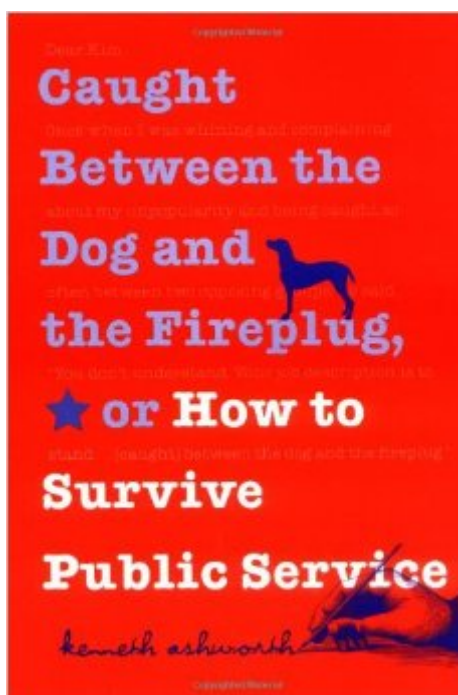


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# Caught Between The Dog And The Fireplug, Or How To Survive Public Service (Text Teach / Policies)



## Synopsis

Replete with practical advice for anyone considering a career in federal, state, or local government, *Caught between the Dog and the Fireplug, or How to Survive Public Service* conveys what life is really like in a public service job. The book is written as a series of lively, entertaining letters of advice from a sympathetic uncle to a niece or nephew embarking on a government career. Kenneth Ashworth draws on more than forty years of public sector experience to provide advice on the daily challenges that future public servants can expect to face: working with politicians, bureaucracy, and the press; dealing with unpleasant and difficult people; leading supervisors as well as subordinates; and maintaining high ethical standards. Ashworth relates anecdotes from his jobs in Texas, California, and Washington, D.C., that illustrate with humor and wit fundamental concepts of public administration. Be prepared, says Ashworth, to encounter all sorts of unexpected situations, from the hostile to the bizarre, from the intimidating to the outrageous. He shows that in the confrontational world of public policymaking and program implementation, a successful career demands disciplined, informed thought, intellectual and personal growth, and broad reading. He demonstrates how, despite the inevitable inefficiencies of a democratic society, those working to shape policy in large organizations can nonetheless effect significant change—and even have fun along the way. The book will interest students and teachers of public administration, public affairs, policy development, leadership, or higher education administration. Ashworth's advice will also appeal to anyone who has ever been caught in a tight spot while working in government service.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an excellent book for beginning students of public administration or practitioners new to public service. It makes an excellent companion to an introductory textbook in Public Administration or American Government. Ashworth wrote the book as a series of letters to a niece who has decided to enter public service as a career. Each letter covers a theme of public service from an experienced practitioner's viewpoint, and is jam packed with useful advice. I especially found Ashworth's reflections on the political nature of public service useful and insightful. I have very few problems with this book. One problem is that some of the chapters ramble, just like a real letter would. This makes each chapter very readable and a welcomed break from the dry approach most textbooks take to the subject. This is why it makes an excellent supplementary text to an introductory public administration textbook. However, this approach might make it difficult for students to remember the insights and practical advice of each letter. Another problem is that a few of Ashworth's reflections are superficial. For example, his chapter on ethics comes across to me as pontification, not unlike a good person who has rarely studied the foundations of ethics, but now ponders such questions after a successful and fulfilling career. I have found that older professors in universities often believe they are qualified to teach ethics merely because they have lived a long time and want to indulge in some personal reflections. They ask questions about ethics without taking a disciplined approach to discover how others have attempted to answer such questions or why they reached their conclusions. Then, such professors make some remarks about their own ethics, leaving the foundational questions unanswered. In other words, the assumption made is that we need to be good and assume the great ethical questions do not need to be answered. This unstructured approach may reflect many people's approach to ethics. However, ethics is a discipline that, while being more like an art and than a science, is more structured and logical than Ashworth seems to indicate (for a better approach to public ethics, I recommend *Practical Ethics in Public Administration* by Dean Geuras and Charles Garofalo, or for a more academic approach, *Ethics in the Public Service*, by the same authors). As a result of his approach, I didn't find this chapter in his book very useful. Still, it is one small chapter out of a larger selection of excellent reflections about government service. So, I strongly recommend this book for its practical advice and insights into the everyday workings of government. I use it as a required supplementary text in my introductory public administration courses.

Excellent read. It was an assignment for a course in Public Administration, however, I kept it due to the information for survival. I will pick it up & read some of the sections I have marked. They are often helpful with many situations. I highly recommend this book for anyone venturing into management or public service.

If I didn't need this book for class I would have never purchased it. The author rambles in circles with a bunch of common sense theories and no solid scholarly terms or theories. Lots of "he said, she said"

Ashworth is writing to the imaginary, gender neutral Kim about public service. But he isn't very service-minded. The sub-title, "how to survive public service," should have been "how to survive when you have a public service position." The guy just doesn't seem to have gone into it as much for service as for glory or as a stepping stone to a better job. It doesn't help that the voice is very much like the title character in *The Screwtape Letters*, which led to my reading it with irony. I kept thinking I was reading "Brutus is an honorable man," or "A Modest Proposal" or any of those other things where the writer means the exact opposite and expects you to know it.

In his book "Caught between the dog and the fireplug", Ashworth has managed to take the sometimes boring subject of public service and made it humorous and anecdotal. Definitely a worthwhile reading for any student of public administration and especially beneficial to me, since I am involved in the educational field of public sector. It gives us real life applications of public administration theories and models used to formulate public policies by the author and behind the scenes look at public policy in the making. Ashworth feels the pressures of being a public servant who is required to serve the needs of the people but is at the same time has to answer to the requests of elected officials who are "never equal" in status to a public servant. It gives credence to theories by many experts who believe that elaborate constraints on public managers deprive them of authority to carry out their jobs and frustrate them professionally. In spite of this the author continues to do his job the best he can inside of the constraints of his domain and manages to influence public policy to benefit the public that he serves from the "bottom-up".

I'm currently in a masters program for public administration (I had four years in the field before heading back to school, so there's a bit of practical knowledge in my head as well). I'm about

half-way through the book and have enjoyed each chapter. A lot of what Mr. Ashworth recommends gels with what I've learned or had supervisors tell me in the past. These are highly-linked skills with a public sector position and would help anyone jumping into the fray. If there is one gripe with the book, it's that it is frequently focused on a federal level of gov't interaction. Not all public servants will be sitting before legislatures, senate committees, etc. It would be nice to get more insight from the local (i.e. city manager, city council etc.) level. However, it seems that Mr. Ashworth spent a great deal of his career at this federal level and it is perhaps what he relates with the most.

Thank You Mr. Ashworth for giving public administration students a "real" viewpoint. So many times as students we are bombarded with the rosier pictures of the field that we have chosen. While it is discouraging to know that there is much to overcome as a public administrator, I have a renewed fervor to see it through. I can hope that those whom your book was read by walked away with the many jewels that it had to offer. You are very funny and honest Thank You.

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