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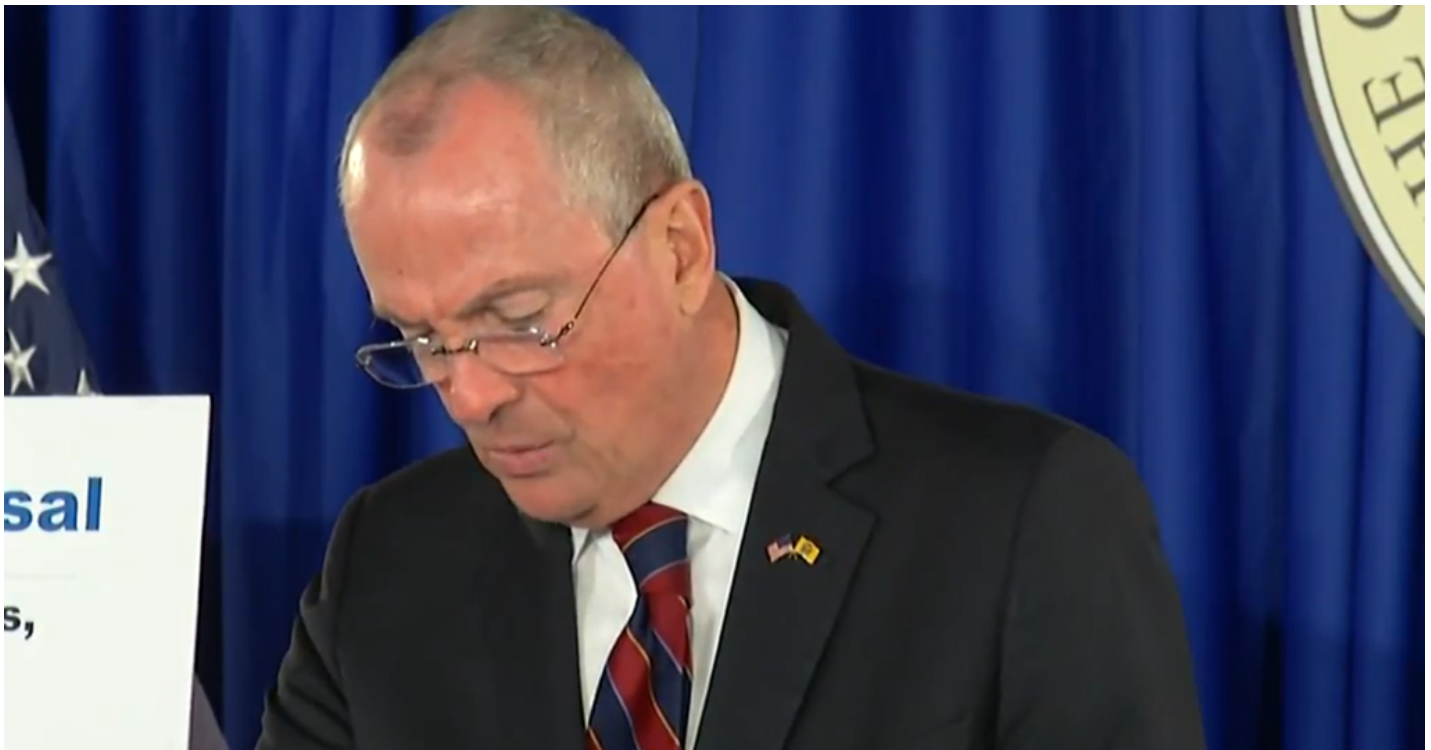
Don't Embarrass the Boss. Ever.

By Carl Golden | March 4, 2019, 1:36 pm | in **Edward Edwards**
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There are a few basic, largely common sense rules governing the personal and professional conduct of individuals entrusted with the responsibilities of cabinet and sub-cabinet officials as well as top level governor's office staff.

Some go without saying (don't get arrested, for instance) others are self-evident (don't drink yourself into a falling down stupor at fund raisers), and others merely call for common sense judgment (if you drive a state-issued vehicle, don't park in front of a

massage parlor at noon on a workday).

There is, though, one simple overarching, never to be disregarded rule: Don't embarrass the boss. Ever.

Recent history suggests the avoid embarrassment directive was missing from the new employee welcoming kit distributed at the outset of Gov. Phil Murphy' Administration 14 months ago.

Consider:

*The rolling public relations disaster produced by the bungling of the sexual assault allegations lodged against a Murphy campaign official and his subsequent appointment to a top-level position at the Schools Development Authority.

*The revelation that the executive director of that Authority had purged 38 career employees and, in what appears to be a case of patronage run wild, replaced them with relatives, friends, and previous co-workers and associates whose qualifications are somewhat dicey.

*The failure to respond rapidly and effectively to a mid-November snowstorm that stranded thousands of motorists for hours and kept students overnight in a school, exacerbated by the disclosure that while the storm paralyzed a large swath of the state, the governor was enjoying dinner in an upscale restaurant near his home.

*Spending nearly one-third of the State of the State address to belabor the state's tax incentive program, claiming that \$11 billion had been committed to lure business development or location, funds which could have been used for aid to education or the public pension system or transportation system subsidies when, in reality, the \$11 billion represented future tax credit commitments rather than hard cash allocations.

*The appointment of a former Passaic City Councilman to a position in the Department of Education, even though he was barred from holding public office because of a Federal conviction and prison term for accepting bribes.

As publicly embarrassing as these incidents are, they also portray an Administration unable to foresee potential problems or to act decisively when confronted with situations that demand a determined and confident response.

It is an Administration which seems flustered, constantly behind the curve, reacting to developments rather than controlling them.

For instance, Murphy, asked about the allegations of out of control patronage at the SDA, replied that his Administration "was trying to figure out what was going on there," a response that only solidified the perception of a failure to manage government effectively.

For months, the Administration insisted that it acted properly and in accordance with regulatory restrictions in dealing with the accusation that Albert Alvarez, a campaign official, had raped another campaign worker, Katie Brennan, in April of 2017, and that its hands were tied in any effort to investigate further before Alvarez was hired.

It took only four hours for their argument and rationale to be totally demolished by an employment law expert from Seton Hall University who testified before a **select legislative investigating committee** that nothing stood in the way of a review of the assault allegations, nor was there any legitimate reason to withhold the information from the governor.

To this day, the committee has been unable to discover who approved Alvarez' appointment and, given the denials by all the governor's staff witnesses, it's likely to remain a mystery, adding to the embarrassment factor.

The governor blamed the less than robust response to the November snowstorm on inept weather forecasters — an excuse which satisfied no one and brought withering criticism down on his head from the National Weather Service.

His attack on the state's tax incentive program was long on hyperbole and short on accuracy, a deficiency which could have been easily foreseen and cured by more rigorous research and advice from those involved in the program. It came across as an overreach, a search for a political headline rather than a carefully thought out plan for greater oversight of the state's efforts to foster economic development and business growth.

At the core of these instances of official embarrassment lies a serious lack of political judgment and instinct, qualities honed and absorbed by experience on the part of those who've walked through the fire of campaigns or have held positions of political leadership, who understand and appreciate the wisdom of people who deal with the fundamentals at the heart of political reality and who are willing to share that wisdom.

The turmoil and upheaval which characterize New Jersey politics — all politics for that matter — cannot be learned or understood from a book; it must be lived and those who have lived it should be appreciated and viewed with respect.

History has it that Lyndon Johnson, following the first meeting of the Kennedy Administration cabinet, took to bragging to House Speaker Sam Rayburn about the White House staff of advisers from Harvard and other prestigious academic institutions and think tanks.

"You may be right and they may be every bit as brilliant as you say," Rayburn is said to have replied, "but I'd feel a whole lot better about them if just one of them had run for sheriff once."

His point was unmistakable, and Murphy could benefit from the old Speaker's advice.

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