

EP08 P1: CLAUDETTE MILLER

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

00:00:01 **Katie Jensen**

Applaud is proud to showcase the dedication of those who make decisions for the greater good and strive to leave the world a better place for all Canadians. All personal views expressed by guests and our hosts are their own. Applaud will continue to recognize those in public service, offer a kaleidoscope of perspectives and operate in good faith to build trust with Applaud members and all public citizens.

00:00:31 **Claudette Miller**

You must always be relentless in your pursuit of what you want to accomplish. The world is not without challenges, and no matter where you go, you are going to encounter challenges. But you cannot let negative things that come against you deter you from your calling.

00:00:53 **Katie Jensen**

I'm Katie Jensen and this is The Path of Public Service from Applaud, celebrating people who have spent their lives working in Ontario's public sector.

00:01:03 **Claudette Miller**

My name is **Claudette Miller**. I worked at the Ontario public sector for over 30 years, working my way up from an

Administrative Assistant all the way up to the corporate operations manager for the Civil Law Division in the Ministry of the Attorney General.

00:01:25 **Katie Jensen**

Claudette spent her career working in administrative, managerial and operations roles.

00:01:30 **Claudette Miller**

And there were many of my staff that would come to me for advice, especially in the role that they saw me, as they wanted to know how I was able to get into management, what are some of the challenges that I faced. And I just shared my experience with them and helped them to understand some of the pathway that they needed to take for themselves, that was a good listener.

00:01:52 **Katie Jensen**

And advice for working on policies that may take decades to complete.

00:01:56 **Claudette Miller**

The disappointment does come, because especially I've invested so much time on this and you really want to see this policy implemented and implemented soon. But you're also aware that sometimes there's politics

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that's going on. It may not happen, or it may take a longer time.

00:02:14 **Katie Jensen**

We started by exploring Claudette's family life and her family's connection to working in public service.

00:02:20 **Claudette Miller**

My mother, she was a postmistress in Jamaica. So basically she had a I would call an excellent career where she worked in various branches of the post office, which would be the federal government. She was away from home a lot because she was traveling all the islands, being at different places.

00:02:41 **Claudette Miller**

And so I spent a lot of time with my great grand aunt and great grand uncle who were instrumental in raising us. As well my grandfather, who is my father's father. He also worked as a tax collector at the tax department, where he was responsible for collecting property taxes.

00:03:03 **Claudette Miller**

So therefore, it's not unusual then that I would have entered public service here in Canada, although I had not planned on doing so. It just happened that way.

In terms of my early life, I immigrated from Jamaica to Canada.

00:03:23 **Claudette Miller**

I went to high school here, Kitchener Collegiate Institute, as well as called Collegiate Institute, completing my Grade 13 diploma. And after that I took a year off to work and following that year I went to the University of Western Ontario where I completed a Bachelor of Arts in Administrative Office Management Studies.

00:03:51 **Claudette Miller**

Following that, I worked at the University of Western Ontario itself in the Human resources department as a summer intern where I worked in both the staffing and recruitment area as well as the benefits area. From my program at the University of Western Ontario, it was a program that was highly subsidized by IBM Canada and Procter and Gamble. And so a majority of the graduates from that program would find employment with those two employees.

00:04:25 **Claudette Miller**

I had worked there as a summer intern and I truly liked the company and the office automation that they were undertaking during that time. When I

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graduated, unfortunately, IBM was now facing great competition from the PC computers and so they lost a very important contract and as a result IBM did not hire any students from the program.

While I was working at the University of Western Ontario, I noticed there was a paper at the time called Job Mart, and as well the topical, and there are a number of government jobs that were advertised In those newspapers.

00:05:09 **Claudette Miller**

Being in HR, and I developed a fondness for it, I decided to apply to one of those positions there and that's how I was able to get my foot into the government.

00:05:21 **Katie Jensen**

Tell me a little bit more about that first job. What was your experience like?

00:05:25 **Claudette Miller**

The real title was Secretary to the Director of the Robarts School, at the Ministry of Education in London Ontario. And that role provided a wide variety of administrative support to the director as well as the business manager and audiologist and a psychologist. Because

it was The Robarts School, there were various audio transcriptions that I did.

00:05:52 **Claudette Miller**

But I also got involved in composing letters for the director, making his travel arrangements, reconciling travel expenses, and attending meetings, giving ideas for improvement, etc.

00:06:07 **Katie Jensen**

Then you moved on to your next position. What was that opportunity?

00:06:10 **Claudette Miller**

That's when I came to Toronto. And when I came to Toronto then I was successful in a competition for a position of administrative assistant to another director with the Ministry of Energy.

00:06:25 **Claudette Miller**

And that is where my, I guess, supervising experience began. I had one junior administrative assistant that I supervised and again it was a wide range of administrative support to the director and staff. And there are various professionals, policy advisors, that were working for the director at the time.

00:06:46 **Claudette Miller**

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So I helped in providing support to them. We had a wide range of attending meetings and taking minutes and transcribing minutes, making travel arrangements, composing correspondents, supervising the administrative assistant, and just all the duties that would be assigned to me as an administrative assistant during that time.

00:07:10 **Katie Jensen**

For someone who's thinking of becoming an administrative assistant within the public sector today, would you say that the landscape and the technology changes would make their job completely different now, to how you were working in those first few roles 20-30 years ago?

00:07:23 **Claudette Miller**

Oh yes, their jobs would definitely be different, because here everybody has their own computer, you have all the different software which can help you so much in accomplishing your work.

I remember when I started out, you had copy typing basically and you had, for example, forms with maybe four or five pages. So if you made a mistake, it was starting all over again or using the white-out to get rid of mistakes or anything like

that you would make. So most definitely would be a lot easier.

00:07:53 **Katie Jensen**

You were able to move across many ministries in your time in the Ontario Public Service. Can you share an overview of the roles you've had?

00:08:00 **Claudette Miller**

I advanced my career through various positions, moving out of the administrative stream and into management. For example, I was the office manager of the Legal Services branch for the Ministry of the Attorney General, and I supported on three different experiences.

00:08:21 **Claudette Miller**

I was first with what was called Human Resources Management Secretariat, which doesn't exist today.

00:08:27 **Claudette Miller**

Then I worked with the Ministry of Government Services and then with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. And those were all in the legal services branch in the Ministry of the Attorney General.

00:08:42 **Claudette Miller**

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Following those positions, I then became manager of finance in the Finance Office in the Court Services Division for the Ministry of the Attorney General. Then from there I became the manager of divisional administration, which was with the Ministry of the Environment.

00:09:01 **Claudette Miller**

Following that position, I moved on to manager of administration and planning with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. My next position after that was manager of Central Control Unit with the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. And I ended my career as the corporate operations manager for the Civil Law Division in the Ministry of the Attorney General.

00:09:27 **Katie Jensen**

And I'm sure that you got to experience the evolution of the landscape going from copy typing to personal computers over your tenure. How did you deal with the changing technology throughout your career?

00:09:37 **Claudette Miller**

For most of the time, I was excited about technology changes. I especially

like the business process reengineering that happened at the Ministry of the Attorney General. For example, there was an office called the writs office and where you would have just people coming in and going to a counter to have everything being done manually for them. With the automation that was put in place, they now had terminals and they could actually go to the terminals and look up various information for themselves. When counter clerks in the court services area, when they received all their terminals, they now had computers where they could input a lot of these transactions instead of doing them manually.

00:10:23 **Claudette Miller**

I think one of the systems for me that I found challenging and frustrating was the IFIS integrated information systems. That was the big financial control system for the OPS. That one was very challenging because there are so many different facets to it, and it just seemed that every time something was fixed, something else always came up that needed more attention, and I had responsibility in that area. Yeah. So that one was a challenge.

00:10:50 **Katie Jensen**

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Would you say that the Ontario Public Service is future-seeking and proactive in adopting new processes or technologies?

00:10:56 **Claudette Miller**

Yes, yes. Well, definitely Ontario Public Services have come a long way, and they are certainly a great tech company here with a lot of technology to help staff in terms of doing their work better and even to serve the public better. Because that's the whole idea, we're serving the public so we should be at the forefront to provide these services as best as we can. So there have been a lot of improvement technologically to make all the systems and the workplace a better place.

00:11:26 **Katie Jensen**

Can you share how it feels to work on policy that directly helps and supports people? I'm curious what you keep in mind when you're working on policies that are more tangible.

00:11:33 **Claudette Miller**

For me to work on policies like employment equity policy and pay equity policy, it was very important. Because we know, we face, certain challenges in the workplace, and we

need policies to put in place to change some of these inequities that exist. And so when I can work on a policy that will achieve that, to gain equity or equality among the different types of people in the workplace, that gives me great joy or satisfaction to know that I'm working on something that is going to make a difference in the long run.

00:12:18 **Katie Jensen**

You mentioned working on the pay equity policy. Can you walk me through what an average day in your role was like when you were working on that project?

00:12:24 **Claudette Miller**

Pay equity was very busy, as one can imagine, and I provided administrative support to the pay equity director and managers, as well as policy advisors. But of course, as I volunteered for this project as well, I would contact individuals and ask them to participate in focus groups in order for the consultants to collect data to develop their reports and their findings for the project.

00:12:56 **Katie Jensen**

We know that certain policies can take many, many decades to complete, and

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you may come on midway through knowing that you might never see the implementation of that policy. How do you keep motivated when working on these longer term projects?

00:13:07 **Claudette Miller**

That one can be very challenging. Because you know, we're human beings with emotions, and sometimes the disappointment does come. Because especially if you invested so much time on this and you really want to see this policy implemented and implemented soon, but you're also aware, but sometimes there's politics that's going on, it may not happen, or it may take a longer time.

00:13:34 **Claudette Miller**

But for me, I take satisfaction that I did my best and I don't have control over everything. So whatever is in my control, that I do very well. Whatever it's out of my control, that I have to leave it to the other person to make that judgment call in terms of what they're going to do with our policy at that time.

00:13:54 **Katie Jensen**

Speaking of the politics, how do you navigate changing governments while still doing the same job? Particularly in a

case where a policy has been canceled or changed significantly with the new government?

00:14:05 **Claudette Miller**

One of the things that I found quite challenging was when there was a program changed sometimes which involved surplusing an employee, and I've been through that myself as well, you know, being surplus. I've had my position surplus in the Ontario government.

00:14:24 **Claudette Miller**

And so, it's very difficult when you've got to tell the staff that their position is being surplus and they're basically out of a job. But I always did that with a lot of empathy. And of course, there's always the resources to help the employee in terms of transitioning into another position if that is what they choose to do, that's fine, or if they wish to exit the service. So I always demonstrate lot of empathy and understanding when I had to surplus staff.

00:14:58 **Katie Jensen**

Did you have other opportunities to directly manage and support not only surplus employees, but colleagues

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transitioning to other roles for different reasons, or brand new staff?

00:15:07 **Claudette Miller**

Well definitely. As a manager, it's not just managing, it's also mentoring your staff. And there were many of my staff that would come to me for advice, especially in the role that they saw me as. They wanted to know how I was able to get into management, what are some of the challenges I face, what did I do, for example. And I just shared my experience with them and help them to understand sort of the pathway that they needed to take for themselves. I was a good listener and they could always confide in me whatever they say would stay with me, for example. And so they built up a lot of trust with me. And so I had a trusting relationship as a mentor with a lot of my staff.

00:15:49 **Katie Jensen**

Were there instances where you felt like you were mentored and well supported?

00:15:52 **Claudette Miller**

Yes, yes, there were times I felt I was mentored and supported my role. And I had some very good managers. And I also had the opportunity to take various

courses throughout the Ontario public sector and those were very good.

00:16:07 **Katie Jensen**

It sounds like you have the ability to try new things and get inventive within some of your roles. Can you share how you essentially built the NSF check project to withhold service?

00:16:16 **Claudette Miller**

So in my role as manager of finance at the Ministry of the Attorney General, there was a lot of outstanding debts that clients would write NSF checks per se. And of course, there were some companies where they use numbered companies, they could now quickly gave a name change. So where this company would have this numbered company under this particular number, the next time they come for service it would be a different number for example. So that was the way of getting around not paying for the service that they received. So one of my challenges was to see how we could reduce the NSF account, so that so much money was not being outstanding to the government. And so with my staff we brainstormed, and then I landed on this idea that, you know what,

00:17:14 **Claudette Miller**

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How about if we just have a list of all the different companies that have given NSF checks and still have an outstanding balance to be paid. And when these companies come for service, each counter clerk would now go through this particular list, and if their name appeared on the list, then the service would be denied them until they made payment or made arrangements for that payment to be made. I discussed that with my court services manager at the time, and we were all in agreement that this would be a good approach to help to reduce the NSF accounts. And it did, because if you knew you had an outstanding amount and you knew you need to come to court for a particular service to get a certificate or a particular transaction done, then you know you're going to pay up the money in order for you to receive the new service that you need, right? Because if you don't, that is going to create problems in your business because you cannot move forward with all these particular documents from the Ministry of the Attorney General.

00:18:33 **Katie Jensen**

This has been part one of our conversation with **Claudette Miller**. In Part 2, Claudette shares what she's learned in her career.

00:18:40 **Claudette Miller**

Communication skills, interpersonal skills, being resilient, just learning to get along with a whole different lot of people.

00:18:50 **Katie Jensen**

On remembering that the world of public service can be a smaller one than one might think.

00:18:54 **Claudette Miller**

And an organization like this, there are many people who are related that you would never know that these people are related. They may be husbands and wife, or brother and sister.

00:19:04 **Katie Jensen**

And a tip that might be useful for graduating students.

00:19:07 **Claudette Miller**

When you get into any organization, get to understand the culture. Find people that will help to guide you and to show you the rope, so to speak, in any new environment.

00:19:24 **Katie Jensen**

Thanks for listening. Applaud is proud to showcase the dedication of those who make decisions for the greater good and

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for all Canadians.

00:19:34 **Katie Jensen**

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will continue to recognize those in public
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