

Further questions from

Times of transition: working with a new government.

Question from audience

Every policy and legal official should read the Cabinet Manual as part of their induction to the public service! It is not promoted amongst staff at all in my experience. Poor!

Anne's response:

I'm surprised and disappointed to hear that. The Cabinet Manual is indeed essential reading and fundamental to learning the public service craft.

Question from audience

What do you see as place of research & evidence based decision making for new Govt? Kay

Anne's response:

The government's views about this will become clear, but I'd have thought ministers will take for granted that proposals will be evidence-based and informed by the best available research.

Question from audience

You mentioned public servants can become collateral damage when a government changes My observation is that this is more overt and expected in Australia than in the NZ public service - I'd be interested in your observations

Anne's response:

I'd agree that this is more overt in Australia - it's very unfortunate and corrosive of capacity and institutional memory. 'Collateral damage' doesn't always imply that people are sacked; it can be that departments are criticised in what is really an attack on the previous government.

Question from audience

- a. A National Minister of. Maori affairs. Duncan MacIntyre, appointed the then chairman of the Labour Maori Policy Committee to be his Private Secretary. Would you recommend this approach to a new government?

Anne's response:

I'd never be so presumptuous as to make recommendations to any Minister about their choice of staff. They understandably want to know they are supported by people they know and trust. I might suggest it's a good idea to ensure a mix of skills and experience in his/her private office, but networks into the community and politics are essential. I presume that was part of the Minister's assessment of his support needs.

- b. Yes Minister: "Watching a Minister in action is to witness the endless subordination of matters of long term importance to the demands of urgent trivia".

Anne's response:

I think lots of them feel this way

Question from audience

Learned helplessness- what do you mean by this, and where does it come from?

Anne's response:

It's something that David Epstein, who was Kevin Rudd's CoS observed was the case with the APS when Labor came to power in 2007. He talked about it at an event he and I did at the Wheeler Centre when the book was published in 2014. I think it might be on YouTube if you're interested to know more.

Question from audience

If Ministers are spending 10-15% of their time on portfolio matters, how else do they spend their time, politics? How can officials reconcile that 100% of their work, focus and attention isn't equally received at 100% by the Minister?

Anne's response:

Officials, who let's recall are unelected exist to serve elected representatives; not the other way around. The role of the Minister is multi-faceted. They are elected representatives, MPs, members of their political parties, they represent their Party in the media; they are members of Cabinet; and much more. They're also people - parents, partners, friends. How can officials reconcile that? I find the question a bit surprising. They reconcile it by understanding that's the way it works and always has, but also by responding to opportunity that presents engage a Minister more fully in policy and the outcomes being sought by the department. Compelling advice will always attract attention. Paul Keating didn't spend 10-15%; nor I suspect did Bill English. But not every Minister is policy-oriented. We discuss this at length in Learning to be a Minister.