

10 TIPS FOR TACKLING TOUGH ISSUES

1. If it's honorable, it's tolerable. Challenging professional issues are unavoidable, but usually manageable and character-building; bad judgment and ethical lapses are avoidable and usually unmanageable and character-destroying.
2. Tackling the Toughest Issues R-Us. Guess what? We are hired to tackle tough issues – it's who we are (a cat that gets himself out-on-a-limb, won't do himself any good by wishing he were a dog).
3. Brand your tough issues to make them fun and exciting. Reframe the problem to boil it down to its gut level public policy/professional essence. It will feel more like an opportunity, a challenge, a mission – and less like torture, torment, “politics”, conflict, bureaucracy.
4. Take a smart team along for the adventure. Don't be a lone ranger. Nearly all challenges are made easier, more rewarding and more fun by tapping the knowledge, skills, abilities and advice of others.
5. And don't be afraid to let the “dragons” in, too. The “toughest issues” usually start with some kind of opposition and conflict. Don't keep opponents at bay. Get to know them and involve them in the process and outcome. You might find that they are really not opponents after all.
6. Develop a plan and be strategic. Flexibility is good, but don't try to muddle your way through a tough problem or “make it up as you go.” Develop a written plan by asking – and answering – some fundamental questions at the beginning.
7. Think of it as an exciting chapter in your life story. Keep a journal. It will provide perspective, a place to vent and a healthy reminder that your life is not dull. (Imagine reading a biography about someone who faced no tough issues).
8. Have a robust sense of humor. Take the problem seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously. Help others have fun, too. But don't drink the cynicism cool-aid! Cynicism is organizational poison.
9. Celebrate successes along the way – even small ones. This will help you and your fellow travelers feel better about your challenges, the courage and commitment being shown, and the progress that you are making (even if slow).
10. Stay true to your core values (Do you know what they are?). Remember, if your challenge is honorable, it's tolerable. It will make you stronger and wiser – and give you some interesting life stories to tell some day.