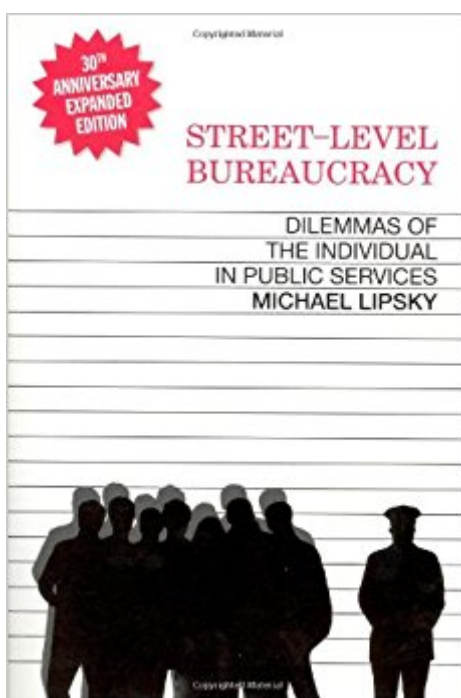


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# Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas Of The Individual In Public Service, 30th Anniversary Expanded Edition



## Synopsis

First published in 1980, *Street-Level Bureaucracy* received critical acclaim for its insightful study of how public service workers, in effect, function as policy decision makers, as they wield their considerable discretion in the day-to-day implementation of public programs. Three decades later, the need to bolster the availability and effectiveness of healthcare, social services, education, and law enforcement is as urgent as ever. In this thirtieth anniversary expanded edition, Michael Lipsky revisits the territory he mapped out in the first edition to reflect on significant policy developments over the last several decades. Despite the difficulties of managing these front-line workers, he shows how street-level bureaucracies can be and regularly are brought into line with public purposes. Street-level bureaucrats—from teachers and police officers to social workers and legal-aid lawyers—interact directly with the public and so represent the frontlines of government policy. In *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, Lipsky argues that these relatively low-level public service employees labor under huge caseloads, ambiguous agency goals, and inadequate resources. When combined with substantial discretionary authority and the requirement to interpret policy on a case-by-case basis, the difference between government policy in theory and policy in practice can be substantial and troubling. The core dilemma of street-level bureaucrats is that they are supposed to help people or make decisions about them on the basis of individual cases, yet the structure of their jobs makes this impossible. Instead, they are forced to adopt practices such as rationing resources, screening applicants for qualities their organizations favor, “rubberstamping” applications, and routinizing client interactions by imposing the uniformities of mass processing on situations requiring human responsiveness. Occasionally, such strategies work out in favor of the client. But the cumulative effect of street-level decisions made on the basis of routines and simplifications about clients can reroute the intended direction of policy, undermining citizens’ expectations of evenhanded treatment. This seminal, award-winning study tells a cautionary tale of how decisions made by overburdened workers translate into ad-hoc policy adaptations that impact people’s lives and life opportunities. Lipsky maintains, however, that these problems are not insurmountable. Over the years, public managers have developed ways to bring street-level performance more in line with agency goals. This expanded edition of *Street-Level Bureaucracy* underscores that, despite its challenging nature, street-level work can be made to conform to higher expectations of public service.

## Book Information

Paperback: 299 pages

Publisher: Russell Sage Foundation; 30 Anv Exp edition (April 8, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0871545446

ISBN-13: 978-0871545442

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.2 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 17 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #51,201 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > United States > Local #51 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Public Affairs & Administration #63 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Social Policy

## Customer Reviews

MICHAEL LIPSKY is senior program director of Demos, a non-partisan public policy research and advocacy organization, and an affiliate professor at Georgetown University.

Bought this book for a course given the same name as this book that outright said that almost the entire course was built around reading and understanding the content of this book. Book focuses on street level bureaucrats (Paid professionals who work with some form of clientele directly, yet still maintains a high level of discretion on how they may do their job), this ranges from teachers to police offices to almost any other form of public servant. As a result, you get the final part of the story, the point of view that is very rarely ever reported on. After reading this book, anyone from an Anti-Government Tea-Party member to a Socialist that believes that the Government should control everything, will reevaluate their view on public servants and government involvement in their lives. To this day I still use terminology and ideas gleaned from this book, to very good effect in both the purposes of customer service and interfacing with public servants while they are on the job. Highly recommended read, especially for the price.

Lipsky compiles a great analysis of the average "street-level" bureaucrat. He describes how their freedom to utilize discretion to function and survive within their job parameters and resources. He argues how various barriers, both perceived and real affect the average public worker and change their ability to do their job as well as potential solutions to these barriers. This text will be useful for

anyone needing to compile research on the subject of "street-level" public servants. However the writing is very dry and repetitive so the average reader will likely find the subject matter uninteresting.

Great book.

Libsky's book is a must read to anyone who specializes or interested in public administration or personnel management.

I read an essay by Lipsky for one of my grad school classes and I immediately fell in love with his writing. I have this book sitting in my office. I grab it from time to time and pull from it. Great book!

Great analysis and good read!

Brilliant and ground-breaking. Incredibly accessible.

Great book for anyone looking for theory in regards to discretionary power of civil servant positions making decisions regarding sanctions and services for clients.

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