

# **Generals, Troops and Diplomats**

**Mark Madden**

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## Foreword

There is a growing body of academic work and discussion about the role of advisers in the Australian political system. While this guide may add to that discussion, that is not its purpose. This has been written to provide practical advice for advisers and those who may aspire to the role.

The guide has had many versions, starting out in response to the need for an induction program for advisers while working in the Office of the Premier of Victoria in the early 2000s. Previous versions have been for internal distribution only, generally for my own staff in Ministerial offices. This is the first version to go 'public'.

It is my personal view of the role of an adviser. It brings together experience gathered from more than 20 years' involvement in politics as a participant and an observer, including as a journalist, a media adviser and as a senior adviser in Labor governments at State (Victoria) and Commonwealth level. It draws on the wisdom and practical advice of Ministers, fellow advisers and party officials with whom I have worked directly and indirectly, and lessons from successes and failures in public policy and political management on all sides of politics in that time. It also draws on my experience in business, as a facilitator, strategic planner and board member. It is undoubtedly idiosyncratic and most likely suffers from my own 'confirmation bias'. It is one person's view on a complex role in a complex system.

Advisers play a critical role in the Australian political system. The role is rewarding, exciting, exasperating, tiring and sometimes thankless, often on the same day. Advisers are at one level the conduit between their Ministers and Departments, which at times leaves them feeling like the 'meat in the sandwich' rather than the 'icing on the cake'. At another level they are 'policy entrepreneurs', important players in the development and delivery of policy change. And if politics is ultimately a battle of ideas, to be successful requires the combined skills of good generals, troops and diplomats.

Every morning an adviser is one day closer to losing his or her job and having to look for another, while often carrying the baggage of having worked in a 'political' job. While the pay can be good and the achievements deeply satisfying, there are easier ways to make a living. So this guide is written in thanks to those who have served in the role, as an aid to those currently in the role, and as an encouragement to those who aspire to the role, or who will answer the call once asked. Politics is a noble profession and good government needs good MPs, ministers, public servants - and advisers.

**Mark Madden**

## Acknowledgements

To borrow a philosophical metaphor, this is my 'raft' of adviser knowledge. It is made up of many planks: personal experience and reflection, notes from meetings, advice from and discussions with colleagues and friends over the years, books, newspaper articles, TV series, interviews on radio; the list could go on. It is kept together by some nails here and a bit of rope over there. It may weigh too much or not enough, it may not be nimble enough to navigate the tricky waters of that grand river called politics. But it is afloat, and its basic design will allow new planks to be added and old ones to be replaced, reshaped or discarded. You never know, it may be able to be fashioned into a yacht... or it may hit a bank or sandbar as it travels.

But that is for the future. Now, I want to thank those that delivered many of the planks that helped to get this 'raft' built - former Victorian Premier John Cain (via Michael Roberts), who gave me my first job in politics; the Premiers and Ministers (State and Federal) and Opposition leaders I had the privilege to serve: Barry Pullen, 'Bunna' Walsh, Joan Kirner, John Brumby, Steve Bracks, Rob Hulls and Simon Crean; party officials, including John Lenders and Candy Broad (who went on to become Ministers in the Bracks/Brumby Governments) and Andrew McKenzie, Roland Lindell; the many adviser colleagues I had the privilege of working with including Richard Wynne (who also went on to become a Minister in the Bracks/Brumby Governments), Caroline Hogg (Minister in the Cain/Kirner Governments), Mike Roberts (not to be confused with Michael Roberts), Rosemary McKenzie, John Cain jnr, John Thwaites, Sue Pickles, Geoff Emmett, Paul Begley, Rosie Tovey, Gerry Tickell, Richard Searle, Robyn McLeod, Julie Ligeti, Joe Burke, Dan O'Brien, Kim McGrath, Bruce Cohen, Joel Deane, Michael Gurr, Aileen Muldoon, Anne Learmonth, James McGarvey, Phil Reed, Lachlan McDonald and Nada Kirkwood (with whom I worked on an initial induction program for advisers many years ago), Andrew Herington, Peter Holding, Fiona Hayes, Louise Glanville, Elena Campbell, Stan Winford, Mary Polis, Linton Duffin, Roger Wilesmith, Megan Hughes, Meaghan Shaw, Yvette Carisbrooke, Anna Brown, Susie Wilson, Roger Wilesmith, Bernie Dean, Brian Tee, Tony White, Garrie Hutchinson, Steve Gartland, Jaclyn Symes, Sandra McKay, Chris Altis, Susanne Legena, Brett Curran, Stephanie Mitten, Elizabeth Wortley, Emma Carnovale, Julie Stevens and John Duggan. Then there are the many dedicated, talented and hardworking public servants I had the privilege of working with and from whom I learned a great deal, including Christine Cookson, Ken King, Peter Harmsworth, Penny Armitage, Liz Eldridge, John Griffin, Ross Kennedy, Anne Crouch (and all those who worked at DoJ), David Hanna, Nicola Watkinson (and the Office of Manufacturing), Monica Pfeffer, Lyndsay Neilsen, Fran Thorn, Lea Saddington, Doug Hooley, Caroline Douglass, Merita Tabain, Xavier Csar, Glenys Beauchamp (and all those at the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government Arrts and Sport ) and Nicole Feely.

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Feedback will be gratefully received. If you want to contribute to the next version (comments, experiences, anecdotes) please send you feedback to [mark@devilsadvocate.net.au](mailto:mark@devilsadvocate.net.au). (Please advise if you wish no attribution).



## Welcome to Politics, the 'Art of the Possible'

*Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies.*

- Groucho Marx

*In politics, nothing moves unless it's pushed.*

- Morton C. Blackwell, *Laws of Politics*

*You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away and know when to run.*

- Kenny Rogers, *The Gambler*

*... they do not seem to have had from fortune anything other than opportunity. Fortune, as it were, provided the matter but they gave it its form; without opportunity their prowess would have been extinguished, and without such prowess the opportunity would have come in vain.*

- Machiavelli, *The Prince*

*Several of the men at the table said that pressing for the passage of a civil rights bill would jeopardise the tax, and the appropriation bills, and would shatter Johnson's relationship with the southerners who had always been the base of his strength in Congress and whose support he would need there now.*

*'One of the wise, practical people around the table' urged Johnson not to press for civil rights in his first speech, because there was no chance of passage, and a president shouldn't waste his power on lost causes - no matter how worthy the cause might be.*

*'The presidency has only a certain amount of coinage to expend, and you ought not to expend it on this,' he said.*

*'Well what the hell's the presidency for?' Lyndon Johnson replied.\**

- Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*

## As science and art

Ignore the cynics: politics is a noble profession! As Bismarck is believed to have said, politics is the 'art of the possible' - the art of making things possible for individuals, families, communities and the country. Politics is about the effective use of power to change things, solve problems and get things done; it's about people, the battle of ideas and for the emotions that convert people to or away from a cause. It is both 'science' and 'art'. A science because it's important to know and understand the rules of the game and an art because it is important to know when to apply, when to modify and when to break those rules. Successful politics requires luck and good timing; recognising an opportunity when it comes, and seizing it; knowing when to act and when NOT to act.

The best way to 'learn' politics is to look around you. Politics is all around, in our families, in our workplaces, in our clubs and community organisations. When a family of four with one car comes together on a weekend to discuss what they are going to do with the day ahead, the result will be delivered through politics. For example, how will the different interests and desires be accommodated, through compromise or through the sheer exercise of power by one or both of the parents? How will the family budget affect what is decided? Will the family stay together on the day or decide to go their separate ways, depending on the age of the children? What effect will the final decision and the process for achieving it have on the long-term relationships in the family? Will compromise now lead to gains later on?

In the workplace and in community organisations and clubs that you have been involved in, ask yourself how managers get to be in positions of power or influence, how ideas become policy and how successful or otherwise managers have been in getting things done. Indeed, at any meeting, note the power relationships in the room and the agenda, and watch how those power relationships determine the politics that in turn determines the outcome.

### **Generals, troops and diplomats**

Political parties all do 'politics'. For a political party in Opposition, it involves playing the political game, holding the Government to account by keeping tabs on broken promises, and highlighting waste and mismanagement, policy and program blunders and inconsistencies, conflicts of interests and values (which go to trust, integrity and credibility) while developing policy and becoming an alternative government.

For a political party in government, it requires a great deal more: it means governing! As well as playing the political game and defending itself against the politics being played by the Opposition, a government must be alive to the politics that will allow it to govern effectively and implement its own agenda while being responsible for administering the effective and efficient delivery of public services to the community. It is not always easy to get the balance right, and while governments can take comfort in the maxim that good policy is often good government, any government that forgets, ignores or fails to take advantage of 'the politics' in what it does, will not be effective or govern for too long.

In the end, government is a series of difficult choices, a political juggling act where there are never enough resources to do everything that needs to be done. To be successful and to get done what needs to be done, political practice in government combines the skills of a good general (able to develop and set the agenda, implement a strategy, mobilise support and resources) with those of skilled troops (able to deliver policy on the ground, troubleshoot issues, know when and how to attack and retreat, 'join the dots') and diplomats (able to understand the nature and limits of power, recruit allies to the cause, negotiate and bargain for the best possible outcomes). These skills can be present in the one person or in a group of people gathered around a person, issue or cause.

*\* Against great odds, Johnson got the civil rights bill, tax cuts and appropriations passed.*



## [From the Light on the Hill to the Light on the Desk](#)

*I try to think of the Labour movement, not as putting an extra sixpence into somebody's pocket, or making somebody Prime Minister or Premier, but as a movement bringing something better to the people, better standards of living, greater happiness to the mass of the people. We have a great objective - the light on the hill - which we aim to reach by working for the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand.*

- Ben Chifley, ALP Conference 1949

*I want every kid to have a desk, with a lamp and his own room to study.*

- Gough Whitlam's response, when asked to give a concrete example of equality.

- Graham Freudenberg, *A Certain Grandeur*

*We are a modern social democratic party which has made Australia better off, fairer and more sustainable. Universal health care, fairness in the workplace, and the age pension are Australian achievements, part of our tradition of working together for the common good and taking care of those with limited capacity to take care of themselves.*

- ALP National Platform, 2011

## [Values, the foundation of political strategy](#)

From the light on the hill to the light on the desk, the modern Labor Party has much of which to be proud, and much more to do. Advisers play an important role in getting it done. Advisers work for the Labor Party for a variety of reasons, including: because they are 'believers', in its values, policies and programs and want to be involved in delivering them; because they believe the best way of achieving a particular policy outcome important to them is by getting involved in government; because they are 'mercenaries' and see the role as a sinecure or part of a journey to somewhere else, whether in politics or the private sector; or because they have been 'drafted' out of the public service to provide important technical advice and policy depth. It could be one or more of the above.

Whatever the motivation, it is important for advisers to understand the values that underpin a modern social democratic labour party, like the Australian Labor Party. They are the foundation of political strategy. These values drive policy development and implementation, political behaviour and the party's political framing and messaging.

## Labor's values

The National Platform, for better or worse, is the source document for the party's agreed values, objectives and priorities. The document is long, detailed and repetitive. It may never win prizes for its prose and it definitely does not have the eloquence of the 'light on the hill' speech, but it is worth reading to refresh why we belong to the Australian Labor Party and why we seek to serve the Labor Party in the Parliament, whether in Government or Opposition. As set out in the platform, the national ALP has three core values:

- \* **Opportunity** (for all Australians to achieve their potential, contribute to their community and national life and shape their own lives);
- \* **Fairness** (treating everybody with dignity and respect; sticking together and sharing the risks we all face, upholding the rights, benefits and duties a fair distribution of wealth and income; a reconciled Australia and support and care for those who need assistance in the short or long term), and:
- \* **Responsibility** (taking active responsibility for ourselves, each other and the future).

What helps set us further apart from other political parties are the fundamental beliefs and the focus that flow from these values. Our belief in the power of **education, enterprise and equality of opportunity** (the light on the desk); in a **sustainable market economy** that gives all Australians an opportunity and makes sure no-one is left behind; in the unique and **positive role that government can play** in a market economy, in ensuring universal, high-quality education, health care and a social safety net; protecting national security; planning for and meeting national infrastructure needs and **protecting the natural environment** as well as taking responsibility for acting on **climate change**; in the right of every person to have a say directly or indirectly in the decisions that affect his or her life and in human rights, in a **just, tolerant society with open, democratic and accountable government**.

Labor's traditional focus involves working for the **common good**, working to break the **cycle of poverty** and disadvantage and **taking care** of those with limited capacity to take care of themselves (the light on the hill).

These values and beliefs are not strictly hierarchical. There will always be (and should be) discussion and debate about the relative importance of or weighting given to these values in the development and implementation of particular policy responses, framing or messaging.

### Integrity, values in action

All organisations (and indeed people) have two sets of values: those they preach (or write down) and those they practise. When these two sets of values align there is a strong sense of integrity, unity, energy and purpose, a healthy culture. When they don't, there is dissonance and confusion, which if not resolved saps energy and leads people to ask, 'What do we/they actually stand for?'

Taken together, these values, beliefs and programs are Labor's aspirations; the aspirations we have for communities and for the country. As with all aspirations, these are what Labor strives for and, as with all aspirations, Labor (like people) doesn't always live up to them in all ways and at all times. That's life, that's politics, but that's no excuse.

In politics and in life, knowing what values are written down and agreed on is one thing, but putting them into practice is the most important thing. Politicians and political parties are fundamentally judged on trust, integrity and credibility, which are measures of the extent to which values have been put into action.

The behaviour of advisers and Ministerial offices will be judged in the same way. It is important therefore to be clear about your own values, develop a shared set of values and behaviours for the Ministerial office and ensure Labor's values are embedded in how Labor governs.

## **The Role of Ministerial Offices and Advisers**

*[Advisers are] frontline troops in the continuous battle to protect and advance the interests of the Minister and the Government.*

- Senator John Button, Minister in the Hawke and Keating Governments

*The essence of power is the knowledge that what you do is going to have an effect, not just an immediate but perhaps a lifelong effect on the happiness and well-being of millions of people and so I think the essence of power is to be conscious of what it means for others.*

- Bob Hawke, Prime Minister

*Politics can be made more difficult than it really is. There are three essential tenets. First, take responsibility; second, reject the ideas that distract, divide and discount the nation; and third, argue to the last breath for the ideas and ideals that make the nation a better place. Honesty will, nearly always, win over duplicity.*

- Bill Kelty, former ACTU Secretary

*Shape the agenda or have it shaped for you, see the connections, join the dots!*

- Simon Crean, Minister in the Hawke, Keating, Rudd and Gillard Governments

*Where no Counsel is the People Fall; but in the Multitude of Counsellors there is Safety.*

- Proverbs 11:14

## **Understanding the role of a Ministerial office**

The role of the Ministerial office is to protect and advance the interests of the Minister and the Government. The Ministerial office is at the top of the Government decision-making process. The expectation is that those who are higher up in the process have the opportunity to see the furthest, to see and understand the bigger picture and to see the connections (join the dots) and dislocations in policies and reforms, to see the alternatives, the threats and barriers, to spot the opportunities and to know when to move and when not. This is the value that a political office should seek to add.

Professor Mark Moore's notion of 'public value management' provides a powerful way to view the role Ministerial offices. If you imagine the diagram as a 'helicopter view', you are looking at the political terrain that a political office must be across, from understanding the 'public value' you want to create, to whether the policies, programs or decisions are legitimate, approved and politically sustainable, and finally whether what is being proposed can actually be done.

According to Moore, public value is what the public actually values. That is, what the public is prepared to 'give time, money and freedom for'. It focuses attention on what the public values and not just what the 'producers' value; it highlights the importance of long-term outcomes, not just short-term inputs and outputs, and the process of 'co-creation' or effective network governance.



**Figure 1** Professor Mark Moore's 'public value model' provides a 'helicopter view' of the political sphere.

The delivery of 'public value' requires approval from the 'authorising environment' (political parties, government values, resource allocations, laws, community attitudes, interest groups and media) and 'operational capabilities' (through the legislative power, departments/agencies). As political scientist and former adviser Dr Stephen Mills says, each sphere asks a simple but important question: involves answering three key questions:

- \* Should we do this? (Will this create substantive public value?)
- \* May we do this? (Is this legitimate, approved and politically sustainable?)
- \* Can we do this? (Is this operationally and administratively feasible?)

To be effective, a political office (and individual advisers) must know the 'political terrain'. An office must understand the public value it seeks to create. This is found in the Minister's and Government's election commitments, priorities and broader agenda, including the ALP National Platform, the party's values statement, other relevant policies and key speeches. A political office needs to know how all these pieces of the puzzle fit together. It also needs to know the public value it is responsible for; that is, the policy and administrative tasks that are already in place. (A Minister's 'administrative terrain' is outlined in what are called administrative orders, issued by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet or the relevant Department of Premier and Cabinet following the announcement of a Ministry or any Ministerial change.)

A political office must also understand the alternatives of the Government's political



opponents. A political office needs to identify the key people and organisations in the 'authorising environment' and have a clear view about the operational capability of its department, including its legislative powers, skills base and budget, which includes its degree of budget flexibility.

### **The skills requirement of Ministerial offices**

There is no fixed structure to Ministerial offices. The allocation of advisers (and the level of seniority) and support staff is decided centrally, including the number of Departmental Liaison Officers (public servants based in a Minister's office that act as the conduit between the Department and the Minister's office). Some Ministers prefer hierarchical structures, others flatter structures. The Chief of Staff plays a pivotal role in modern political offices, bringing together two key roles as senior political adviser and office manager. In many cases, the administrative and budget aspects of office management are delegated by the CoS to another staff member, although the responsibility of managing the delivery of the Minister's overall program remains the CoS's responsibility. Ideally, the CoS should not have too many specific portfolio responsibilities, so that more time can be spent on developing and delivering the overall political strategy and providing quality political advice. Taking the responsibility for Cabinet as well as for budget preparation or the Expenditure Review Committee (if the Minister is a member) provides an opportunity for a CoS to be across, review and advise on key Government-wide issues and strategies.

An effective Ministerial office requires staff with a range of skills and knowledge, including:

#### **Political advice, policy development and implementation skills**

Political strategy (short-, medium- and long-term)

Ability to analyse issues quickly and provide concise political advice (written and verbal)

Policy breadth and policy depth (not always in the same person)

An understanding of the decision-making processes of Government and Parliament

An understanding of policy implementation by Departments

Risk management

#### **Project management**

Knowledge and critique of alternative views and policies, particularly those held by Opposition parties

Policy development skills (external and internal, including election policy)

People skills

Negotiation skills

Ability to work to under pressure, to tight deadlines and for long hours

Knowledge of the caucus, caucus committees and the party

Knowledge of other parties and MPs

Life experience

#### **Issues management, communications and media strategy skills**

Strategic communications, community engagement and marketing

Knowledge and experience in mainstream and social media

Understanding of Freedom of Information laws and processes  
Issues and crisis management  
A sound understanding of polling, particularly qualitative  
Speechwriting  
Monitoring of correspondence

### **Information management skills and systems**

Modern office systems, including software  
Understanding of Departmental information systems and processes  
Agreed timelines and deadlines for briefings/requests/correspondence  
Internal systems to manage briefings and other information

### **Diary management systems**

Logistics and event-management skills  
Regular diary meetings  
Strategic use of the diary

### **Parliamentary processes**

Parliamentary processes and tactics, including passage of legislation, the operations of parliamentary committees, including joint committees, house proceedings and rules including the operations of the Whip's office  
Preparation of Possible Parliamentary Questions (questions the Opposition may ask in Question Time) and Dorothy Dixers (the colloquial term for questions Government members will ask in Question Time)  
Monitoring of answers to Questions on Notice and Adjournment debates  
Estimates Committee-type hearings

### **Relationship management**

Central Ministerial offices (PMO, Treasury)  
Other Ministerial offices  
Relevant departments  
Statutory authorities  
Backbenchers and their staff (Caucus)  
Independents and their staff  
Shadow Ministers and their staff  
Community groups  
Unions  
Business and other special interest groups  
Party officials, policy committees and members  
The general public

Not all of these skills will reside in one person. If they do, make sure you grab them, pay them well and keep them! There are also times when an office may need to complement one adviser's skills with another's, or use the specific skills of an adviser across the office; for example, in areas such as negotiation and/or budget skills. It is also important to realise that every political staff member, from the receptionist to the Chief of Staff, has a wealth of life experience that can be drawn on to test and evaluate ideas and approaches.

There are a number of staffing challenges for all political offices: gender balance; age and experience profile; and policy depth or breadth. While the party still struggles to meet the targets for women in safe seats, there is no excuse for not ensuring an appropriate gender balance in political offices. Given the hours many advisers have to work, it is often hard to attract advisers with younger families, or keep them when they begin their families. Offices can end up a combination of younger singles and older advisers with grown children. It is hard to do, but getting and keeping a broad profile of age and experience helps. Getting policy depth and breadth can also be a challenge. While policy depth is critical, having an office that can look both deep and wide is important. A more strategic use of DLOs can assist in this regard, where they are selected not just for their administrative skills but their policy experience. They can be a good source of technical specialist advice.

### **The challenge of being a central office**

There are three central political offices in government charged with the delivery of its overall agenda: the Prime Minister's Office or PMO, the Premier's Private Office or PPO in State jurisdictions (or Chief Minister's Offices in the Territories), the drivers of the politics, the Treasurer's Office and the Finance Minister's Office. A more centralised approach to government has seen these 'gatekeeper' offices, particularly the PMO/PPO, grow in size and complexity.

While the nature of modern politics means that the relationship between central offices and ministerial offices will always be problematic - things don't always run smoothly, there are overlaps in responsibilities, disagreements about the best way forward and 'blameshifting' is not unheard of, whether justified or not - strong, robust relationships between central offices and other ministerial offices are crucial to the success of a government. Indeed, the conduct and performance of central offices strongly influences the political culture across the government. As they say, a fish rots from the head.

The relationship between central offices and ministerial offices is more effective if there is a commitment to a collective effort or shared sense of purpose focused on a clear political strategy. This requires clarity about the roles and responsibilities as well as the authority of advisers, and a genuine desire to break down the 'silos', to act as honest brokers and facilitators and not play political games - to seek out and listen to a range of opinions and expertise to get the right solution. Good communication is also fundamental, including the need to 'close the loop' on the issues at hand as well as engagement with stakeholders and other key players.

### **The challenge of dealing with central offices**

The central Ministerial offices are the internal 'authorising environment' of government. As well as putting you through the hoops on the 'should we?' and 'can we?' questions mentioned earlier, central offices are the ones that give the answer to 'may we?' (Indeed, the starting point for Treasury and Finance Departments and Ministerial offices to any policy or program request is usually 'NO!') Constructive relationships are critical. A political office needs to get a clear understanding of the Government's broader political strategy from the central offices and identify how the Minister's agenda fits in and contributes to it. That is, to see how their piece fits into the overall political 'jigsaw puzzle'. This understanding becomes the basis of the discussions and arguments put to

them about why an issue should proceed and/or be proceeded with in a particular way. 'What we are doing is delivering this part of your agenda...'

A political office needs to build relationships with those in the central offices that deal with its portfolio or portfolios and be in regular contact. A political office needs to understand the nature of the relationships between the PM/Premier, Treasurer, Finance Minister and its Minister as well as the relationships between those central offices to get a sense of the political culture in which it is operating. A political office needs to engender and support a positive culture and work around, overcome or protect itself from a negative one.

A political office needs to understand where the real authority is. Lower-level advisers in these larger offices often have little direct contact with the PM, Premier, Treasurer or Finance Minister and it's hard to know at times whether what they say is actually the view of their political boss. Also, when, as sometimes happens, two or three advisers turn up from the same central office, it is vital to find out who has carriage of that issue in that office. When responsibility is dispersed, a political office will sometimes need to bring on the 'full court press', that is a co-ordinated and consistent series of approaches to key decision makers to make the case. In the end, political offices can only go so far, and when that point is reached it is the Minister's turn to take up the challenge.

Ultimately insularity is a danger to both central and other political offices and advisers. Proverbs 11:14 is good advice for everyone involved in decision-making: 'Where no Counsel is the People Fall; but in the Multitude of Counsellors there is Safety.'

### **Working with Caucus**

It may be stating the obvious, but nevertheless it is important to state that without a Labor caucus that can deliver a majority in the Parliament, there can be no Labor Governments, no Labor Ministers and no Labor Ministerial advisers! Good progressive policy cannot be implemented from the Opposition benches. Backbenchers in particular are on the frontline of the battle of political ideas. They are the ones subject to a popularity contest every few years. They do the hard, grinding work of selling the Government's decisions and achievements, delivering outcomes for their electorates and solving or resolving constituent issues. They must be recognised, be a part of and feel they are a part of the bigger agenda. They come from a range of different backgrounds, have a range of different needs, are often a good source of practical political and local advice, are ambitious for themselves and their electorates, can at times be demanding and rude, like all of us, but we can't do without them.

While there are a range of caucus and parliamentary processes to assist, it is vital for Ministerial offices to establish good working relationships with Caucus and to establish systems and processes to assist local members to provide input and local intelligence, deal with constituent issues and identify emerging issues as well as sell the Government's agenda with localised announcements and Ministerial visits.

Caucus also has a range of committees, like Cabinet sub-committees, that bring Caucus members together to discuss key policies and policy implementation, including legislation. They meet when the Parliament is sitting and can be important forums to discuss policy ideas and do policy development. Caucus members are also members, including chairs, of parliamentary committees. Your Ministerial portfolio will be

'covered' in some way by a parliamentary committee. It is important to establish good working relationships to assist in developing relevant references for these committees - they can do important work in advancing (or hindering) the Government's agenda and in identifying, examining and managing emerging issues and problems.

Ministerial offices should also have systems in place so that they are dealing effectively with all backbenchers, whether Labor, Liberal, National, Greens or Independents, to ensure that it is a government that governs for all Australians. One option is to set aside a regular time in the diary during parliament sitting days where MPs can book a time with the Minister to raise constituent concerns. The appointments should be short, around 10-15 minutes, with an emphasis on the MP 'cutting to the chase' on the issue of concern and an emphasis on the Minister's office following up on the issue and reporting back as soon as practicable.

### **Working with the Party**

It may be also be stating the obvious, but nevertheless, it is important to state that without a Labor Party raising funds and winning elections, there can be no Labor Caucus that delivers a majority in the parliament, no Labor Governments, no Labor Ministers and no Labor advisers! It is important for advisers to have good working relationships with party officials to ensure effective two-way communication and co-ordination on key issues and messaging. This relationship intensifies around party policy development processes, including the national conference and national platform, fundraising events and in the lead-up to an election.

### **Avoiding 'ministerialitis', 'departmentalitis' and capture**

In his book, *How to Be a Minister*, former British Labour politician Gerald Kaufman identifies two dangerous diseases: 'ministerialitis' and 'departmentalitis'. The major symptom of the first is a 'pre-occupation and satisfaction with holding Ministerial office to the exclusion of almost all other considerations', particularly the 'real world' of parliament, the party, the electorate and a country 'going about its daily business and rarely sparing you a thought unless you do something that particularly annoys it'. It is a pre-occupation with the job and its trappings, rather than getting on with the job of (often hard) reform and policy implementation, solving problems and helping people. A version of 'ministerialitis' can also infect advisers. It is called 'adviseritis' and the symptoms are the same.

'Departmentalitis' is a form of bureaucratic 'capture', where the Minister thinks the job is simply to advance the interests of the Department at the expense of the needs of the Government and the country. It is about being determined to win, regardless of whether another Minister or department has a better case. It is the role of advisers to guard themselves, their colleagues and their Minister against these infections. 'Capture' in particular can also involve interests groups and an adviser's own interests. It can occur in a range of ways and for a range of reasons. It is often an incremental and understandable by-product of the work of politicians/advisers and the context within which they work. Its symptoms include: advocating a particular point of view/course of action without a thorough analysis and critique; advocating for your particular issues without reference to a broader government/office context; advocating on behalf of issues/groups because it is in your best interests; thinking bureaucratically, not politically; seeing issues in terms of

'personal' victory/defeat; failing to listen; preferring the comfort of 'echo chamber' politics (where groups tell you what they think you want to hear, rather than what you need to know) provided by stakeholders/interest groups rather than the views of others in the community, and defending the indefensible. Capture becomes inevitable if you do not remain alive to the symptoms, or become overwhelmed by 'administrivia', the pre-occupation with minor details and administrative matters best left to the Department.

### **The importance of the Minister's diary**

There is no more important document in a Ministerial office than the Minister's diary, no more important person than the Minister's diary secretary and no more important process than getting the diary right. The diary process allocates the Minister's time and it is critical that the process for deciding how the Minister best spends his or her time is linked to the overall strategy of the Government, Minister and office. Indeed a measure of political effectiveness is the extent of this link. Good diary decision-making requires a clear understanding of the political strategy and key priorities of the Government and the Minister; proper identification and prioritisation of key stakeholders internal and external; and a clear understanding of the demands of the Minister's 'other life' of family, friends and leisure pursuits (not that there is much time for leisure). The demands on a Minister's time are seemingly endless, but the fact of the matter is you can't meet every request. The diary requires tough decisions and the framework for making those decisions is the political strategy. Every request needs to be tested against the needs of the strategy. An adviser needs to be able to explain the reasons why a request should be agreed to as well as the reasons why it shouldn't. This advice not only informs the final decision-making by the Minister but also the briefing request to the Department in relation to the meeting or event. For example, if the invitation is to make a speech at a specific event and it is accepted, the adviser should then be able to clearly spell out in the brief to the Department the requirements of the brief and suggest the key themes and content of any speech. Getting it right at the start saves time, angst and re-writing closer to the event. The notion of 'start with the end in mind' applies strongly to diary decisions. For example, if a deadline has been set for the release of a policy or for the giving of a speech, time must be allocated in the diary to cater for all of the meetings, discussions, processes and preparation to deliver that outcome. An agreement to do a speech will need at least two meetings - the first to discuss the outline of the speech and the second to finalise and rehearse the speech.

The backbone of any diary is made up of parliamentary sitting dates, cabinet and sub-committee meetings, regular departmental meetings, key festivals, holidays and family occasions as well as known relevant conferences. The diary should be planned in three- to six-month blocks; flexibility should be maintained by not committing too early, although there is a balance to be maintained between the need for flexibility and the needs of the organisers of any event or invitation received. 'Free time' and 'reading time' needs to be built in to allow the Minister to meet informally with colleagues and others, schedule last-minute meetings and to ensure that he or she has thinking time and is able to get across the briefs in the office as well as Cabinet documents.

The Minister should be presented with the invitations recommended and the invitations rejected, as well as the strategy to deal with those rejected, including whether the meeting will be delegated to the adviser or department or simply responded to with a 'sorry, the



Minister is not able to meet at this time, etc...' The diary should NOT stack meetings up one after the other unless it is unavoidable. The Minister should be given time at the start of each day to review the day and to prepare for each meeting. The diary should also pay particular attention to logistics so that the Minister gets to where he or she needs to be on time and with the least amount of fuss as possible.

### Strategies for success

There are some basic building blocks for success in Ministerial offices:

#### **Clear expectations and a strategic political agenda**

The Minister's office and relevant departments should have clear expectations of what is required by the Minister. This includes the agenda to be implemented (see the separate chapter on strategy) as well as the process for development of advice and briefing papers (their layout and content), issues management, communications and speeches. (If they don't know what your agenda and priorities are, then how can you expect them to implement it?) While this is often communicated by the Minister to senior personnel of the Department, in the hope that it will be communicated to the rest of their staff, nothing beats an address by the Minister to the whole Department (either at the one time or by progressively meeting different areas of the Department) so that all departmental officers can hear the message directly and see the Minister in action. (Ministers should also make time to mingle with Departmental staff after the address. To arrive, speak and then leave without mingling runs the risk of it being a token effort and undermining the very reason for doing the address in the first place!)

#### **Regular meetings/liaison/consultation**

The following meetings should be a regular part of any office itinerary:

- \* A meeting with all staff (and the Minister). It is important that all staff, from the Administrative Assistant to the Chief of Staff, are properly informed about, and can have input into, the Minister's long- and short-term agendas. Administrative staff are key parts of the team; they are the ones on the front line taking the telephone calls and must be kept well informed. So, too, are electorate office staff. The Minister, as well being a member of the Executive, is first and foremost a local MP or Senator and a member of Caucus. Electorate staff also need access to their MP, have to assist their MP to sell the Government's policies, deal with constituent issues and provide local intelligence.
- \* A Cabinet de-brief. Failure to do so delays decision-making because without de-briefings departments have to wait for the Cabinet minutes. The Cabinet minutes are not always as detailed or as clear as is necessary for follow-up to be quick and effective. Briefings allow departmental officers to clarify decisions on the spot and to follow up the decisions that have been made.
- \* Regular meetings with Parliamentary Secretary(ies) as appropriate.
- \* A weekly or fortnightly meeting, with a formal agenda, between the Minister and advisers, the Departmental Secretary and/or deputy secretary or secretaries. This is a mechanism to ensure that issues are raised in a timely fashion, to clarify concerns and to monitor the implementation of key policies and programs. The Minister's key

priorities should form the backbone of the agenda.

Meetings with stakeholder groups are important to maintain the flow of information both ways: independent agencies, unions, business groups and community groups. Sometimes it can be useful to bring stakeholders with similar interests together. It not only 'kills a few birds with one stone' and frees up diary time, it allows for interesting policy discussion and encourages greater co-operation.

Meetings and/or effective communications with other Chiefs of Staff and advisers are also crucial, particularly to manage issues that are 'whole of department' or 'whole of government'. It can be useful to invite central agency ministerial advisers to your staff meetings or at least share the agenda with them.

Effective caucus liaison is vital. There is no one answer to how do this effectively because the requirements of Caucus will vary depending on the Ministerial portfolio. However it is important that resources are dedicated to the task; that calls are returned within a set period and that a steady flow of information is maintained. It is important to work with your Caucus committee. Give them interesting work to do and engage them where possible in what your office is doing.

### **Knowledge management**

Document management is critical. It is important to have a system where all staff can get quick and easy access to policy and other documents, relevant annual reports, media releases and crucial departmental briefings. This may involve setting up your own internal 'library' system using electronic and paper-based resources.

Maintaining a list of achievements is important for two reasons. First, it is a record of how you are going. Second, it is an important resource for material to use in press releases and particularly in speeches.

The monitoring of alternative views and policies, particularly by Opposition parties, is vital. Don't let the demands of governing distract you from your political opponents and what they are doing or not doing. You need to maintain a central file (electronic and paper-based) of all Opposition statements on your portfolio (This may also need to include key stakeholder groups). This should include:

- \* Media releases
- \* Press clippings and transcripts, including social media activity such as Twitter
- \* Hansard
- \* All promises and proposals should be costed (wherever possible)

### **Use of Departmental Liaison Officers**

Use your DLOs wisely. It is important that they have the right mix of skills and experience, including the ability to work under pressure.

### **Monitoring and staying alert**

Every office needs 'alert systems' to monitor issues. One of the most crucial is the monitoring of letters from the PM/Premier(s), Ministers (State and Federal), independents, unions and other stakeholder groups as well as the Opposition. These letters will raise issues that need to be dealt with, and the failure to deal with routine



issues in an expeditious way may become an issue in itself!

Another is the monitoring of telephone calls and emails. This will allow you to pick up trends and issues and respond quickly and appropriately. For example, the effective recording of issues raised in telephone calls may reveal the beginning of a campaign on a particular issue, or signal the need to take action before a key issue becomes a major public issue.

Every office should have systems in place to ensure that phone calls from the PM's or Premier's office, and other Ministerial offices, are responded to urgently. This includes a system to ensure that any member of the office can quickly contact any other member of the office (including the Minister) and senior members of the department/statutory authority, etc. This includes things like telephone lists (including after-hours contact numbers for senior bureaucrats), the carrying of (and switching on) of pagers and mobile phones, and relevant access to the internal diary system (to know where people are).

### **Office systems**

Every office should have systems in place to ensure that routine things are done routinely! This includes the management of correspondence and briefings as well as Cabinet documents; the handling of invitations and the management of events (including the involvement of the local MP); the distribution of media releases and speeches; and the management of travel and allowances. A checklist, for example, is a good idea for managing major Ministerial announcements/events.

### **Communicate your success and repeat your messages**

Your themes and priorities need to be consistently spelled out in speeches, press releases, parliament and in your publications.

### **The importance of thanks**

Don't forget to understand the effort that has been made by public servants. It is amazing how motivating a simple thank you can be. From time to time, putting on a function as a thank you for the hard work done above and beyond the call of duty is worthwhile.

### **Understanding the role of advisers**

As mentioned earlier, successful political practice in government requires the skills of a good general (able to develop and set the agenda, implement a strategy, mobilise support and resources, 'join the dots') with those of skilled troops (able to deliver policy on the ground, troubleshoot issues, knows when and how to attack and retreat) and diplomats (able to understand the nature and limits of power, recruit allies to the cause, negotiate and bargain for the best possible outcomes).

The job of adviser draws on all of these skills. It requires stamina, a thick hide and the ability to stay calm under pressure. The tasks range from doing the 'basics' to being more proactive and practising 'policy entrepreneurship'. The 'basics' include providing political scrutiny and alternative policy advice (within an overall political strategy), liaising with the Department, oversight of policy development and implementation, and effective political communication. 'Policy entrepreneurship' is a more proactive role of working within the authority of the Minister to shape the policy agenda; it involves 'joining the

dots' (linking ideas and approaches and looking for opportunities) and working in the 'authorising environment' to broker agreements, build coalitions, gain support, overcome opposition and ultimately deliver the agreed outcome.

To be effective, there are a number of things an adviser needs to be clear about: THE agenda, their agenda and the expected minimum standards of behaviour.

### **Understand the agenda**

It is important to familiarise yourself with and understand the Minister and Government's priorities and broader agenda and know how they all fit together. Identify those who are knowledgeable about the issues with which you are dealing, including key stakeholders. Get a clear view of the Minister's position and preferences. Find time to think 'politically' and test your understanding and ideas with other advisers and staff. The adviser adds political value by using this information and understanding to ensure that the Minister has the best possible advice (political and technical) with which to make a decision or to make a case. A good starting point for any analysis is to play the role of 'devil's advocate' and test the original proposal against alternative ideas, perspectives and information. Indeed, argue against it and see how the arguments for and against stack up.

### **Frank and fearless advice**

The notion of providing 'frank and fearless' advice applies to advisers as much as it does to public servants. Ministers need to be told what they need to know and not just hear what they want to hear. Sometimes you have to pick the best moment to ensure the advice is received; sometimes you have to 'sow a seed'; at other times it may have to involve a third party; at all times you have to be prepared for the argument. Sometimes you will be tested by the Minister to see if you are capable of providing the advice he or she already knows needs to be given. Don't shirk the responsibility. There's plenty of hurly burly in politics, learn to enjoy it.

Advisers have different motivations for doing what they do and at times can have conflicting or indeed a hierarchy of loyalties: to the Government, to the Minister, to a faction, to the issue or to a future career, whether in politics or the private sector. There is nothing wrong with this. However, it is important to be upfront about these interests in the formulation of your advice. It is part of the commitment to provide the best possible advice. As mentioned earlier, advocating on behalf of issues or groups because it is in your best interests is a form of capture. A captured adviser isn't much use to government. And there's no point trying to hide your motivations, loyalties or biases. If they don't know already, your colleagues and your Minister will soon work them out.

### **'Get it done, or get elected'**

Once a decision is made, it is the adviser's role to ensure that the decisions of the Minister and the Government are implemented. 'Cabinet solidarity' applies to advisers as well as Ministers. Advisers, like Ministers and departments, have opportunities to shape a decision in the lead-up to its being made. Once made, they have a duty to ensure the decision is implemented, whether their advice was accepted or not. As one former Minister put it, 'Get it done, or get elected'.

### **Setting the standard**

The standards that every adviser should know and abide by are contained in the Code of Ministerial Conduct. The most important of these is that 'advisers do not exercise direct ministerial authority. Executive decisions are the preserve of Ministers and public servants and advisers do not have the power to direct public servants'. Advisers are in effect conduits between the Department and the Minister, ensuring direct and effective communication. While with experience you will get to know the mind of the Minister and have a high degree of certainty about the decisions he or she will make, never claim that you 'speak for the Minister' unless the Minister has clearly conveyed to you his or her view or decision.

The other standards set out in the Code are those that apply to almost any job: to act with honesty and integrity, to avoid and disclose conflicts of interest, to declare any gifts and hospitality received, to treat others with respect and courtesy, maintain appropriate confidentiality, to properly use information and resources and to avoid breaking the law.

Remember also that confidentiality applies to your dealings and discussions with the Minister and other advisers. What happens in the office should stay in the office.

### **Political scrutiny and the Ministerial brief**

The basic work of a political adviser is to provide political scrutiny, the majority of which will be done via a Ministerial brief - the dominant form of communication between a Department and a Minister. It is the role of the adviser to understand the brief, provide political advice, and ensure that the Minister receives it in a timely way in order to make a decision. It is not the role of the political adviser to simply provide or summarise departmental advice. While it is important to understand the advice a department (or interest group) gives and to understand why it has given that particular advice in that particular way, it is the role of the adviser to put that advice to the political test and to advise on the public value questions: should we, may we, can we?

A Ministerial brief should contain the following:

- \* A clear **purpose** or reason for the brief;
- \* A **recommendation** or recommendations that state what the Minister should do;
- \* The **background** history and context;
- \* **Analysis** of the key issues as well as funding, policy, legislative or other implications for the Government or the Department;
- \* **Options** that have been considered, their relative merits and preference;
- \* The details of **consultation** undertaken with other Departments, stakeholders, expertise (and their views on whether they support the proposed action) as well as any further consultations that need to take place;
- \* Any **attachments** relevant to the brief, including previous briefs, relevant reports or research.

The brief will also contain the author's name and contact details and be signed by the most relevant senior manager or managers in the Department.

### **Reviewing the brief**

The following is a guide for reviewing briefs.

The **purpose**

\* Is the purpose clear? What is the issue/problem that is being fixed/responded to/advanced?

\* How did this arrive on my desk? Is it part of the Minister's agenda or someone else's agenda? Was it a request from the Minister? Has it been generated by the Department and, if so, why?

### The **recommendation**

\* While it is important to have the recommendation in your head as you read the brief, leave the proper consideration of the recommendation till you have read all the material. The question to consider along the way is whether the advice is building on previous discussions and whether it fits with the overall agenda.

### The **background**

\* Is there anything missing from the history and context of this issue?

### The **analysis**

\* Are all of the key issues identified/explored/explained? Is there information/evidence missing? Does the evidence and analysis suffer from what Hugh Mackay, in his book *What Makes Us Tick*, calls 'professional deformity', which is the tendency to be blinkered by your (or their) specialist knowledge or by 'confirmation bias', where the only facts and evidence assembled are those designed to confirm an existing departmental world view? We can all (advisers, ministers, bureaucrats, experts) suffer these afflictions, which is why it is important to question assumptions and why a robust and respectful exchange of views is critical.

\* Does the brief demonstrate an understanding of the policy direction?

\* What are the funding, policy, legislative or other implications for the Government and Department? Have they all been identified and explained? Are the costings rigorous? Are there hidden costs?

\* What expert knowledge has been relied on (internal/external) and how up to date is it?

\* Is there logic to the arguments/analysis?

\* Are you being told what the Department thinks you want to hear? Are you being told what suits the Department rather than the community?

\* Who will be the winners and losers, or is this a case of an 'everybody wants to get to heaven, but nobody wants to die' approach?

\* Does the brief address the cause or the symptoms of the issue?

### The **options**

\* Have all the options been identified and fairly assessed? If not, what are the other alternatives?

\* Why have the alternative options been discarded?

## The **consultation**

- \* Have all relevant stakeholders been consulted (and in what detail)? (Note that stakeholders includes other relevant government departments and it is your responsibility to consult other Ministers' offices, even though they may have been alerted to this issue by their department)
- \* Is the 'echo chamber' response evident? (That is, are stakeholders telling the Department what they think they want to hear rather than what they really need to know and hear?)
- \* What further internal processes (formal or informal) will this need to go through?

## The **attachments**

- \* Has the analysis missed or misrepresented material contained in the attachments?

## Your **advice and recommendation**

Put simply, if you don't understand it, don't expect the Minister or the public to. It is your job to first understand, and then, to explain. Meet with the author or relevant manager to clear up any issues or to get additional information if you have concerns about the information. Verbal briefings can also assist your understanding of the issue. It is not always easy to fully comprehend what is written down without discussing it with the person responsible. You may also need to speak to the relevant stakeholders (depending on the confidentiality of the issue) to get their perspectives as well as your colleagues and Chief of Staff. In finalising and framing your advice, it is important to consider the following questions:

- \* Is this advice/course of action consistent with government policy, values, and principles? Is this/can this be part of a bigger agenda? How might this solution fail? What are the consequences of failure? Is this the right solution or is it window dressing?
- \* What are the political implications and risks of what is being proposed? Who benefits and how? If there are winners and losers, how will they react and how will that reaction be managed? Will this proposal get broad community support? What position will the Opposition take on this issue? (Understanding of course, that announcing a 'vote winner' is not about just responding to what the polls might be saying now. Tough but fair and necessary decisions may be unpopular in the short-term, but when well explained and implemented can be 'vote winners' and gain strong community support in the medium- to longer-term. Again, good policy well argued and communicated is good politics). Does it require further community discussion before a final decision? (Do you need to 'fly a kite', that is put a proposal out there without committing to it, to see if it 'flies' or gets shot down?")
- \* Does the Minister have the final say or does it need to go through further processes, i.e. Cabinet? Does/should anybody else (other Ministers, the Prime Minister, etc.) need to be consulted before decisions are made?
- \* When do we have to make a decision? Is the timing right? How is this decision best announced/communicated?

Your advice should not regurgitate the brief. It should provide a high-level summary of what is proposed and its implications and whether to accept, reject, modify or further discuss it.

### **Additional tips**

It is not possible to ask the Minister for a view on every matter that comes up. Therefore, it is important to get clear direction from the Minister about the parameters of decision-making involved in a particular issue or set of issues and manage within them.

Departmental advice is not 'holy writ'. If it was you might as well do away with Ministers and members of parliament and let the bureaucrats decide everything. It is the role of the adviser to ensure that the Minister has the best possible advice (departmental, political, other...) on which to make a decision. You aren't there to tell Ministers what they want to hear but what they NEED to hear!

When requesting a brief it is important to be clear and provide as much information as possible. For example, has the brief been triggered by a stakeholder meeting? By a media query or story? Are you seeking background, ideas, and/or solutions? The clearer you are with the request the more efficient the Department should be in completing the task.

Avoid analysis paralysis. Make decisions, in a timely way. Trust your instincts and get a 'gut feel' for the issues. A failure to make a decision or to make a decision in a timely way can bring on its own set of issues. Don't let briefs sit around in in/out trays - the secret to managing paperwork is to keep it moving!

The philosophy of briefs should be about what can be done rather than what can't. They should discuss the issue or problem and provide the solution(s). **However, sometimes a brief cannot replace a discussion or debate.**

Add value not just time to the decision-making process. If you can't get to a brief say so, don't just sit on it or find a spurious reason to send it back to the Department. Remember a department has a record of when the brief went in and the adviser to whom it was assigned.

And, assume everything that you have written down or every email that you have sent the Department may be released under FOI laws. Get to know the basics of the FOI regime that applies. Ask yourself the question, how would my friends, family react if they read about my advice or requests in the media?

As well as FOI, be aware that the decisions of the Minister and actions of the Department can be subject to a range of other accountability mechanisms across government, including the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman.

### The importance of Ministerial correspondence

Ministerial correspondence should be a key part of your communications strategy. It is the adviser's job to assess how to respond and whether the response to correspondence is appropriate. Often your knowledge of the background to the issue or the person referred to will be important.

Letters from the Minister should:

- \* Answer the question or the key part of the question
- \* Be friendly/objective
- \* Use clear, concise language
- \* Offer a way forward
- \* Refer to government policy where relevant and any other relevant achievements
- \* Provide follow-up contact points

Correspondence should be easy to read and language should flow and should NOT be defensive/dismissive. Don't let letters sit in your or the Minister's in/out tray. Every Ministerial office should set timelines for the turn around of Ministerial correspondence. The order of priority should normally be as follows, although this is not hard and fast and depends on the issues raised in the correspondence.

- \* Prime Minister/Premier
- \* Treasurer
- \* Minister(s)
- \* Caucus/electorate officers
- \* Opposition MPs/Independents/Greens
- \* General public/interest groups

The office should have in place a monitoring system for correspondence via normal mail and email and through phone calls that picks up on emerging issues and trends. Particular attention should be paid to Opposition correspondence, particularly in situations where MPs praise the Government or seek assistance from programs they have opposed, make fundamental mistakes, or make funding or policy commitments not previously made public.

## Understanding the Cabinet process

The Cabinet is the council of Ministers that has the power to take binding decisions on the Government's behalf. In theory, it is the mechanism that brings together the key figures and the best political brains of the Government to review, resolve and decide the key issues facing the Government and the nation. This means the process that supports Cabinet decision-making is the most important in the Government. As Proverbs 11:14 points out, a good council requires good counsel! An effective Cabinet process is necessary (but not sufficient) for good government and there is a link to be made between the quality and robust nature of the Cabinet process and the decline and fall of governments.

There are important points to understand about the Cabinet process, including:

The decisions of Cabinet are collective and the notion of 'Cabinet solidarity' means that once a decision is made, ALL ministers are required to support the decision, even if they argued against it. If a Minister cannot support a decision, the only option is for him or her to resign. (This goes for advisers too!)

If a collective decision cannot be reached, the Prime Minister's/Premier's view is authoritative.

Collective responsibility can only operate effectively if all members of Cabinet are well informed and advised (and have the time to read and properly understand the submissions that come before them).

The deliberations and documents of Cabinet are confidential, so that Ministers can express their views frankly.

The PM/Premier decides the membership, leadership and terms of reference of Cabinet subcommittees. While the number and subject area of these may change, a constant is an 'expenditure review' type committee that shapes the budget and make the decisions about government expenditure and finances.

The PM/Premier determines the Cabinet and Cabinet committee agendas in consultation with the Cabinet Secretary. The Cabinet Secretariat supports the effective running of Cabinet processes.

Cabinet submissions follow a two-step process: an 'exposure draft', which invites comments and changes to the proposal, and then a final draft for 'co-ordination' that allows relevant departments to comment on the final proposal and Ministers to gauge the level of support or disagreement. There are separate processes in place that provide for urgent matters to come before the Cabinet and/or to bypass the normal process. These are referred to as 'under the line' or 'red folder' submissions.

There is generally a 'five-day' rule that sets a deadline for final submissions to allow five days between distribution of the submission and its consideration by Cabinet. Attendance by Ministers takes precedence over all other issues.

The Cabinet Handbook sets out in detail the history, principles and processes of Cabinet government. It is compulsory reading for all Ministers and advisers. The following are



some tips for managing the Cabinet process:

It is vital that Ministers are well prepared so that they can make an effective contribution to the Cabinet debate. Every office should have a person who is responsible for managing the Cabinet process (usually the Chief of Staff) and dividing responsibilities among advisers to ensure that every submission is reviewed and advice provided to the Minister. This process also allows advisers to develop expertise outside their portfolios.

If your Department is preparing an 'exposure draft' submission for Cabinet consideration, ensure that there is a discussion with the Minister about the form and content of that submission before it is circulated and once circulated begin a parallel process of consultation with other relevant Ministerial offices. In some cases it may be better to have a discussion with the Minister and the Prime Minister/Premier's Office about the recommendations before the exposure draft is even begun. The recommendations are the most disputed part amongst departments, so getting everyone comfortable early can help smooth the passage of the submission. (Note that there can be more than one exposure draft, and there are also 'pre-exposure drafts' which are a way of testing ideas (particularly with central agencies) before getting into a formal Cabinet process.

The submission process will invariably identify issues of concern and/or disagreement from other Departments and Ministers. Some of these can be resolved at Departmental level, but at other times it will require discussions between Ministers and Ministerial offices to clarify and resolve issues, particularly if a submission is a 'joint submission' with another Minister or Ministers. Issues of concern are usually identified and where possible resolved during the 'co-ordination' phase. These are 'die in the ditch' issues for Departments and if not resolved, there is some expectation on their part that the Minister will agree with them and raise them round the table. (Of course, the Minister doesn't have to agree with them.)

The preference of Departments (like us all) is for consensus; to resolve issues and get the submission to Cabinet with as much support of other agencies as practicable. In particular, departments often defer to the central agencies, Prime Minister and Cabinet/Premier and Cabinet, Treasury and Finance. This is not always a bad thing. However, sometimes this leads to good ideas being rejected before Ministers can discuss them, outcomes which support the status quo rather than challenging it and a lowest-common-denominator approach to policy and decision making.

It is important therefore to keep track of a submission's development to allow the Minister to decide the final form of the submission to take to Cabinet and the extent to which he or she wants the Cabinet to discuss the issues and options in question.

Get to know the 'Cabinet' culture; the extent to which there is robust discussion and debate where advice and feedback is given and taken constructively (without rancour or recrimination) as well as the adherence to deadlines. It's important to get a feel for whether your Minister is someone who likes to fight in Cabinet or prefers to have issues resolved prior to a Cabinet meeting. Make sure the Department understands this. This will determine how you operate and how you plan your weekly schedule!

Build an effective relationship with the Cabinet Secretary's office. It is not an easy job co-ordinating the Cabinet process!

Use the Cabinet committees constructively. They can be important forums to test issues and ideas and to draw on the skills and knowledge around the table in relation to the

issues you want to advance.

Despite the fact that visuals and graphics can be powerful aides in understanding issues, CabNet, which is the secure system used in the Commonwealth to distribute Cabinet submissions, cannot handle graphics very well and can't do colour. If you want colour or pictures, these have to be separately printed by Departments and hand-delivered by the sponsoring Minister's office. While a Minister will burn up some goodwill if he or she wants them every time, encourage as much as is possible the use of graphics and visuals (or visual language) in the setting out of issues and arguments. Hopefully the technology will catch up.

Advisers and senior public servants can attend sub-committee meetings (usually the Chief of Staff, or the specialist adviser who has provided advice on a particular submission).

Always check the Cabinet minutes to ensure via the Minister that it reflects accurately the decision of the Cabinet. Ensure decisions of Cabinet relevant to the Department are communicated as soon as possible to ensure timely follow up.

### **Understanding the Expenditure Review Committee process**

The Expenditure Review Committee is the most powerful committee of the Cabinet. It shapes and delivers the Government's economic and fiscal strategies, including the budget. Its membership includes all the central agencies and their Ministers. At the Commonwealth level, the PM usually attends only the key agenda-setting meetings, but works closely with the Treasurer and Finance Minister on the agenda prior to each meeting. (The PM is represented by officials and advisers in all ERC meetings.) The rest of the Committee is made up of senior ministers.

While being a member of the ERC provides an important opportunity for the Minister to shape the budget and the broader political agenda, it places a major additional burden on a political office. Sometimes this is recognised with the provision of additional staff, but sometimes not. Ultimately, the additional burden has to be shared across all of the advisers, which means that in addition to having expertise in their own portfolio areas, advisers must also develop expertise in a range of other areas across government.

The budget development cycle begins in earnest around October/November and ramps up in March and April. At the Commonwealth level this can mean day-long ERC meetings almost every day for the month of March. Treasury and Finance dominate the ERC and the process is designed to keep it that way. The submissions and advice, despite promises to the contrary, arrive close to the meeting dates, leaving little time for detailed analysis. The Finance advice called a 'green' often becomes the default position on agenda items and it is almost impossible to shift a position that has been agreed by the central offices and agencies.

In this context, it is important to take a strategic approach to participation in the ERC and work out how best the Minister can add value to the decision-making. For example, if there are plenty of Ministers on the ERC who like to argue about the figures, the best way for other ministers to contribute may involve drawing out the practical and broader political implications of the proposals.

### **Parliament and preparing for Question Time**

Although reviewing, passing or repealing legislation is the key role of the parliament, any government's reputation is made and lost in the daily theatre of the Parliament, Question Time. Like all good theatre, success depends on a strong script, the ability to deliver a line, think on your feet and be authentic, being able to answer questions without really answering them, an understanding of the dynamics of the surroundings you are in as well as a commitment to preparation, preparation, preparation. Question Time, which is the time set aside each sitting day for 'Questions Without Notice' is stage managed to the extent that the Government decides the questions its own MPs will ask (these are colloquially known as Dorothy Dixers) and who will ask them, in line with their strategy for the day. The Opposition will draft its own questions in line with its strategy of the day with a view to embarrassing or catching out the Government, or getting a key message or statement in the media through these questions or through points or order, often rehearsed.

Good preparation means that no question from the Opposition should come as a surprise. It is crucial that you and your Minister know the key issues (positive and negative) and master the material or 'script' that is developed. The Department prepares a Possible Parliamentary Questions (PPQ) or Question Time Brief (QTB) folder, which covers all of the key issues that may be the subject of a question from the Opposition. This is updated every day that Parliament sits, in consultation with the Ministerial office. It is the adviser's role to decide what the key issues are and to develop what is referred to as a 'hot issues' folder of questions and answers to issues most likely to be raised, and then to 'politicise' these answers, by including key political messages and attacks. (This is not the role of the Department.) It is also up to the adviser, in consultation with the Minister and the office of the Manager of Government Business, to script the Dorothy Dixer (both the question and the answer). This is really an exercise in short, sharp political speech, bringing together key facts and decisions with a concise political message. It is important to break down a complex issue into its constituent parts, pick the part that provides the strongest political attack, identify a key theme or themes and find ways of illustrating them with stories, anecdotes and examples.

The following are some tips for mastering your material:

Your PPQ/QTB folder should be updated weekly (and daily where necessary). New issues should be added, and old ones discarded. All issues should be ranked in order of priority, and an index provided which is easy to use.

Preferably each issue should be canvassed in no more than one page, and contain the following information:

- \* The precise problem;
- \* The specific answer proposed, and the reasons for it;
- \* The costs, benefits and implications for the public, Government and Department as well as any other sector affected;
- \* Any third-party endorsement for the position;
- \* The changes required to bring about the action (policies, legislation, practices);
- \* The Government's broad policy in relation to these and related issues
- \* Alternative courses of action available/rejected (previous Government policies, Opposition policies). This provides an opportunity to say that the Opposition either (a) supports your decision/action or (b) has no policy, or (c) has the wrong policy.

The Department should make very clear to the office if there is text in a PPQ/QTB that can't be paraphrased or changed (sometimes on complex matters, the wording will be very carefully chosen, and changing it can result in inadvertently misleading Parliament). A 'good PPQ/QTB' should be able to be quickly rewritten into a good Dorothy Dixier, if required.

It is crucial that you understand and master the domain: get to know the Parliament, how it works, its procedures and conventions, and use them to your Minister's advantage.

It is crucial that you get to know your opponents. You must get to know their policies (or lack of them), and their values and weaknesses. Check everything they have said or done in relation to your portfolios, and get to know their record as politicians, as a minister (if applicable) and as a shadow minister.

Senate Estimates hearings are long, drawn-out question times targeting departments. Ministers from the House of Representatives do not appear before Senate Estimates. The Minister responsible for their portfolio in the Senate usually does. (However, in Victoria, all Ministers including the Premier appear before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.) At Commonwealth level, the questions go to departmental officials, while the role of the Minister is to guard against political attacks and intervene on political questions. At the State level, the questions go to the Ministers, with departmental officers there to provide support on matters of specific detail. The preparation by Departments is extensive (perhaps overly so, but they see these hearings as their yearly 'exam' and are always keen to do well), and includes the highlighting of achievements as well as answers to difficult or potentially embarrassing issues. Political offices at the Commonwealth level should ensure that they brief the Minister who will be appearing before the Committee and liaise with the chair of the relevant committee.

### **Running a good meeting**

Government runs, or some might say, doesn't run, on meetings, so much so, that calling for a meeting is the general default position of most people in government. Meetings are unavoidable, but it is important to learn and implement good meeting skills to avoid your day or week being swamped by them or having to endure endless bad meetings that achieve nothing.

First take control of your diary. Ensure nothing goes into your diary unless agreed by you. To be agreed by you insist on a clear agenda or clarity around the reasons for the meeting and the expected outcomes. While it is important to make sure the time set aside for the meeting reflects the gravity or complexity of the issues, keep meetings to between 30 minutes and an hour. Even if you think the meeting might take longer, allow flexibility in your diary, and make the decision to keep the meeting going during the meeting. Meetings are a bit like the universe, they will expand into the space allowed for them, so don't flag the need to meet for longer unless you have to. Shorter meeting times also help to focus the mind and ensure participants cut to the chase.

Make sure the outcomes of the meeting are clear to everyone. Doing a meeting review, at the end of the meeting, is often the best way to do this. If follow-up is required, get it done ASAP. If a follow-up meeting is required make sure that the actions from the previous meeting are included in the agenda of the next one. Always give yourself and others time to prepare. If there are papers, ensure that these are circulated in good time

and make sure that everyone at the meeting is clear about the agenda from the very start of the meeting. One of the reasons it has been said that, 'when all is said and done there is often more said than done' is that not enough time is set aside for getting it done (after and between meetings)!

Note that in meetings with or briefings for Opposition politicians, the departmental officer provides technical details and answers to technical problems or issues. It is the adviser's job to deal with the politics.

### **Dealing with lobbyists**

There are two types of lobbyists: those who work for private lobbying firms, are hired by their clients and therefore subject to the protocols of the lobbyist register, and those who are employees of their organisations, including private and public sector companies, not-for-profit organisations, industry associations and sporting bodies who usually have 'government relations' in their titles. They are thick on the ground when Parliament is sitting! Some will be former colleagues trading their policy skills, knowledge of government and contacts.

Lobbyists, whether hired or in-house, and the requests they make for meetings and access should be dealt with like any other stakeholder: how important generally are the issues to be raised? How important specifically to the Ministerial portfolio are the issues to be raised? Will the meeting assist in gathering general intelligence about the state of their industry or sector or provide an opportunity to send a clear message to the organisation or sector about the government's intentions? Lobbyists like to trade in information and can assist your own attempts to gather good political and industry intelligence.

Avoid, if possible, the many drinks and other functions that they put on, or at least understand that there is no such thing in the end as a free lunch or a free drink (it will also be good for your health and well-being). Always remember the requirements of confidentiality, the requirements of the code of conduct and the lobbyist register, and even if they are known to you keep the relationship on a professional level.

### **Policy entrepreneurship**

Every morning you need to remind yourself that you are one day closer to losing your job. So, if you want to get things done before that day comes, you have to help clear a path and make things happen. As Morton C. Blackwell says in *Laws of Politic*, 'In politics, nothing moves unless it's pushed.' Getting things done draws on the skills of 'policy entrepreneurship': the ability to shape the agenda, link ideas, identify opportunities, mobilise support, negotiate and deliver an outcome.

A key part of this involves identifying and managing risks and opportunities. An adviser needs to have a strong focus on 'risk management' - identifying and managing risks to the achievement of the political agenda. Advisers need to keep a list of 'hot issues' or 'problems', or what is called in the vernacular 'shit sandwiches'. It is important to not only identify existing issues but to also think about the issues that may emerge. This can be done through a process of 'war-gaming' - playing out best-case and worst-case scenarios of what is being proposed or implemented.

A basic knowledge of risk management is helpful in this process. There are three types of risk: hazard risk (the threat of negative things happening); uncertainty risk (the possibility

that the end result won't be what was anticipated); and opportunity risk (the possibility that positive things won't happen because of cumbersome decision-making processes or delays in decision-making). Opportunity risk is often forgotten, but its consideration in politics is vital, because political success is often the result of being able to take the opportunity when it arises. There are five levels of impact: catastrophic (no explanation needed), major (requires action otherwise serious damage will occur), and moderate, minor and insignificant (all of which require monitoring and standard issues-management type responses).

Risks should be mapped and reviewed regularly. They can be managed in a number of different ways, and even if they can't always be solved, it is better to be seen to be managing them than ignoring them all together. If the problem is easily fixable, get it fixed ASAP. For those that are difficult to fix, you can try a number of different tactics: change the rules, challenge assumptions and/or rephrase the problem; argue that it is NOT a problem (or it is a different problem); position the problem as a small part of a bigger picture; or focus on a smaller part of the overall problem. You could review the problem from a range of different angles to see if most/all agree; look to the community or outside experts for a solution; look for a creative 'third' way to solve the problem; create a diversion; or adopt your opponent's solution and move on. Remember the 'spilt-milk theory': that if you have spilt the milk, the act of cleaning up it will quickly dissipate any anger about the mess you have created. Failure to clean it up will only prolong and deepen any annoyance or anger of those affected by the spill.

### **Delivering the outcome**

It is an ill political wind that blows no good. Crises and problems, after all, provide political and policy opportunities. They are, as succinctly outlined by political scientist John W. Kingdon, essential to turning policy into reality, the true role of the 'policy entrepreneur'. First, you need a crisis, or at least the perception of a problem in general need of attention. The problem needs to be well understood, and where possible able to be measured, preferably by well-known indicators. Second, you need a solution - a policy or idea that is or has been under discussion as a potential solution, preferably supported by third parties. Third, you need the right time, the political window of opportunity when politicians and the community are receptive to the policy solution or action proposed. Or in other words, you need a case, the desire and the right timing for success. When the problem, the idea and the moment come together, you get traction. Getting all of these elements to align is the key task. Sometimes it involves creating or highlighting the problem (or waiting for the crisis to arrive), knowing that while you already have the solution, you need the political window of opportunity to open up. Of course, you have to pick your crisis, as some are better avoided! (For a longer discussion on policy, see Chapter 6: Developing and Implementing Policy.)

### **Polling, dodgy polling**

An understanding of what makes good polling is critical to the role of advisers (and everyone involved in politics). Polls (quantitative and qualitative), well developed and conducted are an important political and policy tool. Used wisely, they can be a good gauge of the mood of the community at any given time or how it has changed over a period of time and tell you what the community is thinking and saying about a specific

issue or about issues generally. They can form part of a comprehensive community engagement and consultation strategy on government policy and programs. They can provide a sense of the size of the policy and communication challenges ahead, clues to the best language to use as well as guidance on how best to achieve the outcome required.

Sadly, polls are now ubiquitous in politics. News organisations do them regularly; business and community organisations and think tanks trot them out to support their positions; and the emergence of new social technologies means that instantaneous polling can now be done via mobile phones while sitting in front of the television! The effect on politics has been insidious. Political reporting now resembles sports reporting, with the focus generally on the 'battle' and the 'score' rather than the content or key issues.

Quantitative and qualitative polling (legitimate, dubious and otherwise) has become a weapon by which to influence strategy, undermine public policy, develop key messages and phrases and change political leaders.

Advisers are exposed to polls in various ways. While the preparation of and the results from party political polling as well as 'government attitudes monitoring' surveys is usually very tightly held within the party office and limited senior members of the Government, it trickles down to Ministerial offices in the form of 'key messages', new policy ideas and target groups. Of course, there are the now constant media polls. Lobbyists and organisations seeking policy change will often present polling both quantitative and qualitative in support of their position. Being able to converse in the language of polling and to spot good from dodgy polling is important.

We know that the quality of quantitative polling depends on a number of factors, including the size and composition of the sample population and the neutrality or otherwise of the questions asked. (There is also an ongoing debate now about the best method of conducting a poll, whether by telephone, face-to-face or online). Generally the information on which to make an assessment is printed with the polling results, including the margin of error. If it is not, ask for it. As a general rule, the larger the sample, the smaller the margin of error.

Assessing the quality of qualitative research and the use of so-called 'focus groups' is much harder to do. The 'findings' of this research is often presented as a set of key 'messages' and issues with no questions asked. However, it is vital to interrogate the quality and veracity of the work done, otherwise you will end up with 'key messages' that jar and reasons or excuses not to take on, or proceed with, important policies and decisions.

Experienced social researcher Hugh Mackay provides an important overview of the issues and problems with qualitative research in his response to George Megalogenis's Quarterly Essay *Trivial Pursuit*. The response is available in the correspondence section of the subsequent Quarterly Essay, *The Happy Life*, by David Malouf. The key points made by Mackay are reproduced here:

'Qualitative research (a term covering a wide range of research techniques that rely on non-statistical methods) is good for assessing the mood of the community; for determining what's on their agenda; for getting some appreciation of the language people are using to express their hopes and fears, and their reactions to events around them; for explaining why they are doing whatever they have recently been doing (taking this job, buying this brand, watching this program, donating to this cause, voting for this



candidate).'

'The role and function of qualitative research is abused - degraded, corrupted - when it is used to tell politicians what to say, let alone what to believe, or when it is used to try to predict, rather than explain, how people might act. (Large-scale quantitative polling is far better at prediction.)'

Mackay says it is important to make a distinction between what we currently call 'focus groups' and the more traditional 'discussion groups', because the structure and conduct of these groups will affect the outcomes.

'First, participants in focus groups have usually been recruited as individuals who are strangers to each other, whereas "real" group discussions use real (i.e., existing) social groups - friends, neighbours, work colleagues, drinking mates, book club members ... people who already know each other well and whose group dynamics are already well established.'

'Obviously, in order to construct a sample with sufficient diversity across gender, age, socio-economic and geographical categories, a large number of such groups must be recruited for any one project - but qualitative sampling is another story.'

'Second, focus groups tend to be conducted in a central location where the individuals are assembled purely for the purpose of research, whereas traditional group discussions are conducted in the natural habitat of each group - a home, a pub, a staff room.'

'Third, the moderator of a focus group is an active participant in the process, structuring and steering the so-called conversation, often following a comprehensive prompt sheet. A traditional group discussion, by contrast, is a largely unstructured, free-wheeling conversation in which the researcher typically plays no active part beyond introducing the topic. Indeed, it is vital to the success of the method that the researcher remain as silent and unobtrusive as possible, so the participants are free to explore whatever is interesting or important to them about the topic, with as few hints or nudges from the researcher as possible.'

Mackay says the traditional approach is designed to minimise 'the effects of the experiment we are conducting', as opposed to a focus group, which is 'an essentially unnatural situation which generates unnatural group dynamics and in which the scope for distortion of "opinions" is horrendous'. As he says 'strangers in a strange place are likely to say strange things - or, at least, things they mightn't say if they were in a more relaxed, familiar, secure setting'.

He provides the following warning: 'Use qualitative research, by all means, to inform yourself about the state of mind of your audience; use it, if you must, to gauge their reactions (if any) to your work. Never, never use it as a form of control over a politician's performance; never, never ask a group of non-expert citizens (whether in their role as voters or consumers) to sit in judgment on your campaign material.

Even if you can't change what is presented to you or your office, being aware of its shortcomings is important if you are to avoid placing too much emphasis on research that is fundamentally flawed.

### **Additional tips**

To be effective, advisers must remember that politics is about people and relationships. Getting things done means persuading, managing and challenging people and groups. So



treat people with respect. It is vital to understand the 'politics of issues'; understand/manage 'political risks' and provide 'political' advice.

It is also important to manage the flow of information into, from and around the Minister and Government. Manage the urgent, but don't lose sight of the important. Make timely decisions and provide frank advice to the Minister/Government. Allow 10-15 minutes in the morning to plan your day and 10-15 minutes in the evening to review it. It will make sleeping easier. Time management is not really about the management of time per se, but about the management of decision-making.

Deal with more than one issue at a time and do not get consumed by crisis management. It doesn't take everyone in the office to manage a crisis. Ensure the other important work of the office continues as best as possible if a crisis hits. Think ahead, anticipate issues and resolve them.

Don't allow issues to build up in your in-tray or your email in-box. Failure to do so can bring on its own crisis.

Avoid a 'bunker mentality' and understand that the best ideas, thinking and solutions come from talking to others, getting out and about, and not from staring blankly at walls. Avoid 'groupthink' by seeking out alternative positions and playing 'devil's advocate'.

Develop effective working relationships with colleagues and with ALL stakeholders, including other Ministerial offices and Government departments and statutory authorities. Know and understand your stakeholders. Know which stakeholders are the most important (this will change from issue to issue); how they use their influence; how often you need to be in contact and the best way to communicate, as well as whether they truly represent the view of those for whom they claim to speak. Also consider whether you are hearing 'echo politics' - being told what they think the Government wants to hear, rather than what is the real situation.

Establish clear lines of communication, feedback and reporting with the Department to ensure the Minister/Government's policies and agenda are being implemented. Sell the Government's message and promote its achievements as they are delivered.

Don't get consumed by the job: manage health and well-being, stay in touch with your 'other life' and relationships outside work as best you can and remember that some of your best thinking will be done while you're not at work; good ideas can be triggered while doing exercise, reading a book, going to the cinema, theatre or sporting event, in casual conversation with partners, friends, acquaintances, strangers. Creativity often depends on a wandering, unfocused mind.

Advisers should not underestimate the importance of dealing face to face with people, particularly other advisers and departmental staff. Even if it is only once, it is often worth meeting with people so that in future dealings you can put a name to that face - it often makes dealing with people easier, even when the issues are difficult.

In the Commonwealth, as soon as you begin the role, set aside time to get your security vetting done as quickly as possible. The process is time consuming, so it is best to get it over and done with as soon as possible.

Remember also that your working life as an adviser is a precarious one unless you have been seconded from a Department. Make yourself aware of your terms and conditions, particularly redundancy provisions so that you are comfortable with the consequences of

a Ministerial change or reshuffle or an election defeat.

Ultimately the task of any adviser is to avoid the Seven Deadly Sins and obey the 10 Commandments of Re-Election (below ) as best he or she can. While written for Ministers, they apply equally to advisers and political offices.

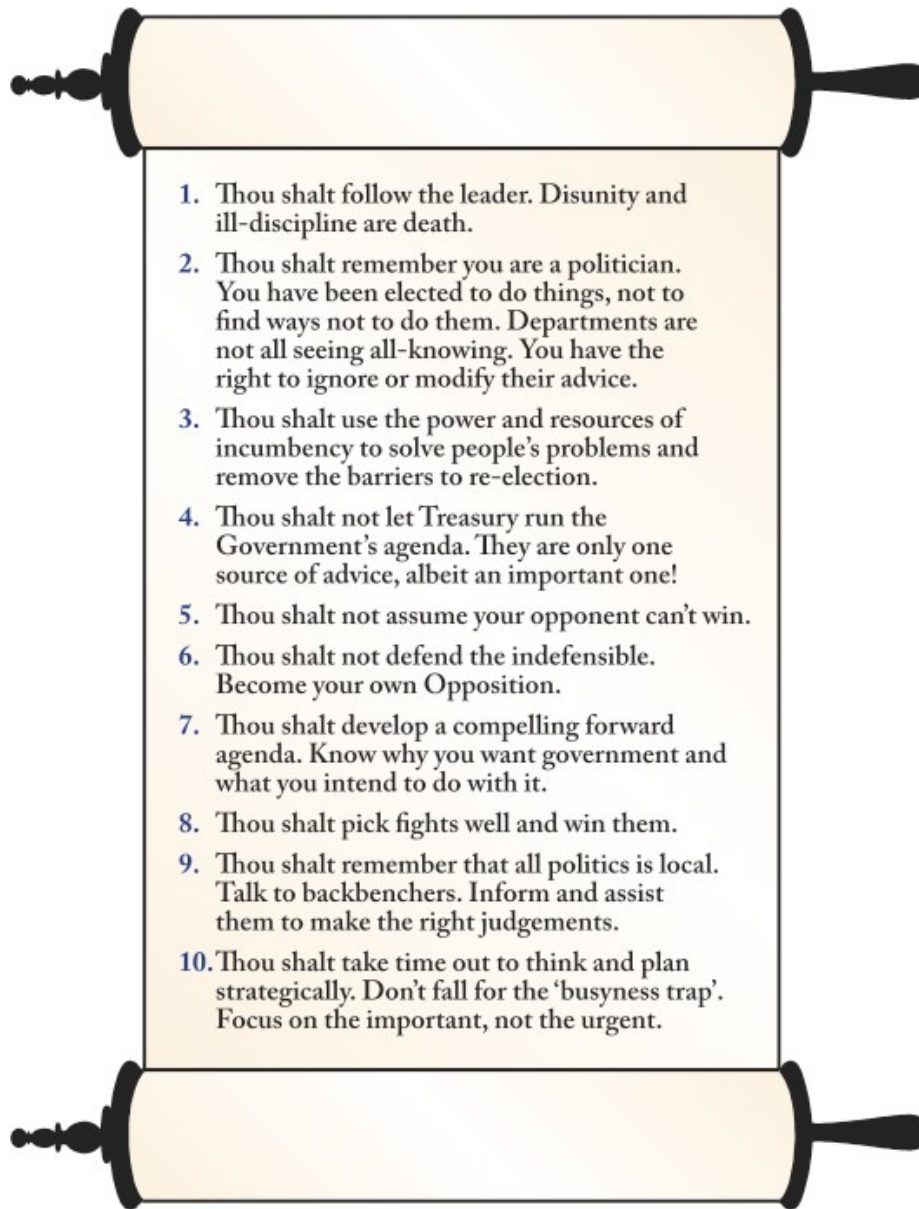
## Deadly sins and commandments

The sins and commandments set out below are based on a series of presentations to Victorian ministers and advisers by Mike Kaiser when he was Secretary of the ALP Queensland branch.



**Figure 2** The Seven Deadly Sins of Government.

There are other, shorter versions of what it takes to be successful in government. Former ACTU secretary Bill Kelty outlined three key tenets in *The Age* on March 28, 2013: 'First, take responsibility; second, reject the ideas that distract, divide and discount the nation; and third, argue to the last breath for the ideas and ideals that make the nation a better place. Honesty will, nearly always, win over duplicity.'



**Figure 3** The 10 Commandments of Re-Election.

Former Attorney-General and Deputy Prime Minister Gareth Evans outlined five fundamental rules of politics in *The Australian* on June 27, 2013: Have a philosophy and stick to it; have a narrative and stick to it; have a decent governing process and stick to it; that ministers should surround themselves with well-weathered colleagues and advisers who will remind them as necessary of their political mortality; and don't trash the brand!

## **Working with the Department and Statutory Authorities**

*The increasing pace and complexity of government means that departments and Ministerial offices are structurally destined for partnership and they had better get it right.*

- Sandy Hollway, former Deputy Secretary for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and former Chief of Staff for Prime Minister Bob Hawke

### **Bridging the divide**

If some former heads of the public service are to be believed, the general perception of advisers in the public service is that they are not even 'necessary evils', just evil. They would rather do away with them altogether as they supposedly stand between public servants and direct access to Ministers and their ability to provide frank and fearless advice. Indeed, there are some within the public service who see governments as an imposition they would rather not have to deal with! This attitude is reciprocated by some advisers, who use the term 'bureaucrat' as denigration, classify frank and fearless advice as defiance, classify cardigan-wearing as a hostile act, rather than a fashion statement, and see public servants as standing in the way of good policy implementation and effective service delivery. Indeed, as an adviser, the first time you meet with a senior manager in the public service they are going to think that you got your job because of your politics; that is, you're a 'political hack', and that they have their job because of their knowledge, skill, ability and superior performance.

While these views and attitudes are neither accurate nor helpful, they are indicative of the divide that needs to be bridged for constructive and co-operative relationships between Ministerial offices and departments. Robust and respectful relationships are essential to good and effective government. The starting point is respect for each other's roles, the responsibilities that entail and the limits of those responsibilities.

In the Minister's office the political meets the apolitical and advisers gain respect, whether political hacks or not, by demonstrating they are across their portfolio areas, know the politics, carry authority with their colleagues and the Minister, and take responsibility for their own actions, particularly if things go wrong, as they will sometimes do. (The quickest ways for an adviser or a Ministerial office to lose the respect of the Department is claim to speak for the Minister when they clearly don't or to not take responsibility for their own mistakes and blame the Department.) Public servants gain respect by providing frank, comprehensive, accurate and timely advice in the implementation of Government policies and programs and in response to emerging issues; and by carrying authority with other Departments (Commonwealth and State) and getting on with implementing decisions once they are made.

### **Building the partnership**

The relationship is and should be a dynamic one, characterised by robust discussion and respectful conduct. Clear expectations and good processes are the key to an effective relationship; clear expectations about the Government and the Minister's agenda and about expected behaviours as well as good administrative processes that all staff are not

only aware of but follow. (So much time can be lost and much frustration caused by a failure to establish good processes and protocols.)

Clear expectations flow from the effective development and communication of a strategic plan with clear priorities (see Chapter 5: A Strategy or a Shopping List?). The Department will initially know your policies better than you do. All Departments do detailed analyses of policy proposals during election campaigns (called the 'red' and 'blue' books) in readiness for an incoming government. It is the Minister and Ministerial office's responsibility, working with the Department, to turn these policy proposals into an agenda or strategic plan with clear priorities and expectations and to communicate this plan to the Department. Rather than simply relying on the senior executive of the Department to communicate the plan to his or her colleagues, arrange for the Minister to address the whole Department (or as much of it as possible) at least twice a year. The best time to do this is usually at the start of the year to set out the agenda and at the staff Xmas party at the end of the year to review the year and say 'thanks'. This way, everyone in the Department can at least gain a general understanding of the direction and priorities for the year ahead, or what has been achieved in the year that's about to finish. While most of your dealings will be with senior managers, make an effort to meet with and get to know the rest of their team. They are the ones that do the main body of research, analysis and brief writing and it is important that they get a clear understanding of the agenda and what is required generally or specifically on a particular matter. Get the Minister to meet the team if you can.

Clear expectations about behaviours come from understanding and respecting each other's roles and responsibilities as well as the constraints under which everyone works. Each Ministerial office should provide an office structure with key adviser responsibilities to the Department and understand the structure of the Department and the responsibilities of senior officers.

Processes for requesting, providing and dealing with briefs should be developed, refined and/or amended, with clear expectations around structure and quality as well as timeliness in requesting briefs and in providing them to the office, to avoid, where possible, last-minute requests and last-minute sign off and delivery. Avoid at all costs multiple requests on the same issue. The Ministerial office must speak to the public service with one voice.

Remember that the brief should reflect the Department's best take on the issue in question. It may not be the advice that you were hoping for, but as long as it accurately addresses the issue and provides clear recommendations then it has done its job. If you or the Minister are not happy with the brief, let the Department know why in a constructive way and get it to fix it. Don't do the Department's work for it. A constructive dialogue on the quality of briefs should see the quality improve over time right across the Department.

Don't pass on any advice or brief that hasn't been cleared by the relevant senior manager or the head of the Department, either in writing (on the brief) or verbally (if the circumstances require). Make decisions in a timely way. Let them know if decisions are to be delayed.

There also need to be processes put in place to deal with issues or complaints that might arise about the behaviour of either advisers or public servants. If there are any issues

about an individual's behaviour and/or departmental performance on an issue, take the matter to the Chief of Staff who can take the matter up discreetly with the Departmental Secretary.

Your relationship with senior managers in your Department will set the tone for the rest of the Department; that is, 'word' about you spreads quickly. Never purport to be talking on behalf of the Minister unless you really are. Good public servants work it out quickly and your trustworthiness will erode just as quickly. Do your own homework and absorb as much subject matter expertise as you possibly can: informed conversations get the quickest results.

Understand that public servants generally have three 'masters': the Minister, the Departmental Secretary and their reputation within the broader public service. As a result, there are limits to what can be done at a Departmental level and once that limit has been reached, the issue becomes one that can only be resolved at the political level by Ministers and Ministerial offices.

It is also important to understand the capacity of the Department and the workload it is under and rather than adding tasks to the list of things to be done, be open to a discussion about the need to re-prioritise tasks to take on any new issues. Understand also that political processes are 'disruptive' for people, organisations and systems. While the initial response to requests for urgent advice, additional work or a change of direction is often less than positive, most people, organisations and systems are generally good at responding to these interruptions, particularly when they are clearly explained. So expect a process of resistance and pushback (but don't necessarily take it personally!), followed by getting on with the new, additional or immediate request.

Remember that while advisers generally don't have a life after work, public servants do, and they are entitled to them. And don't forget to say thanks!

### **Working with statutory authorities**

Much of what has been said about working with departments applies equally to statutory authorities. It is important, however, to understand the purpose and powers of each authority that comes under the Minister's portfolio and the powers that the Minister has in relation to that authority. This will in many ways determine the extent and nature of the relationship. For example, the Minister's powers may in some cases only extend to appointing the chair and board members; in others it may go to strategic plans and key directions. Ultimately the Minister has responsibility for the legislation that governs the authority and in some cases the only way to change the authority is to change the legislation. None of this stops a Ministerial office from having a respectful and appropriate relationship with these bodies, including a clear understanding of the Government's priorities and agenda, and where that authority fits in with that agenda.



## **A Strategy or a Shopping List?**

*A good strategy does more than urge us forward toward a goal or vision; it honestly acknowledges the challenges we face and provides an approach to overcoming them. Too many organizational leaders say they have a strategy when they do not.*

- Richard Rumelt, *The Perils of Bad Strategy*

*Bad strategy ignores the power of choice and focus, trying instead to accommodate a multitude of conflicting demands and interests. Like a quarterback whose only advice to his teammates is 'let's win,' bad strategy covers up its failure to guide by embracing the language of broad goals, ambition, vision, and values. Each of these elements is, of course, an important part of human life. But, by themselves, they are not substitutes for the hard work of strategy.*

- Richard Rumelt, *The Perils of Bad Strategy*

### **List + choice = strategy**

Every Minister, Ministerial office and adviser ends up with a list of things to do, usually long: a series of policies to implement; issues to manage, appointments to make and administrative and service delivery tasks to monitor. As the term goes on, new issues arise and new opportunities open up. The challenge is to turn the list of things to be done into a strategic political plan that brings together your timelines, skills and resources and directs them to the achievement of your political and policy objectives and most importantly helps the government get re-elected (so that you can do it all over again!).

However, a strategic political plan without an actual strategy to get it done is simply a shopping list with an impressive name. A strategic political plan needs to bring together the key objectives or priorities with a strategy to deliver them - what needs to be done combined with the how, when and by whom it will be done.

Strategy involves choice. It requires focus. It involves 'lining up all the ducks' set out in Moore's concept of public value discussed in Chapter 3, so that you answer the key questions: should we do this? (Will it create public value?); may we do this? (Do we have the authority to do this, or how do we get the authority to do this?) And can we do this? (Do we have the operational capability to do this? How do we develop get the operational capability to do this?) The process of developing one will reveal, challenge and/or reinforce the priorities you have, identify the resources gap (the difference between the resources you have and the resources you need), identify the decisions that have to be made (and when), the opportunities to be captured and the challenges to be met. Developing one will cost you time in the short term, but will save you time, and anxiety, over the long term.



A genuine political strategy gives you a priority-setting and decision-making framework. It not only guides what you should do but also what we should NOT do. If your activity is NOT contributing to the achievement of the key priorities then STOP DOING IT. You can't develop and deliver a successful 'short-game' (tactics) without a long-term view (strategy).

### **The keys to long-term strategy**

There are a number of elements to a successful strategy. For example:

#### **Don't make it too complicated**

The strategy is to get from where you are right now (Point A) to where you want to be (Point B). The strategy also has to be able to be understood and effectively implemented. That's why is better to base your plan on the view that 'less is more'.

#### **The political strategy MUST drive the communications strategy (not the other way around)**

There needs to be a dynamic relationship between the strategic political plan and the media and communications plan. However, the political plan must be the driver. Laying out the political plan will identify the media and communications challenge: the work required to build a case, to ensure that a problem or issue is understood; to outline and gain support for the solution and then to communicate and embed the solution. The political plan will also provide a context for issues that will come up from time to time in the media.

#### **Values, messages and themes must be at the heart of the plan**

The most complex and comprehensive government program or programs can be expressed more simply through the use of key themes. (These themes are informed by government values/principles and directions and should embody its key messages). Themes can unify a seemingly disparate group of programs and policies, and can allow all those responsible for each of them to feel that they are contributing to an overall goal. (A word of warning: unless you can agree on the words that sum up the key message(s), you can't really progress at all.) This can be a two-step process: what are the overall key themes/directions of the Government? What are the key themes/directions in the Minister's portfolio? How can these be linked?

#### **Good research is important**

You need to benchmark where you are right now (Point A) through the use of available research (including any polling if it is available) and measure progress on the way to Point B. (Well-informed, active Caucus members can give you a pretty good idea of how issues are tracking.) You also need to know what has been achieved, so you know what you're building on.

### **Plan in yearly (then quarterly) cycles**

While ultimately a three- or four-year plan needs to be outlined, the key timeline is one year. The yearly cycle in turn needs to be broken down into quarterly plans, generally based around parliamentary sitting cycles and the seasons. For example: summer period (December-February), autumn/Budget (March-May), winter break (June-July) and spring (August-November). There needs to be a dynamic relationship between policy delivery and media/communications activity. Each yearly grid should include every key date and every possible message opportunity. For example, if we deliver this policy outcome by X date, then we can use opportunities Y and Z to announce and reinforce, etc. OR if we can deliver this policy outcome by X date, then what opportunities can we create/accept/bring forward or delay announcing and reinforcing. Each quarterly plan should focus on one or two of your key messages/themes (acknowledging that it takes time and concentrated effort to get the message through).

### **The need for discipline**

Ensure discipline and focus by setting targets for each three-monthly period, including communications targets. The quarterly plans should also be aligned to party political polling cycles and government non-political/issues polling where possible and if available.

### **Orchestrate**

Life, speech, music has a rhythm. It is not of one pace. A strategy must include some 'orchestration'; that is, the volume (you don't always have to shout to be heard and you don't have to be in the media every day) and pace (sometimes you'll need to fight, other times it will require consensus) needs to vary. This will in part be driven by the parliamentary and decision-making cycle, when there are times when you have to focus predominantly on getting decisions made and policies finalised and times when the focus can be on selling those policies.

### **Sometimes you win, sometimes you...**

Accept that you cannot win every day. Keep your eye on the long-term strategy.

### **Consistency, consistency, 'persistency'**

Consistency and 'persistency' are critical to the delivery of any strategy. Your messages need to be consistent and persistent; reinforced in ALL forms of communication: speeches, press releases and advertising. Consistency of message isn't about slavish repetition of the same words. There are different ways to say or illustrate the same things. Also remember that the message is more than just words. You need to create images and leave impressions.

Persistence also pays. Good policy ideas will eventually win through; they just need the right opportunity. If a good policy proposal hasn't succeeded, understand why, refine it, persist in making the case till an opportunity opens up.

### **A ready-made agenda**

Your short-, medium- and long-term priorities should be reflected in your Minister's diary, in your diary and be a standard item on your regular meetings agenda with other advisers and the Department.

### **The key elements of a strategic plan**

A strategic plan should contain the following:

#### **Themes and objectives:**

The Government's key themes and objectives;

The Minister's key themes and objectives;

The relevant department/portfolio's key themes and objectives (where relevant);

(There should be a strong fit between all three.)

#### **Key initiatives, listed under each of the themes**

\* Each initiative should include the actions and timelines required, including:

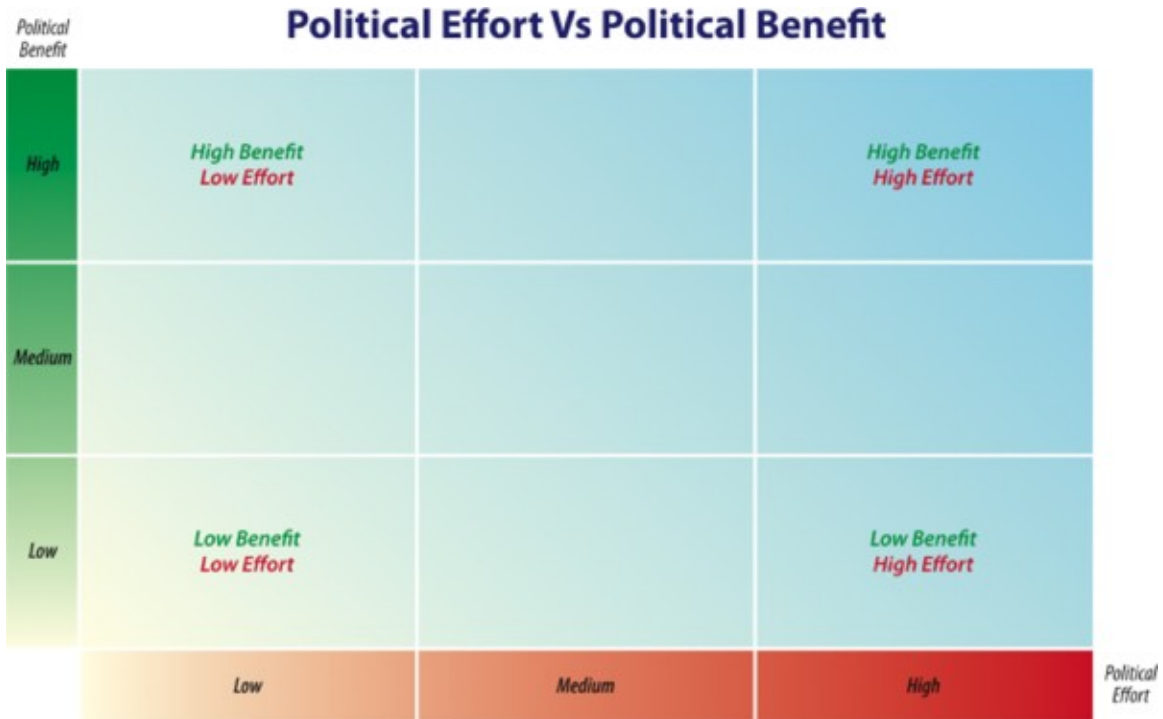
- o Key issues and the decisions required;
- o The types of decisions required;
- o Where and by whom decisions are made;
- o Key dates;
- o Relevant stakeholders;
- o Links to other issues/initiatives;
- o An assessment of the time and resources required to get it done.

#### **Clear accountability**

Even if an initiative requires the input of a variety of people, one person should be given the responsibility of managing its progress.

#### **A sense of priority**

Not everything can be done at once. Not everything is THE priority. Strategy requires a choice being made based on a clear sense of priorities informed and driven by an understanding of the nature and challenges of each of the initiatives, the resources available for the whole of the political program, and the time available as well as the political opportunities. It is far better to get serious progress made on a smaller number of key or priority issues than limited progress made on all of your issues. *The Political Benefit/Effort graph* provides a way to help make decisions about your priorities.



**Figure 4** The Political Effort/Benefit Graph.

The 'political effort' is the time and resources required to get something done. The 'political benefit' is the political benefit for the Government in delivering and being seen to deliver on its promises and programs. Plot your key activities on the graph. If you have a large number in the 'low benefit/high effort' section, you have to ask why you are doing them and whether they can be done with less effort. (Although in government, there are things that you just have to do no matter what!) If you have a large number in the 'high effort/high benefit' section you have to ask whether you have the time and resources to actually get it all done? This might prompt a rethink about the timing of the activities and/or a redesign of the activity to use fewer resources. This exercise can only ever be a rough guide but it does stimulate thinking and discussion about your priorities.

#### **The ability to review and refine**

No plan survives contact with the 'real world' intact. Unforeseen circumstances, both negative and positive, or the failure to exploit, overcome or manage an opportunity or challenge, will require the need to review and refine the strategy. A strategy set in stone has a good chance of sinking like one, so it is important to review and refine the strategy as it progresses.

## Developing and Implementing Policy

*Because out here, on the edge of Asia, a long way from major markets and natural groupings, ideas are all Australia has to shield itself from the harsh winds of global change. Not military might, or a large population, or unique resources. Just ideas. Ideas are what must sustain our democracy, nurture our community and drive our economy into new areas so we can cope with the challenges...*

- Paul Keating, *A Time For Reflection: Political Values in the Age of Distraction*, The Third Annual Manning Clark Lecture, 3 March 2002

*Policy making is not a strictly logical pursuit, but a complex and fascinating matrix of politics, policy and administration. When electoral considerations, budget constraints and implementation problems pull in different directions, problems might be open to multiple solutions, or no solution at all. No single procedure guarantees a successful result; governments can make howling errors even using the most rigorous and exact policy processes.*

- Peter Bridgman and Glyn Davis, *The Australian Policy Handbook*

## Turning ideas into policy

Labor values should not only shape the policy, they should also shape the process of policy development and implementation. If you believe that every person has the right to a say, directly or indirectly, in the decisions that affect his or her life; if you believe in open, democratic and accountable government; in empowering citizens and improving their participation in government; in genuine broad-based engagement by government in tackling the opportunities and challenges that face the nation; and in genuine tripartite processes in dealing with industrial, economic and environmental reforms, then policy development and implementation must provide the means by which this can happen (see Chapter 7: Community Engagement, Media and Communications).

The best ideas and policy can come from a variety of sources, including but not limited to chance meetings and conversations, quiet contemplation, private and public advice from experts or practitioners here and overseas, private and university-based 'think-tanks', external lobby groups, the arts, local communities, government departments and agencies, parliamentary committees, backbenchers, Ministers and their offices, political party policy committees, books, journals and public seminars. (However, be wary of lobby or interest groups who present 'solutions', especially if those solutions are round sums of money. Always ask what motivation the interest group has in wanting that solution and whether they really understand the problem. Round sums are often a sign of a lazy lobbyist who isn't really representing their members' interests.)

While genuine broad engagement can be time consuming, if done well, there are important benefits to be gained, from a diverse range of ideas to ownership and enthusiasm for the policy and its implementation. There is still a great deal more to be done by political parties and government departments to harness the ideas of the community and of public servants. The effective use of social media externally and internally, particularly around well-presented 'strategic discussions', provides new opportunities to engage, as does a more modern approach to the 'green paper/white paper'

process, which was once widely used in government. There are plenty of good ideas out there, political parties and governments just have to be smarter about how they harness them.

### **Problems, 'wicked' and otherwise**

Policies are responses to problems, which is why in policy development it is important to clearly understand the problem you're trying to solve. Poorly defined problems have a habit of turning into badly delivered policies, and big wastes of public money (and subsequent embarrassments). So beware of jumping straight to solutions. And there are also those problems known as 'wicked problems', not because they are evil, but because they resist or defy solution. These problems are those where the nature of the problem and/or the solution are contested. They can't be solved, only managed. Not recognising when you are dealing with a 'wicked' problem can lock you into a spiral of constantly promising 'fixes' that don't work.

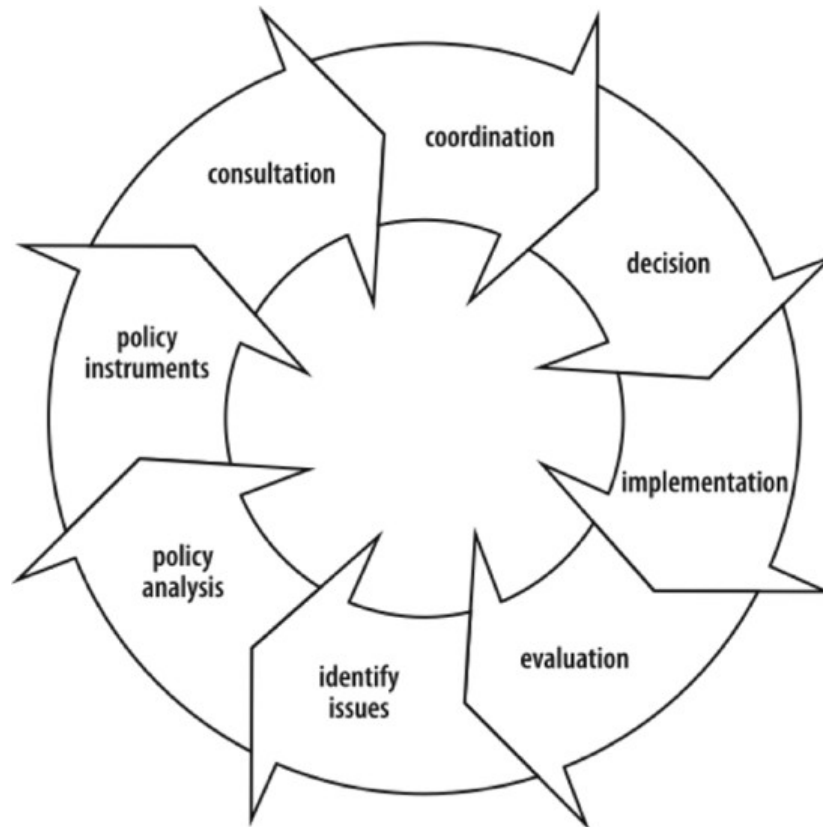
### **Reframing**

In his book, *Reframe: How to Solve The World's Trickiest Problems*, Eric Knight provides some good advice on how to avoid looking for answers in the wrong places. He says that we tend to see problems through a 'magnifying glass' (which rather than helping you too see more clearly tends to zoom in and fix your gaze on 'one corner of the universe and miss those elements of a solution lying just outside the lens') and point it at the 'shiny objects' (those parts of the problem 'which are visually compelling and graphic'). At other times 'we are lured by intellectual trinkets and shiny ideas. Both can distract us on our mission to solve complex problems. It's only when we cast them aside that we have a chance of making progress.'

He goes on to say that the problem needs to be 'reframed'. 'Reframing is not a linguistic tool, a trick to disguise or evade difficult problems. Rather, it is an intellectual choice we must make. Seeing the answer to our problem requires us to have the right elements of the problem - the right system - in focus. Instead of a magnifying glass, think for a moment of the lens on a camera. When the aperture is set at one width, we see a flower. That's one system in focus. Widen the aperture and we see a meadow - that's another system in focus. Widen it further and we see the mountains - a third system. Having a particular system in focus alters our ability to see the answer. Focus on the flower, and the mountains are invisible. Reframe the problem - remove the magnifying glass - and we may arrive at the right answer.'

### **Policy development within Government**

While there is no single definitive government policy cycle, *The Australian Policy Handbook* by Peter Brigman and Glyn Davis, sets out an 'Australian policy cycle' which should be familiar to current and former advisers and which should become familiar to new and aspiring advisers.



**Figure 5** The Australian Policy Cycle, reproduced from *The Australian Policy Handbook*.

Policy will 'cycle' through eight stages:

1. **Identify Issues** (A new problem emerges; an existing policy is no longer working, etc.)
2. **Policy Analysis** (Sufficient information is provided to make an informed judgment)
3. **Policy Instruments** (Change to legislation, taxation or government administration/operations, additional resources or funding, advocacy)
4. **Consultation** (Across government(s), the broader community, those affected, etc.)
5. **Co-ordination** (Across government(s) to identify funding; clarify responsibilities and resolve issues)
6. **Decision** (By Cabinet)
7. **Implementation** (Through legislation, government program and/or departmental action, intergovernmental agreements, etc.)
8. **Evaluation** (Gauge the effect, adjust or rethink the policy, restart the process, if needed)

In practice, there are cycles within the cycle, in that a policy proposal may go through the first five phases several times before being ready for a decision. In the Cabinet process

(including the Expenditure Review Committee) the hardest part to get through is the co-ordination stage where central agencies, and most importantly Treasury, bring their analysis and views to bear to on the policy, including support or otherwise for funding. Policies, during the implementation phase where they are delivered into the so-called 'real world' will need adjustment from time to time, prompting the authors to remind us that 'Policy is a wheel continually turning, task never completed.'

### Policy development outside Government

As a Government's term proceeds, the policy agenda it was elected on is progressively implemented and new issues and new opportunities crop up that require a policy response, all of which is dealt with through the policy processes of government, including the yearly budget cycle. Later in the term, the Government must turn its mind to its next term of government and the development of a compelling forward agenda that will not only help win the next election but provide a strong next-term agenda. The Government's forward agenda is a joint effort between the Government and the Party to revise and approve the Party Platform and then to develop the policies and to decide the policy priorities. It involves Ministers, MPs, advisers, party officials, union members, policy committees and the broader community.

The aim is to deliver good, attention-grabbing, election-winning, problem-solving ideas that are:

- \* Framed or informed by Labor's progressive values and consistent with the Government/Party's broader policy approaches
- \* Recognised as the best solution to the problem
- \* Affordable and measurable
- \* Easily communicated and able to grab the attention of voters (if they can be a 'barbecue-stopper', even better!)

Some policies will need to be targeted at specific constituencies; others will need a broader appeal. The aim at all times is to put your opposition on the back foot.

As you move through the policy development process it is important to guard against the following common policy problems: bureaucratic language; vague, unclear or confusing commitments; a 'one-size-fits-all' approach that fails to take in regional/local variations and circumstances; policies or initiatives that bear little or no relation to people's concerns; are difficult or impractical to implement in the so-called 'real world' and which contain large, hidden or unexpected costs. The challenge in all policy making should be to gain the maximum social/economic/political gain with the minimum spend or indeed find ways to do more with less.

There are three key pillars of good policy development: good processes, content and presentation/packaging.

### **Process**

The tendency in government is to put bureaucratic policy development structures in place that add to or connect with the already bureaucratic party policy structures. There is a call for policy proposals and costings, usually via a pro-forma policy document all of which disappears into a black hole, sometimes never to be seen again. Policy discussions are



generally formal, and restricted. There is often a lack of genuine engagement with party members and the broader community, outside the party. To get around this, the Ministerial office needs to put in place its own policy development process and devote time to developing a compelling forward agenda in its portfolio responsibilities and to generate ideas across government. At a minimum this should include a series of staff meetings and forums to identify and discuss policy; regular meetings with stakeholders and keeping up to date with local, national and international trends.

## **Content**

Good content involves providing the best solution to a problem or an elegant way of meeting a need. Identifying and understanding the problem comes first. For example, what is upsetting, annoying or frustrating people the most? Where are progressive values not reflected in existing policy and programs (fairness, opportunity and responsibility)?

Is the problem you are solving understood as a problem? Can it actually be solved or is it a 'wicked' problem that at best can only be managed? Is it on the public radar? (Are people campaigning on the issue? What is the reliable private and public qualitative polling saying [if available]? What are the opinion leaders, media and critics saying? What are stakeholders and community groups saying? What is the Opposition saying? What are the experts saying?) What is happening interstate/overseas? What is the size of the problem? How many people and places does it affect? Can the problem be measured? Is it regional or national? Which level of government is responsible? Is there agreement on the problem? If not, to what extent is there agreement/disagreement?

Then comes the search for the solution. Why have previous policies failed?

How are similar issues being addressed elsewhere? Is the idea/policy already working somewhere else? Are there different and equally valid ways of responding to the issue, rather than one answer? What part of the 'system' would be easiest to fix or deliver the biggest benefit? Will a 'one-size-fit-all' approach work or does it require regional variation?

Can these be trialed? Are adequate resources available? Can its impact be measured? Does it trump the ideas your opponents are getting traction on? It is vital to test its practicality with the people who will be affected by it and identify all the costs of implementation.

## **Presentation**

Good policy presentation avoids bureaucratic language as well as vague and unclear commitments. Good policy documents are short, sharp and specific and speak to ordinary people's concerns or the 'real world'. They find language that connects with people. They frame the debate around the agreed progressive values and provide a contrast with alternative and lesser approaches. So ask, can it be described in a short sentence? Are the winners going to be excited? If there are losers are they going to accept the change or be angry?

## **Turning policy into reality**

Political scientist John W. Kingdon has outlined three key elements required to turn policy into reality. None of these will be unfamiliar. First, you need a crisis, or at least the perception of a **problem** in general need of attention. The problem needs to be well

understood, and where possible able to be measured, preferably by well-known indicators. Second, you need a **solution**, a policy or idea that is or has been under discussion as a potential solution, preferably supported by third parties. Third, you need the **right time**, the political window of opportunity when politicians and the community are receptive to the policy solution or action proposed. Or in other words, you need a case, a desire for change and the right timing. When the problem, the idea and the moment come together, you get traction. Getting all of these elements to align is a key task. Sometimes it involves creating or highlighting the problem (or waiting for the crisis to arrive), knowing that while you already have the solution, you need the political window of opportunity to open up. Of course, you have to pick your crisis, as some are better avoided, or solved quietly!

When the problem, solution and timing come together, it's time to get on with implementation. And while the responsibility for implementation falls to the Department, the Minister's office and the responsible adviser must be closely involved because any failure to deliver on time and or to deliver the promised results will rebound on the Minister and the Government NOT the Department. On some occasions, removing roadblocks to implementation will require negotiations with and intervention by other Ministerial offices.

To assist understanding of the implementation challenge, it can be helpful to put together a 'ready reckoner' and have a 'strategic conversation' with those in the Department about how the policy will be implemented. The key questions set out below provide a useful guide. This is important, not just to get everyone 'on the same page' but to focus departmental effort on the task at hand. While implementation is part of the policy cycle, more effort often goes into getting a decision made, than into properly considering detailed implementation. A 'strategic conversation' at the beginning of the implementation phase can save a lot of time and potential trouble, distilling the core issues into a plan of action. If the policy itself has been clearly articulated then answering these questions should be easy. If not, this provides an opportunity to do so. It will also help your media adviser and your Minister, who will be about to go out and announce what the Government has decided to do. As always, answers should be expressed in clear, jargon-free language.

### **What is the PROBLEM?**

What is the problem to be solved or the issue you are addressing? How big is the problem? Is it well understood? What facts, figures, data, research and other relevant information and arguments have been assembled in support of the view that there is a problem to be solved?

### **What is the POLICY SOLUTION?**

What do you want to do? How will the problem be solved? What are the benefits? Who benefits? Can the solution be easily explained?

### **What's the POLICY PRIORITY?**

What priority does this initiative have when compared to the other initiatives of the Government? Is this priority known/shared within and outside the Government?

### **What are the key INITIATIVES?**

What are the component initiatives/actions/tasks that make up the entire policy proposal and who is responsible for their implementation? What priority has been given to these? Is there an order of priority for implementation?

### **What PEOPLE and ORGANISATIONS are crucial for success?**

What people and/or organisations (internal and/or external to Government) are the key to the success or failure of the initiative and how will they be recruited, supported, countered and managed?

### **What PROCESSES and TIMELINES need to be met?**

When must this be done by? What processes (internal and/or external to Government) have to be put in place (or observed) to achieve the outcome? Can these processes be shortened, improved, combined, synchronised or ignored? Initiatives will be subject to consultative, legislative, bureaucratic, organisational, legal, financial and other processes either through choice or because they are mandated. (However, be aware that departments won't push back on timing most of the time, which can mean you'll get what is possible in the timeframe, not necessarily what you want.)

### **What CHALLENGES can we expect?**

What challenges stand in the way of successful implementation and how can they be overcome or avoided? If the Cabinet decision varies from the recommendation, how can these changes be accommodated? Are you confident that the necessary resources have been provided to get it done? Have we got the necessary skills to do this? How robust was the risk analysis? What other problems may arise along the way? What will you do if things start to go wrong? What contingencies are in place for the biggest risks?

### **How will you measure PERFORMANCE and PROGRESS?**

How will you measure success? What are the key performance indicators (long term and short term)? And how will they be presented/communicated?

### **What PUBLICITY is required/can be generated?**

What overall publicity opportunities/challenges are there? What type of publicity is required/will be most effective? What is the role required of publicity to establish the need for this initiative? (That is, sometimes before you can solve a problem people have to be aware that one exists or is about to exist.) How can publicity assist in overcoming problems?

### **What's the IMPLEMENTATION PLAN?**

Given everything so far, how do we make it happen? Put your plan/strategy together. (At Commonwealth level, Departments have to produce an implementation plan for Cabinet for anything that medium-high risk, complex or high-profile. It'll have useful stuff in it, so make sure to read it, and use it to question the Department, especially if it looks overly optimistic!)

### **[Avoiding some deadly traps](#)**

In their book, *If We Can Put a Man on The Moon: Getting Big Things Done in Government*, William D. Eggers and John O'Leary outline what they call the 'seven deadly traps' of policy implementation. These 'traps' should not be unfamiliar to anyone who has worked in government in Australia. My interpretation of these is as follows:

\* **Confirmation Bias** - Looking only at evidence that confirms your view of the world.

Ways to combat this include: being a 'devil's advocate'; testing ideas with sceptics, by starting with the facts, preferring data over ideology (and getting the agreement of opponents to the facts), looking to other fields and disciplines and expanding the ideas pool.

\* **Failure of Design** - Legislating before properly designing or 'design-testing' the initiative. (Thinking only about what can get passed, rather than what is required for the initiative to succeed.)

Ways to combat this include: bringing practical 'real world' experience to bear, particularly on implementation, and probing for design weaknesses before legislation is finalised.

\* **Wanting a horse, ending up with a camel** - Failing to align political, bureaucratic and public support for the initiative or compromising too much to get that support and ending up with an initiative that will not achieve the intended outcome.

Ways to combat this include: Remembering that successful policy implementation generally requires three things: a crisis or a problem that is acknowledged and needs fixing, a solution that is already being discussed or formulated, and the right timing; working through all of the things that could go wrong with your initiative and developing strategies to deal with them; maintaining the integrity of the idea and the principles that underpin it; being prepared to delay if it is not the right time rather than sacrifice the initiative's integrity.

\* **Overconfidence** - Having unrealistic levels of optimism.

Ways to combat this include: embracing the possibility of failure; being realistic and taking a hard look at the resources, time and costs required; minimising opposition and managing expectations. It is better to under-promise and over-deliver.

\* **Human nature** - Failing to take into account the 'human factor', the difficulties of changing attitudes and bringing about behaviour change.

Ways to combat this include: understanding the political, bureaucratic and organisational terrain, including 'culture'; bridging the political/bureaucratic language divide; emphasising the importance of what is being done and the benefits and providing incentives.

\* **'She'll be right' complacency** - Failing to properly evaluate ongoing programs to ensure that what is being done and how it is being done still makes sense in a changing world.

Ways to combat this include: Constantly re-evaluating what Government does and cutting non-essential activities; the use of 'sunset' clauses; asking 'what if' questions

and testing disaster scenarios, as well as risk-management exercises.

\* **No dot joining** - Failing to break down barriers, see the opportunities for an integrated approach, 'join the dots' and develop a shared sense of purpose across different people, organisations and agencies. Ways to combat this include: developing and articulating a clear goal and defined roles; identifying partnerships, potential supporters and links across the public sector, ensuring there are no 'weak links' in design or implementation; and promoting co-ordination and developing good processes and systems that support co-operation.

### **It's time... persistence**

As discussed, good policy and good ideas can fail because of bad timing. However, don't abandon good policies or good ideas. Persistence pays and their time will come. It is important therefore to put them in the bottom draw, keep them up to date and await the next political opportunity. (The program of the Whitlam era was still being implemented many years after the government was defeated.)

## **Community Engagement, Media and Communications**

*Frames are mental pictures that shape the way we see the world. As a result they shape the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act, and what counts as a good or bad outcome of our actions.*

*- George Lakoff, *Don't Think of An Elephant, Know Your Values and Frame The Debate**

*In the same way that a painter will prepare a canvas before painting, a medical professional will prepare surgical equipment before operating and a sports coach will prepare her team before a match, a persuasive appeal requires preparation, too. And sometimes such preparation requires us not only to consider how to pitch our message but also to pay attention to previous messages and reactions. As the saying goes the best way to ride a horse is in the direction that the horse is going. Only by first aligning yourself with the direction to the horse is it possible to then slowly and deliberately steer it where you'd like it to go.*

*- Noah J. Goldstein PhD, Steve J. Martin and Robert B. Cialdini PhD,  
*Yes! 50 secrets from the Science of Persuasion**

### **Spinning not moving**

The aim of every form of political communication is to persuade, convert and energise. Despite the protestations of media organisations and journalists, so-called 'spin' has been around for thousands of years, since the first person tried to persuade the next about the merits of what they were doing or proposing. (Eve got Adam to eat the apple, after all.) However, it is important to understand that the current structure for the management of 'spin' within government actually mitigates against effective communication and engagement with the community. This includes but is not limited to: overly centralised control (rather than co-ordination); over-reliance on media releases; strict adherence to focus-group-tested 'key word' messages; succumbing to the '24-hour news cycle' and 'announcement-a-day' strategies (rather than ongoing explanations of policy and programs); agenda-setting by media outlets that only politicians tend to watch or read such as SkyTV and *The Australian*; the limited use of video, audio and graphics to explain issues and policy; the growth of alternative media; and the combative nature of government-media relationships.

Media management and centralised control of messaging has been substituted for real communication. This is compounded by the fact that many media advisers are good at handling media on a day-to-day basis but don't know much about the broader challenges of strategic communication, and that many government departments can churn out 'communications strategies' but generally aren't very good at 'issues management' or 'community engagement', and even if they were great at these things, they aren't really able to do much because of the centralised management of 'political' communication.

### **Effective political communications**

The extent and type of community engagement can determine the success or failure of any government policy or initiative. The ability to manage, persuade, convert and

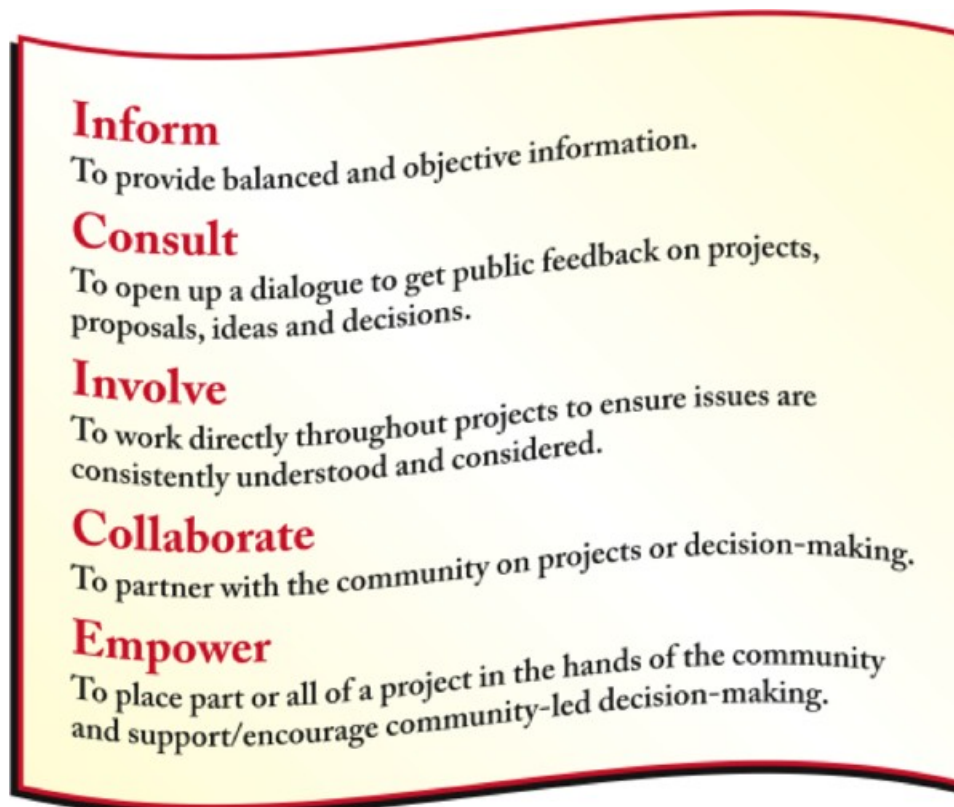
energise strategically and effectively in the current milieu requires an understanding of community engagement and that media and communications practice is a means to policy end rather than an end in itself.

As mentioned in Chapter 5: A Strategy or a Shopping List?, there needs to be a dynamic relationship between the strategic political plan of the Government and Ministerial Office and the media and communications plan. However, the political plan must be the driver. Developing the political strategy will identify the community engagement, media and communications challenge: the work required to build a case, to ensure that a problem or issue is understood; to outline and gain support for the solution and then to communicate and embed that solution. The political plan also provides a context for issues, including the proverbial 'shit sandwiches' that will come up from time to time in the media, and guards against comments or actions being taken to deliver a short-term media fix that undermines the long-term outcome to be achieved.

### Community engagement

There is a continuum of 'community engagement', from the need to inform the community at one end to the need to collaborate with and empower the community at the other. Between these come the need to consult and the need to involve. These steps are not mutually exclusive and an issue, policy or program may require a combination of them over time. The step or steps to be used are a function of, on the one hand, the simplicity or complexity of issues and, on the other hand, the certainty, or lack of it, about content or knowledge of those issues and the number and type of constraints that might exist. For example, if the content of an issue is tightly constrained and there is very little opportunity for input or change, then the task becomes to 'inform' the community. If a problem requires a community-led solution, then that community will need to be 'empowered' to make and implement the decisions required.

In a nutshell, the community engagement continuum can be described as:



**Figure 6** The community engagement continuum.

This is important to understand because while departments will do most of the implementing of each of these steps, as an adviser you will need to advise the Minister on the adequacy and appropriateness of the Department's proposals and processes for engagement around issues, policies and projects and the Minister's own level of involvement in each of these steps (noting that there is sometimes an unhealthy bias towards simply informing people, rather than truly engaging with the community to generate greater understanding of, enthusiasm about and commitment to the decision, policy or direction).

### **The importance of 'framing'**

Framing is developing the language that fits the Minister's/Government's argument or worldview in a way that allows that worldview to prevail. It is about defining who you are and what you stand for rather than having your opponents define you. A frame is more than just words, it is what the words conjure up that is important - the ideas, messages and images, often subliminal, that are contained in those words. Some modern examples are 'war on terror', 'family values', 'tax relief', 'working families' and 'budget crisis'. In *Don't Think of An Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame The Debate*, George Lakoff argues that the 'frames' flow from values and that conservative and progressive values flow from two different family models: 'the 'strict father' model and the 'nurturant parent' model.

Most importantly, he argues that being clear about values is essential to the effective framing of the debate. The success or otherwise of your 'frame' can be measured by the extent to which it is accepted into the discussion as 'common sense' or the extent to which



arguing against it seems futile or foolish. Needless to say, he says, the conservatives do it far better than the progressives.

The book sets out some key rules of framing. They include that when you negate a frame, you evoke a frame. For example, as Lakoff explains, when someone says, 'I am not a crook', as former President Nixon once did, people will most likely think that he is a crook, or if a politician says 'Mr XXXX cannot be trusted' people may well ask whether the politician making the claim can be trusted. So be careful of the frames you evoke.

When you are arguing against the other side, do not use their language. When you adopt their language you reinforce their ideas; for example that a 'budget surplus' automatically equates to 'good economic management'. However, there are times when it is right to steal their 'frame', particularly when it can be 're-framed' in your language, for example 'welfare reform'.

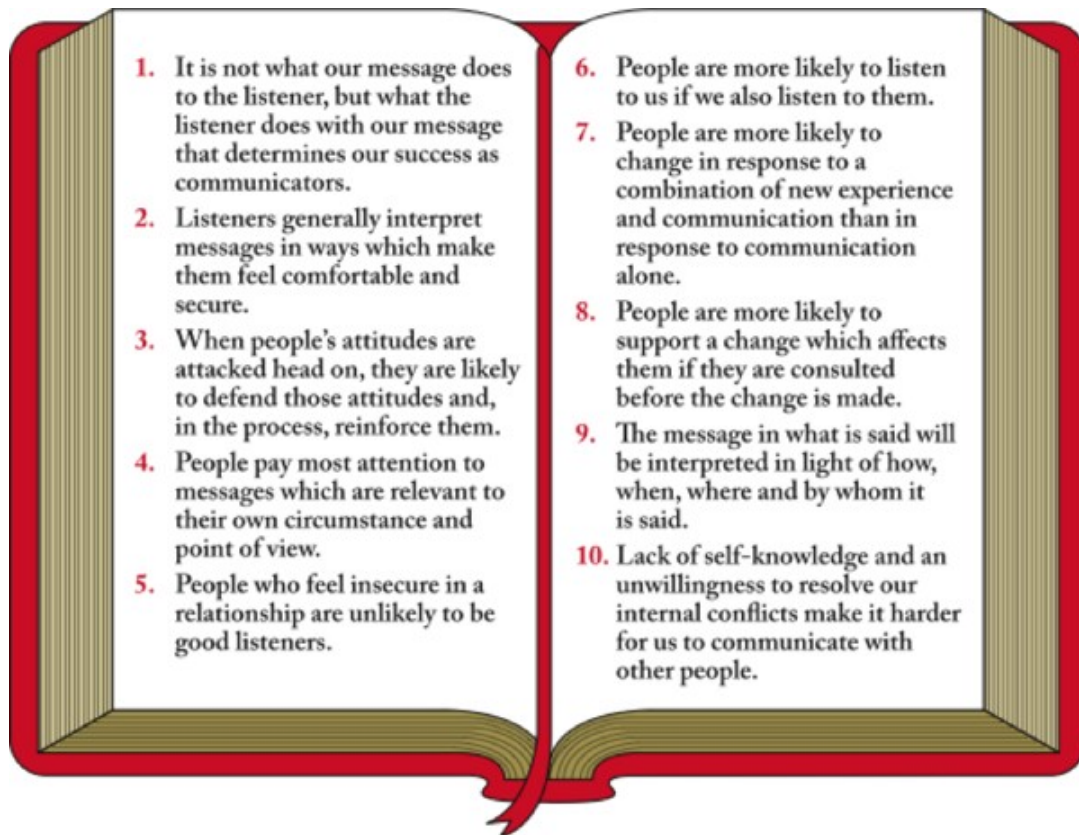
Perhaps the most important issue to contemplate is that according to Lakoff's research, people do not always vote in their self-interest, or as we often colloquially say, for their 'hip pocket'. They vote their identity and values. If all these things are aligned - that is, self-interest, identity and values - that's the way they vote. If there is a difference, it doesn't mean that self-interest always wins.

People in the 'middle' of the political spectrum, that is those who are most likely to swing, use both the 'strict father' and 'nurturant parent' models in different parts of their lives, so the challenge is to get them to use your model for how they make decisions about politics.

Lakoff also makes the point that Orwellian language points to weakness. It is generally used when it is realised that people do not support what is really trying to be done. He also advises that when you think you lack words, what you really lack are ideas: get clear on and use the language of values, 'drop the language of policy wonks', don't just say what you believe, turn the values into frames, and practise re-framing everyday!

### **Commandments of communication**

Most of what a media adviser does will fall into the realm of 'informing' and 'issues management'. The following are 10 commandments put together by Hugh Mackay. They are worth pondering, before you embark on any form of communication, whether a public hall meeting, speech or media release.



**Figure 7 The Commandments of Communication.**

**More than the words**

It is important to understand that a person's total communication is more than the words they use. Indeed, words make up only about 30 per cent of the total communication or 'message pack'. As mentioned above, the message in what is said will be interpreted in light of how, when, where and by whom it is said.



**Figure 8** Your 'message pack'.

We have all come across Ministers and backbenchers whose words are betrayed by their body language, or whose words sound rehearsed. In these circumstances we remember the body language communicated or the fact that the words sound rehearsed rather than the words themselves, and as a result we discount the communication. This is where strict adherence to 'key message documents' often get it wrong, asking politicians to say things that beggar belief or in words they don't normally use or in ways they don't normally speak. When, for example, a politician says, 'I don't take any notice of the polls, polls come and go and the only poll that counts is on election day', what the people hear is something like 'I am speaking bullshit, or I am deluding myself.' It is important therefore for a Minister to be comfortable with his or her words, convert key messages and/or themes into his or her own words and phrases or take the advice of comedian George Burns, 'Sincerity - if you can fake it, you've got it made' and practise, practise, practise!

To be successful, the message needs to be understood and ACTED UPON by the listener. The most effective communication speaks to listeners' circumstances and points of view. It is important to understand where the audience is coming from and to use that understanding to either reinforce their view (if that's what your aim is) or to get them to challenge or to think differently and change their view (if that's what your aim is).

### [Enough of theory, now to the practice](#)

The media adviser is the Ministerial office's conduit to the world via the media. The job is one of the most demanding and stressful in any political office. Before the mantle was taken by a current Prime Minister, and as a result of the 24-hour news cycle, the media adviser became the first '24/7' political operator. The day begins early in the morning, assessing what is in the morning media cycle and whether there are any implications for the Government and/or the Minister, to reviewing what is happening in the evening media cycle and in between getting on with media releases, story development and placement and issues management. While all Ministers and advisers should be across the media, media advisers need to ensure that they are. Media advisers also need to be kept in

the loop about what the Ministerial office is doing. (Although there are times when it is best that they don't know some things until absolutely necessary!)

Effective management of relationships with, and use of, the media requires understanding on both sides. It is important for advisers to gain some understanding of the demands of the 24-hour media cycle and the nature of the media 'beast'. For media advisers it is important to gain some understanding of the nature of the complex relationships and issues that an adviser must develop, manage and maintain and the general lack of enthusiasm for, and understanding of, the media in bureaucracies.

To make the task of the media adviser easier, all of the issues advisers deal with also need to be looked at in the light of the communications challenges and opportunities, whether or not an issue is a media possibility, and whether it is a positive story that needs to be publicised or a negative story that needs to be managed.

The following are the sorts of questions a media adviser needs answers to:

- \* What is the core issue(s) involved?
- \* What impression do we want to leave; that is, how should the message be delivered?
- \* What is the logic of the argument?
- \* What is the emotion we are appealing to?
- \* How do these points relate to other issues and Labor's general themes?
- \* What are the three key points that need to be made?
- \* What is the key phrase we want used for TV/radio?
- \* What message or visual should be used for Facebook/Twitter accounts?
- \* Who is the message going to?
- \* Should I test these with other press secretaries/advisers?
- \* Have I got all the information I need?
- \* What are the strengths and the weaknesses of our argument?
- \* How do we focus on the strengths and overcome the weaknesses?
- \* What points will our opponents make?
- \* How do we counter them?
- \* How should the message be delivered: by press conference, press release, background briefing, exclusive interview or social media, including Twitter?

These questions should not be new to any adviser. They are indeed the questions that an adviser should ask in relation to the preparation of political advice. So the more you answer these questions, the more effective you will be as an adviser, not only in providing political advice but also in assisting the provision and assessment of media advice to the Minister and in managing the public presentation and management of issues.

It is important for everyone in the Ministerial office to understand that the media is one of a number of stakeholders that a political office must manage; that as much as possible you should avoid making short-term decisions about media without reference to medium- and long-term objectives; shit happens: human systems fail, get over it; you can't win the media every day; some stories are just 'one-day' wonders, so take the hit and move on, and the Minister must always be kept in the loop about media requests.

The mainstream media is only one aspect of a broader communications effort. Social media, including Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other variants as well as speeches, 'word

of mouth', the targeting of key 'influencers' and the use of third parties are alternative ways of getting the story told. Mainstream media is also more than the ABC, SkyTV, major TV networks, talk radio and daily print. There is a massive audience out there listening, for example, to FM radio as well as reading magazines and online publications.

### [A basic media guide](#)

It is important to remember the demands of journalists and the media. They need to be seen to be 'objective', to meet deadlines, and to provide stories/commentary that will sell newspapers, attract online 'hits' and make electronic news bulletins rate. Journalists have a need for peer respect, career advancement, a good angle to a story, good quotes, clear ideas, a 'scoop' and, increasingly (sadly), to be seen as a 'player' in the political process.

Remember also that journalists usually need the opportunity to come to their own conclusions or at least feel that they have come to their own conclusions and that they are generally not empty vessels; they have biases, they filter information, they have to make judgements about what is important in a story. They (like all of us) misunderstand things from time to time.

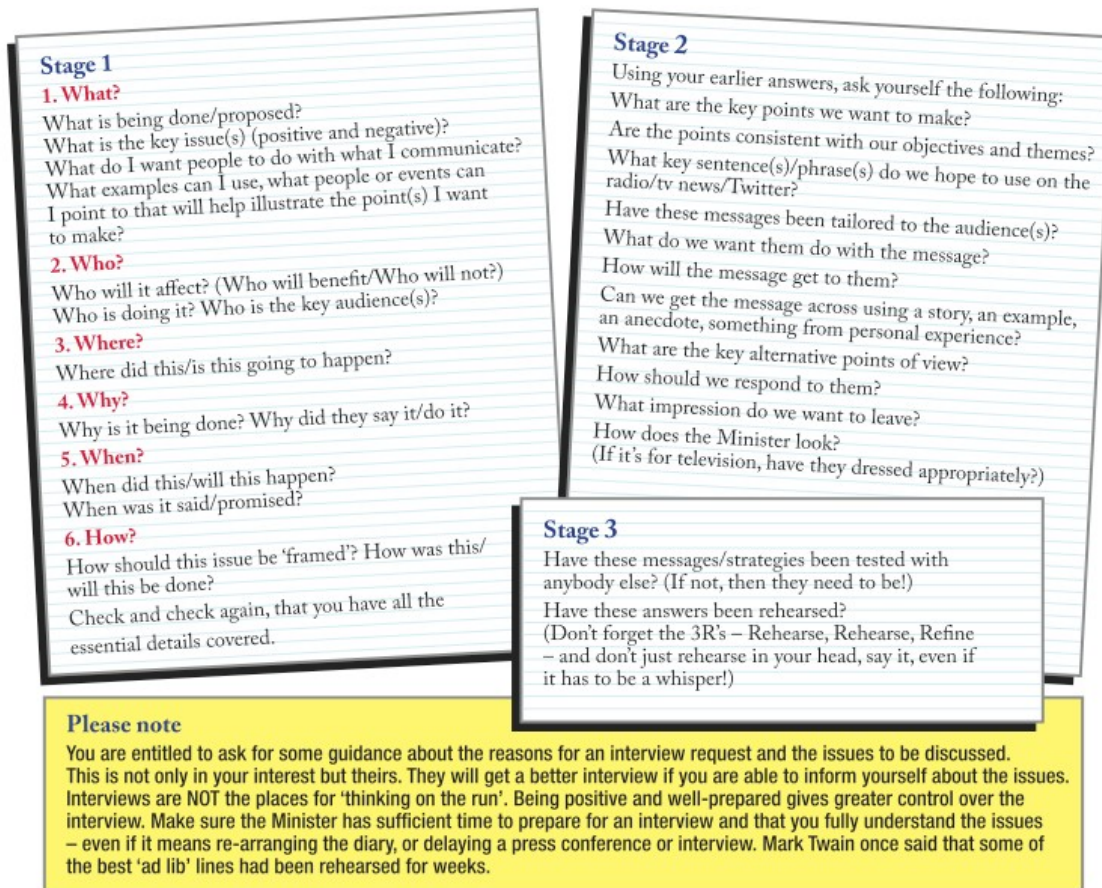
There are some important warnings to consider: you are in the marketplace of ideas, in which you must not only develop but sell those ideas. If you have something to say, find the best way of saying it. Frame your story, cut to the chase, tell a story and use humour if appropriate. If you have nothing more to say, then say nothing more. Let the journalist fill the gaps in the conversation. While establishing a good relationship with a journalist goes a long way, don't fall for the trap of thinking a journalist can be a 'friend', as you may find the friendship will only last for as long as you are a source of information or don't conflict with the journalist's need to get that big or important story. Always check whether you are speaking 'on the record' (what you say can be published and attributed to you) or 'off' the record (what you say is for background only and is not to be attributed to you).

Social media is also changing the face of communications and making media advisers' jobs more complex. The advent of social media requires Ministers, media advisers and communications teams to understand what works (and doesn't), particularly when it comes to blogs, Facebook and Twitter and their variations, which provide a more personal and 'informal' way of communicating. This adds a new layer to the communications task but doesn't obviate the need to be very clear about the core message you want to deliver.

### **Preparing for an interview**

Every media adviser needs to ensure that a Minister understands that there are three keys to a good performance in a media interview: preparation, preparation, preparation. Preparation should include the Minister understanding and having clear answers to the What, Who, Where, Why, When and How questions and going through a rehearsal as set out below.





**Figure 9** The three stages of preparation.

### Hints for professional performance

The following is advice that every Minister should be familiar with. A media adviser should reinforce this advice from time to time and also provide feedback after every interview.

It is important to think positive. An interview is your chance to get your message across to a wide and accessible audience. If you look and feel positive, you will come across that way. Think of the interview as a need to convince or persuade the interviewer, and it may help to think of the interviewer as a close friend.

With television make sure that your backdrop is appropriate. Make sure your surroundings reinforce your message rather than detract from it. In the studio, make sure you are comfortable. Sit firmly in the chair and lean forward so that you create the impression of being involved. Sitting back makes you look smug.

Address yourself to the interviewer/questioner rather than the camera. Concentrate on the questions and comments being made and create the impression that you are totally involved. At a media conference either look at the person asking the question or look directly at the camera. Moving your head or your eyes from side to side during your answer will make you appear shifty.

Do not allow interruptions to put you off. Pull the interviewer back in line by saying, 'Peter, please allow me to answer the question'. This also draws interjections to the notice

of the audience.

Don't be afraid to be animated/lively. Use your hands expressively, look for intensity in your speech rather than volume. Accentuate the right words in speech... 'a TERRIBLE decision'...rather than 'a terrible DECISION'. Sound out multi-syllable words, such as particularly, recognition, actually.

Allow yourself time to think - what feels like eons to you may in reality only be a few seconds or even milliseconds. Pauses and silences can also add to the flavour of the interview. Avoid umms and aahs - a brief silent pause to gather your thoughts is preferable. Avoid coughs and splutters. If they're unavoidable, turn well away from the microphone.

For television and radio you need to speak with greater intensity - you need to project your voice about 20 per cent more than you would in normal conversation. On TV and radio news only a small part of your interview will be used, so word quality rather than quantity is vital. So, keep your answers brief and to the point. Often the ideal answer for television news is seven to 10 seconds. For radio it is between 10 and 15 seconds. (Although this is not a hard and fast rule. They will allow good grabs with good content to run beyond these time limits, but not much beyond.) While it doesn't sound like enough time, you'll be surprised what power a few words can hold. Do not run sentences/statements/words into each other. It makes the task of editing for a radio or TV grab extremely difficult and sometimes impossible!

Television and radio are mediums of impression, of looking and sounding a particular way. (Note that a lot of radio interviews are now recorded for television as well as for streaming straight to the web.) Dress is important for a few reasons. The way you dress leaves an impression and you don't want it to become a distraction. (Unless the way you dress is intended to be a distraction!) You don't want people to say after you have made a comment about a matter of major importance, 'What did you think of the dress/tie/haircut?' So, dress appropriately. Avoid busy designs and patterns. Avoid white as a rule. Dark blue or greens are good for television. Make sure your hair is not all over the place.

Local media is no longer local. While tailoring your message to your audience or to a region is important, gone are the days when you could say something to one audience knowing that it wouldn't be heard by another audience or community. Modern communications technology and media monitoring has put an end to that. So, if you speak to one, imagine you are speaking to all, and be consistent.

And finally, learn from the masters. Take note of good media performances and what made them good. How did they keep your attention? Why was what they said memorable? Remember also that good performers on TV and radio will be asked back. Bad performers will not.

### **Managing events**

Failure to manage an event can become a story in itself and potentially undermine the original reason for that event. Ministers as a rule should spend not less than 45 minutes at most events. This allows the Minister to meet and talk with community members and key stakeholders, pick up good local views and knowledge and show that he or she is interested in the issues and the community around which the event has been planned. A

'whip in and whip out' approach to events will almost always backfire (unless the reasons are properly explained) as it sends a message that the Minister doesn't really have the time for the event or the people involved.

A checklist is a good idea for managing major Ministerial announcements. A basic event checklist should include:

- \* Is the event in the Minister's diary?
- \* Has the Department's public affairs branch been notified?
- \* Have relevant local MPs, local government office holders and relevant local business and community figures been notified/invited?
- \* Have relevant local ALP members and ALP Policy Committee members been notified, or if it's in a workplace has the relevant union official been notified?
- \* Have the key stakeholders been invited?
- \* Have Ministerial administrative staff been briefed and provided with talking points to deal with calls from the public?
- \* Have other Ministerial offices been invited/notified?

Following the event:

- \* Have the speech, media release and other publicity material been put up on the relevant website for easy access and has the announcement been noted on your 'achievements' register?

### **Working with the Departmental communications branch**

Every department has a communications branch, one of the key roles of which is to support the communications requirements of the Minister. Working effectively with them is critical to making your life somewhat easier and your communications effort more effective. A key message for the Department to receive is the importance of a 'no surprises' policy and effective 'issues management'. That is, it is important to ensure they understand that the Minister understands that we all live and work in human systems where inevitably mistakes are made and things go wrong. However, when mistakes are made and things do go wrong, it is important for the Department to know that the Minister needs to be briefed as soon as possible about the issue and any proposed action to be taken rather than reading or hearing about it in the media first!

Regular meetings are critical. They should be at the highest possible level and involve to the greatest extent possible all staff involved in the communications task, including speechwriters. These meetings should be the opportunity to shape and refine a plan of events and media and other communications requirements, from the preparation of media releases to policy documents and annual reports.

As invitations are accepted and events agreed, the Minister's office should take time to properly convey to the Department the key messages, focus and outcomes envisaged for the event. Indeed, in an ideal process these considerations should be part of the advice on whether or not to accept the invitation or agree to the event. Clarity at this early stage and early communication with the Department will generally make the process work more smoothly, limit the need for endless re-writes of speeches and media releases, and ensure drafts are received in time for final consideration by the Ministerial office and the Minister.



### Media monitoring

Every Department monitors the media. They normally engage a specialist firm to do so and the monitoring is done through key word searches. It is important for the Ministerial office to review the key words in the search from time to time to ensure the monitoring is effective and not missing important areas of debate or other activity relevant to the work of the Department and or the Minister.

### The future of government media and communications

Government media and communications is still in the 20th Century, churning out media releases that never get read, print runs of policy documents that never get out of their boxes and struggling to come to terms with the possibilities offered by new technologies and structural changes including media convergence, the bringing together of computing, communications and content and the collapse of old notions of separate print and electronic media. (The only consolation is that the Australian media is also still struggling with the notion of media convergence!) While the communications challenge remains the same; that is, connecting the message to the audience via the best means or 'pipeline', there is an opportunity for governments to effectively become their own 'broadcasters' or at least operate in a more sophisticated way, based on the 'newsroom' of the future, tailoring information to the various channels now available to it and engaging directly with the public, by-passing what is becoming a more partisan mainstream media.

## **The Importance of the Political Speech**

*In public life there is nothing more noble than the well-argued, articulate political speech. A political personality is developed to think, to reason, to explain and to propose matters of state. The political speech, old as it is as a medium, is hard to beat. It deserves to survive political spin, the 10-second grab, the simple, uncritical, anonymous questions at the doorstep. All the devices that absolve the politician from explaining, indeed thinking.*

- Speech given by Paul Keating on the occasion of the Fifth JCPML Anniversary  
Lecture marking the 57th anniversary of John Curtin's death, 5 July 2002

### **Speaking of a narrative**

Political speeches are efforts in persuasion. They are a key opportunity to gather support and enthusiasm for the speaker's ideas, views and agenda. They can be used to right wrongs, to claim victory or concede defeat, reinforce a direction or signal a change and promise action. They play a key role in establishing a government's narrative.

While some speeches are acts in themselves, such as the apology to the Stolen Generations, most speeches should be seen as part of a continuing conversation with the public, updated from time to time, as actions are taken and progress made. While it is not the role of the speechwriter, a failure by a Minister or their office to 'deliver' on the contents or promises in the speech runs the risk of changing the speech from a political milestone into a political millstone, a reminder of hopes dashed and promises made but never delivered.

Speeches are not lectures (just because you have been asked to speak for 40 minutes doesn't mean you have to fill up the time); they are energised and amplified conversations. While the audience doesn't talk back to the speaker, a good speech and speaker will anticipate the conversation happening or questions forming in the minds of the audience. Speeches are for speaking and hearing. For example, the following is written to read: 'A few days ago a friend of mine died from cancer'. However, the following is written to be spoken: 'A friend of mine died the other day (pause). It was cancer'. The second sentence engages listeners. They take in the fact that a friend died. In the millisecond of silence between the first and the second sentence they ask the question in their heads that you are about to answer: 'What did the friend die from?' Speeches at their best are 'visual'; they create pictures, stir emotions and leave impressions. They should not be written as if for a chapter of a book (although it is important to make sure the speech is made available for people to read at a later time). Indeed, a good speech should inspire audience members to seek out a copy!

Most speakers will only get one chance to persuade a particular audience. However, at any one time, only a portion of the audience will be listening to the speaker. The rest will be thinking about other things: what they did yesterday, what they have to do today, what they are doing tomorrow, family, relationships and sex, just to name a few. Every member of the audience will go through cycles of engagement and disengagement, depending on his or her interest in the speech and the speaker, as well as what else may be going on in his or her head or in the venue. This is why the speech at the very least

needs to repeat its key themes and ideas.

The best speeches get to the key point or points quickly, set out the agenda, explain it in as simple language as possible and reinforce those key points. The formula is generally 'tell them what you are going to say, say it and then tell them what you said'. A good speech also contains a 'call to action'. There is no point generating enthusiasm for an issue or idea if there is no focus for or place to channel that enthusiasm.

The best speeches are tailored to and connect with their audience. However, you should not always assume that an audience of teachers only wants to hear about teaching or education or that business people only want to hear about business. Every speech should be an opportunity to put what is being said in a broader context. For example, business people are also parents, send their kids to schools, have concerns about health and the environment. The best way to connect with your audience is by telling stories or 'parables' (humorous or otherwise) and simplifying complicated messages. Stories can be used to illustrate something about you, explain something about the points you are making and why they are important, or to demonstrate that you know something about the audience. A complicated message can be simplified by drawing pictures, using analogies, comparing and contrasting, removing doubts and by appeals to emotion.

The best speeches are also written in the active voice. For example, don't say, 'A decision to set the price of petrol will be made at a meeting tomorrow between myself and my ministerial colleagues.' Instead say, 'A meeting of ministers tomorrow will decide the price of petrol.' They are also not over-burdened by too many facts and figures (the audience won't remember them anyway). If figures are to be used they should be expressed wherever possible in terms of percentages and/or ratios or equivalents. For example, xx billion litres of water is 'half of the town's water supply' and equivalent to 'x number of Olympic 50-metre swimming pools'.

The best speeches use programs like PowerPoint effectively. Generally, PowerPoint presentations should be used sparingly, as they often lead to more time being spent on the form of the presentation rather than the content and limit the flexibility of the speaker to respond to changing circumstances. If they are used they should be predominantly visual (that is, using strong illustrative images or graphics), with a limited number of slides and contain only key words and headlines, NOT slabs of words from the speech. The website TED.com provides good examples of effective use of these types of presentations.

## To speak or not to speak?

There are a number of key questions set out below that you need to answer before you agree to deliver a speech. They may be basic, but they are important, and a failure to know the answers to any of these questions can be the difference between success and failure. For example, a formal detailed speech is hard to deliver without a lectern!

### **Prior to making the decision, check the following:**

- Name and type of event (dinner/breakfast/conference, etc.)
- Date and time of the event and the time allocated for the speech?
- History of the event
- Purpose of the event
- Theme of the event
- Likely audience (type/number)
- Why has the Minister been invited to speak?
- What is the link between the event and the Minister's/Government's priorities? What opportunity does it provide to support/advance those priorities? Is there a better option?
- Can it be fitted into the schedule? If not (at present) should the schedule be changed?
- If I agree to do it, what are the reasons?

### **Once the decision is made to give the speech:**

- **Find out more about the audience** (How many? Who are they? Male/female? Age range? Key members/special guests? How much have they paid? What concerns/issues do they have? What do they want to hear?)
- **Find out more about the organisers/industry** (Who are they? What's their history? What are they trying to achieve? Do they have a logo, slogan, motto? Have they been in the news lately? Who are the key officials/office bearers/contacts? What's in their most recent annual report? What are the industry issues? What has been their interaction with Government?)
- **Refine the messages** (What are the key messages we want/need to deliver? What personal/work/other experiences can help explain/reinforce those messages? What impression do I want to leave? What do I want them to do with my message? What issues should be avoided?)

### **The function/venue/location**

- Is there a 'welcome to country' and how will the acknowledgement of Indigenous elders (past and present) need to be tailored to the location?
- What is the expected time of arrival and who will meet the Minister?
- What is the preferred time of departure?
- What is the Minister's session time?
- Who will introduce the Minister?
- Who are the speakers before and after (if applicable) and what are their subjects (can we ensure there will be no overlap?)
- Are there any other notable speakers?
- What is the dress code?
- Is there a lectern and sound system?
- Is there audio/visual equipment?

## Figure 10 The speech checklist.

### The keys to preparation and performance

The key to preparation is to understand that any speech will only succeed in leaving an overall impression of the speaker and the agenda and one, two or at the most three key messages or facts. That is, 'The speaker was passionate, obviously knew what she was talking about and said that we must do A because of X and Y.' The preparation of the speech, like most things, should start with the end in mind. What is the key impression we want to leave? What do you want to persuade your audience to think about the speaker and the agenda? What are the key messages/facts we want the audience go away with and repeat?

Preparation for speeches is similar to, and should be linked to, that of media releases. Indeed there should be a clear link between the speech and the media release, with the media release being the summary or bringing together of the key points to be made in the speech. (Too often, the media release bears little or no link to the speech, which means the communications specialists in the office haven't been working closely together - a major problem!)

Another way to look at this is to ask yourself if you were driving along the street the next day after the speech, what banner headline (describing the speech) would you would like to see at the newspaper stand? What headline would you want to see in the newspaper (print or digital)? What is the key message you would want 'tweeted' by audience members? What is the 10-second grab you would want to hear on the TV or on the radio? What commentary would you like to have written or communicated about the speech and the speaker?

A speechwriter/speaker must never forget that it is all about the audience and that in the end, it's all in the delivery, of both the speech and any commitments made in that speech!

The following are the keys to writing and delivering a good speech:

### **Understanding the challenge**

The speech needs to grab the audience's attention and keep it, which means giving them a reason to listen. Speaking to what interests them and what benefits it will bring them can do this. The speech needs to tell them what you want them to do and inspire them to do it.

### **Preparation**

You need to know the speaker you're writing for, or, if you are both speechwriter and speaker, know your own mind! You need to write as best you can in the language and style of the speaker. Attempts to impose your own style will most often end in arguments, frustration and multiple rewrites. You also need to be clear about the purpose of the speech: the audience(s) (including the audience outside the room that may come via the media); the occasion and running order (and realise that a breakfast audience is different to a lunch audience which is different to a dinner audience); the venue and the speaker's support 'technology' - lectern, microphone, etc. - and the issues (review previous speeches, relevant policies and other debates and articles relevant to the speech topic).

Do an initial outline, including suggested key messages/impressions as quickly as possible after agreeing to do the speech, 'brainstorm' your issues/ideas with others and then submit and discuss these with the Minister. Bring a recording device with you so

that you can capture key reactions, thoughts and phrases. Ask the Minister to make a quick impromptu speech on the key themes of the speech. And, give yourself plenty of time (not always possible) to get it done.

### **Writing/developing the presentation**

Write the speech to be spoken, and heard (speak it as you write it). Avoid jargon, long words and too many facts and figures. Pitch the detail to a 12-year-old's understanding. Develop a unifying metaphor that can link the various elements of the speech. Draw pictures in people's minds. Prepare a one-page summary or 'mind-map' of key points/messages.

If you choose to use a PowerPoint presentation (they should generally be avoided), ensure it is limited, dominated by visuals and graphics and 'headlines' that support the speech. Avoid a mass of words regurgitated from the speech.

Time the speech properly. This can often only be done properly by rehearsing it aloud. Leave time for pauses and ad-lib moments. Be warned that PowerPoint presentations often run over time because there are usually too many slides and the presenters have spent more time on getting these done than paying attention to how long it takes to communicate what the slide is about!

### **Basic structure**

Note that in writing an essay or other report we often go from the premise to the conclusion. In a speech it is often better to start with the conclusion and then provide the premise. A basic structure is as follows:

#### ***Give a short, strong introduction***

Tell a story (amusing or otherwise) that illustrates the point you want to make, preferably from the speaker's personal experience. Avoid jokes unless they relate strongly to the issue and the speaker can pull them off. Avoid long greetings or if possible weave the greeting into the body of the speech.

#### ***Introduce the issues you want to discuss***

Explain the details of the issues, make the argument, make the emotional link, set out the solution/actions required.

#### ***Bring it all together***

Sum up and remind them what you have said and repeat the call to action.

This basic structure becomes the building block for longer speeches. That is, a longer speech becomes a series of smaller speeches linked by an overarching theme/storyline.

### **Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse (for the speaker)**

While this is advice for the speaker, the speechwriter should reinforce the need to rehearse the speech (at his or her desk, in the shower, in the car, with a friend or partner) because the success of the speech is almost all in the delivery. The speaker should not rehearse in his or her head. It is more important to rehearse 'out loud' (even if it is only a whisper) so that any difficulties in phrasing, emphasis or timing can be identified and to ensure the speaker is comfortable with what is being said and how it is being said. The one-page summary of key points should be used to assist in memorising key themes and

messages.

The speaker should use the rehearsal to mark up the speech to highlight key words and ideas, phrasing and emphases. All speakers should be reminded of the following:

- \* In the act of preparing is the moment you start caring;
- \* They don't throw rotten fruit at or boo the speechwriter, and;
- \* Ordinary content delivered well will trump great content delivered poorly.

### **Delivery**

Remember the 'message pack' (mentioned earlier), particularly the point that words are only 30 per cent of communication. This is why it is important to get everything else right, so that the speaker feels confident about him or herself and the venue. While the audience generally wants the speaker to do well, it is important to be at the venue ahead of time and if possible to meet organisers and members of the audience to get a read of the mood in the room/venue and to make sure all the technology is working and the lectern is there, as promised! In delivering the speech, it is also important for the speaker to understand the power of 'the pause' (what seems like an age to the speaker is often only a second to the audience and a well placed and timed pause will bring the audience's attention back to the speech); to look up, and engage with the audience; to amplify, even if they have a good sound system and doubly so if they don't; to watch the speed of delivery and to dress appropriately.

It is important for a speaker to be able to think on his or her feet. For example, a speaker who follows a series of long-winded speakers will win the audience over by keeping his or her speech short.

### **Follow up**

Repeat themes and messages in subsequent speeches. Keep the 'vomit principle' in mind; that is, by the time you're sick of saying it, the message is only starting to get through!

### **A lesson from some masters**

Aristotle, one of the world's greatest and most influential philosophers, said that persuasive speech was about character and appeals to the hearts and minds of an audience. It needed to incorporate three elements: ethos (the values that go to the character of the speaker); pathos (the ability to appeal to or stir the emotions or hearts of the audience); and logos (the rational appeal or argument that contains the facts, evidence or proof of the matter). Therefore, a speaker should aim to have the audience believing he or she is a credible person operating with values they share or understand; feeling great (or sad, or shamed, or inspired, or mobilised), and able to recall one or two facts that provide a rational foundation for their belief or proposed action.

Winston Churchill, one of the 20th century's great speakers, also had a simple formula (*from 'Language of Leadership'*): **Strong beginning** (No hello's, thank you's, etc., no jokes (do the joke later), get straight into it); **One theme** ('A speech is like a symphony. It can have three movements, but it must have one dominant melody 'dot, dot, dot... dah'); **Simple language** (A speech is not the place to display your wonderful vocabulary. Leave that for the office or dinner table'); **Pictures** (Draw a picture in the listener's mind); **Emotional ending** (Appeal to pride, vision, etc.)



### All honour to the first draft

All honour should go to the first draft and the first drafter of anything, whether a report or a speech. Without that first draft nothing can follow. Never be disappointed if the final draft bears little or no resemblance to the first. Good speechwriting is an iterative process and the best speeches come from robust discussion and debate. There is nothing better than writing for a politician/speaker who takes speechwriting seriously!

There is also no reason to be concerned or disappointed if the speaker abandons the speech or diverts from it significantly. Good speakers can read their audience and the mood in the room and know whether the speech is going to work or not, and can fall back on their own resources and knowledge to re-craft the message 'on the run'. At other times, they may decide to change their mind or change the message in light of a recent experience or event. For those who know the Charlie Brown cartoons, a speech is sometimes like Linus' 'security blanket', designed to reduce anxiety and in some cases provide the speaker with the confidence to move away from the text knowing he or she has a good fall-back option, if required.



## **Life in Opposition**

*Far better to define who you are than allow yourself to be defined by who you are not.*

- Julia Baird, *Introduction to Don't Think of An Elephant* by George Lakoff

*The way to get things done is not to mind who gets the credit.*

- Benjamin Jowett, 1817-1893, English Clergyman, *The Oxford Book of Aphorisms*

## **Cycling through Opposition**

Politics runs in cycles, governments inevitably commit the 'Seven Deadly Sins' and break the '10 Commandments of Re-Election', the electorate gets restless and ultimately the Party ends up in Opposition. The hard work of winning back government needs to begin. To be successful, an Opposition needs to quickly put an effective team together, review why government was lost, reach a balance between defending the legacy of the Government and distancing itself, or better still owning up to the mistakes of the past, and put together a strategy to 'rebuild the brand', be an effective Opposition, renew the team, and develop a compelling forward agenda.

The size of the defeat will shape a view about the realistic length of time it will take to win back government. However, it is important to understand that the first period of Opposition is critical and whatever the size of the defeat, it is vital to believe that you can recover in one term, particularly given the volatility of modern electorates. In the end you may not win (that is always difficult to do) but at a minimum it is critical you don't go backwards, and a strong performance sets an Opposition up for a win at the subsequent election.

## **The three key challenges**

The focus needs to be on the party, policies and the people. The party must be renewed, revitalised and strengthened (head office, branches and membership, and in the Parliament, including pre-selection of the new generation of MPs); policies must be reviewed, renewed and created to meet current and future issues; and through this process the people must be convinced that you are ready to govern. Or to put it another way, there are three key challenges: work to regain the support of the people, command the Parliament and develop a compelling forward agenda.

## **Regain support of the people**

This is a longer-run challenge, in that it will really only be put to the test at the subsequent election. The now ubiquitous opinion polls along the way will provide some indication of progress but it is only when you get the opportunity late in the term to position as an alternative government that you will start to get a true measure. So you need to hold your nerve. The work must begin straight away. A dispassionate review of why government was lost is needed that not only focuses on the performance of the Government but also the conduct of the election campaign. A balance will need to be found between defending the legacy of the Government and distancing the new team and leadership from the old. All governments make mistakes, so it is important to identify and own up to them and move on. This should not be about 'trashing the brand' but

developing a strategy to 'rebuild the brand'. While some prefer a good 'bloodletting' after a lost election, the danger is that at the end of the process, you're left with bitter people determined on revenge, unless it is a genuine 'exorcism'. A balanced, dispassionate, mature process is not always possible but is much preferred.

At the end of this process, every member of the parliamentary party should be very clear about: why government was lost and what the key issues were; where the political pendulum is positioned, which way is it moving and how fast is it going; where support was lost and who the party needs to reconnect with and convince to regain and/or get future support. This provides the foundation for the strategy to regain government.

One of the good things to do as soon as possible is to get back out to stakeholders. This helps get your new message out 'we made mistakes we are here to listen'; they know what the government is doing and they know what mistakes the government is making. They can be helpful in finding policy ideas and in testing or fine-tuning policy ideas or responses to government decisions.

The other early challenge is 'to get your house in order' and present as a united team, an effective Opposition. Define the government early and deliver consistent messages and themes. Keep the focus on them and don't let internal issues bring the focus back to you. And, stand for something - pick and prosecute an issue or issues that highlight Labor values and define the difference between you and them.

### **Command the Parliament**

The aim has to be to make the Government dread Parliament, particularly Question Time, Matters of Public Importance, debates on key bills, the Adjournment debate and Parliamentary Committees, particularly estimates-type committees; to drive wedges between and make Ministers look uncomfortable, incompetent or deceitful while their ambitious colleagues look on, and to make the floor of the Parliament the Opposition's terrain.

Parliament provides the Opposition with the only time it has a guaranteed audience of other MPs, the media and the public (in the galleries and via the media). Success requires sound knowledge and strategic use all of the rules and procedures that govern the different aspects of the Parliament. Develop a strategy for each Cabinet Minister (working on their political and policy weakness), and any rogue or maverick MPs, but understand that most energy needs to be directed at their Leader, Deputy-Leader, Treasurer and senior Ministers.

### **Compelling forward agenda**

An Opposition has to also begin the task of developing a compelling forward agenda to take to the next election. As discussed this requires making a break with the past; being prepared to review and refresh existing policies and demonstrating that you're listening and are seeking new ideas and solutions. This means developing a community engagement program that goes beyond the party structures and policy committees so that you have input and involvement from a broad base. Prepare specific papers on key issues to provoke discussion and debate (without committing to policy decisions). Don't underestimate how much time and effort you will need to put into it. After long periods of government, it can be quite hard work coming up with new ideas. You no longer have access to the ideas and expertise of the public service and stakeholders no longer knock

on your door. You have to go to them.

### [A political plan](#)

The 'strategic plan' should be based on the election cycle. For example:

**Year 1** - Renew, Rebuild, Establish your presence, Define the government

**Year 2** - Reconnect with the community, Begin policy development

**Year 3** - Finalise policies

**Year 4** - Strategic release of policies and Campaign to convince the people that you are ready for government

In the federal system, which does not have fixed term parliament these activities and stages will need to be completed more quickly and in some cases run in parallel. Each year should in term be broken down in three-month blocks, around key themes and targets and activities, including Parliament sittings and the Budget. This plan should also establish workplans that reflect the key directions, themes and messages to focus the work of the Shadow Cabinet, members of Caucus and the broader party.

At some point in the cycle, you are going to need to make a choice about the issues that resources need to be directed to. You cannot campaign on everything. However, the development of a simple set of themes allows a range of different issues to be campaigned on under a single 'banner'.

### [Scrutiny and accountability](#)

The work of 'hoisting them on their own petard' needs to begin urgently. It is important to: put together a detailed list of 'election promises' and contradictions and identify when they are broken; keep a list of cost blowouts, waste and mismanagement; set detailed performance benchmarks and processes for measuring including cost of living, waiting lists, educational attainment, employment growth, investment attraction, congestion, population growth to name a few. This work provides fodder for Question Time and for media. It is also important to develop a strategy for use of Freedom of Information and for Parliamentary Committees, particularly Estimates Committees. Estimates Committees are basically long-run Question Times directed at individual Ministers. They provide an opportunity to not only frame or define the Government but to put a Minister under maximum pressure in the media glare. Ask 'political questions', leave the finer details and esoteric points for questions to put on the notice paper.

### [Framing them, framing you](#)

As well as defining what you stand for, it is vital to define them early as a government in terms of style and substance. One way of doing this is by framing their budget each year. List the things they should be doing; set an expectation they cannot meet and then ensure everyone knows they haven't met it. In the first year the challenge will be to identify all the programs they have cut/changed; any good ideas (that you have put forward) that they should fund as well as the demand/cost pressures they haven't met. Identify and add to the list of problems they said they would fix.

### [Communications and media](#)

Don't let the media tail wag the strategy dog. Focusing on simply winning the 24-hour mainstream news cycle may just deliver the pyrrhic victory that loses the election battle.

Some days you will win, others you will lose. You can't play a good short game without a long-term view of where you want to be and when. Don't get sucked in by the mainstream media's agenda, particularly if it doesn't serve your strategy. If you have a strategy and agree with it, then support it, with a mainstream media strategy and a comprehensive social media strategy. Don't allow yourself to be knocked off track by the desire to get a quick (and often cheap) grab on TV or in print. In particular, use Question Time for your needs, not the media's (unless both needs converge). If the mainstream media want you to comment about an issue they have identified and it is worth doing so, then do so at a media conference, rather than distort your strategy for Question Time. Social media has opened up new opportunities for Oppositions to go around the mainstream media, to both 'broadcast' and 'narrowcast' its messages.

### **Force them into sin**

You need to reverse engineer the 'Seven Deadly Sins', as follows:

#### **1. Disunity, Mixed Messages**

Highlight divisions within the Government. Force Cabinet Ministers to publicly support issues you know they don't or haven't in the past. Put 'Cabinet Solidarity' to the test. Highlight differences between the backbench and the Ministry.

#### **2. Arrogance. Failing to Listen**

Demonstrate examples of the Government not listening. Accuse ministers and the leader of being arrogant and out of touch.

#### **3. Defending the indefensible**

Ministers are often in a bind. Blaming the public service may go down well in the public but damages the relationship between the Minister and the Department, particularly if it has been a simple case of 'scapegoating'. Use this to your advantage. One mistake might be forgivable but a failure to learn from mistakes is not. Build up a list of mistakes and/or failure to admit them.

#### **4. Governing bureaucratically**

There's not a great deal that can be done except to wait and encourage Ministers to focus on the spoils of office and keep them busy and tired.

#### **5. Failing to communicate your achievements**

Try to keep them off balance by highlighting issues or problems and framing their achievements in a negative way. Don't get sucked into fight you can't win and which are designed to highlight their achievements.

#### **6. Running out of ideas**

Don't let them steal your best ideas. Keep detailed policies under wraps until the timing or occasion suits their release. (This doesn't mean adopting the cynical approach being taken by some to wait till the last possible moment during campaigns).

#### **7. Underestimating your opponent**

Make the election a referendum on them. Make their track record their opponent.

### **The 10 Commandments of Opposition**

There are 10 commandments to follow.

- 1. Stand for something.** Attack from a strong policy/principle values foundation. Defend the legacy, play on Labor's home ground/policy strengths: education, economic management, climate change, health, fairness, opportunity, jobs. Labor may have lost the election, but voters gave it a 'mandate' too! Never concede on economic management and remember that Labor governs for everybody; the Liberals govern for vested interests and their mates.
- 2. Don't be a 'government in exile'.** Let them try to govern, make mistakes and pay for them. Don't allow the Opposition to become the target. Make sure the focus remains on the Government. Define them early as a government in terms of style and substance. One way of doing this is by framing their budget each year. List the things they should be doing; set an expectation they cannot meet and then ensure everyone knows they haven't met it.
- 3. Take risks.** If you're not taking risks (calculated risks) or making mistakes it means that you're probably not going anywhere. Forget the habits of government. Take a risk, be controversial, get people talking. Freed from having to govern, Opposition is the opportunity to learn and play the politics.
- 4. Faction not friction.** Disunity is death. Build a strong 'get back into Government faction' among the staff, in the Parliament and at Party HQ. The 'faction' needs to be big, broad and strong enough to keep the inevitable malcontents and plotters in line.
- 5. Find another dog.** Don't let the Leader become the chief 'negater'/attack dog. The Leader's language/communications should be strong but not aggressive. Other good communicators should be used to lead the majority of the attack on government.
- 6. Feed the media beast.** You will need to do most of the work for the media. You will often hand them stories on a platter, but on many (most) occasions you will not get the credit. You just have to get used to it!
- 7. Force them into 'political sin'** by highlighting their divisions, arrogance, defending the indefensible, governing bureaucratically, making it difficult to highlight their achievements and expose their lack of ideas. Make their track record in government their opponent.
- 8. Develop a 'strategic plan'**, based on the election cycle. There should be a key theme for each year and for each quarter. For example: Year 1 (Renew, Rebuild, Establish your presence, Define the government); Year 2 - Reconnect with the community, Begin policy development); Year 3 - Finalise policies and release policies).
- 9. Begin the work of 'hoisting them on their own petard' urgently.** Put together a detailed list of 'election promises' and contradictions and identify when they are broken; keep a list of cost blowouts, waste and mismanagement; set detailed performance benchmarks and processes for measuring including cost of living, waiting lists, educational attainment, employment growth, investment attraction, congestion, population growth to name a few. This work provides fodder for Question Time and for media. Develop a strategy for use of Freedom of Information and for Parliamentary Committees, particularly Estimates Committees.

**10. Don't let the media tail wag the strategy dog.** Focusing on simply winning the 24-hour mainstream news cycle may just deliver the pyrrhic victory that loses the election battle. Some days you will win, others you will lose. You can't play a good short game without a long-term view of where you want to be and when. Don't get sucked in by the mainstream media's agenda, particularly if it doesn't serve your strategy. If you have a strategy and agree with it, then support it, with a mainstream media strategy and a comprehensive social media strategy.

Opposition is a thankless, hard slog. It has the occasional highs, but the highs of Opposition still don't beat the lows of Government, which is all the more reason why every effort needs to be made to get out of Opposition and into Government. Persist.

### **The unavoidable criticisms of Opposition**

Politics is both a science and an art. A science because it's important to know and understand the rules of the game and an art because it is important to know when to apply, when to modify and when to break those rules. Of course, remember, no matter what you do, there are a number of criticisms that are made of ALL Oppositions. These include:

#### **Not having public prominence**

It takes a long time to build a strong presence in the media and the community. Most of the electorate know little about key members of any government, let alone an Opposition leader and the rest of the Parliamentary team. If your strategy is right, if your ideas and messages are right, then prominence will come.

#### **Being negative and the Opposition's negative role**

Identifying what's wrong and criticising the actions of government are important functions of an Opposition. However, it is important to avoid as much as is possible having the Leader always delivering the negative message. Putting out 5, 7 or 10-point plans of alternatives to government actions can also assist from time to time to demonstrate that you are not a 'policy-free' zone.

#### **Not having an alternative strategy to the Government**

This is where an Opposition needs to hold its nerve. There is no point putting a comprehensive alternative strategy together too early. It is best to prepare a basic strategy that sets out a strong narrative around principles/values and outlines key directions and leaves detailed policy and the compelling aspects of the agenda to closer to the campaign or during the campaign itself. The strategy mentioned earlier in relation to 5, 7 and 10-point plans should be used sparingly. Governments generally try to steal or neutralise good policy ideas, so keep your good policies close. (Of course, if an issue opens up early in a term that clearly differentiates between Opposition and Government, and if campaigned on will damage the Government and strengthen the Opposition, don't wait. Go hard!)

## **Final Advice to the Reader**

*People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centred. Love them anyway.  
If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.  
If you are successful you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.  
The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.  
Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.  
The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by  
the smallest men and women. Think big anyway.  
People favour underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for underdogs anyway.  
What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.  
People need help but may attack you if you help them. Help people anyway.  
Give the world the best you have and you will be kicked in the teeth.  
Give the world the best you have anyway.*

- Kent M Keith, *The Paradoxical Commandments*

## **The Advice**

A thorough review of the purpose, background, analysis, options and consultation involved in the development of this guide results in the following conclusions and recommendations:

The purpose of the guide is to provide practical advice for current and future advisers (although it should also help Ministers draw maximum performance from their staff).

It is written for Labor advisers.

It should be useful for advisers of all political parties: Advisers from non-Labor backgrounds should identify the values of their party and substitute these in the relevant section(s).

The guide is somewhat idiosyncratic. It provides more than just practical advice; it invites discussion on issues: the future role of the media, the importance of values in policy making; the role of political speech.

It suffers from 'confirmation bias' (a trap warned about in the chapter on policy) as much of the material taken from books and articles is used to reinforce a previously held view or position.

It would be improved by more graphics, cartoons, illustrations and perhaps some worksheets and will be developed in a second edition. Case studies and war stories would assist - but the author decided to keep confidences agreed in the course of researching the guide. As with life, some policy advice and discussions need privacy.

It makes the point that political advisers are in many ways the 'public service' of the political party in government, there to advance the interests and agenda of the Government, to provide frank and fearless advice, develop and manage complex stakeholder relationships and aspire to hard work and high standards.

A Ministerial office needs to pull together a range of skills from policy activism, entrepreneurship, analysis and implementation to relationship management, issues management and basic administration.



There are recurring themes in the guide: the importance of values, clear communication and strategy.

Values underpin policy development, they 'frame' the party, the Government and its actions; they underpin relationships and go to personal integrity. If politics is about people and ideas, values sit at the heart of politics.

Great store is placed in clear communication: about roles, about policies, about direction. The Who, What, Why, When, Where and How questions are employed in various sections, to provide quality advice to a Minister, to get the messages and communications right and to lay the groundwork for effective implementation of policy.

A key message is that strategy is hard, important work. So much of the politics of today is about lists and tactics, not about strategy, which is not only about setting out a goal or vision, but honestly acknowledging the problems, the opportunities and the ways of overcoming and exploiting them. Ultimately it is about setting priorities and making a choice. Tactics may keep you in power for a while, strategy's aim is to deliver the purpose of being in power in the first place.

### **Recommendations:**

Read thoroughly once.

Return to use again as a quick reference, using the detailed table of contents.

Send feedback now and later to [mark@devilsadvocate.asia](mailto:mark@devilsadvocate.asia), so the Guide remains relevant and comprehensive with the benefit of your experience and analysis.



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