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Dealing With Government XI

Running it Like a Business- Patrick Brown

For many years, political parties supported by business have advocated running government like a business. This, they said, would pay dividends in efficiency and effectiveness, put a stop to waste, and ensure fiscal responsibility.

After a number of experiences with national, provincial, and local governments of this type, it may now be possible to define what 'running a government like a business' actually means. (Warning: this is for politicians only—do not try this at home.)

Organization

1. First of all let everyone know that the government is under new management, and that everything will be different from now on. This can be done by requiring employees to wear suits and ties all the time, except in bed, where itchy striped cotton pajamas are compulsory.

2. Appoint as many people as possible to the Board of Directors (Cabinet, Council), all reporting directly to the President (Premier, Prime Minister, Mayor). This is known in business as a 'flat' organization because it ensures a minimum number of levels of management, which is a good thing because it means the President can keep an eye on everything.

3. Appoint separate Directors for planning and operations. This will ensure that nobody can be held responsible for carrying out any plans that the public might find out about.

4. Fire anyone who remembers how things were done before the takeover. (This includes the Boards and CEOs of Crown Corporations, and anyone else who can be fired.) This will ensure that things will be done differently (see #1) or not done at all (see #18). Be sure to pay them off well (so they don't complain).

5. Hire a group of new executives with previous experience elsewhere in running government like a business. This ensures that they will quickly and efficiently make the same mistakes as they did before. Pay them well (they have more experience).

6. Appoint a group of underemployed executives to examine the entire government for 'red tape'. This provides a place to direct complaints and enables them to meddle in any

department of the government without taking any responsibility for the results. It will also have the effect of discouraging any written documentation, which means that nobody can be held responsible for anything.

7. If employees strike, do not try to settle the dispute. This will save a great deal of money.

Finance

8. Before examining the books, declare a dividend. This ensures that all thinking starts at the bottom line. Paying out the dividend will ensure a shortage of cash, resulting in increased debt and the payment of interest. Remember, interest is 100% tax deductible.

9. Hire a number of accountants to examine the books (but not until after #8). Be very careful that they don't go too far and start giving advice. There will be lots for them to do later (see #15-17).

10. Announce that there are certain functions that will be 'protected'. This means that their budgets will be frozen, and that inflation and population increases will be allowed to take their toll on the services provided.

11. Identify other functions as 'core functions'. This means that their budgets will be reduced by one-third but they will still be required to appear to carry out their responsibilities.

12. Identify some functions as 'non-core functions'. This means that their budgets will be eliminated but they will still be required to appear to meet the requirements of their legislation.

13. Do not visibly increase taxes. Increased revenues from gambling are, however, to be encouraged.

14. Do not visibly increase taxes. User fees, however, may be increased at any time without warning, since the user must pay for services and all government departments are, after all, 'profit centres' (see #15).

Accounting

15. Ensure that each small part of the government is designated as a 'profit centre', distinguished by a fourteen-digit number. This provides years of creative work for accountants who must calculate what each department must charge any other department for its services; if these charges are excessive

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enough, interdepartmental co-operation can be completely prevented.

16. Charge each 'profit centre' with a portion of management costs. This ensures that it will be impossible to determine what management costs are, which will be useful because they will be high. This system also ensures that management will appear to make a profit, justifying more management next year.

17. Using this system, it will be perfectly safe to publish the public accounts, since they will be meaningless to anyone who might be inclined to analyze them.

Policy

18. Do not assume responsibility for anything unless it is absolutely unavoidable. This applies unless you can call it a 'war' (war on drugs, war on terrorism, war on the pine beetle), in which case someone else will have started it and they can be blamed.

19. Cripple Crown Corporations; this is particularly important if they appear to be successful. This can be done by selling off (privatizing) any parts that may be profitable, and encouraging competition if they are not (so they will become less profitable and eventually can be abandoned). Restructuring always helps; be sure to separate planning, infrastructure, and operations, locating them in separate cities if possible. (In the case of any type of insurance operations, competition may be permitted to take the good risks and leave the Crown Corporation with the bad ones.)

20. Regulatory functions (such as enforcing employment or environmental standards) can best be carried out voluntarily by business and industry. This is a basic step in avoiding 'red tape'. Occasional scandals can then be blamed 100% on industry.

21. Encourage all departments to purchase essential services from private contractors. Should these services be inadequate, blame the contractors.

22. Should it become unavoidable to build expensive items of infrastructure (such as roads or bridges), encourage the private sector to build and finance the project by allowing them to charge escalating user fees so they can make a monopoly

rate of return. This not only saves debt charges for the government, but also gets the government off the hook for the user charges.

23. Do not invest in the future in any way; the present is expensive enough. Assume that the future will be no better than the present, and you can be sure it will be so (until just before the next election).

Marketing

24. Have the first word. Spare no expense in employing the best spin doctors. Deluge the media with well-written press releases about everything you do. In these days of media cut-backs this will ensure that your party line reaches the public.

25. Do not promise that anything good will happen until just before the next election. This will lower public expectations so that it will not be disappointed.

26. Talk a lot about accountability and transparency. Accountability means that there will be a lot of accounting going on. Transparency means that nothing very much will be visible.

27. Hold Board of Directors meetings in public. This ensures that there will be no dissension or discussion, and ensures that the President can keep an eye on everything. It also saves work for some media people.

28. Where there appears to be too much demand for a government service or program, make it clear that it is the users' fault and they are bad people to use it. This can be done by sending them threatening letters, imposing new eligibility rules, cutting benefits for all, or in extreme cases, terminating the program. Do not accept 'need' as an excuse.

29. Praise volunteers for their work on any social problems that might occur. Also praise their efforts to raise funds privately.

30. Avoid any additional responsibilities by pointing out that taxes and red tape have been reduced, and that solving problems is 'not the role of government'.

31. Blame any problems on the state of the world, national, or local economy, some other government, or, in extreme cases, the United States. ☞