**Association Newsmakers – Ivan Adler – Oct. 4, 2016**

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**D:** How do politics, campaigns, and partisanship impact executive recruitment? That’s the focus of this edition of the award-winning series, Association Newsmakers.

To hear from someone who knows the answer, we are pleased to welcome Ivan Adler, a principal at The McCormick Group, where he specialized for 17 years in placing senior executives in GR and in public affairs. Ivan is widely recognized as an expert in lobbying and government relations and is often quoted in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Politico*, and *Roll Call*. He has a passion for politics, knows the ins and outs of Capitol Hill, and has a wide network of bipartisan contacts in the legislative and executive branches of government. Welcome, Ivan, to Association Newsmakers.

**I:** Thanks, David, it’s great to be here with you.

**D:** So as we’re moving into an election, how does the executive search community view politics, partisanship, the election, and how does that impact someone looking to move up in an organization?

**I:** Well, first of all, it’s probably the Christmastime for headhunting because change is the best thing that can happen. It’s also great for candidates and companies alike because there is going to be a changing of the guard which means that there will be [a] biblical-proportion game of musical chairs; so jobs will become open and people will move from place to place into the government, out of the government. That revolving door will spin, and it’s just a great, great time to be in Washington.

**D:** What tips would you offer executives who want to advance their career, given the partisanship we often see in Washington, DC today?

**I:** Yeah, it’s a very good question. You know, it’s hard to be everything to all people. I think that the key factor [is] that people have to make sure that they maintain at least a semblance of being able to get along with the other side. You don’t have to necessarily believe everything and advocate that, but you do have to not have doors slam, you do have to be invited to the meetings. And so partisanship, although it’s prevalent, maybe can’t be beat but can be dealt with if we do that.

**D:** Typically, do organizations wait until after the election to hire?

**I:** So summer in Washington, for me, has been a time of meeting with a variety of clients who are waiting for the election in order to start making decisions on who to hire. Organizations that are more political – that really depends on Democrat or Republican at the helm – are waiting because they want to be sure before they make a decision.

**D:** Ivan, typically do organizations wait until after election results to fill positions, and if so, what should individuals be doing to prepare themselves for a successful placement?

**I:** Well I think there’s – in the government affairs space – there are five things that people have to do really well in order to be hired. And politics is one of them. They have to know people, process, policy, politics, and press. And the more you know those five things, the better your chances are of being hired, and politics is one of those five P’s.

**D:** And of the five […] are they of equal weight? Do you need to be better at one thing or another or is it just a combination of the package is what makes the most attractive?

**I:** I think it depends on what you want to do in government affairs. There are situations where the people you know are more important than the policy you know, and there are times when the substance is more important than the policy, so that it really depends on the career you want to have. I think those people that are most valued in this town, David, know those five P’s really well.

**D:** What advice would you offer those who have been active partisans to remain true to their principals yet demonstrate an ability to work with all sides?

**I:** Well, I think you need to find the right environment where you can be true to your ideals and make a living, and there are plenty of examples in Washington, especially in the association world, where they’ll have Democrats and Republicans who will cover both of those parties and do so in a way that you would never think they could get along but they do. So I think it’s a case of just finding the right spot. You can be true to yourself in this town pretty easy if you think about it.

**D:** In this period of political turmoil what should executives avoid in order to stay top of mind with headhunters?

**I:** One thing you should totally avoid is drinking and then posting on social media. It’s amazing, David. You know, it seems like such an easy thing but in Washington where socializing is part of the game, people tend to overindulge and then get on social media and express themselves. I beg people; you know, friends don’t let friends post drunk. You have to be able to make sure that because what you say now remains out there forever, and a small mistake can hurt you because companies are looking into those sorts of things and making sure that there’s no red flags out there and you haven’t said anything that is going to embarrass them or the organization.

**D:** Yeah, and I suspect in the competitive role that takes place in hiring in government relations people, an inappropriate comment or inappropriate social media posting or something could basically take you off the list rather than put you on the list.

**I:** That’s correct. One of the easiest ways to be taken off the list is post something offensive or that’s embarrassing on social media. Both headhunters and companies, associations are all looking and you will be disqualified pretty quickly if they tend to find something that they feel is offense.

**D:** So I’m a GR professional, I want to move up after the election, I understand I have to wait until the outcome of the election to see how the environment is set. What other two or three tips might you offer them to kind of prepare themselves now to be ready for post-election activity?

**I:** Well, there’s two things. One is: you’ve got to continue to network. You always have to dig your well before you’re thirsty so that you have the contacts that once it’s time you can go to and have help. The other is: you want to know what you want to do. Government affairs is a broad field, and it’s becoming broader and broader with the advent of bringing in public affairs and strategic communications in this. So you have to find, I think, where your piece is in this ecology of Washington. And that requires some forethought.

**D:** Well, thank you Ivan for being with us today.

**I:** My pleasure, thanks for having me, David.

**D:** And thank you for joining us on Association Newsmakers. We look forward to seeing you again soon.