

Among the seven ecological factors identified by John Gaus, which three do you consider to be most critical in shaping Robertson's performance? Why? Likewise, from the Arnstein Model, what three factors are most critical to Robertson's effective performance? Why?

William Robertson: Exemplar of Politics and Public Management Rightly Understood

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William Robertson presides over the City of Los Angeles' Bureau of Street Services. The bureau today consists of seven unique divisions that are charged with developing, constructing, and maintaining streets, sidewalks, and trees throughout the city. In total, the city maintains a 6,500-mile street system, with approximately 1,000 miles of failed streets. The total budget for the bureau is roughly \$130 million annually, with a total staff of approximately 1,300.

Robertson's story is defined, in part, by his quick advancement through the leadership ranks in military and local government service. His story is further characterized by his independent-mindedness in work performance and career choice, his educational learning objectives without formal university education, and his choices to follow lessons and advice from people around him, including his mother. Throughout his military and professional careers, Robertson has developed and refined his general orientation to working with the public: They shouldn't be told lies, and honesty is the best policy.

Robertson's military service was marked by a rapid rise through the ranks. He enlisted in the Marine Corps; out of the 80 or so who were in each boot camp platoon, two or three were promoted early. After being chosen for advancement, Robertson was selected to lead a larger, more diverse group of men. This was his first experience leading a culturally and racially diverse group of people, as he had grown up and attended school in a predominantly white part of Los Angeles County. From there, Robertson was charged with leading a sniper group and, within two months, had his own squad in Vietnam.

Robertson believes the training and experience he gained in his military service provided a greater

education than he could have received in a college classroom. For instance, Robertson reports that he learned a sense of responsibility—primarily to his military colleagues, but also to the organization. This lesson was applied recently during particularly bad winter rainstorms in the City of Los Angeles, a story we will return to later.

After completing his military service, Robertson returned to the United States and took a job as a salesman with a textile company, Milliken and Company, in South Carolina and Georgia. He worked there for three or four years but found that sales was "not my niche. I hated sales and didn't like lying to people." After this period, he returned to his childhood home of Los Angeles and bought a truck. For three or four years, he worked as a truck operator, driving through the 48 states. However, his independent trucking business did not last long; his mother did not like him doing that kind of work. At his mother's prompting, Robertson joined the City of Los Angeles' Bureau of Street Services.

Robertson's service in the bureau, like his service in the military, has been marked by rapid advancement. He first joined the bureau as a heavy-duty truck operator. After working for six months, he was tapped to serve as acting supervisor, a position he held for two years beginning in 1986. After this period, Robertson took the civil service test and placed at the top of the list. He went on to earn a street maintenance certificate at Los Angeles Trade Technical College. As a supervisor, he did not need this certification, but he chose to do so because of his interest in learning. He hoped to spread this interest to other people in the organization, which has been a challenging task. According to Robertson, "eighty-five percent of the workforce comes from the construction trade, and education is not viewed as helpful in their advancement."

Notes

1. J. W. Bews, *Human Ecology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 1.
2. From "Administration, A Foundation of Government," by Charles A. Beard, in *American Political Science Review*, XXXIV, No. 2 (April, 1940), p. 232. Reprinted by permission of the American Political Science Association.
3. The methods as well as the substantive interpretations of Frederick Jackson Turner should be familiar to students of public administration so far as the printed page permits. It was a rich

experience to be present as he worked over maps and statistical data of a county, state or region, putting geology, soils, land values, origins of residents, and voting records together for light on the resulting social action.

4. A reverse picture is the sudden demand on the use of ores in the Adirondack region during the world war because of changes in the conditions of ocean shipment. In one remote village a public housing project, to take care of the expanded work force, was a consequence, again, of the catastrophe of war.

CASE STUDY 3

Introduction

The concept of ecology of administration can be illustrated by most public administration case studies, for it is a rare public administrator who is *not* influenced at least by a few of the major ecological factors that John Gaus outlined in the preceding essay. The concept of ecology runs throughout all administrative activities in government, serving to shape and reshape the content and direction of public policy and public institutions in innumerable ways. The following case study, "William Robertson: Exemplar of Politics and Public Management Rightly Understood," by USC professor Terry L. Cooper and his graduate research assistant Thomas A. Bryer, offers an excellent example of how ecological factors affect administrative activities in practice and how an administrator can succeed brilliantly when he identifies and copes with them effectively.

At first glance, William Robertson's work may appear mundane, technical, even uninteresting. After all, he heads the Los Angeles Bureau of Street Services, an agency many would imagine as the "typical" big bureaucracy, though on closer examination his job is hardly routine or insignificant. Robertson is responsible for maintaining 6500 miles of roads, scattered over 470 square miles in the third largest American city. He runs a complex agency with seven large divisions and an annual budget of \$130 million. Managing this bureau's operations involves one way or another all seven ecological factors identified by Gaus which, in turn, immensely complicates Robertson's administrative duties.

First, "people": Robertson's work requires that he interact daily, not with one "public," but numerous, very different sorts of stakeholders throughout Los Angeles. As evident in this case, this task is not easy. It requires long days and intense involvement, sometimes defusing hostile confrontations. How Robertson goes about dealing with people individually and collectively significantly shapes the effective performance of the Bureau of Street Services. Second, "the place": unquestionably the uniqueness of the Los Angeles metropolitan landscape determines to a great extent the scope and nature of administrative demands and challenges