

## The Lefebvre Austruther Maingy Questionnaire

Leslie Pal

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From 2001 to 2005, he was Director of the School of Public Policy and Administration. He was the Director of the Canadian Parliamentary Internship Programme from 1998 to 2001. Currently, he is co-Director of the Centre on Governance and Public Management at Carleton University, and is also the Chair of the Accreditation Board of the Canadian Association of Programs in Public Administration.

*Lefebvre Austruther Maingy was a Canadian federal civil servant circa 1885. Little is known about him, but if we could travel back in time, we would ask him the following questions.*

### What traits do you most admire in a policymaker?

The combination of vision, intuition, and organizational skill. Most people have one or the other, but to combine them is rare. Really good policymakers can see beneath the surface and imagine aspects of a problem in original and arresting ways. But then they can also follow through on the organizational dimension.

### What traits do you most admire in a politician?

Civility. It is so easy (and natural and understandable) to be blindly partisan. A measure of calm, and a balanced engagement would improve politics immensely.

### What traits do you most despise in a policymaker?

Pure careerism. Making policy for the government and public means affecting people's lives both in the short- and the long-term. It's a big responsibility, and you have to keep your eye on the public interest, however one would have to wrestle to define what that is.

**What traits do you most despise in a politician?**

Arrogance and a sense of prickly entitlement. We have come to use the term “public servant” only for appointed officials, but it actually includes elected officials as well. How many think of themselves as “servants”?

**What advice would you give a young policymaker?**

Three points. First, never turn anything down in the early days. It can be exhausting, but you can learn so much from different assignments and tasks—even ones that seem menial. You build networks and skills, and a certain resilience, that will stand you well throughout your career. It means late nights and filled weekends, but it builds foundations. Second, find a good mentor. There are lots of programs now to do this, and fortunately there are many senior officials who understand the importance of bringing on the next generation. But not everyone is good at it. This links with the first point—if you are out there, taking on projects, you will connect with someone or come to someone’s notice. Third, look for “stretch assignments” that take you out of your comfort zone.

**Who is your favourite author?**

On the popular social science side, I really like Gladwell, and he has introduced me to Gary Klein’s work. I’m increasingly interested in decision-making, and that takes you into more of the psychology literature. Fiction? Carl Hiaasen is consistently good for lighter fare, but Cormac McCarthy is the king. To read the rich density of *Blood Meridian* and then the stark prose of *The Road*—the guy can write.

**What's your idea of happiness?**

I travel quite a bit these days, and everything seems so rushed with work and writing. I love visiting a new city, getting up early in the morning, and just walking through it for a few hours. I like observing a new landscape, different customs—no agenda, meetings, deliverables—just a stroll.

**What do you hate the most?**

I try not to hate anything, and have tried to remove that word from my vocabulary. That’s not political correctness, which I detest...but I don’t hate it.

**What is your present state of mind?**

Thoughtful, since I am writing this. I have a big trip tomorrow, so I am thinking of packing, lists, how I got to this part of my life, finishing a paper tomorrow morning in three hours while I find time to pack, then a meeting, then catch the plane to Frankfurt at 5:15. Pretty normal.

**What is your favourite food?**

Kraft single slices (thin, not thick). My family thinks I am crazy (“they probably sweep the crumbs of real cheese off the floor to make this stuff”), but I grew up with it.

**What is your favourite drink?**

About three mornings a week, I will buzz up a yogurt shake with banana, frozen fruit, juice. Sublime.

**What talent do you wish you had?**

Easy language acquisition. I’m trying to learn a new language (I picked one of three toughest), and I realize that I have no natural talent. It’s going to be work.

**Who most inspires you?**

As saccharine as it sounds, my mother. Not a strong person in the conventional sense, but with an implacable love that never wavered, whatever her dumb kids threw at her. She’s still around at 80, and I see the arc of a generational effect from her parents, to her, to me, to my kids.

**If you could make one overnight change in government, what would it be?**

I would like to see the Speaker read a poem to the House once each week. Poems about love, conflict, hate, longing, anticipation and disappointment, loss, want, touch and connection.

I was once the Director of the Parliamentary Internship Program, and we had study tours each year. Once we went to the Flemish parliament, which is filled with art—even the committee rooms have original, unobtrusive, but powerful pieces. This reflected the Flemish artistic sensibility, and when I asked the guide, she told me: “We also want to put art in the legislature, to remind the politicians that there is a bigger world out there, and they are only one part of it.”