

"Putting the 'Servant' back in 'Public Servant'"



Time to write the annual report for 2014 for the state and county parks. Used to be easy, working in the state government. "The iron rice bowl," people used to call it. No more. It started with a few minor trends in the 80's and 90's: local and national governments doing less and less in-house, more often contracting consultants and private firms to complete reports, design programs -- eventually even implement them. The trend accelerated both formally and informally: DNR contracting the Nature Conservancy to manage parks; transit and garbage/ recycling services offered by private companies under government contract; and frustrated citizens organizing locally to help the needy, clean up public parks and commons, and offer tutoring and training programs to kids at risk. With the government contracting out for services it had funds to buy, and people giving up on government and starting grass-roots self-help programs, the end was inevitable.

The watershed came in the 90's, with the state procurement scandals. Public outrage splintered party loyalties and upset the patronage apple cart. Demand for government accountability exploded in the '04 gubernatorial race, when a statewide referendum required all state and county employees to re-bid for their jobs every year, based on the past year's performance and next year's goals. A related referendum required competitive bid contracting for all services, downsizing government until only a core group remained to write contract specifications for services based on public input and participatory community planning. Those two referenda put the "servant" back in public service, and effectively dismantled some long-standing bureaucratic fiefdoms.

Well, employment has changed in the private sector, too. Employees there face just as high a risk of losing their jobs. Companies in the 10's keep their competitive advantage entirely by virtue of state-of-the-art employee training: technical and social change have accelerated to the point where any skills learned in college are obsolete in two or three years -- except of course the ability to learn itself. Corporate training programs have mushroomed. All the best teachers flee to corporate training, where the facilities are excellent, the students motivated, and the pay good. Enrollment in universities and small colleges has declined drastically as those institutions failed to retread their programs to meet the six month training cycles necessary to keep pace with innovations. Those universities or schools that have survived did so by signing service contracts with businesses for specific courses of instruction. Consumers - students - are also demanding quicker turn-around on training as well as intensified career counseling.

The good news for flexible, innovative education providers is that overall demand is increasing - more full-time workers becoming students, education seen more and more as a leisure activity as well as an economic investment. It's now a "nursery to nursing home" pursuit. The much-heralded advances in telecommunications and interactive global computer networks make "classrooms" more mobile: school is anywhere and anytime you can link into the Internet. What caught people by surprise after 2000 were the side-effects that advances in bioengineering had on education.

At first biotechnology seemed a boon primarily to agriculture: first hardier crops were introduced and then "designer foods", which contributed to the success of diversified "gourmet" agriculture in Hawaii. Increased sophistication in analyzing biochemicals and manipulating genetic stocks also allowed bioscientists to "disendanger" species, and to extract useful pharmaceuticals from indigenous Hawaiian plants. It was pharmaceuticals and neurochemicals that really changed education: insights in neurochemistry and brain functioning resulted in pharmaceuticals that enhanced learning skills and memory. Unfortunately darker applications also resulted, and in 2014 neuro-chemical approaches to criminal rehabilitation -- or

neuro-chemical "penalties" -- and control of anti-social behavior are quite common. On the other hand, we also know more about the chemicals that the body produces to reduce stress and enhance calm, contentment, and happiness -- and those are also in widespread use as more and more people try to cope with the anxiety of life in a state of perpetual "future shock."

Continued advances in biotechnology require several new park programs: working with the National Endowment for Humanities, we are setting aside exhibit spaces in Kapiolani Park for "biosculptures," genetically designed art forms. Or, as one department wit would have it, "BONSAI -- THE NEXT GENERATION." This will be carefully monitored, as the unintended consequences of genetic "sculpturing" are potentially catastrophic. We are reinforcing one standing program: re-seeding indigenous and endemic species to restore the native ecology, and establish the parks as biodiversity preserves. Finally, we are eliminating the program to fight graffiti. The new wall paints on all park facilities have proven effective in biodegrading all other paints sprayed over them.

Given these successes and positive goals, I am confident I

have avoided any salary penalties assessed against me for delinquent public service. That regulation was one of the most extreme to result from the public's cry for accountability: guarantees of effective public management and leadership.

Trends:

- * growing demand for government accountability
- * accelerated job mobility, increased emphasis on employee re-training
- * advances in all forms of biotechnology

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