

# Soulless in the city? An insider's guide to surviving Washington

By Rick Klein, Olivier Knox, Richard Coolidge, Jordyn Phelps & Ali Dukakis

## Top Line

Is it possible to succeed in Washington, D.C. and keep your soul at the same time? One longtime Beltway insider has written a book aimed at helping those who want to try.

Communications consultant Torie Clarke, perhaps best known for her role batting back reporters' questions as the assistant secretary of defense for public affairs to Donald Rumsfeld, has published "A Survivor's Guide to Washington: How to Succeed Without Losing Your Soul."

At the top of Clarke's rules of the road: "Suck it up or pack it up."

Clarke once packed it up herself, when she resigned from her post at the Pentagon in 2003. But she maintains that her time working for the Defense Department was the highlight of her career, citing her role in a program to embed journalists with troops during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"When I look back on my time there, I like to think about how I, with a lot of really talented people and some enlightened leadership, had the most transparent administration in the Department of Defense ever," she said. "Nobody had ever before taken almost a thousand journalists and put them, as we said, at the pointed end of the spear. ... People may have agreed or disagreed, but we weren't hiding anything."

Clarke also warns her readers against finding themselves in one of two particular groups.

She describes the first group as "mattress mice."

"Mattress mice are those people, and there are thousands and thousands of them, and they scurry around," Clarke said. "The faster somebody scurries down the hallway the less likely it is that he's actually doing anything meaningful. They're just trying to demonstrate some sense of importance through energy, which is not true."

And the second group, as Clarke dubs them, is the "village of the damned."

This group, described tongue-in-cheek by the former Rumsfeld aide, includes the "thousands and thousands of people who have been on the receiving end of thousands and thousands of Don Rumsfeld's snowflakes."

"Rumsfeld snowflakes," Clarke explained, are memos that the former secretary of defense would send to his staff to get answers on the issues that mattered most to him.

"It's an absolutely brilliant managerial tool to keep other people working off your inbox," Clarke admitted. "And that's the way it should be."

While Clarke said many of the snowflakes she received dealt with significant issues, such as whether the U.S. should modify its policy on terrorist detainees in 2003, others were painfully minute.

"[An] insignificant -- but in my case, painful -- example, 'Who the heck set me up for this ridiculous photo shoot with Vanity Fair,'" she recalled one snowflake saying. "In any situation, there was an expectation that these snowflakes would be responded to and dealt with immediately."

But Clarke found a way to take power back into her own hands, admitting that she was guilty of pilfering snowflakes from Rumsfeld's file that were directed at her. "Confession is good for the soul," she said.

But stealing snowflakes doesn't hold a candle to another sin Clarke owns up to in her book.

Following a TV appearance alongside former comedian and now Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., Clarke stole Franken's limousine for the day.

Franken, to Clarke's memory, "hijack[ed] every line of conversation" during the taping. And after storming out of the studio into a rainy New York City, a fuming Clarke was presented with an opportunity to get back at Franken.

"As I'm standing there, swearing and ticked off that I've wasted my morning doing this, this beautiful limo pulls up, and the window comes down and the driver looks up at me, and he goes, 'Franken?' And I went 'Yeah,'" she said. "Now I owe Al – Senator Franken – a car ride, I think."

For more of the interview with Clarke, including her advice on how and when to appear on late night television comedy shows, watch this episode of "Top Line."

*ABC News' Gary Westphalen, Jim Martin and Mary Quinn contributed to this episode.*

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