



Ugh bureaucracy...

It's everywhere.

I don't know about you, but I sure feel like I spend a lot of time being herded into queues. Veterans use an old cliché, "Hurry up and wait." We rush to school, the bank, the doctor's office, to get a license or a permit in this never-ending hope to be the first person in a line to wait. And wait. And maybe wait in a new room or different chair.

Why do we even need bureaucracy? Ugh.

Bureaucracies are older than you might think. Bureaucrats in most societies across time and geography are tied to one of three things: managing food storage, supplying a military, or (re)distributing wealth or food by a religious order. Bureaucracies are both machines of governance and not the government itself. The epitome of sustainable bureaucracy? Star Trek. Go on, Trekkies. Think about it for a minute.

The thing is (Star Trek aside), most of us hate the experience of a bureaucracy. We hate being the customer petitioning the bureaucrat. We hate being bureaucrats--or at least popular media says we hate both sides of it. The beleaguered bureaucrat is iconic enough to get reliable laughs in children's movies. Think of Roz, the raspy-voiced yet monotone character in Disney-Pixar's 2001 film, *Monsters, Inc.* More recently, Disney relied on the trope again in the enduringly meme-able scene where the main characters encounter Flash the Sloth at the DMV in *Zootopia* (2016).

The jokes work because no one has a good time on either side of a bureaucratic exchange. Right?

The fact is, we rely on bureaucratic processes and civil servants who make them work because they are infinitely more efficient than life without them. Is it possible for bureaucracies to not eat away at the souls of people on both sides of the plexiglass divider?

I think that there was an unintended consequence of bureaucracies. At some point, the people at the top figured out that if a policy is bad, they can blame the policy. It becomes nobody's fault, just bad policy. Policies can be fixed. Processes can be fixed.

Somewhere along the way, people start serving the systems instead of the system serving the people. We need to make systems and processes work for us, for people. It doesn't matter if it worked before; it only matters if now it isn't working well.

Are your clients and customers feeling served by your systems? Are your employees and peers? Are you? Maybe it's time to look for inefficiencies, gaps, and pain points in your systems and policies. Do you know what works well and why it works for you, your coworkers, and customers?

At the risk of citing yet another meme-able classic film moment, I have a particular set of skills. ... It's just helping you ensure your processes work for you.