindset shift that I think is really important.

41

00:08:48.790 --> 00:09:05.089

Neil Bouwer: Another mindset, I don't know if it's a shift or it's just a tension to be navigated, but for me, a big thing is this tension between vanguards and guardians. Vanguards being the people that are trying to create new public value from new trends and new ideas.

42

00:09:05.090 --> 00:09:29.219

Neil Bouwer: and guardians who are trying to preserve the wisdom of the status quo, and have compliance with regulations and the law and everything else, and the system as it is now. And that's a real tension. And, you know, at times you really want to be a vanguard, you know, using AI and data and, you know, whatever. And then times you want... you need to be a good guardian, a good guardian, a steward of resources, of people, and so on, and that's a real tension.

43

00:09:29.220 --> 00:09:33.910

Neil Bouwer: And we should all be good vanguards, and we should all be good guardians.

44

00:09:33.910 --> 00:09:40.989

Neil Bouwer: So I think in my career, sometimes I've emphasized one over the other to my detriment.

45

00:09:40.990 --> 00:09:52.180

Neil Bouwer: And I think the real full-spectrum public servant understands how to be a great vanguard and how to be a great guardian. And then the last sort of mindset shift that I would say is.

46

00:09:52.180 --> 00:10:04.400

Neil Bouwer: you know, there's an artificial distinction between policy or strategy, and then delivery or programs. And, years ago, in Ontario and Canada, they used to use the word

47

00:10:04.400 --> 00:10:05.570

Neil Bouwer: prolifery.

48

00:10:05.570 --> 00:10:24.779

Neil Bouwer: Which is a combination of policy and delivery. And I realize that's an assault on the English language, but the idea is there that you want to mesh policy and delivery together. You cannot separate the two, and we sink or swim together, and we really need to be talking. And so, you know, in terms of this mindset shift, you'll know

49

00:10:24.780 --> 00:10:48.060

Neil Bouwer: you're being good at integrating these two when the policy folks can talk about the delivery challenges and the delivery strategies, and the delivery or the program folks can understand the strategic considerations and the policy dynamics, and also create insights from operational data and operational experience that feeds program design, which is a policy feedback loop. So that's also a really big mind shift that I think we need to navigate.

50

00:10:48.980 --> 00:10:53.029

Keri Landau: Thank you. I feel like this comes up in some way, shape, or form, you know.

51

00:10:53.030 --> 00:11:00.010

Neil Bouwer: almost every week working in government, and it really depends where you come into the system, but thank you for really.

52

00:11:00.050 --> 00:11:02.160

Keri Landau: Drawing that out.

53

00:11:02.160 --> 00:11:14.530

Neil Bouwer: I'm actually thinking, just on that point as well, that that was about mindsets, but it is... sounds like it's also about relationships, and how you communicate, with people, perhaps in different functions, so....

54

00:11:14.530 --> 00:11:28.149

Keri Landau: I'm wondering, and this is relating to a pre-submitted question, kind of what your advice is for building strong and genuine connections across different teams and departments that may have competing or adjacent mandates.

55

00:11:28.150 --> 00:11:45.369

Neil Bouwer: Yeah. Yeah, so first of all, I think that, so relationships are of primordial importance, and, you know, it's to our detriment if we sort of focus on the ideas, or focus on the tasks, and forget about the people. And so there's a few different complexions of that. One is, you know, thinking about...

56

00:11:45.370 --> 00:12:02.550

Neil Bouwer: you know, empathy, design thinking, you know, user-oriented, so that sort of good digital principle, that's one good way to do it, because it kind of forces you to have formal methods of incorporating people into whatever it is that you're doing. The second thing, I think, is just.

57

00:12:02.550 --> 00:12:06.080

Neil Bouwer: You know, building authentic relationships, which is to say.

58

00:12:06.080 --> 00:12:21.410

Neil Bouwer: you know, really try to understand what interests a person, and then remember it. And, you know, I have a terrible memory, so sometimes I even rely on, like, online tools, like, you know, Trello, or Evernote, or whatever, you know, kind of online things, and I'll...

59

00:12:21.410 --> 00:12:35.109

Neil Bouwer: I'll have someone's name, and then I'll try to remember, yeah, what were the policy areas that they're really interested in, or what were the programming areas, or what are just their interests? And that sounds a little schmarmy, but I guess it's just a way for me to...

60

00:12:35.110 --> 00:12:53.919

Neil Bouwer: remember people, and so if I'm thinking about, oh, I'm thinking about Carrie, okay, well, then I'll look up, oh, I see her research interests are in this area, and she's really into, you

know, career transitions and building good public service careers. Well then, if I come across an article or an idea, then I'll reach out kind of proactively. The last thing I'll say about this is.

61

00:12:53.920 --> 00:12:55.810

Neil Bouwer: There are communities

62

00:12:55.920 --> 00:13:13.410

Neil Bouwer: that should exist, and some that do exist. So, you mentioned the apolitical communities. That's a fantastic way, online, kind of reaching out and building community. Also, you know, within our governments and within our communities, there are these sorts of communities. And too late in my career, I sort of realized

63

00:13:13.410 --> 00:13:33.510

Neil Bouwer: that some of these communities were missing. So, you know, in Canada, we created, you know, maybe it's 8 years ago now, the policy community. There had not been one before. That's crazy. I also think, you know, we need a Gs and C's management committee, which... or community, rather, which doesn't really exist right now. So, I think, you know.

64

00:13:33.510 --> 00:13:36.190

Neil Bouwer: My advice would be to, you know, start or join a cult.

65

00:13:36.190 --> 00:13:56.059

Neil Bouwer: You know, if one exists, join it, but if one doesn't exist, we'll start it. And because there's strength in numbers, and obviously we're a function of the people that we interact with, and when we have people that are interested and come from diverse perspectives, and we sort of talk things through, we're going to have better careers and more effective outcomes as a result.

66

00:13:57.440 --> 00:14:04.029

Keri Landau: Great. Public value, ... cults, or... Coalitions of the willing.

67

00:14:04.030 --> 00:14:05.770

Neil Bouwer: Yeah, that's a better way to put it, maybe.

68

00:14:06.040 --> 00:14:13.409

Keri Landau: And just, Neil, you mentioned Gs and C's, and for those of us that aren't familiar with that, would you mind elaborating?

69

00:14:13.410 --> 00:14:29.380

Neil Bouwer: Yeah, that's grants and contributions. So, in my experience, there's a lot of people that know how to be good guardians for grants and contributions and to follow the rules, but it's harder to find people that are really interested in how do you design grants and contributions or granting programs.

70

00:14:29.380 --> 00:14:37.779

Neil Bouwer: what are the design features, and how do you manage them strategically? And that's a community, at least at the federal level in Canada, I think could be really supported and grown, so....

71

00:14:37.780 --> 00:14:46.289

Keri Landau: Great, thank you for that. And I think that's where, the more you work in the system as well, actually, the more you understand where the gaps are, or the opportunities.

72

00:14:46.430 --> 00:14:58.180

Keri Landau: Perhaps to share together. So, thank you for that. I'm thinking you've got so many different parts of your, career, really, to, draw from here, Neil, and I wonder...

73

00:14:58.580 --> 00:15:10.970

Keri Landau: If there's something which perhaps is not role-specific, but a kind of truth about working in government that perhaps no one says out loud, what's the one thing that you think everyone should know?

74

00:15:10.970 --> 00:15:15.460

Neil Bouwer: Well, I think it's important to know that, at least in the Government of Canada.

75

00:15:15.750 --> 00:15:19.219

Neil Bouwer: That risk aversion is rewarded.

76

00:15:19.860 --> 00:15:29.380

Neil Bouwer: And that, innovation is, ... are quietly... Innovators are quietly chipped away.

77

00:15:29.760 --> 00:15:41.699

Neil Bouwer: and sometimes not so quietly chipped away because they get a big award which just draws attention to themselves, but... but I think it's sort of, there is inherent in the DNA of governments

78

00:15:41.820 --> 00:15:53.399

Neil Bouwer: a reactionary risk aversion, and there's a good reason for it. I mean, there are many good reasons for it. Government... unlike the... in the private sector, you can do anything you want unless the law tells you you can't.

79

00:15:53.400 --> 00:16:00.540

Neil Bouwer: In the government, you can only do something when it is, put in place through an act of a legislature or a parliament.

80

00:16:00.540 --> 00:16:15.200

Neil Bouwer: So, you must therefore have to constrain your actions by that will of Parliament or the legislature. So, in that sense, this compliance function is very much baked into the DNA. It preserves the status quo.

81

00:16:15.200 --> 00:16:27.799

Neil Bouwer: of the situation, and there's always wisdom in that status quo. So they don't tell you that at the beginning. It would create a lot of young cynics if they did, but when you're navigating change, which we must all do.

82

00:16:27.800 --> 00:16:35.940

Neil Bouwer: It's important to understand this reward system behind the scenes for management and senior management and executives that exist

83

00:16:35.940 --> 00:16:59.610

Neil Bouwer: That will, sort of, you know, you're always leaning into the wind when you're trying to truly, innovate. So, that's not to say you shouldn't do it, but it's to say that there are strategies for navigating that risk aversion. For example, I mentioned excellence. Like, pursuing excellence is better than pursuing innovation. Nobody's going to disagree with pursuing excellence. In fact, even someone who's risk-averse is going to understand

84

00:16:59.610 --> 00:17:02.910

Neil Bouwer: But if you're not excellent, you may slowly become incompetent.

85

00:17:03.010 --> 00:17:08.380

Neil Bouwer: And so you have to change in order to remain competent, or maybe even to pursue excellence.

86

00:17:08.380 --> 00:17:25.330

Neil Bouwer: Whereas, if you say you're pursuing innovation, there's a whole group of people that will say, well, what's that for? That's just eye candy, that's just, you know, pilotitis, that's, you know, something that is not really important. So there's different strategies for doing that, and for example, pilot projects, experimentation, measuring results.

87

00:17:25.329 --> 00:17:38.250

Neil Bouwer: these are all things that appeal to the risk-averse mindset and the reward structure that's set up in government. So I think that's sort of one of those fundamental truths that they don't put on their recruitment posters, you know?

88

00:17:38.770 --> 00:17:39.910

Keri Landau: Yeah, wow.

89

00:17:39.910 --> 00:18:01.839

Keri Landau: That is gold, and I think just that honesty about helping people, it's almost what's the obvious thing that is maybe perhaps not immediately obvious to you, not visible, but you might be bumping up against without realizing, and I really appreciate your specific tactics there on framing, which I'm sure people here today will find useful.

90

00:18:01.840 --> 00:18:16.079

Keri Landau: So thank you for that. But just on that point, Neil, and also noting, you know, we have people from the UK and other countries which have reform agendas, we do see a lot of change and reform efforts across the public sector.

91

00:18:16.080 --> 00:18:24.570

Keri Landau: And given the context that you've just talked about, I mean, what have you learned about influencing or leading change effectively from within?

92

00:18:25.490 --> 00:18:41.809

Neil Bouwer: Yeah, and apologies, because this is gonna... this is gonna sound, obvious, so, forgive me, in advance. But the first thing is, is that you do need senior support. If you're an innovator, or a pioneer, or you fancy yourself as a vanguard, and you're alone.

93

00:18:41.850 --> 00:18:51.609

Neil Bouwer: then bad things are gonna happen. First of all, it could be that you are misguided, because if you don't have people aligned with you, it could be that your idea is not as good as you think it is.

94

00:18:51.610 --> 00:19:03.500

Neil Bouwer: But secondly, even if it is a good idea, it's not going to go anywhere if you don't have a coalition of support. And this is where culture comes into it, because there are a lot of unspoken power circles in every organization.

95

00:19:03.660 --> 00:19:28.480

Neil Bouwer: So just to give you an example, when I was at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, I led this reform for, you know, modernizing our food inspection system to be more risk-based and horizontal and so forth. Basically, I didn't make it up. I listened to the organization, and in particular, I listened to the technical experts in the organization, the scientists and the sort of the program leaders in the organization, and they were

96

00:19:29.100 --> 00:19:35.319

Neil Bouwer: they were articulating this to me. I was just synthesizing it, validating it with them, and then communicating it.

97

00:19:35.320 --> 00:19:52.189

Neil Bouwer: So I guess what I'm... what I'm saying is that you have to have allies, it's not just your boss, it's not just the senior management table, because sometimes the senior management table is also delusional, in the sense that they can create an agenda which really doesn't make the kind of progress that

98

00:19:52.190 --> 00:20:09.089

Neil Bouwer: they think it's going to make in that time frame. So that's, that's one thing that's really important. The other thing I would say is, you know, there's this concept of adaptive leadership, so rather than a revolution, look for an evolution. So I think that's important. You know, you don't need to boil the ocean, you don't need to solve all the problems at once.

99

00:20:09.090 --> 00:20:28.149

Neil Bouwer: And a corollary of that, I would say, is transform thyself. In other words, try to do what's in your immediate span of control. Make that an example of the future, make that an example of modernization, and really try to do, what you can in your area of remit. Rather than wishing someone else would change, or wishing for the big change.

100

00:20:28.150 --> 00:20:39.720

Neil Bouwer: be the change that you want to be, and set an example for others, and you'll be thankful for it. And then finally, on this, I'll just say a good dose of strategic patience.

101

00:20:39.720 --> 00:20:52.909

Neil Bouwer: If you have good ideas, and if you're oriented correctly, you're evidence-based, and you feel like things are going well, and maybe you're frustrated in the moment about the progress that's not being made, be patient. Don't freak out, don't burn bridges, don't...

102

00:20:52.910 --> 00:20:56.100

Neil Bouwer: You know, don't, don't hit the panic button.

103

00:20:56.100 --> 00:21:15.899

Neil Bouwer: Be patient. Try to find an angle, or a small incremental change, or something positive. Work your coalition, broaden your coalition, get into other circles of influence, and the time will come. And I can think of countless examples in my own career where things didn't happen at the time. They may not even happen while I was there.

104

00:21:15.900 --> 00:21:26.310

Neil Bouwer: But they do happen, and they may not happen at the pace that we would like, but they... but you've got to have faith that everyone's pointed in the right direction, and good things will happen.

105

00:21:28.150 --> 00:21:43.840

Keri Landau: Thank you, Neil. Well, I think there's just so many phrases here which I'm going to be pulling out my bag there. Strategic patience is definitely one from today, but thank you, and I can see we have a lot of engagement in the Q&A.

106

00:21:43.890 --> 00:21:55.760

Keri Landau: So, I'm very keen to also, move on to those, if you don't mind, and hear what people in the room would like to ask about. So...

107

00:21:57.910 --> 00:22:00.879

Keri Landau: We are going to be going...

108

00:22:03.490 --> 00:22:08.180

Keri Landau: to the Q&A tab. Hold on a second.

109

00:22:15.180 --> 00:22:17.709

Neil Bouwer: while you're doing that, Carrie, can I just add a quick point?

110

00:22:17.990 --> 00:22:18.810

Keri Landau: Yes, please.

111

00:22:18.810 --> 00:22:36.820

Neil Bouwer: I just wanted to add that you asked me sort of what I wish someone would have said at the beginning, but I also... I just want to add also what I consider to be one of the big lies that you're told. One of the big lies you're told is that if you do your tasks and your job well, your career will take care of itself.

112

00:22:37.000 --> 00:22:47.720

Neil Bouwer: So good things come to those who produce at their job. And there's certainly a huge grain of truth to that, and obviously, everyone should strive for excellence in their immediate thing, but what that ignores is the people dynamic.

113

00:22:47.830 --> 00:23:12.769

Neil Bouwer: What that ignores is that it's not just about the tasks and doing good at the tasks at hand. It's also about building bridges across different functional areas, different parts of the organization, different levels within the organization, and with other organizations. And I think if you're thinking in career terms, it'll really serve you well to take time to think about that and cultivate that, sort of going back to that idea of curiosity

114

00:23:12.770 --> 00:23:26.390

Neil Bouwer: I mentioned earlier, be curious about all parts of your organization, be curious about other parts of the... of other organizations, and really nourish that curiosity and pursue it in a constructive way. You know, I would say an architectural way, but in a constructive way over time.

115

00:23:28.750 --> 00:23:45.999

Keri Landau: Thank you so much, Neil. I'm gonna just, I've now found all the brilliant questions here, and I just wondered, Neil, for a bit of advice here, around... you mentioned building support, about how you would manage to speak to people, perhaps higher up, perhaps beyond your usual management line.

116

00:23:46.760 --> 00:23:59.939

Neil Bouwer: Yeah, for sure. Well, first of all, I really like that question, because I think that you should have empathy for, you should understand, not just what your boss is trying to achieve, but you should try to understand what their boss is trying to achieve. And at the limit.

117

00:23:59.940 --> 00:24:24.219

Neil Bouwer: you should understand what their boss and their boss, you know, and so forth, are trying to achieve, because it's good to have a sense of organizational direction and strategy. So, I coach a lot of people who are in central agencies and perform the challenge function, and I find that, that if you continue to do the challenge function, you can really become a so-and-so, and what I really coach people to do is to have empathy for the strategic direction of the heads of the departments that they're challenging, so they can understand

118

00:24:24.220 --> 00:24:48.669

Neil Bouwer: the big picture, not just challenge, but also support. So, in terms of having that conversation, I think if you can sort of empathize with their strategic playing field, the forces that are going on them, also going with an open mindset and a curiosity-driven approach, and asking them, so what are the forces that you're navigating? What are the things that, you know, that are on your mind? You know, where do you want to see progress? What are you worried about in terms of blockers?

119

00:24:48.700 --> 00:24:59.899

Neil Bouwer: What strategies are you considering? Frankly, that conversation actually helps that person do a better job, because it forces them to articulate clearly to somebody that kind of playing field, which is brilliant.

120

00:24:59.900 --> 00:25:24.650

Neil Bouwer: But also it will help you be more conversant with them. And then when you find yourself giving advice, I would say, you know, I wouldn't do it in a huge forum. You know, I used to have this fellow that worked for me when I was an Assistant Secretary to Cabinet at the Privy Council office, and this one officer in particular, and he would say, Neil, do you have 10

minutes? You know, I'd like to talk to you about something. Sure, he'd close the door, he'd sit down, and basically then he would say.

121

00:25:24.650 --> 00:25:42.329

Neil Bouwer: there's something on my mind, I'd like to give you some feedback, are you open to that? Yes, I am. And then he would go ahead and tell me very, you know, one-on-one, very low stakes, but would give some very direct feedback about, you know, he thinks we were being too tough or too easy, or whatever the issue was, and he had a really nice way of doing it, and I actually felt coached

122

00:25:42.330 --> 00:25:46.010

Neil Bouwer: By... this is, you know, this is somebody who reported to somebody who reported to me, if you know what it is.

123

00:25:46.480 --> 00:26:01.729

Neil Bouwer: So anyway, so I would say, yeah, avoid... I wouldn't make it high stakes, I wouldn't do it in front of a crowd, and then I would be thoughtful, and I would be... you should go in with an open mindset, and you should go in with sort of the Socratic method, asking more questions, and trying to get the result.

124

00:26:01.730 --> 00:26:12.549

Neil Bouwer: And, you know, take it naturally, and also don't put too much on one conversation. It's okay to have a broaching conversation. You'll both go away and think about it more, and then you can always come back later. That would be my advice off the cuff.

125

00:26:12.720 --> 00:26:22.059

Keri Landau: Yeah, I love that, and to know that it would be welcomed. Thanks so much, Neil. And for everyone else, please do keep sharing your questions in the chat for Neil.

126

00:26:22.060 --> 00:26:30.880

Neil Bouwer: And just before we dive into a few more questions, I wanted to also let you know, that we've curated some follow-on resources on today's topic.

127

00:26:30.880 --> 00:26:53.280

Keri Landau: a playlist of the best career advice shared on the apolitical platform, and we know that you'll find useful perspectives in there, and other kind of words of wisdom. So just, pleased to do that, to receive your link to go to the collection, please go to the career development

community after this event, and leave a comment in the post, which I've pinned at the top of the page.

128

00:26:53.280 --> 00:26:58.140

Keri Landau: And then if you leave a comment, we'll be able to send you the resource later this week.

129

00:26:58.140 --> 00:27:10.430

Keri Landau: And also, if we don't get to your question today, I would say please do share them in the community, and we'll be able to, signpost Neil, and also other people will be able to answer those. My colleague has posted a link in the chat,

130

00:27:10.430 --> 00:27:19.239

Keri Landau: to that particular community thread. Right, so we're going to be, going back just to see if we've got time for a few more questions here.

131

00:27:19.510 --> 00:27:27.750

Keri Landau: ... I am going to ask something a little bit different. We've talked about risk aversion already, ...

132

00:27:28.230 --> 00:27:43.059

Keri Landau: And here's one that I think is quite relevant to my research, as well as what you've talked about. You talked a lot about your public sector career. Would you recommend people seeking some private sector career work experience as well?

133

00:27:43.060 --> 00:27:58.419

Neil Bouwer: Well, everybody's different, and everybody should pursue what makes sense to them, what makes their story interesting to them, so I would... yeah, I would if that's sort of what turns their crank, but I'll share my experience with it. I left government to go to Crown Corporation, the business development bank.

134

00:27:58.420 --> 00:28:06.250

Neil Bouwer: Which I was leading the Department of Finance, I was thinking this was a stepping stone to the private sector, and I have to tell you, after a while, I just wasn't sure that...

135

00:28:06.250 --> 00:28:23.450

Neil Bouwer: quarterly earnings was the metric that I... that gave me satisfaction at night. I think there's something about the public sector, and serving the public, serving your community, serving your country, your region, or whatever it might be. So I think that if I...

136

00:28:23.450 --> 00:28:32.030

Neil Bouwer: if I'm honest about public service careers, it's good to go to the private sector, or maybe an NGO, or a university, or whatever.

137

00:28:32.080 --> 00:28:37.590

Neil Bouwer: But if you've got that vocation in you, probably you're gonna be coming back.

138

00:28:37.590 --> 00:28:49.799

Neil Bouwer: in some way to a public sector role. So I would bear that in mind. I mean, you know, I'm not sure I would coach someone to leave and just go and try to make a wad of money. You know, what's... where's the...

139

00:28:49.800 --> 00:28:59.560

Neil Bouwer: where's the satisfaction in that sort of thing? So I think it really is a vocation. But yeah, different experiences from different places is really valuable. Not always rewarded.

140

00:28:59.560 --> 00:29:15.880

Neil Bouwer: In government, by the way. So, in my experience, I've left twice. I had short stints, less than 2 years, and in those cases, it was excellent for my career, as well as for my learning, and as well as for my perspective, but it was short enough that I didn't lose touch with

141

00:29:15.880 --> 00:29:26.469

Neil Bouwer: the public sector ecosystem, I was able to come back in and really thrive from a career point of view. So, yeah, my advice would be try it, but consider it.

142

00:29:26.470 --> 00:29:33.829

Neil Bouwer: Kind of a... as a two-year, or maybe a three-year, learning experience, rather than a real, you know,

143

00:29:33.870 --> 00:29:38.389

Neil Bouwer: If you're thinking that this is going to be a huge stepping stone to come back into the public sector, I'm not sure it works that way.

144

00:29:38.930 --> 00:29:59.970

Keri Landau: Thank you. So always having in mind that kind of long-term public sector career, whichever choices you make. And thank you so much, Neil. We've just had such incredible wisdom from you today, and I would really like to invite everyone who's here today to join me in sharing a huge virtual round of applause with Neil, for Neil.

145

00:30:00.210 --> 00:30:15.049

Keri Landau: And most importantly, thanks to you, to the attendees for investing in learning and being so engaged in this topic, our team's gonna pop up a quick poll to find out how you felt about the event, which will help us continue to improve our content, and we really appreciate your responses.

146

00:30:15.050 --> 00:30:40.050

Keri Landau: So on a scale of 1 to 10, please rank your agreement with this statement. This event was a valuable use of my time, with 1 meaning you disagree, and 10 meaning you completely agree, and you'll see the poll up there. And that is, unfortunately, all we have time for today. Please do continue to share your questions in the community. We hope you found it helpful, and we want to say an absolute huge thank you to Neil, who's made, and to everyone who's made today

147

00:30:40.050 --> 00:30:56.639

Keri Landau: happen. Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy days. Keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recording, and don't forget to find my post and comment for today's follow-up resources. We really hope to see you at another apolitical event soon. Have a great day, and thank you, Neil. Goodbye.