



# The Servant of the People: On the power of integrity in politics and government

"Hard as it may be to believe, most politicians are pretty likable folks." Barack Obama<sup>1</sup>

"Becoming a good person is a lifelong effort."

Bill Clinton<sup>2</sup>

"The things that go wrong are what make this the second toughest job in America. But the things that go right are what make me still want it."

John Lindsay<sup>3</sup>

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### Introduction

Servants of the people, abbreviated to SPs, are those who hold a position, paid or unpaid, in the public sector. SPs gain power in office in order to be able to serve, and they must handle this power with integrity. This book aims to offer insight and assistance for this.

Whether we are talking about politicians, government officials, semi-officials, or volunteers for political parties, about mayors, prime ministers, or monarchs, they all have at least one thing in common: they are ministers in the Latin sense of the word, which means servants. They are chosen, appointed, or elected to serve the people, society, or their community. As Tony Blair rightly said to his campaign team after he first won the UK national elections, "The people are the masters. We are the servants of the people. We will never forget that." For the same reason Russian presidents take an oath: "I swear in exercising the powers of the President of the Russian Federation ... to faithfully serve the people."  $^{5}$ 

In order to be able to serve, servants of the people, in this book abbreviated to SPs,<sup>6</sup> are given power in their positions to make, execute, or control policy. They have the power to influence something or someone.<sup>7</sup>That is why the Russian president's oath makes the connection with exercising power. There is a risk that this power SPs have will not be used for its intended purpose, that of service. Aristotle, one of the first and greatest philosophers and political scientists, said that because rulers have power they will be tempted to use it for personal gain.<sup>8</sup> This applies not only to rulers but to all SPs: power brings with it the temptation of improper use or abuse. It is important that SPs withstand this temptation, and that requires integrity. But what is integrity, why is it so important, and what demands does it make on SPs?

This book is written for SPs and aims to answer these questions.<sup>9</sup> Each of the 95 chapters discusses one of the many facets of integrity.<sup>10</sup> The central message is that there is great power in integrity for SPs. Those acting with integrity gain power, whereas a lack of integrity undermines or destroys power.

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The book is divided into 16 parts. Part I is about important sources for determining what integrity is, namely rules, morality, and ethics. Part II shows that SPs' integrity rests in both their behavior and their character. Part III is about the ways in which SPs' integrity can be assessed. Part IV proposes that SPs should be expected to show a higher level of integrity than the average citizen. Part V argues that integrity is contained in SPs' ideals and viewpoints. Part VI describes the factors which put the integrity of an SP under pressure. The following three parts deal with three important traits SPs need to handle this pressure with integrity: faithfulness, willingness to serve, and responsibility. Part X describes an important dilemma for SPs, namely the gap between standards and practice, while part XI offers rules of thumb for handling dilemmas. Part XII describes the importance of integrity for SPs and part XIII suggests ways of tackling behavior lacking integrity. Part XIV shows that integrity is important both before and after holding office. Part XV argues that the importance of integrity extends beyond the personal level. Part XVI closes with a call for readers to put integrity into practice without delay, because, as prime minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore said, "good politics is first and foremost about integrity."

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## I. Rules, morality, and ethics

The six chapters of Part I are about what rules, morality, and ethics mean for SPs' integrity.

#### 1. Integrity begins with knowledge of the position

SPs should know what their position entails, because integrity is related to their position, and since positions vary, the required integrity also varies. Integrity as a citizen is therefore no guarantee of integrity as an SP.

What is a monarch, president, or mayor? What is a member of a national or provincial congress, or a municipal council? What is a chairman or committee member of a political party?

It is not necessarily a problem if we are unable to answer these questions. However, it becomes a serious problem when SPs cannot answer such questions about their own positions, as in the case of a recently elected municipal councilor who, when asked by a reporter to explain his job, was lost for words.

Not knowing what your own position involves is an essential, even existential failing. Without knowledge of your job you cannot determine what it means to succeed. After all, what is good depends on the position, what it stands for, and the reason it was created. If people are unable to define good work, they cannot determine whether and to what extent they are successful, or whether it would be better to act differently. In such cases they can only get down to work at random, and success is a question of coincidence and luck.

Likewise people cannot act with integrity if they do not know what the position entails. If members of congress wish to act with integrity, for instance, they must first know the function of congress before they can determine what behaving with integrity means. The fact that we link integrity with public service shows that the position plays a part in determining what integrity means for the individual official in context. If the position were irrelevant, we would only be able to talk about acting with integrity as a citizen and not as an official. However, since integrity is linked with specific positions, SPs must know what their positions entail in order to act with integrity.<sup>12</sup>

Integrity therefore varies in different positions. Different kinds of integrity apply to mayors and councilors, for example. In principle mayors in the UK are not supposed to apply party political views to matters in their own local areas, whereas a county councilor should.<sup>13</sup> However, where mayors can or even must be members of political parties and can or must behave party politically outside their own local areas, in a monarchy a monarch must stand back from party politics and cannot be a member of a political party. County councilors will consequently be criticized for failing to express party political views, whereas monarchs will be criticized if they do express such views.

The fact that the position in part determines what counts as integrity means that SPs' integrity is not equivalent to that of ordinary citizens. <sup>14</sup> Citizens are permitted to do things that SPs are not. Citizens are generally free to have second houses wherever they want, but SPs have been discredited for having vacation homes in areas with which their own local authorities had special relationships, located in parks where their officials owned shares, or in countries with bad human rights records, corruption problems, or tax havens. SPs should therefore realize that they are not just ordinary citizens, and that acting with integrity as a citizen in no way guarantees acting with integrity as an SP. <sup>15</sup>

In order to function with integrity SPs must therefore gain an in-depth understanding of their position. Why was it created and with what aim? What is the function of the position? What does it have in common with similar, related positions, or their own past jobs, and where do these differ?<sup>16</sup>

SPs should always take their job descriptions to heart. What do the rules and regulations say about the function of their position, what was stated in the vacancy advertisement, and what does the job profile say about this? For anyone who takes integrity seriously, an in-depth investigation into what has already been said and written about the position is indispensible. Without a grasp of history it is impossible to properly understand a position and place it in context.

In sum, SPs' integrity begins with knowledge of the job.<sup>17</sup>

### 2. Integrity demands knowledge of the rules

Rules serve to allow SPs to handle their power with integrity, providing clarity as to what counts as integrity and offering others possibilities for guiding and correcting SPs' behavior. Since the rules are inextricably bound up with the job, an SP in a particular position must accept the associated rules. Not knowing or recognizing these constitutes a denial of the position. SPs must therefore be proactive in finding out about relevant rules in advance and while in office.

SPs may be scornful of the rules that apply to them, dismissing them as not be taken too seriously, there to be broken, a sign of weakness, or generally burdensome and no fun. All kinds of reasons are given for non-compliance. SPs may say that the rules are antiquated, unnecessarily complex, impractical, oppressive, overly extensive, or patronizing. Even if this is true, it is a dangerous way to think.

Laws, codes of conduct, procedures, rules, regulations, and protocols do not exist by nature. They have been developed for a reason, with a function. That is because of the power all SPs possess. SPs receive power by dint of their positions, power that they would not otherwise have, such as the power to decide, judge, speak, make promises, execute decisions, and check and sanction others. SPs may be empowered to make laws, award licenses, and invest money, or more concretely, to deport asylum seekers and refugees, declare war, and expropriate land from citizens.

It is essential that this power is used for the intended purpose, otherwise it would not have been granted with the job. It would be contradictory to allow SPs to act against the interests of those who put them in power. However, when people receive power, this gives rise to the possibility of misuse, in forms such as personal enrichment, favoritism, and inappropriate infringement of the rights of others. Rules are there to limit the chance of abuse of power.

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