

Trained to Lie: The Making of the Modern Politician

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Theme: [History](#)

It would appear these days, that unless one can show that one is important or an expert in some way or other, one will not be taken seriously by those who only see life as a social climbing highway called 'career making'.

Gone, as important values for society, is respect for simple common sense, the quiet search for deeper knowledge and the expression of native indigenous wisdom. Unless one is on the road to 'making it' or has already 'made it' on the terms of reference of the current status quo, one is treated as a kind of social misfit.

Accordingly, aspirants of fame and fortune struggle to attain positions in society which enable them to make an impression by pronouncing authoritatively on various issues of the day. Most people seeking to acquire this authoritative aura go out of their way to ensure they look the part, choosing their attire with great care and no doubt spending much time in front of the mirror before anchoring themselves to their chosen pedestal and awaiting the applause of the public arena.

Some get an early break and are able to establish a good foothold on the 'making-it' ladder; while others flounder and fall from grace without getting beyond the first or second rung. They are the lucky ones, because they are saved from the overwhelming temptation to sell their souls to the devil called power.

For the perspective of this article I am interested in following those who, once on the ladder, single-mindedly devote their entire lives to getting to the top. Those who become steadily more and more blinded by the prospect of achieving the holy grail status of becoming what is commonly called 'a power broker'.



The most febrile setting for the enactment of this Faustian power game is politics. The Politician learns the rules of the game at an early stage of his/her career and the first and most important rule is to become thoroughly well versed in the art of deception. There really is not much hope of moving up the rungs of the 21st century political ladder without perfecting this skill. The ability to oh so convincingly make a lie sound like a truth.

The first lesson of the new kid on the block of politics is "obey the party line or sink into

oblivion.”

The party line, one is bound to observe, is itself a characteristic evasion of the truth, because it lays down a set of values and conditions that must be adhered to, even though they are perennially based on biased, bigoted and typically blinkered views concerning the direction society should move in.

But our recently elected seeker on the political path is not too concerned about that, and is all too ready to sign-up to membership of this little prison. The party rules offer a certain safety zone within which to operate, one which pretty much ensures that it will never be necessary to think or act outside this particularly well insulated box.

The convenience of signing-up to life inside a virtual prison is clearly extremely enticing. Few political career builders fail to fall for its unholy assurance of protection and insulation from the typical struggles of everyday life on the street. Those who unflinchingly obey the party line will always remain candidates for the next rung up the ladder of political privilege which comes with being a well protected member of the elite.

So, signing-in completed, off goes our recently elected eager little bundle of good will towards mankind to hold a ‘surgery’ with the constituents who voted him into office (I have chosen to use ‘him’ but it might just as well be ‘her’). Congratulations are the order of the day and our new parliamentarian can bathe in the warm glow of becoming ‘a representative of the people’. A bright future looks assured with the next rung on the ladder already firmly within his sights.

In the hallowed halls of Westminster’s the parliament building, the newly elected get their first true taste of the trappings of power. It could be any parliament in the world, the effect would be the same. The place is packed full of history, of famous people and famous events. National TV crews hover around waiting to do interviews, eager to pick-up the issue of the moment. Members of the public cue to get into the spectators gallery and a large police presence maintains a 24 hour patrol of the precinct. A personal office is ready for occupation with a well trained secretary awaiting orders from her new boss. It’s a heady combination, perfectly designed to fuel career ambitions and massage an ever opportunistic ego.

Then, one fine day a few years down this road, the great chance comes. A junior ministerial post in the ministry of Defence is offered, and our young politician is called to attend a private session with a small group of senior party grandees. In spite of the fact that our friend has learned how to reel-off the party line to perfection and to fend-off awkward questions from his constituents – what he is told in this meeting is unexpected.

The ensuing conversation goes something like this:

“Sit down David – cup of tea? We have observed your allegiance to the party and are pleased with your performance in this regard, however there is one area in which you still appear a little vulnerable.”

David “Oh, I’m very interested to hear what that might be..”

Grandee “Good, do you take sugar? David, none of us in this room would be where we are today if it wasn’t for the fact that we had – on a number of occasions – to be ..well how shall I put it..somewhat conservative with the truth”.

David “If you mean the need to conceal some information in the cause of protecting the party position – I’m quite familiar with this need.”

Grandee “That is indeed close to what we want to convey – however on occasions it goes a little further. You see David, as you are no doubt aware the party is dependent on funds from donors, some of whom – especially the corporate ones – would not continue to support the party should it deviate from its pledge to follow-through certain commitments, some of which might appear .. somewhat controversial.”

David “There is much controversy raised on a daily basis in the house, do you mean something over and above this?”

A second grandee “What ‘the right honorable gentleman’ is referring to – to borrow the language we use in the debating chamber – does somewhat exceed the typical repartee of the chamber, and indeed the standard line we put-out to the media. What my colleague wishes to convey to you David, is that once one has attained the position of a Minister there is a need to prioritize both verbal and actual support for the commercial interests of our chief sponsors. There really is no room for expressing a view outside the one that assures the economic viability of the party.”

After a small time spent reflecting on this, our young political aspirant replies

“I see, well it has been my observation since becoming elected that we are dependent upon a number of well-off party faithfuls to keep the coffers topped-up.”

Second grandee “While that is a valid observation, we need to take it one step further. Suppose someone – a Saudi Royal for example – should establish contact with you with a view to acquiring a substantial order of military equipment – and upon inquiry – it becomes evident that this could possibly be used to enforce some form of coercion upon a neighbouring country. Suppose, David, that you were in a position to make a decision on whether or not to go ahead with this request – what would your response be?”

David “Well..I find that a little hard to answer. I think it would depend upon first making a more detailed assessment of the geopolitical position.”

A somewhat prolonged silence settles over the room, making our young aspirant a trifle nervous. Then the first grandee leans slowly forward

“That is not the right answer David. It would indeed be right if you were being interviewed by the BBC, but in this room, between you and I and my colleagues – it is not the right answer. David, now that you are to take up this important position in the Ministry, you will need to take a considerably more pragmatic stance in such matters. One that is not influenced by the possible outcome of completing an arms deal such as that being mooted. You must place any conscientious concerns behind you and recognize that to refuse such a deal on humanitarian grounds, or similar considerations, would mean a serious loss of earnings to the government – and indeed, to the prestige of the Country. What I am saying, David, as I feel sure you will understand, is that you must readily agree to negotiate the sale of such military armaments and beyond that – to declare your pleasure at being able to unequivocally support the Royal personage’s request.”

On receiving this information, our still somewhat naive Junior Minister falls into a state of mini crisis, a kind of black-out of the mind. His wife, children, home, old school friends – all flash past his eyes – followed by a freeze frame vision of severely wounded and brutalized citizens of an occupied Middle Eastern Country. Yet, rising-up and ultimately superseding all these images, is the career. The desire to ‘make it’. The vision that accompanies this emotion is of a newspaper headline ‘David Saunders Set To Be Prime Minister’.

After what seems like an interminable and agonizing passage of time the words are formed in response

“I admit that I am rather taken-aback by the uncompromising nature of your answer. I do possess a moral compass which would in normal conditions make me wish to consider this issue before responding. However, if my role as a Minister demanded a response in line with the one you have indicated, I would of course feel obliged to take that route. But I will not pretend that it would sit easily in me or that I would not feel the need for some moral justification in taking such a decision.”

First grandee “ Ah, we all went through that one David, it is an essential initiation process into the world of real politics. I’m afraid there is no way around it, you have to make economic pragmatism your new moral compass. You have to bury any lingering sense of ethical or humanitarian consideration, and go forward in complete confidence, demonstrating that you have no doubts and are fully committed to the call of your office.”

David “I see”.

Grandee “Yes, it’s not easy at first, but after a while it becomes second nature. You will soon learn to set aside old scruples that would otherwise block your political career and undermine your status in the outside world. You will need the same resolve to by-pass any human sensitivities you might feel when you stand in front of the cameras for news’ broadcasts; in newspaper quotes; in official trips abroad, even in front of your own family. You see David, you are undergoing a necessary training. You are being trained to lie, both to yourself and to the outside world. There really is no other way if you wish to be a successful general on the battlefield of 21st century politics. In fact, you will need to work tirelessly in order to perfect the art of deception. To that point where you yourself actually come to believe your pronouncements to be true, even when they’re clearly not. At that juncture the public will fall for your every word and not be able to discern what is right from what is wrong. Good luck David, stick by the rules of the game and your highest dreams stand every chance of being realized.”

Leaving the room, David Saunders MP, Junior Minister of Defence, felt a new sense of resolve. The highest positions of office were indeed within reach; why should he turn down any opportunity that might present itself – to boost his status as a successful Minister, enrich the party coffers and move closer to that all enticing goal of one day leading his Country?

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