



Commonwealth of Puerto Rico
Office of the Comptroller

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Dear friends. Thank you for inviting me to share my experience of fourteen years in public service, almost ten as Comptroller of Puerto Rico and four as Secretary of the Treasury. Your invitation has been a soul-searching process. What can I say of my experience in public service? I will be honest with you, which means sometimes I will be critical, but mostly I am hopeful for the future.

My presentation has three parts:

- (1) first, some introductory remarks to set the tone of my ideas**
- (2) second, I'll present a few slides of the lessons I have learned**
- (3) and last but not least, let's have a session of questions and answers**

Let us start, then. Who hasn't heard that movie line "Show me the money"? But that attitude is not unique to sports contracts; most people care more for results than for promises. That goes for "better government".

Puerto Ricans every day are desperately asking the government to show them what kind of a deal democratic citizens are getting for the money we pay in taxes and for the politicians we freely elect. The citizens feel they are not getting value for their taxes, they are overtaxed and they should be getting better services.

And the government is obliged to respond with truthfulness and justice. You know why? Because Puerto Rico happens to be a democracy, which is not the same as a totalitarian state, or a society in chaos, or a government ruled by the despotism of political parties or interests groups.

Let us be very clear regarding democracy. A democratic government minimally presupposes three essential elements: transparency, accountability and equality. Transparency denotes free access to governmental political and economical activities and decisions. Accountability entails a state being held responsible, by both its people and its elected bodies, for its choices and actions. And equality means citizens being treated equally under the law, as well as some degree of equal political participation among them in their own governance. I will add a fourth ingredient: quality of results.

Therefore, in those general terms, these are some lessons we should think seriously and take heed.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson 1

We can have a good government. But we need two basic conditions:

- **Leaders with strong ethical values, courage, a clear vision of a future, dedication and commitment to advance the common good.**
- **An educated civil society committed to its duties and demanding its rights**

Lesson 2

A good government needs:

- **An overall conceptual approach on how to govern a democratic society**
- **A commitment to effective administration in all agencies**
- **A clear set of results to be accountable by those responsible in all agencies**

Lesson 3

We need a hefty dose of fiscal discipline and accountability. What matters most is:

- **smarter budgeting and responsible spending**
- **setting the price of government**
- **setting the priorities of government**
- **reinforce internal control and oversight activities**

Lesson 4

A good government is an effective agent in promoting desirable social changes, because it delivers superior performance and makes a distinctive impact over a long period of time.

Lesson 5

We need to have the right people in the right places at the right time, to get good results. Therefore, we must improve professional development programs across all public institutions.

Lesson 6

Anything worthwhile in government spending, policy planning and execution needs to be done with a comprehensive set of performance measures, performance monitoring and performance reporting.

(Note: the following explanation is not to be included in the slides)

Let me give you an example of this lesson. There is an agency that was created by law – Law 209, August 28, 2003- called the Instituto de Estadísticas de Puerto Rico, that has never been activated. We consider that the function of this Institute should be performed by the Comptroller's Office.

Lesson 7

There is a need for administrative reform, to simplify and increase agility and pertinence in public sector performance. In all agencies we need a clear set of goals, a passion for the core values, effective planning, strategic alliances and monitoring for benchmarking initiatives.

Lesson 8

Leaders must build a sense of urgency about needed changes, and be specific on the mistakes to be corrected and on the concrete actions to be taken to solve problems.

They must practice what they preach. The essentials are: vision, trust and integrity.

Lesson 9

Strong government accountability requires for the population to have access to government information through internet and other means. This, in turn, demands for an updated IT system in each agency and public libraries.

Lesson 10

An embedded political culture of deceit must be replaced by a commitment to ethical standards of honesty and truthfulness, both in the public and private sphere.