

Opening Keynote
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There's no such thing as a creative bureaucracy. You are civil servants, more importantly, public servants; more important, stewards of the civic, and even custodians of civic faith. There are many labels for the work that people do in government, provincial, federal, municipal, but public service is the noble term; the notion of a person who works for the public good in an administrative, managerial and infrastructural way. Jargon is such that it slots us into sounding like systemic bolts, such that we need a contradiction in terms like "creative bureaucracy". Who wants to be known as a bureaucrat? Anymore than one wants to be called a tax collector or creditor. We get stereotyped negatively. and I don't mean that we should make more puffed up language. I'm not suggesting we call ourselves "civic well being clinicians". Let's do things right.

We must name things and people and work by the terms that give us dignity, and self worth. It is the job of the poet maybe. We must all be poets, for to name things badly is to trivialize our intentions and vocations.

Everyone is called to the public good. We're otherwise just self-serving siphons of the state and cynics in a global mood of self-interest. Everyone could and should contribute to the public good in the building of families, communities, careers. One is otherwise selfish and blind to one's destiny which involves finding meaning in life by interaction, encounter and reciprocity with other people. Public service is the formal call to what we all should do, administer the benevolence of a cosmic good in civic, political and socio-cultural ways. Life is worth living, it has noble purpose and challenges that should guide us to a higher version of ourselves. A society must believe this and public servants are the ambassadors of that faith, the display of civic manners founded on a faith that we can achieve good things in generosity and grace in a civic environment.

I'll go so far as to say that public service is what first of all reflects a city's success or failure, a city's pettiness or vibrancy Find the mood of the public service and you find the spirit of the city, or the

lack thereof. Everyone thinks political leaders and grass roots movements are indicators of civic health. Change may begin at those two poles, but a city's character and soul is reflected in its civil servants; the way they dispense, conceive and strategize the public good. Policy may change with new administration, change may rise from the populist sector, but the dialogue between leadership and citizen is in the styling hands of the public servant, and in the manners of public service we can detect the weakness, or robustness, the courage or the ineptitude, the hopefulness or defeatism in a city's soul.

Furthermore good public service does not depend on great leadership. But good public service can educate naive leadership into the allegiances and loyalties that are the true resource of the a people. This means that public servants must believe in their city, their municipality, their organization, their region, their communities, independent of the fluctuations of electoral personality, independent of the moods of the market, empathic as citizens for the needs and requirements of citizens. Sooner or later we all have to depend on public servants, whether or not they are in our department and we would like to think that the public servant will be a figure who believes, not in what they are doing, but who they are doing it for.

Nobly said. I know something about fiscal constraints, budgets, double-binds in management, risk management, the deference to new elected officials, the problem of management arising when restructuring has been ill-conceived etc etc. Politics is a problem everywhere in life. But when politics snags public service, the damage to the public mood is extensive, the compromises taken in a position of authority are scarring, to oneself and others. The cynicism begotten of helplessness debilitates.

You know this. So what am I here to tell you. I'll tell you that the role of public servants is the most important role there is in public life. I'll tell you that the city of the future will be made or broken by public service. I'll tell you that in the absence of ethical guidelines, either from institutions or political leaders, your moral character must be its own compass. In a climate of accountability that holds everyone hostage you must champion the ethical discussion in a world where the buck is passed continually. I will tell you that a city's spirit is broken not by crisis, economic, international or domestic, not by the transparencies of electoral promise, but by heartless proceduralism and mindless calculation that is becoming the hallmark of systems everywhere. Yes we need protocol and regulation to get along but the

citizen is more attuned than ever to beurocracy at its worst. Internet, information technology, market greed, the reduction of citizen to consumer, extended work hours, the absence of easy civic encounter, the prevalence of surveillance, the proliferation of privacy laws, the ugly design of cities, the outsourced nature of local skills---these and other factors have made the citizen hungry for the human touch and enraged at being the victim of further calculation.

In a world of bylaws, caveats, prohibitions and conditions, you alone, the public servant, can make the citizen feel like a person and not a number.

It is not creativity we need. It's not imagination. It's motive. I weary of the trumpet calls to creativity in the urban discussion. I've been to the boardrooms of the creativity "yak" too often. Generally it's about continuing what you've been doing but with greater efficiency and neat tricks for time saving and keeping the public appeased with good PR. At its worst, creativity ends up being the same as innovation. It doesn't liberate anyone. It doesn't do what creativity is first of all supposed to do—make you happy in your job. Cause if you're not happy in it, you make others miserable. Creation means you take delight in a freshly conceived idea, and feel free to rejoice in someone else's creative idea. It means you are grateful to each other for having shared ideas, and are excited by someone being excited at your ideas. But you can't freely exchange ideas if you don't have a climate of freedom. We need to feel free to create, before we can create, before we imagine and invent wholesome strategies for the betterment of people---we need to be inspired. And you can't be inspired without trusting and relaxing into other people's appetite for truth and not their agendas. Without this grasp, we might as well throw the whole discussion of creativity away. I've been saying this in city-building circles for three years. If you want real growth, real prosperity, schemes that cost less money you've got to have inter-civic trust and a common devotion to ideas that serve others. A city cannot be creative if it is not free to trust, to believe that the next citizen has some altruism, and a city must be strengthened in the witness of benevolence and creativity among the stewards of the social good, the public servants.

If this is moral baggage I'm adding to your responsibility, so be it. I would say that we all first have a responsibility to safeguard our moral visions, as citizens first and then as employees. Without this, our

work cannot be well-purposed, much less creative. Do I have any practical suggestions. First of all there is nothing more practical than establishing a moral vision. Without one, all schemes will get distorted. I'm not going to give you gimmicks and strats and data and smart clues. Allow me to give you some practical advice taken from the art of life, which informs the art of anything, including the art of public service. I know that many of us are creative, seek to be creative, but are handcuffed by the considerations of a system or ideology. You can't dodge the illogic of a system indefinitely, without exhausting yourself. Your challenges may be budgetary, structural; it may be that one deals with the confines of structures that have more limitation than vision, more pettiness than generosity. It may be that one is just trying to keep one's job in a climate of risk-management and selfish agendas. It may be that you are lucky and have preserved in the right time at the right place the moral enthusiasm to your job well and better. In which case you already have a grip on what I am about to say.

Some years ago I gave a talk at city hall about what enfeebles the passionate imagination of a city. I listed four errors that were fatal to the civic spirit, and these four items are fatal in any system and crucial to the offices of any municipality or organization. What destroys the city or the public good is:

1. The notion that money predicates vision.
2. The mean-spiritedness that criticizes before it allows.
3. The conventions of safeness from either the left or the right
4. Anything that discourages human encounter in the interest of expedience and time-saving.

It will be said that these errors are first and quickly made within bureaucracy. The truth is they can be made anywhere; on the streets, in the schools, anywhere where people give in to the temptation of taking the easy way, instead of the human way. The human way isn't just "fluff"; it's that which, if not observed and implemented diligently, will corrupt all strategies in the long run. The ends do not justify the means. and processes corrupt of love, sabotage the means very quickly. We want to do good, but if we do not exercise these four principles in our daily work habits, we will produce at best, workable, heartless cities,

places of sanitation and not sanity, places of fiscal prosperity that aren't livable.

Let me rephrase those four errors inversely as principles:

Avoid the notion that money predicates vision

Avoid the mean-spiritedness that criticizes before it allows

Avoid conventions of safeness from either the left or the right

Avoid anything that discourages human encounter in the interest of expedience and time saving.

Let's take number one. Great cities, great places happen because someone had an idea before they had the money for the idea. If the money is already there, great. But watch out that it doesn't build a habit of caution and complacency. If the civic desire for something is great, no amount of fiscal constraint will stop it in the long run. It goes contrary to the irrepressible need for people to find joy in the enterprise of living together. If the idea is beautiful enough it will find the money, and those who always talk about a small budget are generally people with a small vision. They certainly aren't easily seduced to beautiful ideas. Such people should be avoided. They depress you and rob you of your creative zeal. If there is more talk of budget than vision, it's a sure sign of cultural anemia.

Number two; the mean spirited that criticizes before it allows. You find this everywhere, especially in towns and places and people who have been frustrated by personal failure or discouragement so often, they don't like to see anyone get ahead. These kind don't like to see joy, or excitement or delight grow from ideas, because it might mean taking responsibility for a change of life, a revision of ethical standards, or just taking a chance.

Avoid these people too. They hand on the influenza of discouragement. This cold germ infiltrates the public, the office and the way of life.

Number 3. The conventions of safeness from either the left or the right---hard to know any more what's right or left. Political correctness looked like the left once, now it looks like fascism; the industry of accountability and the sensitivity to every request as a "right" has paralyzed the service sector. This fear has, in some cities, taken city building initiative right out of the hands of the municipal and left it in the hands of the private sector. What a waste. What a missed opportunity to collaborate with market energy and public vision. Forget about what's left or the right. They're both puritanical. And one's allegiance is safeguarding the public good, not about pandering to agendas. If you care about agendas, you're part of the corporational, not the civic.

Number 4: Avoid what discourages human encounter in the interest of expedience and time saving. If you don't like people, build more systems for keeping them at bay, more privacy considerations, more e-mail protocol, more security guards at forums about the public realm, mere intermediaries, more committees to buffer confrontation. Yes, people are unreasonable out there. Citizens are desperate for reasons not owing to your office or your department. Try to avoid the fortress mentality. Don't make the office a celebration of schemes for expediting the unimportant. The unimportant is sometimes what is plainly human. Sometimes office rhythms are set by people who want to get out of the office as quickly as they can. These people have lost their compass and have asked you to follow them. Don't expect creativity in such places. Change the situation, or find a more creative place. Life is too short. Let's remember, creativity doesn't like to be rushed. It isn't about to be corralled into mere cleverness. Imagination is not beer on tap. And it is not a machine. But if people want to get out of their office quickly, they work like machines. Then everyone becomes a number, including the machinists.

Sometimes, people think they're job is just a job, with a fancy tag—not surprising if they let inhibitive conditions prevail, continue and don't take a risk in changing them. Public service is not just a job. It is a vocation. A vocation is a higher calling. A vocation is a place in citizenship, in the building of a civic ideal that rewards all individuals. A vocation does not compromise personal integrity for the sake of

productivity. And productivity fails where integrity is not realized.

The four principles I've mentioned should be postered in every office until they are memorized. They are a paradigm for healthy operations. They are childishly simple prescripts but they are foundational to both vision and creativity. Many will rally to the good sense of these principles, and yet, left to the daily task, we can't help but transgress their good sense.

Put simply, these four principles are exhortations to fearlessness, generosity, and basic delight in human encounter. Fearless, generosity and delight in human encounter---they dynamize each other. If you have delight in civil encounter, and don't fence it, prohibit it, if you don't get corralled into e-mails when you could phone; if you take time, if you take pleasure and privilege in the faces behind the procedures, it refreshes one and inspires one to resist the calculating, the small minded, the numbers crunchers, those who just want to get out and go home for the day. To be refreshed by human encounter is to be inspired to take risks, to have a reason to take risks and not be badgered by political correctness or stupidity. With risk and inspiration you can then be creative. Your thoughts will come more fluidly, you will not fear interaction or collaboration, and team work will not seem like work, if all the players are impassioned by the human element. And passion is irresistible to all, except the fearful. The inspired are not fearful. And the inspiration is in seeing the faces, feeling for the stories and taking time to hear the narratives and give your own. Who has time for such things? If we don't have time, we have surrendered to real bureaucracy. If you can't take time, or are not permitted time, you have been robbed of the quality of life, which is different from life style. And you cannot hope to improve the quality of anyone's life by service that is in the tyranny of regimen.

I am a priest, and I don't need to be told about the burnout in the empathic task of servicing other people. But when I am enlivened by people, the frustrations clear out. You can't be enlivened all the time, but you can resist situations and structures and protocols, departmental or procedural that drink the life out of you

and others.

If I were to pick one of the four concerns that can really undermine a system I might pick the mean-spiritedness that criticizes before it allows. It corrupts all context of work. It is everywhere. Begotten of either envy, or personal failure, it is sometimes just a legacy of protocol in a city, in an office, in a company. Sometimes it afflicts whole neighborhoods. It is a “no you can’t mentality” instead of a “yes you can” approach. It exists in a city that replaces encouragement with mere congratulation. It is the suppression of curiosity and an appetite for life. And it can be lethal in the public service.

Finally, it is just healthy to question questioning rules that don’t make sense. Without a common allegiance to the truth, collaboration becomes a farce. And supporting each other in that questioning is crucial. It unifies the team or staff. It demonstrates a civic heart that services the heart of the civic at large. We are all part of that civic heart, and when we become heartless the whole civic body deteriorates.

Today and tomorrow you will be beset upon or blessed by myriad strategies for creative public service. I ask you only to keep in mind that your creativity will not be unleashed without courage, generosity and zero tolerance for stupidity. It will not be released without the simple delight of knowing who you are doing things for, it will not be released if you are not free to trust, or if your constraints are ungenerously offered by fearful and small minded people. City’s are made or broken in every act of complicit

subscription to the redundant and systemic. Every time a consultant replaces good sense you have hurt the civic trust and your self-credibility. If you know the right thing to do, but those higher up won’t allow it, and your stand my affect your budget and your way of life, you have a decision to make. And depending on that decision, you will or will not be creative. Creative doesn’t mean making the best of a bad thing. It means making the best

of things when all the players can intuit a vision and take delight in it.

These are considerations I offer you as a preamble to the workshops and plenaries. The public service begins in your service to yourself, in the custody of your conscience, in the preservation of the delight that drew you to your vocation, in the acceleration of your pulse as you know you are building a community, a city a municipality, or just helping someone. Globalization is waiting to conscript you by procedure and distancing technologies. In a world that threatens to be connected without being intimate, you are the only bulwark against the impersonal. You mediate the governance to the citizen. In that mediation you must reflect the civic dream back to itself.

I wish you Godspeed in that task.

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