Policy Development and Advocacy for Global Health

Everyday Leadership: The Policy Maker

Week 1

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Hello! My name is Aaron Katz and what I teach and am involved in (as a as an analyst and an activist) is the decisions that government makes on our behalf that affect our lives. So, that's what public policy is.

On Understanding Public Policy

Policy is not just laws; it's not just pronouncements by governments. It's how those laws or how those programs are implemented; and that's as important and in some cases more important than the actual programs or laws themselves. If you look at the federal budget and you look at the programs (like the National Rural Health Mission) which is a broad national policy… oh they say very good things, they have high words and they're going to benefit lots of people, but the actual implementation of the law (in many cases) doesn't seem to be consistent with those big words; and so, if you're interested and concerned about a particular policy, like the funding of health care services or the funding of hospital services, you have to be very concerned about how that law and the money how that's implemented; because very specific decisions made in the implementation that's an inherent part of policy those decisions are influenced by organizations and individuals who have an interest in the decisions. And leadership really at the at the system-level, when you get beyond organizations, leadership has a lot to do with how organizations work together (or don't) to influence those decisions. So, you can think about policy as leadership exercised at the system-level).

Who has influence and what do they need to know?

Policy is really about sort of tuning your antenna. All of us… I don't think I've met anybody who doesn't understand the basic elements of how policy is developed and how policy decisions are made. We all know that if we think about, well, like in our family, in our nuclear family where we grew up, or extended family, we kind of know who has the most influence and who has the least influence. In many families with the most influence over decisions are made by parents or grandparents…elders…you know, perhaps in an extended family. And the least influence maybe are the littlest kids, ok, and we grew pretty much understanding that, and we know that for example, when I grew up, you know, I might want to get my older brother behind something I wanted the family to do, like, where we were going to take a vacation, right. So, I might talk to my older brother and my older sister and say, hey, I'd really like to go to Disneyland and here's why…we haven't been there etc. and convince them and then the three of us can go to our parents and as a unified voice, we can sit and we can convince the decision-makers that that's the right choice. So that's policy-making, policy…that those kinds of political decisions are everywhere in our lives starting in our families. So, we kind of figured that out. We figured out who makes the decisions, and who did they listen to, and that's really a huge; that's a large part

of what policy is, and then of course, the other part is, what information is brought into the discussions. You know, the cost of the trip versus what else we could do with that money, the time, what do we know about accommodations around Disneyland etc. Well, the same is true in public policy around health or health care is that there is information that's brought into those discussions. So, the two major elements are who makes the decisions and who can influence them, and what information is useful in those discussions and in those decisions. So, that's really what policy is. And leadership is figuring out how to influence decisions and if it's a value-based leadership, it's based on some ethical framework, it's how do we get decisions that are going to be of benefit to the people that we care about, how we get those decisions made by decision-makers and who else can we collect into our team and to our coalition in order to influence those decisions.

Detective Work

Stakeholder analysis and political mapping. What it involves, is collecting information about the key organizations or individuals who can influence a particular policy decision that you're concerned about, and I'll give you an example. So, you collect information, like a detective. So, who are these organizations? What are their characteristics, they represent so and so, they're so big, they have X amount of money, here's their mission, here's their programs. And here are their priorities, whatever they are, and what is the current position or thoughts about this particular policy issue. And you collect that information, and you can do that by looking at the newspaper. You can do that by calling them up nowadays. You can often go on the web and look at their websites and find out a lot about them. You can talk to other people who know the organizations…all those kind of things. It's like detective work. You collect that information, you put it in a sort of library. Ok, so now I know about the twenty organizations that are going to impact or influence this issue, and then you start mapping them. You say, ok, is this organization for or against? And you might try to answer the question, are they really strongly for or really strongly against, or are they just sort of…this is what they lean…but they might be. We could influence them. And then you ask the question, how powerful are they on this particular topic? And so, you sort of have a map, and that's a living document because it will change over time as the issue you are worried about unfolds. And also, if you're an advocate and you want to move, you're going to try to do things to move. If you're for something, you want to try to move those people who are against it a little bit weaker in opposition, and you want to strengthen the supporters of it. So, that's a basic technique—just detective work. Who is going to influence this issue? What do I know about them and how can I move them in the direction I want to move?

Fundamental Policy Skills

Well, one of the most important skill areas in policy (and again this is why it's an integral part of leadership) is developing and maintaining strong personal relationships. Trusting relationships are at the heart of healthy organizations and they're at the heart of successful work in policy. Decision makers (particularly people who are elected or appointed) they are human beings. And particularly politicians, that is legislators of whatever type… these are people who if they're

expert in anything, they're only expert one thing… and yet they're being asked we ask them to make decisions on a whole range of things. And they have to find some ways to carry that burden. And one way they find, is they rely on certain people for advice and for information. So, they trust certain people or certain organizations so developing and maintaining trusting relationships, relationships that are durable that can be sustained, even through conflict. In the policy world, in the political world, it is often the case that on one issue, on one day you may be fighting some other person or some organization, and yet on another issue on another day you need to be working together. I'll give you an example, in the United States and particularly in this state (Washington), I'm involved in in working with a group of unions that represent nurses and hospital managers. And they are often at odds around issues having to do with nursing in hospitals and having adequate nurse staffing, and a variety of things. And by and large, these people are well-meaning, they really want the best for their organizations (for the nurses and for the patients) but their interests differ at times and they fight a lot over what's an adequate-level of nurse staffing in hospitals, in order to make sure that patients get the best care. But they have to work together, for example, to make sure there's adequate funding for health care programs, because they share that common interest. So, they have to figure out ways on how they can have good relationships, trusting relationships, that are durable when they have to fight, so that they can still work together on these other issues. So, that's key in policy and understanding the importance of having trusting relationships and maintaining them, and in developing respect that can last through periods of conflict.