

Foreword

Assuming the role of government is a lot like a novice rider approaching a horse for the first time in that both take equal measures of firmness and sensitivity. One nears the animal (and the state) with purpose – after all, one should have maps and destinations – but not without intimidation. Here is the problem: the horse has a mind of its own, even though it is willing to recognize direction. Like the state, it has a powerful sense of itself, and, while it is sure-footed, it has an innate sense of risk and feels danger acutely. It can be obedient, but must feel that it is taking orders from a rider who knows what horses can do and cannot do.

So, here you are: approaching a horse you have never ridden. Actually, it is worse, because you likely may have never ridden any horse (or been in government). The first step, as in governing, is to control the head. One is always well advised to start with a mint to nudge the horse into believing that the process will be painless. After a good brushing of the animal, you stand next to it (always on its left – pay attention!), and in one fell swoop you hoist a saddle on its back (for your comfort, not the horse's), and secure it with a girth that fits under the belly. This installation of the “cabinet” must be done gently, so as not to alarm the horse with the revelation that its destiny is not all its choosing. With your back to the horse, you gently insert the bit (a cold steel bar) into the horse's mouth, hoping it will take it in, and not your hand. Carefully, you slip on the bridle over its sensitive nose and head, cautious not to pull the horse's mane. This is an important instrument of control on communications and priority setting: the bit plays the role of the Prime Minister's Office. You speak to the steed softly, encouraging, not threatening. You are slowly harnessing this ton of muscle, but you don't want to assert your authority too aggressively, not yet.

Once buckled in, that saddle must be mounted. Now comes the hard part, the phase of the exercise that can cause you real embarrassment. You put your foot in the left stirrup, grab the mane and the reins in your left hand, and jump up with all your might, swinging your right leg over the animal and hoping the process will land you in your seat. People are watching. The opposition is licking its wounds, but occasionally looks up, hoping you have missed your step, praying that you are not strong enough to lift yourself into the saddle. The media is quick to comment on every detail: your boots are cruddy, your horse's mane is messy, you look like you are going to fall off.

You have made it. You sit atop a still horse. Slowly, you grab the reins and begin your command. The horse does not move. Gently, squeezing your fingers only, you pull on the leather straps and make contact with the bit, forcing the animal's head to turn down slightly. Simultaneously, you are pressing the government's sides with your calves, showing it your political clout. You are nervous, but it would be your downfall if you showed it. You dig your heels a little and you pull harder, using your arms and shoulders as the PMO asserts itself on the beast's head and mouth. The horse moves, tentatively, experimenting with you. You have the reins. In Canada, you shall reign. Soon enough, you will be using your spurs and, likely, your whip.

This volume is about the art of getting on the horse of government and forcing it to move in a favoured direction. Readers could not be better served than by a winning coach in the art of "getting on the horse" and assuming power. David Zussman is a political horseman of the first order, but, better still, he is a generous instructor who shares his experience in detailing the steps to assuming the role of government at a time when the state is at its most vulnerable.

Canadians are very good in the art of government transition. Our culture, by and large, assumes a certain civility in this process, and the respect we give to democracy dictates that power will be surrendered quickly and without fuss. That being said, it has not always been a well-prepared exercise. Conscious of this reality, the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) published a breakthrough collection of essays under Donald Savoie's editorship in 1993. *Taking Power: Managing Government Transitions* was a bestseller; even ten years after publication IPAC received calls after elections from legislative libraries looking for photocopies to replace chapters that had been razored out of the volumes on their shelves. The book was very useful, but, with time, it was clear that the practice of government transitions

had evolved and that the sophistication of the exercise was no longer reflected in that great work.

Hence the turn to Zussman, the guru of transitions, who had participated in three himself and who had made a sport of watching others approaching their mount. Zussman invites his readers to consider the riders, the nature of the horses themselves, the variously good-willed attendants, and, not least, the spectators. He examines all the equipment, pointing out strengths and weaknesses, and suggests particular exercises that will strengthen the shoulders, the arms, the legs – all the right political body parts that communicate – and, most important, the mind that strategizes.

This volume is about politics, for sure, but more important it is about governing. Any student of politics and government will win in reading this book, but just as importantly public servants will benefit greatly from its how-to features. Zussman demonstrates that the keys to success are careful preparation and the need to surround the process with people – politicians and public servants – who have been there, and who have observed horse behaviour up close, so to speak, for many years.

A great coach is a great teacher, and in this book readers get both. David Zussman is that trainer, a scholar-practitioner par excellence, a mandarin of the finest ancient Chinese traditions. Combining the sharp eye of a keen student of politics with the skills and knowledge of public administration, Zussman delivers here a bible for assuming power. By carefully detailing the steps, he presents a product distilled from years of experience and research in all the Canadian capitals. With this book, he serves the public administration and the political community exceptionally well. More than that, he serves Canadian democracy.

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