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The SAC® Release

Can the Public Sector Expect Top Talent to Enlist?

“Although our members work mostly in the private sector,” says Society for Advancement of Consulting® CEO Dr. Alan Weiss, “we do become involved in the public sector. There is an opportunity for public sector organizations to attract top talent in this economy, but here we present two opposing findings to consider.”

Dr. Maynard Brusman is a consulting psychologist and executive coach. He is the president of Working Resources, a talent management and leadership coaching firm in San Francisco, California.

www.workingresources.com He offers a few insights:

“Younger generations — the so-called Gen Xers and New Millennial — comprise half the U.S. work force. Gen Xers and Millennial have many reasons to question authority, rather than bow to it. They don’t automatically believe their leaders tell the truth. They have seen plenty of lies from presidents, CEOs, legislators and even religious institutions, which bred skepticism.

"It may be time for some of the best and the brightest to explore the public sector. Top talents are increasingly considering working in the public sector as an alternative to traditional financial or pre-law careers. In the public sector, you can make a real impact and gain valuable skills. At a nonprofit, you can have responsibility and leadership experience right out of college. Not choosing Wall Street isn't necessarily the end of the world."

Dr. Pat Lynch, President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc. (www.BusinessAlignmentStrategies.com) in Long Beach, CA, has worked extensively with clients in the public sector. Her experience is that most people who enter public service do so because they want to “do good,” i.e., to have a positive impact on society. Until recently, the best and brightest individuals *did* enter public service. Unfortunately, that trend is changing. A number of major deterrents now are shutting off the desperately needed flow of talent at a time when large numbers of experienced public workers are retiring. Here are a few of the obstacles that face those contemplating a career in the public service arena:

- Excessive bureaucracy that strangles movement and stifles creativity.

- Politicians who put self-interest ahead of the public good when making decisions that they (career employees) must implement even when they know the decisions are incorrect or at odds with the public good.
- Extremely high levels of risk aversion that kill initiative because someone might be offended or might sue.
- Political correctness that has run amok, often replacing common sense.
- Onerous public disclosure requirements for those seeking to serve in both paid and (more often) volunteer positions.

Society is paying, and will continue to pay, the price for the loss of talent in the public sector.

Weiss concludes, "It's apparent to me that the success in attracting talent is going to be situational. Where there is honest and sincere appeal, we may actually be able to give such terms as 'government bureaucrat' a retirement. But I'm not betting on it."

SAC is an international association of consulting professionals who subscribe to an industry code of ethics and have provided evidence of significant consulting results among their clients. For more information, please go to <http://www.consultingsociety.com>, write to info@summitconsulting.com, or call 800/825-6153 (401/886-4097).