

Transcript | Career Moves: How to Make Your Impact Known

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 0:21

Hello and welcome, everyone, to this panel event. This is the event, How to Make Your Impact Known, part of our Career Move series. My name is Khalifa Idris and I'm a tech lead here at Apolitical.

Oliver Matikainen 0:38

My name is Oliver and I'm a senior learning designer here at Apolitical as well, and I'll be co-moderating with Khalifa today.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 0:46

Today is all about ensuring that your accomplishments at work are seen and recognised by your line manager and senior leadership. You'll be hearing from experienced public servants on how to determine which achievements to discuss, connect them with the outcomes leaders care about, and find sponsors or champions to catalyse your career progression.

For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, welcome. Apolitical is the world's largest online network for government, used by more than half a million public servants and policy makers across 170 countries. Apolitical is a strategic partner to governments, helping them prepare their workforces for the future. We achieved this by upskilling through short online courses and peer communities, as well as by building innovative learning design tools designed for and with the governments. It would be really great to hear from and all about all of you too. So do post in the chat from where you're joining us and from what organisation you work for.

Now, just a few bits of housekeeping before we get into today's session. First, I'll mention that this event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website, so please don't record it yourself. We'll also be using the recording to generate events insights, including with AI-powered software, as this is as this session is running.

on Microsoft Teams Town Hall. We won't collect your video or audio data, but personal data you share in the chat may be captured.

Contact details for privacy concerns are in the Apolitical homepage footer. Closed captions are available in your own language and can be toggled on or off in your screen settings, and my colleague will post the instructions in the chat now.

Secondly, before we get started, I would love to introduce you to the career development community on Able at School. It's a space to ask the questions that we don't always get time for at work or at these events, such as what are the best tips for updating your resume? If you've ever wondered about this, you're definitely not alone. And this community is a great place to connect.

with and learn from your peers in the public sector. And my colleague will post the link to the community in the chat. So please definitely join that.

Okay.

Just having a look at where people are joining from.

Okay, some people from Ontario, Canada, seeing Oxford, Birmingham, Nottingham.

Okay, got a few folks from Canada. That's awesome.

And London, hope you're enjoying the weather before it turns back to Haiti next week.

Awesome.

Before we introduce our speakers, we are going to run a few quick polls just to get a sense of where you're coming from into today's discussion. So the first poll, whose recognition matters most for your work right now? That will be launched in the chat. The answers.

or the options are senior leadership, my line manager, colleagues on my team, my wider organization, or someone else. Please share that option in the chat if other. So again, the poll is whose recognition matters most for your work right now? The options are senior leadership, my line manager, colleagues in my team, my wide organisation or someone else.

Hey.

Give me a second.

Okay, looks like the line manager is coming up.

That's interesting.

All right.

Okay, so my manager is coming up at, okay.

Coming kind of a tie now between blind manager and senior leadership. It's interesting.

Okay.

So yeah, just looking like my manager first, then senior leadership, followed by colleagues on my team, then my wide organisation and someone else.

and myself. Crucially, that's important.

Okay, on to the second poll that we have. What most often stops your work being recognized?

And the options are, I do not know what to highlight. I worry it sounds self-promotional. The work is too complex to explain. Credit gets shared unevenly.

Something else that you share in the chat. And the question is, what most what most often stops your work being recognized?

OK.

Taking a look at the responses.

Alright, I worry it sounds self-promotional is looking like the most popular response.

Okay, credit gets shared unevenly as well is an interesting one.

Okay.

Right, so first it looks like I worry it sounds self-promotional as first. I do not know what to highlight. Second, and credit gets shared immediately third, and the work is too complex to explain for.

Line managers, in the chat, I'm seeing line managers not having enough time being spent, not have enough time spent looking at it to be recognised. Okay, and policy development is harder to talk about as it's longer term. Yeah.

That's interesting.

Awesome. Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts on that in the poll and also in the chat. Much appreciated.

Oliver Matikainen 6:49

Thanks, everyone. It's always so interesting to see what you pick out in the poll. And I'm sure that we're going to come back to some of these topics, both in the panel, but also in the Q&A later. So if you do have any questions around these things, please do put it in the Q&A function. But now it's my pleasure to introduce our speakers, and we're really fortunate to have three brilliant guests with us today. We have Sasha, Nellie, and Joss joining us. Sasha Russell is an organisation development consultant and co-chair of the Neurodiversity Network in the government of Jersey. As an HR specialist, Sasha works across public service to identify workforce challenges and design practical evidence-based solutions that improve both the employee experience and organisational effectiveness.

Nelly Leonidis is the Director of Digital Communications at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and has previously worked in several Government of Canada departments. Nelly has built and modernised teams, led rebrandings, launched digital products, and contributed to foresight research. Last but not least, we have Joss Frame.

is the National Chair of the Federal Youth Network in Canada. Over the last 16 years, Jess has held roles in management, project management, budgeting, learning, and community development. And since 2016, he's been shaping the Federal Youth Network to become a driver of innovation, regional engagement, and career development.

You can read our speaker's full bios on the event page, which my colleague is linking in the chat right now. So go have a look at that if you want to read up on them more. And big warm welcome to the three of you. It's really lovely to have you all here.

Let's kick off with an icebreaker. So for three speakers, you'll have about 30 seconds each to share your responses. And here's the question. What is a compliment you've gotten at work that you've never forgotten?

And while you get a chance to just think about that for a moment, I'd love to invite everyone else to answer the question in the chat as well. So please do put it in the chat. What is a compliment you've gotten at work that you've never forgotten? Sasha, can I come to you first? What compliment would you like to share?

Sasha Russell 8:55

Yeah, of course. Mine's special because it came from my teammates, so they're all high performing, they're all lovely. So to get a positive compliment from them is a big deal. So they said I was a fountain of knowledge, a general legend and a good sounding board. The sunshine of the team who brings people together with joy and engagement. Now I cringe saying that, but I do love that, and I need reminding of that sometimes.

Oliver Matikainen 9:18

That's absolutely incredible. That sounds like so many compliments in one as well. And maybe that's something we'll come back to as well, the feeling of cringing when you say something nice about yourself. I feel like that's a, you're not the only one who feels that way.

Nelly, how about you? What's A compliment you've gotten that you've never forgotten?

Nelly 9:35

So talk of cringe in a good way. My team nominated me for a leadership award covertly. And when they submitted the application, I got their letters of recommendation sent to me. And I read, I mean, a lot of contexts about what we've done together and things like that. But the compliment that was

Never explicitly stated, but I took in, and I don't think it'll ever be paralleled, was recognising how they've grown like personally and professionally in real time in front of me. Usually you have introspection when you see growth, but this was like, here's what's happening right now before you. And that is like, that is, I think I'm done.

Guys, the top of my career.

Oliver Matikainen 10:23

That's absolutely amazing. Such great, such a great compliment. I can see some people have challenges accessing the chat, so I will ask our tech support just to see if, to the goodness that, so we can make sure we get everyone's answers in there. But in the meantime, Josh, I would love to hear what compliment you've gotten that you've never forgotten.

Frame, Joshua (he-il/lui) 10:42

Yeah, absolutely. So back in 2011, I had a friend who was in a hiring pool for a position and I set him up for an interview with my manager at the time. And she said that, you know, she was hoping that he could join the team and be another Josh, be, you know, relatively new to the public service, but like high performing and kind of questioning things.

And his sort of backhanded compliment about me was that, well, Josh is his own biggest fan. So I thought that was quite funny. But I took it as a compliment because I think in your career and where we can discuss today is that you have to be your own biggest fan. You have to be the person who advocates for yourself in terms of opportunities because

It's not as if every manager is in every meeting thinking about your needs and your development. So over the last 10 years, I've taught other people to be their own biggest fans. So that was a good sort of starting point.

Oliver Matikainen 11:42

Incredible. That is a fantastic compliment. And I'm sure we'll come back to that as well to see how easy or difficult is it to become your own biggest fan. And maybe some of the feelings of feeling cringe when you do that might come up again as well. Brilliant. Thank you all so much for answering the icebreaker. And we hope we get some answers in the chat as well.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 12:03

Awesome. Thank you very much for that. Cool. Let's get this panel started. We will start with determining which of your professional accomplishments are worth talking about. Nelly, this question's for you. You coach staff on career progression. How do you help people figure out which wins are actually worth discussing?

And what does that process look like?

Nelly 12:27

So part of it is actually figuring out where they think they're not competent or they're not there yet and giving them opportunities to prove to themselves that they're there because I see it when I'm looking at them and I've been managing for a while. It's kind of nothing is more empowering than when you know your value and you own it, right? So My job sometimes is to help them. We can highlight the big projects, the deliverable things that you can very visibly see, because I tend to be in service shops. So you can point to a product and say, we did this. But it's the internal ability to say, you know what, I can get a new challenge. I can do it. I have what it takes. I have my director's support. It's that, honestly, is what I try to cultivate, not the obvious skill sets. It's where's that extra bit that can push you to the next level. level that you need, right? Very strong on tech. Let's talk about delivery, pitching, and finance. Very strong with people. Let's find out how we can work better with project management, that sort of thing to get you to the next level. And confidence all along in terms of giving them assignments that they prove to themselves they've succeeded at. So that's no longer something you think about, right?

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 13:35

That's interesting. Yeah, the motivation and drive coming from within is always a strong, you know, metric for being able to drive success in your career and otherwise. So that's good.

Nelly 13:48

And no one can take that away from you. That's the most important part. Wherever you travel, your successes come with you. And no one can come to you and say, I think less of you. That's fine. I know what I'm made of, right?

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 13:59

Yeah, that's awesome. Awesome. Sasha, so some public servants, including those who are neurodivergent, have trouble even recognising their own strengths as potential food points. How can someone work through that?

Sasha Russell 14:12

The.

Yeah, brill. So I think first of all, part of this is because many of us are brought up to not boast, not show off, because it's rude, again, in quotation marks. So it's kind of become ingrained in us not to speak openly about how and why we're good. Equally, lots of people do brilliant work all the time, accomplish great things, but don't pick up on it as a strength, because they just see it as I'm just doing my job.

Neurodivergent colleagues in particular, the trouble recognising their strengths is caused by that ability to really underplay your values and achievements. That's linked to things like shyness, self-esteem, social anxiety. As you saw, it made me cringe to read out my most memorable compliment, but also a really literal interpretation of the job and the expectations. So it's in my job description, it's expected of me. So it's not a big deal or it's not impressive, which obviously

isn't true. So regardless of who you are, how can you identify your strengths and use them? Firstly, ask other people, ask them. Other people often see our strengths way more clearly than we do. You can either formally ask for your feedback and make sure you get a range on who you are. So everyone has different experience than you. So people reporting into you, someone at your level, your leaders, etc. Or you can just informally ask colleagues, you know, what do you see as my specialisms?

Why do you enjoy working with me? What do I do well? And if you're still not sure then, and if you're neurodivergent, there's lots and lots of research out there about the strengths of neurodivergent people. Look it up, see what gels are you. JP Morgan, for example, found 140% more productive some neurodivergent people. You know, there's other research that talks about innovation, creativity, problem solving, hyper focus, etc.

But secondly, break down your tasks to identify the value. So you might view something as I just ran this working group when actually what you've done is organised and coordinated stakeholders, you've shown project and change management skills, you've coached people into making effective decisions, the list could go on, ownership, accountability, etc. So break them down.

find out what the impact was. And lastly, put regular time aside to write down your key wins, your achievements, so you can really easily identify what your strengths are. So even if that's just 5, 10 minutes a week or every other week, and diarize it so you actually do it, these things tend to get lost in our BAU. But log what you did, log the impact.

And if you keep logging your achievements like that consistently, you're going to be able to draw themes about what your potential strengths are. So in summary, sorry, because I'm a really quick talker, ask others for feedback. They might spot something you don't. Break your task down further to find the value in them, you know, describe the impact, the effects. And also just take time to regularly note what you've accomplished so you can draw from that. and really start to see themes around what your strengths are.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 16:54

I think that's awesome on the point about doing, you know, maybe a weekly review or, you know, just keeping a cadence where you're keeping track of the things that you do, because it generally is useful for your career, but also, you know, just reviewing when you move on something else, you can actually have that as a fallback. And also embracing the cringe, which is great.

It.

Awesome. Josh, people earlier in their careers often describe their work in quite general terms. What's the shift you're trying to get them to make, and what does a strong specific accomplishment statement actually look like?

Frame, Joshua (he-il/lui) 17:30

Absolutely. So I think part of the shift is getting away from that generalised information. So if we say on our resume that we're, you know, a great teammate, the general problem is no one thinks that they're a bad teammate. So it doesn't really tell you anything about that person. It's like saying, I know how to use MS Word. I mean, it's 26.

2026. So our general hope is that you would know how to use MS Word. So I think it's getting to something more specific. I'm a great teammate. I helped develop an onboarding programme for new employees, even just to your section. I mentored and coached a student who was working for the function over the summer.

You know, talking about something that's sort of more specific and getting out of that generalised information I think is key. And I think for folks newer in their career, sometimes it's hard to see their specific accomplishments within the context of a team. Even on teams sometimes where, you know, there are award-winning teams for this big project. It's hard for that person to see exactly what their role was.

and what their impact was. So I think it sort of speaks to Sasha's point earlier, you know, sort of write down your accomplishments, figure it out. I think everyone in the public service, everyone in any role, in any job across the world, should have a focus on making things a little bit better. It doesn't have to be transformational change.

but it should be taking the task and making it a little bit better. You know, that might be automating more of that task. That might be, you know, adding a technology lens that hadn't been applied before. Or it might just be, you know, making that, you know, report make more sense to those who need to read that report. So I think figuring out.

the impact of those accomplishments. And then I will also say, don't overstate. If you write something on a resume or in a job application that your manager or a senior leader would not agree with how you have described that experience, then you've gone far too far in terms of being your own biggest fan and not

being realistic in terms of what that actually accomplished. So if you're the most junior member of a team and you participated on a large project and you're stating your accomplishments as if you were the sole deliverer of that project, that's a problem. So just find some balance there between being able to properly.

state your impact and not overstating your impact.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 20:00

Yeah, I think that makes perfect sense. And your point about automating or finding ways to automate tasks as a software engineer, I can definitely confirm that's a great first step, but that's a great step. Awesome. Actually, continuing on that thread, Josh, if someone's accomplishment statement is technically accurate,

but doesn't land with senior audiences, what's usually missing and how could that, how could they close that gap?

Frame, Joshua (he-il/lui) 20:27

I guess I would say usually what's missing is they haven't sort of properly targeted their audience. So I see this when anyone shares an IT-based resume with me in government, and they have acronym after acronym after acronym. And with one candidate, I had to send it back to them and say,

Like, I'm relatively familiar with a lot of things IT and tech related, and I have no idea what you are talking about in your resume. But I also don't know if you're talking about very specific systems used by one agency or one department. And I know that any HR advisor who is going to look at this is going to think it's gibberish.

Unfortunately, you know, they could put it through co-pilot and say like, what does this mean? What are they talking about? But they shouldn't have to. So I think that's the that's the part that might not land with a senior audience is if you're talking about something very in very specific terms or using, you know, sort of lingo that doesn't make a lot of sense to an audience outside of that workload, then you need to generalise that a bit more. And you can go back to, you know, whether it's KPIs or, you know, something that can kind of describe like what was the financial impact of that project? What was the service impact of that project? You know, so on any workload, it might be, you know, sort of service to your audience. We were able to improve service delivery by 11% for this particular workload. We were able to save, you know, \$1,000,000. I had a programme where we sent out letters to taxpayers and it was basically informing them of a new programme that they didn't know about. and it saved the government \$11 million a year. So I highlight that very much on my resume to say, you know, we were able to increase the filing for this programme that saved the government \$11 million a year in perpetuity. And we did it by sending out letters that cost \$50,000. So that's a great return. I think anyone would take that return personally. But yeah, just make sure that you know the audience that you're trying to appeal to and that you're speaking the same language. Because the same applies to any workload. If you're talking about it too specifically, it's not going to reach the audience outside of that particular specialty.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 22:48

Yes, that makes sense. And I'm reminded about our slack. Sometimes for new joiners, there's a lot of acronyms being thrown around and they're just like, what are you talking about? But on the point about definitely highlighting the measurable impact that you've taken in projects, I think that's a really powerful thing, especially for. you know, people reviewing your CV or your experience. So yeah, definitely appreciate that.

Nelly 23:12

Lalifa, can I offer a slightly different perspective from the point of view of folks who work in places where you can't actually talk about the work? There are a few places where you would have delivered on amazing things. The public will never know about it because that's part of the design of the work, right? I work in the public security portfolio. When you don't hear from us, it's the good news, right?

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 23:16

Two.

Nelly 23:32

So in that case, like I understand the pain when applicants come and they're trying to kind of figure out how am I communicating my value. And what I want to say is focus on the problem that you're capable of solving. It doesn't have to be specific to this project or this discipline. You know, so you offer up what it is that you're able to do and anticipate what do you think the hiring committee, the senior manager, or the department is worried about over the next two to

five years. Let's say it's automation. Okay, so I'm able to break down processes and figure out what is better with human talent and what was better algorithmically sorted, you know. So it's easier for me to grasp on it, and I can ask you for examples that don't touch exactly on the work, but you're demonstrating your logic, how you got there, and what services you can bring with you without needing to go into particulars. Because a lot of folks think that's a prohibitive thing. We can't talk about the work, so we're not able to talk about our assets. But I think you need to switch the thinking into what is a problem that you can fix for me? How are you going to help me address automation, rise in cyber, you know, crime and so on? And that's what you can bring to the table confidently. And then I, as a hiring person, can ask you a series of questions to figure out, okay, they know what they're talking about. They know how to frame problems. And they very clearly understand service delivery because they came to me as a service provider. So I think that's the other side of the equation.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 24:59

That's a great point. Yeah, I think being able to demonstrate that systems thinking without necessarily going into the details of what you've specifically worked on, I think it would be helpful, definitely. Awesome. Just a reminder for people listening at home, if you have any questions, please do ask them and we'll cover them in the Q&A section.

Sticking with you, Nelly, are there any habits that public servants can start now that will make it easier to connect their day-to-day work to the outcomes leaders are paying attention to?

Nelly 25:33

Well, I left Sasha's point on writing a log of what you've contributed because I call that my Friday like shutdown ritual. It's what did I learn this week? What surprised me about this week? What am I proud of of what I've done, right? It's my like the last thing I do before I retire for the weekend, so to speak. It's that introspection.

But at the same time, I find articulating what is it that you're looking for, what is something you want to attain, what is something you want more experiences of, and coming to your managers or your directors with that direct ask. You know, I've worked a lot on, let's say, project management, but I'm a little bit wobbly in financial management. Do you have opportunities for me to bolster the skill set?

It's a lot easier for me to work with as a director than someone who says, I'm ready for the next challenge, which is great, everyone is, but what does that look like to you and how can I help you? Focusing your asks, and this is the part where you're walking the line between, I've mentioned what I've accomplished, so this is me promoting a little bit, and I'm asking you to help me fill the gaps and anything else you want to provide feedback on.

Sasha's point, what do you think I'm strong at? Do you think there are things that I need to work on so that I may move to the next level? Those are like, the more focused you are in how you phrase what is it that you're looking for, the more folks around you will be able to help. And if not me, then I can think of three other people I'll meet at a conference and say, hey, I met this person.

They were fantastic. How about I put you in touch together? Like also don't underestimate the workings of social currency, how much you put in, but I think the precision is the things missing.

And in the public service, we tend to think in abstract, big, lofty goals. I help keep the people safe, which is great.

But I need you to drill it down to if I took you out of this environment, put you somewhere else. And that's the advice I usually give everyone. Think tomorrow's your last day here. What are the top three skill sets? You're walking into a new office and saying, I'm really good at these three things. You can hire me to help you with this problem. Because we tend to think in those big, lofty goals and deliverables, and especially in policy over the long term, And the short term, meanwhile, requires actual day-to-day problem solving, tactile skill sets, and your ability to spot what's next. Excuse me. And from my experience in strategic foresight, I love people who already thought about a couple of other options in the future that they can offer solutions to. So should we go this route, let's say there's more budget cuts, I think we can do this project that will deliver on the goals. And in five years, if this is completely not possible, then I thought maybe we could look into that. So stay on top of the news and try to push the envelope a little bit into what is the future consequence of the developments you're seeing today.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 28:26

That's a good point. Yeah, because you oftentimes you might say, oh, here's a problem, here's a solution, but you might not be thinking, you know, two, three steps ahead because there might be something that comes up.

Nelly 28:38

And in policy, I do want you to show me that you've run three or four scenarios before even coming to me to say, yes, I thought about the, you know, socioeconomic impact. I've also thought about gender relations. I've also thought about this, because that shows me the strategy right up front. And guess what? It becomes one of the things I associate with you. Every time I see you walking past or on my Zoom screen, haha, he's quite a strategic thinker. I'm gonna ask him.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 29:00

Yeah, that's awesome. That's awesome. Thank you, Nellie. On to Sasha, progression processes are often designed, often aren't designed with neurodiverse people in mind. How does that shape the way neurodivergent public servants need to frame their impact to be recognised by senior audiences?

Sasha Russell 29:21

Such a good question. And I've said this to you before, I could easily, easily spend an hour doing a training session just on your inclusive recruitment. But I guess just to summarize, most progression or interview processes reward traits that are not often natural or easy for some neurodivergent people. So that could be things like confident and concise storytelling or interviews that focus on recall and short-term memory rather than the skills themselves. So firstly, learn the techniques that keep you concise. So in the UK, we use STAR, that's the best practise model for interview answers. So that's situations you give a bit about the background task, which is what you needed to do in that moment.

Action would be the, it says on the 10, the action you took and the result is kind of your impact. What changed? Why should leaders care about what you've done? So to begin with, when you're doing this, you might have to use a template just to ensure you are giving the right level of detail. You are doing the STANR. But once you've got that template, you can create a log of examples that you can use

going forward that have the correct technique that keep you concise. Ultimately, what you have to remember is senior leaders are looking for positive outcomes and impact. So whether that is happy customers, whether it's meeting budget, it could be upholding reputation, getting things done quickly and effectively. There's loads of stuff there. But if you don't explicitly link to outcomes and impact, your value can be missed, even if your work is great. So always, always, always give those results.

And secondly, if you're not confident in describing your impact, find ways to prove it instead. So take on development opportunities or activities that make your strengths shine. So that could be acting up, taking on more complex projects, joining working groups, going on to comments, tangible ways that demonstrate your potential, so your ability to take on that additional complexity.

as well as your performance. So gather that evidence to support what you are saying about your impact. And lastly, many progression systems and processes include things that are not inclusive or equitable for everyone. So it might be inaccessible application forms. It might be interview panels that aren't diverse. It could be using psychometric testing, which we know for a fact through research that neurodivergent people, as well as many other minority groups fare worse at. So it's important to advocate for yourself and for fair progression policies and processes for everyone. Part of this is asking for reasonable adjustments if you need them. So neurodivergent people often have to overcome barriers that other people don't. So make sure you have the support you need to thrive when you go into these. So to summarize,

Learn techniques that ensure you can present your impact concisely. So that might be STAR technique or a similar one like CAT. Use development opportunities, likes or comments, project work, etc. to prove that what you're saying about your potential is true and actually show it. And lastly, advocate for yourself. Advocate for inclusive processes. Ask for reasonable adjustments if you need them.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 32:11

Yeah, that's awesome, Sasha. I think the point about kind of showing your, you know, being able to present the thing that you're working on, because sometimes I'm guilty of this, the work, I don't know if anyone in that home has watched Severance from Apple TV, there's a quote, the work I do is mysterious and important.

But the thing is, you do need to, you know, explain why it's important, not necessarily why it's mysterious.

Sasha Russell 32:34

Yeah.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 32:38

Awesome. Thank you very much. Nelly, what impact can a sponsor or champion have on someone's career progression and how could someone go about finding one?

Nelly 32:52

Impact, I mean, massive impacts. And I need to tell you, if you are someone who identifies as a woman or a member of an underrepresented group, you are the one that needs that kind of access to a mentor to be able to push your agenda forward.

just because of the way the system is set up. It is improving, but we're still in different legacies of outdated thinking.

From how do you, let's go to the how do you find a mentor? You have to ask. Honestly, knock on 5 to 10 doors and one of them will absolutely want to mentor you. The thing about public service writ large is people want to give back. The whole point of signing up is you want to improve something.

the person you work with is also a citizen. He's part of the service you're trying to ameliorate. So when you come to someone and you're asking them to mentor you, try to find out what is something they're good at. Like you notice someone who happens to be fantastic at pitching, knock on their door and say, would you be available for maybe 30 hour windows every month to help me work on the skill set?

Go to someone else who's really good at project management. Go to someone else who's really good at HR, labour relations. And make the ask specific. Because again, when you go to someone and you say, can you mentor me, you think, I don't know, can I? Like, what is it that you're actually looking for? When you're coming in with a specific ask, up to and including, hello, I'm from a culturally different place where self-promotion is really taboo.

I've got this like 30 year thing where I can't just shake it off and you know the time it takes to apply to the next job. Can you coach me through your lived experience? Can you help me that way? Like make it easier for mentors to say yes, absolutely. And that you have to be proactive about it, right? Because it's a numbers game for directors. If you have a huge.

team, you're not likely to pick on the small signals of talent that you have. If someone comes to you proactively and there's a demonstrated volume of work, and I think we need to highlight it, right, make sure you're doing the work, not spending all the time talking about the work and not doing the work. So do that on that end. From the mentor perspective, first of all,

I challenge all managers at all times, do you know about your unconscious bias? Because it's designed for you not to be aware of it. But are you putting yourself in situations and opening the door for folks to tell you, I think you're making an assumption or the data doesn't support it. In the tech space, I have to be very careful about assumptions made about women over a certain age.

who are maybe allegedly not as fast as younger folks, right, which is technically not true. In my experience, I have not observed that. And so it's on me to make sure that opportunities are extended equally to all people who want to apply. And mentoring in that case looks like spending time, if it's my staff, one-on-one and getting to know what is it they actually want.

Because you also find some people are not interested

in advancement, they're really quite content where they are. And we're adding this pressure on them to be like, you got to keep aiming high and whatever. Some people are just not built for that. They don't want that. It's genuinely not a driver. Others are waiting for that question. And if

they've not been conditioned to talk about their work, then you're going to be able to notice, okay, we're going to work a little bit on your.

promotional aspects. We're going to figure out what are the files that are so important to you that your passion comes through and I can easily send you to any interviewer and you'll just pass. And what are other skills I can hands on coach you. But I think like on the mentor side, sometimes we give the managers carte blanche and we're too busy and overworked and whatever.

And it would be great if you mentored, but no, it's actually the job. It is on you as a manager to spot who needs mentoring. How can I be of assistance? Is there anything in my experience that I can openly share that will help one person get over an impediments they have? Or just find a way, even just asking them specifically, what is it that I can do for you this week?

Right? Like it's a small frame so they can tell you, I actually would love for you to be able to put me in touch with someone from IT. As simple as that, or something big and lofty. So it's on both ends. You have to come to a place where I understand what you want. On my end, I need to cheque for my biases to make sure I'm not overseeing, overlooking somebody. I need to deliberately create opportunities for people to share.

what they want in a way that feels safe for them. And I need to also understand when to back off. There's periods of time, like now is a good, like this is a good time to talk about how do you move around when promotions aren't there because budgets are frozen and, you know, we're entering a recession, we're not, you know. So what does that look like from a career development perspective when you know

We're not in a growth mode. And then you can mentor people through things like education, taking on courses, making sure you continue to build your own value so that when the moment comes, you already have that database of good things you've done and who you are. So I don't know if I've talked for too long, but it's a

It's A two-sided thing. We have to meet in the middle, but the managers need to step up quite a bit. You also need to look out for folks that are underrepresented and not advocated for in, you know, the boardrooms. You need to create more tables for people to join and learn. And on the other end of it, as an employee, tell me what is it I can help you with. And don't be afraid. the worst thing that can happen is someone will tell you, I don't have time for you. And I guarantee you, you will not lose a limb at the end of that day. So just keep knocking and don't shut like the door in your own face yourself. Other people will do that for you. Just make sure you knock and try to open that door.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 38:29

That's awesome. I think, yeah, it's a two-way st for both the managers, you know, looking for people that can step up to the opportunity as well as the person wanting to do that. And I think also coming with a specific ask is super useful because, you know, it helps, you know, in mentally for them, for the person you are helping, asking for help, kind of visualise if they can give that time investment. So

Yeah, that's great advice. Sasha, neurodiverse public servants navigating hierarchical or politically sensitive environments, what approaches help them present their value in a way that feels authentic rather than performative?

Sasha Russell 39:08

Well, this is actually a question we get loads in our neurodiversity network around performance review time and sort of proving your worth and make sure making sure you're doing it in the correct way. I think firstly, back to Josh's point, it's about being honest about your strengths and development areas. When I think about the world authenticity in this context, it's about making the areas that are strengths explicit.

and showing your specialism, but also acknowledging any development areas. And neurodivergent people often have what's called spiky profiles. So this means that they have very strong exceptional abilities in some areas, but have average or weak abilities in other parts. So it's like a spiky, there's peaks and troughs essentially. But everyone has development points. So if you're able to acknowledge them,

I'll be actively working on them or even better, you know, creating a plan to address them. And that might include reasonable adjustments. This shows self-awareness, it shows continuous improvement and those things of themselves are huge strengths. And secondly, again, exactly what Nellie and Joshua have been saying is use facts and evidence rather than opinions. Think about the key outcomes. So instead of

you know, I did really well on this project, give metrics. So my approach reduced the length of the project by 20% or I came in under budget 15% because those facts and evidence give much more credibility to what you're saying than anything else. So, you know, anyone with the best will in the world can slap I'm a hard worker down on an application, but not everyone can prove that.

And remember, it's not just your performance on your objectives that's important. It's also those behaviours and values too. So not just about the work you do, but also how you do that work that's important. So it might be that since you've been leading a team, there's been a massive increase, for example, in the employee engagement scores. That's hugely valuable. It might not be in a performance objective, but that's massive.

And lastly, it's just creating visibility of your value. So it doesn't have to be performative to what the question said. It doesn't have to be grand, but there's little things you can do, little breadcrumbs you can drop that show your impact and your value. So it might be sending short updates to your stakeholders every fortnight to say, you know, this is what I've done, this is why it matters, and this is the impact.

And what you're doing is building your profile with those stakeholders. You're helping them see you as more organised, more effective, more efficient, reliable, whatever it might be. But doing those little updates means that people who might not see you in your day-to-day can understand the value of what you're doing. So if you want to present your way, your value in a way that is authentic, I would really encourage you to be honest about your strengths and development areas. We all have

them. Remember that facts and evidence are the most important thing, rather than sort of throw away comments. And creating visibility of your value can be done without having to be performative or grand. It could be just regular little updates to stakeholders. And that will go a long way to securing, as Nellie said, when people see you, that whole piece around, oh yeah, that's the person who's got that strength, that kind of thing.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 42:00

Yeah, that's 100% point taken on that. I think surfacing your achievements or impact regular cadence, I think, is useful to stakeholders because the work is getting done. But if that's not being surfaced, then you know, they're not, it's not a top of mind, essentially. So And that's a very useful framing there. Over to Josh. How should someone adapt the way they talk about their impact depending on whether they're speaking to a line manager who knows their work closely versus a senior leader who doesn't?

Frame, Joshua (he-il/lui) 42:35

Yeah, so I think the aspect of this is like, if you're speaking to someone who knows the world closely, then it's really, if you're having a performance conversation with your manager and you're trying to sell them on like that, you've overperformed in the role, then you don't need to sell them on the context as much. You just need to sell them on you know, what impact you had and how did that differ from the year prior? How was your involvement in this making things better, as I mentioned before? So it's a different conversation. And, you know, that's a bit more straightforward to have. If you're speaking to a senior leader, I think for, especially for young public servants, but for public servants at every level, like you don't want to come off sounding ignorant about the organization. You will position yourself really well if you're talking to a deputy minister or you're talking to, you know, the clerk of the Privy Council or anyone in the senior leadership role, if you understand the larger organization.

So no matter what organisation they are leading, whether it's, you know, a sort of director role, director general, assistant deputy minister, deputy minister, if you understand beyond your sandbox how that organisation works, if you've read some of the corporate reports, if you know some of the government-wide priorities and you're able to speak to that, then no matter what stage you are at in your career, you will come off positively with a more senior audience. If you only really understand your sandbox, then it's not going to seem like you necessarily need to be identified for advancement opportunities. If you're not looking outside the organisation and saying, like, what are the best practises on this team or that team? How can we apply some lessons learned whether it's just another government agency or department, what they've done, what's advancing in this area? Like when we talk about IT and government, are you only looking at like what the team next to you is doing? Or are you looking at the agency? Or are you looking at the whole department? Are you looking at the whole government of Canada? Or are you looking internationally? And as you start to kind of like broaden your lens, then it starts to be more kind of palatable in terms of of having a conversation with the senior leader.

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 44:49

Yeah, I think that makes perfect sense. Just less thinking, less local and more, you know, slightly global in terms of the impact of your work, I think makes sense. And perhaps thinking about how the success criteria or how the outcome of the project affects the wider organisation and beyond, I think.

Yeah, I think that's an awesome take. Great. Thank you very much, Nelly, Sasha, and Josh. Those were all very helpful keys. I think the key takeaway for me is embrace the cringe.

Oliver Matikainen 45:24

Thanks so much, everyone. And thanks for all the questions the rest of you have added in the chat and the Q&A. Please keep them coming. Share any questions you have for today's speakers. We have a lot of them already, both pre-submitted questions and questions you've submitted now live in the Q&A. They're really great. Really looking forward to getting into them now.

Before we dive into your questions, I want to let you know that we've also created a great follow-on resource to today's topic that we think you would find really useful. It's a teaser lesson on unlocking the psychology of influence from one of the most popular courses here at Apolitical. So if you attended our recent event, How to Win Budget Approval, you may have already received this resource.

But to receive the link to the lesson, go to the career development community after the event and leave a comment on the post that's pinned right at the top of the page. Then we'll send you the resource by e-mail after the event. And my colleague will also post a link to that thread in the chat so you can open it and exit it.

After the event.

Great. So let's get into the Q&A. So we have lots of good questions from you. Josh, I'm going to start with a question for you. We have a question here in the Q&A. What advice would you give on making your impact known in your current organisation during times of extreme organisational change? So when there's a lot of other noise and things are changing a lot. and the leaders you are trying to speak to and get their attention are very busy focusing on all that change and all that noise and for good reasons. How would you go about navigating a situation like that to make your impact known?

Frame, Joshua (he-il/lui) 47:03

Yeah, I think part of this is maybe having realistic expectations of, you know, what the next 12 or 18 or 24 months looks like. I think certainly in Canada, across all orders of government, we are seeing this in terms of fiscal restraint, but I don't think in the UK or elsewhere you are exempt from that either. So

I think having realistic expectations in terms of like your career might not be advancing in terms of the level of the job that you're doing. Certainly we're seeing that in the federal government in Canada. Like we're reorganising A variety of like workforce adjustment scenarios in terms of people who potentially could lose their job. They are getting priority status on other positions. But across government, I think if you understand, you know, where it's going, and so, you know, fiscal restraint, I think, puts a damper on opportunities. So trying to, you know, get a promotion right now, probably globally in the public service, is very difficult.

But trying to get experience is not as difficult. So looking at sort of lateral opportunities can be a way to get a different set of experience. But understanding that in terms of like how you're positioning yourself, I wouldn't be positioning myself no matter what organisation I was working for.

in Canada right now for a promotional opportunity, unless it seemed like something that was happening, unless it seemed like an organisation was staffing up in particular areas. So yeah, I think understanding that context will help you to sort of position your ask.

And maybe, you know, it's getting more experience in a different area that you're trying to position. But just understand that like no one's getting, you know, huge promotional opportunities right now, at least in Canada, but certainly in many spots.

Oliver Matikainen 49:01

Thanks so much, Josh. And I feel like that links really well to what you said before, Sasha, about facts and evidence. So this is obviously both on your own personal side, but also around the context around you to see what context am I navigating and what is realistic for me to look for and what can I realistically achieve in a short time frame here?

So now we've covered the noise and the change that can be surrounding, but there are other things that can make it quite difficult. For example, a lot of work in government, the impact might take quite a long time to become visible or to realise that it might be hard to communicate that. So question for you, Nelly. How can you share the impact of activities and initiatives you work on, when the impact of those initiatives aren't realised for longer periods of time, sometimes even many years.

Nelly 49:51

You honestly could not have asked the worst panellists because I'm intrinsically motivated. Nobody can flatter me enough as me, and no one can criticise me harder than me. But I do have experience working on, I mean, when I worked at Centre for Foresight, I think they're called, and that used to be Policy Horizons. You're writing documents for folks that start 15 years from now.

So you're going to have to look at retrospect to find out how close the research was to what is going on today. I think this is where managers and directors and senior management can step in and create micro moments of recognition that are not about the public visibility of a program, let's say something that's going to really kick off in three years, but it's recognising the like motivation fatigue people have and how you can create opportunities to say, highlight an accomplishment on the team this week. Tell me your top 10 wins this month. Let's see if there's coverage about your file in the media, like just the topic. Is it still of relevance?

You have to create moments for people to continue buying into the excitement of the work, you know, just the interest in the topic long enough until you can measure it externally. And then you're able to talk about the profound effect you had. But so much of public service work is built into, we're doing our best. The results will be seen in retrospect.

It's on us to find moments where we understand the impact on the citizens will be in 10 years, but the impact on the team is within a month. The impact on me as a person is every day until I'm done working this project. And look for all of the blips where you feel you've contributed. This is why that Friday inventory of what am I proud of,

That's something that keeps me going because I will, some things I do, I will never see the results of in my lifetime, right? They're not, it's very likely I'll change jobs, I'll be interested in something else. It's just, it's not something I'm going to be able to see through and get the insider viewpoint. But it is important for me to create those moments of

You know, we had like a two-year tech project and sometimes it seemed like there is no light at the end of the tunnel. But you're doing a little win while. You're like, tell me about the funniest things that happened this week. Someone bought you lunch. Someone said you looked cool.

Someone said you're cringe. I don't, you know, tell me about that. Let's find opportunity. Tell me a cool thing you learned about the industry. That's another thing I do with folks.

I ask them to send me cool advancements in their fields externally so that we can be like, oh, is there a way we can learn from it? Can we adapt it? Impact known over a long period of time in the public service really is you having to track the public's interest in what you're doing and try to translate it into, well, what have I contributed to it?

Um, but I...

I think it's a lot easier to continue that momentum if you generate that point of like pride, interest, curiosity. How have I learned from the team? What is possible to be seen? What did the department make it into the news in a good way? That sort of thing. But

It's difficult with some things, like with foresight. I won't know, right? The world has changed so much since the pandemic and continues to evolve at a rate where it's difficult to point a single future with certainty. Geopolitics was not at all what we thought it would be two years from like before. So anything in terms of the impact you've had is going to be derailed by externalities that you had no hand in.

which is why you need to self-generate these moments of, we've made an impact as a team, I made an impact as a person. As a department, we continue to strive to make the impact. You have to have that faith that things are moving because you're putting work, otherwise, why are you working, right? And then managers can make it easier by relating to the team. You know what?

Oliver, today, you've made a difference in the way we talked about this thing. I really appreciate you doing that. And over the year, I've seen a lot of growth in the learning department, and I thank you for that. Like, that's another way we can do it from the other side, because there's so much we can't control. And we don't have, as far as I'm concerned, no one here has possession of a working crystal ball.

So we can't tell what the actual impact will look like, but we need to create that drive so that the public service piece continues to want to serve the public.

Oliver Matikainen 54:11

Thanks so much, Amelia. I really like the idea of a win wall and also to recognise that it doesn't have to be all the big headline impact numbers at the end of an initiative, but learning along the way count as well and can definitely go out on the win wall too.

Nelly 54:24

And interactions don't discount the fact that the interpersonal is actually what glues together people at times of severe corporate shocks.

Oliver Matikainen 54:35

Very, very good point. Thanks for adding that. Sasha, we got a question as well on...

What to do, what strategies can you use when you feel your contributions are being overlooked? Whether that's due to a manager who doesn't pay enough attention or due to your neurodiversity or what you call spiky profiles. What strategies can people use when they feel the contributions are overlooked?

Sasha Russell 54:56

Uh-huh.

I can't stress enough how powerful it is to get feedback from multiple sources. So if you feel you're being overlooked by your team, your manager, whatever, seek feedback from your other stakeholders who aren't on your team. Look for opportunities to shout out about yourself. We have in Government Jersey an e-mail that goes out weekly that sort of talks about our most powerful people.

Self-advocate. If you think that's you, put yourself forward. In this day and age, you have to take ownership for yourself. You have to be, as we've said already, your biggest fan. So you have to push past, again, hashtag embrace the cringe. Find those other routes of getting that recognition that you need. If you're not getting it from your manager, then if there's performance review processes, it could be caught up in that when you have HR reviews and leadership reviews of that, go to the next step above your manager, that's an option. But honestly, my big thing is just collecting that feedback more broadly, prove your value without having to get them involved. That would be my big piece of advice.

Oliver Matikainen 56:05

Thanks so much, Sasha, and perfectly ties in with the with your point, Amelia, about relationship, glue between people, ask for advice, get that input, get the facts and evidence right, like that that really helps a lot, even on your your shortcomings or the other the places where you you know you can improve. That self-awareness is a is a big strength as well to know where you can where you can improve and where you already am very strong.

Thank you so much. Those were all the questions we had time for in the Q&A. Really appreciate all the questions that came in. If you do have questions that we didn't have time to answer today, please go cheque out the community you'll find in the chat. And you can post your questions there and engage with hopefully both our speakers, but also a lot of other public servants who are in that community.

And will definitely have will resonate with the experiences that that I can see here in the in the question, so thank you so much for that.

Alicia, do you want to do the closing remarks?

Khalifa Idris — Apolitical 57:30

Thank you. Okay, so we've had some incredible wisdom from each of our speakers, and I'd like you all to join me in giving Sasha and Nelly and Josh a vertical round of applause.

And most importantly, thanks to you and audience investing in learning and being so engaged in this topic. The team is going to pull up a quick poll to find out how you felt about today, which will help us continue improving our content, and we really appreciate your responses.

Before you go, and while you're responding to that poll, I want to share a few more events that you can register for to join us again soon. If you're not available to be there live, remember that you can always register for the event in order to get sent the recording to catch up whenever suits you. For all of you policy makers in the room, you can join us next Wednesday for how to write the perfect policy brief.

where you'll hear expert advice on how to ensure your briefs get noticed. In 2 weeks, we have hacks for writing or working with Claude, if you'll also be writing, where you'll learn time-saving tips, whether you are a seasoned Claude user or brand new. That one's a key one because I love Claude.

And next month, join us for how to be a great facilitator, where an expert will teach you how to lead productive meetings where everyone feels heard.

Great. That is all the time we have for today. We do hope that you found it helpful and we want to say a huge thank you to our speakers and to everyone who's made today happen and for you for taking time out of your busy days. Keep an eye out for the e-mail coming your way with today's recording and resources. Don't forget to post to find my post in the community and we hope to see you at another Apolitical event very soon. Have a great day everyone. Goodbye.

Sasha Russell 59:23
Thankful.

stopped transcription