

Cheat sheet for politicians and public officials.

Public office is power held in trust. Much of the test is how you treat the people who can do the least for you, and who will never know whether you noticed.

Not every hardship is a test, and nothing here is graded.



- ☐ **Tell people the true thing when it costs you, and correct yourself in public.**
When you learn you were wrong, say so plainly and say what you will do now. Skip the long defense.

SAY "I told you that last spring. I was mistaken, and here is the correct number."

- ☐ **Answer the person who cannot help your career.**
Reply to the unheard letter, the small casework request, and the constituent who did not vote for you. Treat the dull problem as seriously as the one that might make news.

SAY "I don't know yet, but I will find out and call you back by Friday."

- ☐ **Describe your opponents' views so they would recognize them.**
Before you criticize a position, state it the way its holders would. Then answer that version. If you can, say: "On this point, they are right, and I'm glad they pushed."

- ☐ **Turn down fear and contempt as a tactic, even when it works.**
Make the case for what you would do without making your audience afraid of or scornful toward a neighbor. When your own side jeers at someone, don't join in. You can disagree hard and still leave people their dignity.

**Disclose your money and your conflicts before anyone asks.**

Publish where support comes from, what you own that your work could touch, and who has met with you. Step back from a decision when you have a stake in it.

SAY "I have an interest here, so I'm leaving this vote to others."

**Make one decision for people who cannot vote or pay you.**

Ask who is not in the room: children, people not yet born, the poor, the far away. Give their interest real weight in one choice this month, even if no one will thank you.

**Do one job with no cameras.**

Visit, listen, and sit with someone, and tell no one. Let the person talk until they are done.

SAY "Tell me what it's been like. I'm not here to fix it tonight, just to hear it."

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING THIS WEEK

Answer one letter you didn't have to, name one thing an opponent got right, and spend an hour listening with no cameras.

This sheet is for anyone in public life, of any party or country, and it takes no side on any policy. Power in public office is held in trust, so the bar is higher than it is for most people. Nothing here is legal or ethical advice. Rules about gifts, disclosure, and conduct differ by place, so follow the ones that apply to you and ask your ethics office when unsure.

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