

To Serve with Honor: Doing the Right Thing in Government

Terry Newell



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To Serve with Honor argues that public servants must act ethically and honorably to earn the public's trust and that no amount of ethics laws will guarantee this. There are 109 pages of federal government ethics laws, yet CIA Director David Petraeus resigned over an affair with his biographer. No law prevented that. The IRS improperly singled out certain groups seeking tax-exempt status for review - and then did its best to explain away what it had done. Again, no law prevented that. Appointment schedulers in the Veterans Health Administration falsified patient wait times under pressure from their own management. Secret Service agents consorted with prostitutes in Cartagena and shared their concerns about agency practices with the press but not their own leaders. Ethics laws and rules can help public servants choose between "right" and "wrong." But rulebooks are not enough. The promise of democracy can be realized only if government workers earn the public's trust by doing the right thing, whether or not there are rules to guide them. This takes skill and moral courage. To Serve with Honor focuses especially on ethics choices between "right" and "right" - where no law or regulation is even possible. What do I do when asked to withhold information I think the public should see? How do I deal with a superior whose behavior is destroying morale? How do I balance competing expectations among clients my organization serves? What do I do when pressured to lie? How can I spot ethical problems before they blindside me? As a leader, how can I create a positive ethical culture in my organization? In these - and most of the ethics issues public servants face- there might be many "right" choices- all of them legal. But how do I pick the best one? This book - filled with case studies, checklists, and stories of exemplary public servants - offers a practical, readable roadmap for acting ethically and honorably. Using the acronym, SERVE, the book takes the reader through five essential steps: Spot the ethics issue, Examine the ethics issue and decide, Recognize and realign the organization's culture, Voice your decision, and Establish justice. Each step is broken into critical questions to address. Public servants need to act honorably - and be honored for doing so. Honor is a concept that has been lost in public service, confined now only to those in the military when it should pervade all those who serve in government. The book's postscript focuses on how to restore honor to public service. Appendices provide practice ethics cases, a model (with questions) for ethical decision making, Web sites that provide additional guidance, and an annotated bibliography keyed to the SERVE model. To Serve With Honor can help restore right conduct and honor to their needed places in the public service. Terry Newell spent nearly forty years in senior positions in the federal government. He regularly writes and teaches on building trust in government, ethics, leadership, and statesmanship.

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