"Rightsizing state government." That's what it says, right there in Andrew Cuomo's "The New N.Y. Agenda: A Plan for Action."

What a great idea! Who can't get behind that?

However, if the governor-elect isn't careful, he runs the risk of making other goals in the agenda more difficult, even impossible, to achieve. In particular, the goals of "Addressing the State's Human Capital Crisis" and "Restoring the Reputation of Public Service."

The New N.Y. Agenda says restoring "prestige to public service" is a top priority and will help address those last two items. Restoring that prestige starts with restoring self-respect to the state work force.

It's not that the people in the state work force didn't come into the field with a strong sense of self. Many, in fact, were and still are truly committed to their fields and to public service. They share a strong desire to make society better.

However, over the last 30 years the incessant messages about the lack of value of government and public service has taken its toll. Especially since some of those messages have been sent by their very leaders, both presidents and governors.

What does all this mean?

It means that in our interconnected world, addressing one goal in the plan will impact another. In this case, it means how the new administration goes about determining "rightsizing" and "retrenches and reorganizes" will send a loud and clear message about the value it places on its most important asset: those dedicated, everyday workers who have chosen public service as their profession.

And, simply put, if the work force doesn't feel valued, nothing else will change. Not the culture, not the self-image, not the state's human capital crisis and not the reputation of public service.

Right now, it looks like the way the new governor will go about "rightsizing" is through something called the Spending and Government Efficiency Commission -- the SAGE Commission, for short. And let's hope commission members are because we all have a lot riding on this.

So here's hoping the commission is sage enough to:
Know what it doesn't know. The commission members, who will be "the best private sector minds" aided by "distinguished" private sector individuals with expertise in all aspects of re-structuring, have to understand the public sector has a different culture. They need to learn about it before they tinker with it.

Know that government isn't a business and shouldn't be viewed as one. Government's mission is to provide for society's members. That mandate is broad and starkly different from the more singularly focused mission of private sector organizations which is to make a profit by getting goods to the marketplace before the competition does.

Know that commission members must expand their view. They must reach out to public-sector organization experts, those who do know the culture and how the parts fit together. There are people who have been looking at the way the many systems that comprise New York state government operate and interact, and understand their complexities. Their input would be invaluable.

Know that across-the-board cuts don't respect the intricate web of programs that often cross over traditional organizational lines and programs. And recognize that you can't just lop off programs like over grown shrubs. There are unintended, and often negative, consequences from such actions.

Listen first and then listen a little more before they act. There are many stories to hear to help them understand the living fabric of the state system. They should bring together the many groups that receive state services: citizens, advocacy groups and the business community.

Know that the employees are not the problem. They are simply operating in the organizations and communication structures that are generally the outcome of politic considerations and not public management thinking.

Involv[e] state employees at all levels. There is a golden opportunity to show employees they are valued and provide the commission with an important "on the ground" perspective.

See that no one has more at stake than the state work force. After all, it's their jobs and personal security we're talking about.

Remember, they're taxpayers, too. And truth be known, many are as frustrated with the dysfunction and inefficiency as anyone else. If you think it's maddening watching this stuff go on when you're on the outside looking in, imagine what it's like when you have an inside view.

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PULLOUT:

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