

Morning everyone my name is Alex Benay, I'm the chief information officer of Canada here in London with the apolitical gang this morning and they asked me to talk about leadership for about 10 minutes so which I guess is going to be a really hard thing to do because it's ten minutes so a little bit of context we all know the world is changing super quickly if you believe the hype we're in the middle of a fourth Industrial Revolution we're talking about things like warp drives being tested out of NASA for the you Star Trek fans we've teleported atoms we're talking about life spans of 120 years and IQs of a thousand thanks to implants and then we have sort of how government operates within that context and typically how governments operated and since we're both Westminster systems it can be quite slow and daunting and when you're in a country like Canada that has federal provincial and municipal level government it makes things very federated which is wonderful democracy but it's also very challenging to navigate and do quick turns in the context of everything that's going on in the world around us whether that's privacy whether that's an artificial intelligence so so leadership in that context becomes very different than the leadership pre fourth Industrial Revolution so I'm gonna talk about four quick things I'm gonna talk about letting it go I'm going to talk about hippos I'm gonna talk about Nike and I'm gonna give you a donkey story at the end of this and then we're gonna try to wrap all of that up in the next eight minutes on leadership so let's start with letting it go if you are a public sector leader.

I implore you first of all to let go of everything you've ever learned around public sector governance not because it's all wrong but because it's actually not a bad starting premise assume that because of the last five to ten years in the pace of change that's going on around the world around us that everything you've been taught is wrong and that's not to say again I will repeat that everything you do or everything you've thought had been learned or have learned is wrong it's mostly around the fact that everything you've learned yesterday is no longer applicable today because things are changing so quickly so learn to let it go okay let go of everything you've been told let go of the box the structure that government has imposed on people and think very very differently because that's how every other sector is thinking. I guarantee you that the folks at the Hilton Telles did not think that three people in their basement would create Airbnb which would disrupt their entire industry and we seem to think that public sector and government has a grip on citizens and has a monopoly on citizens so let's not be the next sort of platform economy victim and think about the problem set very very differently so yourself as a leader whether you're a permanent secretary deputy minister or a manager or even an individual contributor you have to let go of the box in the structure that's been imposed on you in the last 150 years because the world is very different okay so that's the first thing let it go so I guess I'm ripping off Walt Disney and Elsa and the song let it go to make your morning wonderful and have this super annoying song in your head.

So the second thing is hippos. The highest paid person's opinion in the room if you are a leader you must learn to not be that we still often associate knowledge experience with hierarchy in the public sector or as in in the private sector anywhere else in the world it's the developers that are leading the world now the trick is finding the right balance because a developer that doesn't really care about policy or social inclusion or privacy or other things can be very very dangerous in today's day and age so we

have to find the right balance but the automatic assumption that you are the highest paid person's opinion in the room because of public sector hierarchy means that you'll probably address the problem set the wrong way so we have to find a way to get more people around the table from tech in policy discussions we have to find a way to get more policy people in tech discussions there's multidisciplinary of any single issue is is you're now got 10 people around the table as opposed to historically you would have had one or two so do not be a hippo do not be the highest-paid person in the room the highest paid person's opinion in the room that cannot dictate sort of the solution to a problem in today's day and age in the public sector context.

Thirdly the Nike part that I talked about so we need to get to a place where we stop seeing policy as the sacred sort of cow in every single organization because the importance of doing is overtaking the importance of that we had talks and this you know two years to develop the right policy and the impacts on citizen I could get three programmers in a basement and completely turn over an entire industry in six months think think of uber for example so as the public sector is talking about this uber for two to three years worldwide has been disrupting the transportation sector and while it took governments both municipal regional or national and a significant amount of time to kind of wrap their heads around the policy problem someone went out and did it to them right so we have to get away from the policy lens being sort of the sacred cow of public sector and actually start valuing doing things more than policy and I'm not saying the policy people don't do things please don't misquote me I'm simply saying that if you are a policy person you need to consider the pace of change that we've just talked about and often that will happen in the technology space so that will require something very different from our public service it will require the courage to act faster without always having all the data and trying to stay ahead of things Facebook Cambridge analytical as an example how do you react to that and how do you react not in five years but in fact in five weeks so it is a very different space for a policymakers again we'll get back to the point of multidisciplinary if you are a leader you need to bring all of these perspectives to your table immediately not wait not do things in a linear fashion but crash these opinions and these things together and we have to get to a point where the doing actually influences the policy cycle a heck of a lot quicker in light of everything else going around us because if we do not do that things will happen to us things we don't want to have happen to us or to our citizens so it's very imperative that we get into sort of a just do it mode and as opposed to a linear sort of discussion traditional policy lens.

Lastly a story I promised you a donkey story so this is a story of a young man and his grandfather walking to the village with their donkey the the old man the grandfather is in his 90s very frail so rides the donkey as the boy walks beside him and walks towards the village to go to the market as they're walking to the village people they pass people and they start those these people start commenting on how it's horrible that the old man is making the young boy walk beside him as he's riding the donkey so the old man hears this decides to get off the donkey put the young boy on the donkey and they start walking towards the village as they continue walking towards the Villa they pass another group that starts to talk away and say how horrible it is for this young boy to be making this old man walk beside him as the young boy is riding the donkey so the young boy and the old man hear this they decide to both ride the donkey together that way they should be okay they passed a third group of

people on their way to the village who says how horrible it is for two people to be riding a donkey and how horrible it is for the donkey to carry such a heavy load so they both decide to get off the donkey pass a fourth group of villagers on the way to the village which says how stupid these two people are to have a perfectly good donkey and actually not be riding it on the way to the village so at this point the grandfather and the young boy are very perplexed very confused start crossing your bridge and decide that well you know what they will carry the donkey because then that should resolve everyone's problems on their way across this bridge however the donkey falls out of their hands because they're both fairly either you're old or too young and falls off the river and drowns and the donkey dies so the moral of this story here as a leader is you will never bring everyone along for the journey we have a myth in the public sector that we have to bring everyone along to change things and actually that's not how it works you have to try to absolutely bring as many people as you can and build consensus those are all democratic values that do not go away but the concept and the fallacy that you have to bring everyone along or you have to listen to everyone's opinion as you go along means that you will never change anything right it will be impossible to bring everyone along so we may as well admit it take the hard decisions make the hard choices do the thing right make sure you got a multidisciplinary team and actually act because you will never ever ever be able to bring everyone along because if not you're not changing anything it is actually a paradox it's actually however you want to describe it but it is literally impossible so please if you are a leader in the public sector and you're being told to try to bring everyone along you need to know that that is an impossible task that is another word for just don't do anything don't rock the boat right so what you want to try to do is actually make sure you bring as many people as you can don't listen to the critics actually have the conviction to do the thing or I talk to the people take other people's opinions regardless of where they sit in the organisation and let go of everything you've ever learned because tomorrow everything will be completely different.