

DAVID S.T. MATKIN

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Twenty-First-Century Career Leaders

DWIGHT INK

Much has been written about desirable personal characteristics of public leaders, both political and career. These vary dramatically from person to person, from time to time, and from location to location; so much so that I leave to others the daunting task of finding the characteristics most often possessed by effective leaders. A smaller body of literature relates to external factors that have an impact on the effectiveness of leaders. In this chapter, I focus on external factors that limit the effectiveness of federal career leaders as we move into the twenty-first century. The potential impact of these limiting factors is not something of which the public is aware except in emergencies or times of scandal. Yet their day-to-day cost to the taxpayers, and the unnecessary loss of life and property during major crises they may cause, should be of great concern to our citizens.

There is general agreement that in the twenty-first century we will face complex circumstances that require far quicker government responses than before, more innovation, more coordination, and the capacity to address new challenges that may be so serious they threaten the very existence of our society. Since we seem to have had difficulty meeting a number of our twentieth-century challenges, it would appear that we need all the resources and talent we can muster to meet the more difficult problems of this new century. An important step will be utilizing our career leaders to the fullest in responding to future challenges. Especially critical will be their role in crises such as a possible nuclear detonation in New York City that is ten or a hundred times more powerful than the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs combined, an earthquake in Los Angeles of the magnitude that struck Alaska in 1964, or the economic disaster that a powerful, hostile Asia might trigger in another generation or two.

Today I believe we have a wonderful reservoir of talent within our Senior Executive Service (SES) and lower-level federal managers. But how well do circumstances permit this talent to be fully developed and utilized in meeting the formidable challenges of the future? It is my view that our ability to tap this enormous human resource is declining significantly.

In this chapter, I explore factors that increasingly limit the effectiveness of our career leadership that is so vital to our national well-being, and I conclude with a suggestion for beginning to reverse this course.

Preoccupation with Reinvention

One of the strengths of the United States is that throughout our history, we have looked with optimism to the future. We continuously strive to innovate and try new things in nearly every aspect of human endeavor. Our political process reinforces this behavior in government because each new mayor, governor, and president is eager to claim credit for his or her initiatives that are presumably much better than were those of a predecessor. But in the federal government, the downside to this admirable trait often restricts operational leaders when the need to explore various options is needed most. We unnecessarily limit our range of useful approaches to new problems with our preoccupation with the latest well-publicized idea that often contains more rhetoric than substance, and which frequently requires devoting enormous amounts of time and money striving to reinvent what has already been developed. We can easily recall the resources devoted to Planning Programming Budgeting System (PPBS), Zero-Based Budgeting (ZBB), Total Quality Management (TQM), and National Performance Review (NPR). Each of these had value, but I would argue that none drew effectively on earlier lessons, thereby detracting from their potential contribution.

In rejecting serious consideration of past lessons learned as too outdated to build upon or adapt to current challenges, we unintentionally limit the potential contribution of our career leaders. We are often told that the beginning of the twenty-first century is a period of unusual change, a period of transformation, which by definition requires entirely different concepts. New challenges are said to require abandoning old ideas and substituting new ones. It is argued that a new brand of leadership is required.

I would agree that this is a period of great change, and new ideas are needed. But we should not delude ourselves into thinking that transformation in the public sector is a new phenomenon, thereby requiring us to cast aside what we have learned from past successes and failures in our zeal to invent entirely new management strategies and approaches to leadership.

I would suggest, for example, that the period in which this nation was coping with the Depression and gearing up for the greatest war in history was also a period of great transformation in public administration development. There is much to learn from the leadership approaches used so effectively by that great civil servant, General George Marshall, who served so ably during World War II as the Army chief of staff and then became secretary of state and defense. Later, striving to address the poverty and civil rights issues of the mid-twentieth century, while engaged in a civilization-threatening cold war, we experienced another time of great change requiring management innovations, some of which may still have relevance today.

It would be interesting to catalog a few of the significant lessons a number of us have learned from earlier periods as we were developing ways to implement new presidential goals. For example, when President Reagan appointed me to handle our economic and technical assistance programs in the Western Hemisphere, I found

my country mission directors complaining loudly that over the years far too many costly processes had evolved that compounded the time and cost of planning and delivering foreign assistance. Yet the previous political assistant administrators of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) had apparently provided no political support for their efforts to streamline the systems. As part of our response to this problem, we overcame a range of political concerns and adapted several streamlining approaches to delivering assistance that Don Stone had earlier incorporated in the design of the landmark Marshall Plan forty years earlier.¹


A major reason President Nixon was so successful in his remarkably quick launching of the sweeping New Federalism grant reforms was that he had no hesitancy in building upon a series of Bureau of the Budget (BOB) pilot operations conducted during the Johnson administration (Ink 1996). The nationwide system of regional operations, for example, was built upon the field coordination arrangements instituted to address Alaska's recovery from its 1964 earthquake.

It is interesting to compare the speed with which our government moved into entirely uncharted territory during the Manhattan Project, and the skill with which the professional physicists and managers were utilized, with the problems we have today in mounting major initiatives of national importance. Placing a man on the moon was another impressive example. Both of these earlier programs relied heavily on a government-industry partnership in which accountability was clear and scandals were rare. Yet today we see case after case of poor contract administration and scandal. Both of these earlier successes also depended much more heavily on professional leadership from career personnel than we see today.

In stressing the value of looking at past lessons and adapting past approaches that have proven their value, as well as searching for new ideas, I recognize that there are those who are much too wedded to the past. Pockets of resistance to needed change have to be dealt with, but those can be addressed by effective leaders with surprising ease. In any event, their existence certainly does not justify a climate in which so many political appointees discourage career leaders from drawing upon earlier lessons as well as seeking new approaches in meeting operational challenges. In almost every case, permitting career leaders to utilize both the old and the new will enable a new president to move far more quickly with his or her agenda in carrying out campaign promises to the voters, an important feature of our political system. And in the process, the new political appointees will gain a better appreciation for the value of the career leaders and will be likely to use them more fully than if their experience is ignored during the launching of a new administration.

Expanding the Role and Number of Political Appointees

I share the view that the number and role of federal government political appointees is gradually weakening the opportunity of career men and women to provide the professional leadership this country needs to administer our laws effectively. Other advanced nations have not followed this unfortunate path.



Responding to concern about the steady conversion of senior management positions from career to political some years ago, and remembering the dramatic abuses of these and other steps toward politicizing the career service that had occurred in the Watergate period, we included in President Carter's 1978 Civil Service legislation a provision to halt this increase by limiting the number of political SES positions to the percentage of 10 percent of comparable positions that existed at that time. We would have liked to reduce the percentage below 10 percent, but we knew we would be very fortunate to simply halt the increase, and to push our luck further by proposing cuts would jeopardize both White House and congressional support for introducing any controls.

However, while the total number of federal employees has remained surprisingly stable for decades, most administrations have gradually added political appointees outside the civil service system, thereby nullifying the curb on future growth of political appointees that Carter's Civil Service Reform sought to achieve. Both Volcker commissions went further than Carter's reform by recommending a major cut in the number of political employees, but this significant recommendation has gone nowhere.

Several problems, discussed in the next sections, grow out of our excess of political appointees.

Obscuring of Presidential Vision

Career leadership is increasingly complaining that the proliferation of political appointees has eroded, rather than increased, the clarity with which they receive the president's vision of what the new administration is to accomplish.² Low-level political appointees tend to aggrandize their importance by implying a familiarity with the president's intentions well beyond their degree of knowledge, thereby introducing a filtering process that obscures depth of knowledge about the presidential concepts needed for effective agency implementation. Misguided political signals from lower-level appointees may totally miss nuances that make a large difference in what the president has intended and may undermine political strategies for gaining public or congressional support. When that occurs, it is generally the career person, not the political appointee, who is held responsible by the White House for the resulting problem.

Numbers Overwhelm Screening Capacity

Several of the most experienced former directors of White House personnel, regardless of how they feel about the number of appointees needed, have complained that they have not had the capacity to screen the lower-level appointees sufficiently from the standpoint of relevant experience. I stress *relevance*, because we have seen so many people eminently qualified in other fields who have struggled mightily in government leadership roles for which their prior skills had little or no relevance.

Further, many appointees have been told that the key to better government is to run it more like a business, but they do not realize until too late that there are some fundamental differences between running a corporation and a government agency.

Questionable Operational Qualifications

This problem is compounded by the misuse of appointees after hiring. Most political appointees are supposed to fill policy-level positions in which they help the president translate his or her campaign promises into realistic policies and legislative proposals. Unfortunately, lower-level political appointees are used increasingly for other purposes that are more operational, roles for which many are unqualified. Writing campaign speeches or contributing to a presidential campaign will not prepare one to help run an agency with thousands of employees and a multibillion-dollar budget. Operating an agency for a new president is no place for on-the-job training, especially when one realizes that the first few months of a presidency is the time in which a new president has the most political capital and is in the best position to implement the campaign promises made to the voters.

The role of political appointees should be more clearly understood to be that of policy development, advocacy, and agency oversight, not hands-on operations, a role for which career men and women are better qualified in most cases. I believe this clarification of roles would reduce agency costs and improve effectiveness of operations. This change could also pave the way to follow the Volcker Commission recommendations of sharply reducing the excessive number of lower-level political appointees (2003).

This does not mean that career people do not have an important role in policy development, or that political appointees should isolate themselves from operations. Far from it. However, while recognizing there are always gray areas, I believe accountability for policy should lie with the political appointees, and the political leadership should hold career leaders accountable for effective implementation of those policies, that is, the management of operations. More than some, I stress the difference between the desirability of involving both political and career leaders as a team in making any agency function effectively and the need to avoid blurring policy and operational accountability for which I believe the two have different roles.

Layering Decreases Effectiveness

Although the percentage of federal employees who are political appointees is small, the operational problem presented by their growth is disproportionately large. For example, adding political positions, such as associate deputy assistant secretaries and chiefs of staff to assistant secretaries, generally have the practical effect of further layering a department that likely already has too many layers at the top. These layers generate additional levels of approval and an increased number of required concurrences. Longer processing and decision-making time results. Ac-

countability tends to become more diffused. This layering clearly decreases the effectiveness of career leaders.³

Mixed Loyalties

Many former cabinet members and agency heads have complained that they are pressured to accept low-level appointees whose loyalty is more to their political sponsor, such as an important mayor or large donor, than to them or the president. On critical issues, this can be a serious problem when the sponsor has different interests and priorities than the president. At times, such appointees use backdoor channels to advance their own role by secretly undermining the cabinet member through leaks and secret communications. Because this problem may not be apparent during the early stages of a cabinet member's tenure, considerable damage can occur before it can be dealt with.

Reduction in Contribution of Career Service

As mentioned earlier, the proliferation of low-level political appointees has inevitably led some increasingly away from their policy roles into operational roles. This has tended to push down the level of operational responsibilities available to career leaders, and taken them totally out of certain positions they are best equipped to handle, especially in the field. In addition to the frequent drop in operational skill from this substitution of political appointees, there is a widespread view that, in general, career leaders receive less political pressures to influence program management, resulting in fewer allegations of abuse and favoritism in the issuance of grants and contracts.⁴

Centralization

During the Johnson administration, we saw highly centralized federal approaches to administering many of the Great Society programs because of lack of confidence in either the capacity or the will of state and local governments to ensure that the objectives of these programs were met. The established power structures were regarded as not having much sensitivity or understanding with respect to the disadvantaged who had lost patience with their local leadership. Cities were burning, and Johnson had to deal with a growing urban crisis. The result was that field career leadership in most federal agencies had only a limited role in planning these new programs and in decisions regarding their implementation. Washington micromanagement of plans, approvals, and oversight was the result.

Most notable among the important exceptions to this general move toward centralizing controls in Washington was the formation of a heavily decentralized Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), soon to be followed by the Department of Transportation (DOT), both of which established strong field

offices but retained effective Washington monitoring capabilities. The original design of HUD blanketed the country with a series of regions headed by strong GS-17 and GS-18 career regional administrators who were delegated department-wide responsibility for program implementation with several Federal Housing Administration (FHA) exceptions. Not very popular with most political assistant secretaries in Washington, they were nevertheless well received by local government and community leaders, especially those administrators buttressed by metropolitan expeditors.⁵ We tend to forget that HUD was regarded by many at the time as a highly effective domestic department, and was chosen by the Nixon administration as the best model on which to advance its ambitious reorganization of the domestic departments and agencies. The career assistant secretaries for administration in HUD and DOT were assigned the lead task of monitoring decentralization and helping secretaries see that departments as a whole functioned as intended.

President Nixon quickly reversed the Great Society centralized approach. Forgotten by many is the fact that during his very successful first years in office, Nixon drew heavily on Washington career leaders to design and manage his New Federalism, the centerpiece of his domestic initiatives. Especially significant is the fact that this broad-based initiative to move decision making out of Washington relied heavily on agency field offices headed largely by career leaders.⁶ This was in sharp contrast to his later disastrous strategies in which he layered the career service in Washington and the field with political appointees and increasingly isolated himself from both the career service and much of his own political leadership.

The decline in the role of field offices after the 1972 election, the loss of coordination among these offices, the replacement of agency career field leaders with political appointees, combined with the 1973 loss of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) intergovernmental management staff led to a large number of operational responsibilities gravitating back to Washington. As a result, the career role in program delivery has been downgraded significantly to the detriment of our citizens.

In addition, the move toward federal government centralization occurred during the same period that the role and number of White House staff increased greatly, weakening the role of most departments and distancing career leaders even more from detailed information about presidential initiatives useful for effective implementation.

Career-Political Partnership

The career service represents the primary resource upon which any incoming president must rely to carry out the promises he or she made to the people during the campaign. It is a resource without which a president cannot develop and launch successful new program initiatives of any magnitude. The career service is the only vehicle through which a president can govern. Yet we continue to see instance after instance of White House staff and agency leaders not only failing to reach out to the men and women on whom their political success will largely rest

but also quickly alienating them through distrust and marginalizing their roles. Our slowness in developing political-career teamwork in a new presidency has reduced the contribution of career leaders during the critical initial period when a president generally has the greatest freedom to act.

These issues are well known within the public administration community where many books and articles on the subject have been written. Not so in the world of politics where this partnership notion is viewed as heresy. I agree with those who believe that, in general, the career-political relationship has eroded in recent years, limiting the effectiveness of both career and political leadership.⁷ What is the practical effect of this change?

First, limiting the level of participation of career managers in the design of new program initiatives reduces the odds of their being workable, as we saw in Hillary Clinton's ambitious health care initiative. Career leaders best understand what will work and what will not, and they often best understand what can be guided through Congress. Their knowledge needs to be meshed with the political considerations of the new president.

Those who argue that the heavy involvement of career men and women will delay or even jeopardize an initiative by generating a list of objections, or that they will use their ties to the Hill to undermine needed legislation,⁸ either fail to understand how to provide policy leadership or lack management skills to lead the career service. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, it was often career personnel who provided key leadership in designing the more successful programs a new president needed to implement his policies. Career-political partnerships during those years certainly enabled a president to move far more quickly than more recent instances in which the career men and women have played lesser roles.⁹

Limiting the career role in moving ahead with new presidential initiatives also reduces the sense of ownership and incentives to help the initiative succeed that would have been gained by the career service if they were permitted to participate fully in the planning phase. And because of their limited role, more time is needed for the career leaders to understand the intent of the president sufficiently well to engage each level of the department in successful implementation, generally causing months of delay in moving forward.¹⁰

Problems in forging an effective working relationship between new political appointees and career leaders are long standing. Most presidential appointees enter government having campaigned on the need for change, and to them the career service represents the status quo that needs to be controlled and their mind-set needs to be changed. Career people are viewed as supporters of the prior president and his or her agenda, and thus are assumed to oppose changes initiated by the new administration. Few presidential appointees see a distinction between the obligation of career people to support the constitutional office of the president as an institution, regardless of their political affiliation, and personal support of the person of the president within a political framework. Yet from the standpoint of effective government, the difference is fundamental.

The challenge of developing political-career teamwork does not lie solely with the political appointees. Not many career people are skilled at communicating with incoming politicians. Most dislike the amount of simplistic and extreme rhetoric that was part of the campaign that brought most of their new bosses into the government. Especially distasteful is the political rhetoric that blames the bureaucracy (that is, the career men and women) for the government waste, perceived as a major obstacle to government action or balancing the budget. This negative response from the targeted careerists is understandable. But career leaders must try very hard to place themselves in the shoes of the appointees and strive to understand what is important to them and what they believe the new administration hopes to achieve. No small amount of effort may be required to present their ideas and values in language that a politician without prior government experience can understand. Demonstrating how good management is also good politics for the new administration is not readily apparent to most appointees, and skill in explaining how good management will assist their presidency is an art that can be of great help in developing a political-career partnership. Doing so also strengthens the voice of the career man or woman who may later find it necessary to protest political interference in operations that might lead to inequities or favoritism in contracts, grants, and delivery of services.

One word of caution: In developing an effective partnership between political appointees and career leaders, it is important to keep in mind the need for the appointees to retain policy accountability and for career men and women to be held accountable to those appointees for agency operations.

Remaking Government as a Business

Over the past two decades, we have seen a continuing effort to make government function more like the private sector. This movement should be distinguished from the more modest concept of selecting certain private-sector practices that can be usefully adapted to government. The two ideas are fundamentally different. This emerging concept of running government like a business dilutes attention to those values of public service most important to effective functioning of democratic institutions. A private-sector vision of government also reduces its appeal to young people who have a strong motivation to serve the nation and its citizens, a loss that deprives us of an unknown number of future dedicated leaders.

As Ronald Moe (2004) often reminds us, this movement ignores how fundamental the differences are between the basis for government service and business employment. They grow largely out of the fact that government employees are empowered to do only those things that are authorized by law developed within the framework of our Constitution, whereas private-sector organizations are empowered to act in all areas not prohibited by law. In dealing with the public, government employees must observe due process of law. Their role is to serve the public with equity, transparency, and responsiveness, whereas the basic role of business is, and has to be, that of making sure the bottom line reflects a profit.¹¹

However, this distinction does not lead to management in the two sectors being totally different. There are certain management techniques given heavy emphasis in most well-run corporations that can, and should, be adapted to government. Similarly, one can argue that just as public agencies are concerned about how citizens are treated, sound businesses also need to be concerned about their clients. But the latter concern grows largely out of the fact that failure to exhibit concern loses customers rather than out of a fundamental responsibility to serve them effectively. This difference in roles is illustrated by the fact that, unlike government, a business has no responsibility to serve those for whom such service would be unprofitable.

Considerable judgment needs to be exercised in determining what private-sector practices should be adapted to government needs and to what extent. In the General Services Administration (GSA) some years ago, for example, we realized that our warehousing practices were outdated, and we had much to learn from adapting private-sector practices. Yet when we essentially adopted a successful Sears, Roebuck system for our office furniture revolving fund, we came close to violating the antideficiency act at the highest level in our history. Because this approach to a revolving fund worked so well in the private sector, we tried to use it without paying attention to the fact that government is fundamentally different from a private business. We adopted when we should have adapted.

Other activities present much greater potential problems than do revolving funds when we press career leaders too far toward the private sector. This private-sector emphasis encourages career leaders to focus too heavily on business practices based primarily on dollars and cents as compared with designing a process that is responsive to the needs of those to be served. It gives priority to efficiency over the overarching goal of public service: effectiveness. Insufficient attention is given to some of the most important characteristics of public service such as transparency and equity. Public accountability becomes blurred. Application of market principles may be useful with respect to GSA supply schedules, but in other circumstances it will undermine an agency's responsibility for equity in pursuing its mission and may give undue influence to wealthy special interest groups.

We have seen case after case in which the more restrictive public service ethic continuously lands highly talented people from the private sector in trouble after they enter government, but the public rightly continues to oppose efforts to relax public ethics standards to be more like those in business.¹²

Numerous government observers have also become uncomfortable with the extent to which the private-sector emphasis is contributing to the denigration of the value of a public-service career. When the objective of entering public service is simply that of government being just one among a number of jobs during a varied career, we shortchange our citizens. Managers who concentrate on the short-term view of their government experience tend to focus undue attention on their own welfare and less on the success of their agency in achieving its mission and serving the public.

Viewing federal service as simply another job of limited duration has also

reduced mobility opportunities that help qualify career people for important leadership roles. A career in the public service provides more opportunities to meet the original objectives of the SES whereby a potential leader could serve in different assignments with increasing responsibility over time among a variety of agencies.¹³ Many complain about a loss of mobility among top career leaders in recent years. To the extent this is true, this trend will contribute to a further drop in the number of broadly experienced career men and women equipped to handle high-level management assignments. We see too many persons without benefit of varied agency experiences approaching high-level SES assignments with the limited vision of only their prior organization. Lacking experience in different agencies with a variety of cultures and objectives that require different management strategies, they are not well equipped to tailor their management strategies to different circumstances or take risks.

The mobility concept has been damaged by the occasional use of the SES mobility provisions for partisan political purposes by transferring a talented SES member to "Siberia" or to a desk with no duties, in the hopes of forcing the member out of government, despite provisions in the Civil Service Reform designed to prevent such abuse. In contrast to our limited opportunities to broaden one's federal leadership experience, most advanced countries, and our own military, require a variety of assignments for those with the talent to progress to top career levels. This was an important objective of the SES that remains largely unfulfilled.

The private-sector model does not fit public leadership roles in other ways essential to a democratic system such as ours. The degree of transparency in agency management is very different from that of private enterprise. The extent to which public managers must be in a position to defend and explain their every action to the press, to citizens, and to various oversight bodies has almost no counterpoint in the private sector. In fact, private-sector experience does not prepare one for most of the checks and balances that constitute the foundation of our constitutional system, yet these limits have a major impact on agency management. This public/private sector difference also requires a very different concept of accountability.

Some of our most dedicated public servants, political and career, believe that the requirement for government employees to take the oath of office deepens one's sense of obligation to carry out their public duties in an honorable way. Especially for those interested in a public-service career rather than simply a job, it serves as a lifelong pledge of integrity that helps strengthen one's resistance to improper work behavior. Many of us regard public service as a calling and believe it is a privilege to serve the public—a somewhat different mind-set than the principal factors motivating people to succeed in the private sector.

Because of the foregoing factors, I believe the overemphasis on making government more like the private sector is handicapping the development of effective career leaders and needs to be replaced with the more modest objective of looking at specific private-sector practices that can be usefully adapted for agency use. To the extent to which we strive to remake government like a business, we run the

risk of weakening the awareness of public-service leaders to basic public-service concepts, and the understanding of how to function in our constitutional framework of checks and balances.

The Missing Presidential Management Arm

Over much of the last fifty years there has been justifiable criticism that, except for short periods, both the BOB and OMB have relied much too heavily on the budget as the primary means of advancing the management agenda of presidents and implementing congressional legislation. The problem is not the continuing emphasis on effective budgeting; this is a fundamental requirement of good government. Further, although presidential budget policies may be highly controversial at times, the professional skill of those handling the budget in OMB continues to be impressive, and their work is of invaluable importance to a president. Instead, the problem is that the strong budget activity is not balanced by a central management arm of the president that addresses those elements of effective government that are difficult to address through the numbers-oriented focus of the budget. As one result of this imbalance, we are limiting the broad management strategies needed for effective career leadership.

The budget can play a constructive role in management decisions and improving agency operations on some occasions. But the use of the OMB budget leverage has an enforcement aura that, in my view, is not nearly as effective for most purposes as a broader OMB leadership approach that emphasizes assistance to agencies in enhancing their managerial effectiveness. This is a very different environment that directs the attention of career leaders to values not easily reflected in budget numbers. For example, it gives greater emphasis to such values as equity in program delivery systems, safeguards against favoritism in contract administration, and the politicizing of grant award processes. It encourages greater emphasis on effective internal and external field-level coordination and intergovernmental cooperation. This approach provides greater help to agencies needing to increase their management capabilities than does a budget-dominated strategy. Budget processes are rarely useful—and are often counterproductive—in reorganization issues, especially in establishing new agencies.

In part, this overreliance on the budget for management purposes may have resulted from focusing on efficiency rather than effectiveness as the principal objective of government operations, but OMB has recently begun to rectify this problem to some extent.¹⁴ I believe it has more to do with a failure to recognize what can be accomplished through means other than the budget, many of which have proven themselves to be effective in improving government. In addition to their intrinsic value, these approaches also have the advantage of not becoming as entangled with volatile partisan issues as major budget issues do, making it easier to deal with Congress on a bipartisan basis.

The earlier Organization and Executive Management (OEM) division in the

BOB worked closely with budget examiners in exchanging information, but seldom looked to the budget process in achieving the president's management goals. Instead, it relied on its drafting of presidential executive orders; participation in developing policy initiatives and legislation from a management perspective; issuance of government-wide circulars; assistance in strengthening the management capacity of troubled agencies; establishment and monitoring of interagency and intergovernmental coordinating arrangements; handling of presidential reorganization proposals; monitoring of agency program delivery operational outcomes; establishment of government-wide productivity programs; modernizing financial, information, and procurement systems; simplification and integration of administrative and program management systems; handling of reorganizations; and design of crosscutting presidential initiatives. This OEM leadership was provided exclusively by career men and women. Career managers participated in the daily meetings of the top White House staff and occasionally presented management issues to the president and the cabinet. It had an excellent track record with Congress.

These activities used to provide exciting opportunities for the finest career leaders to help the president and cabinet members improve government. This approach cultivated greater genuine agency support for presidential management initiatives, support that extended much further down within the departments. Sadly, OMB no longer has either the positions or the degree of interest with which to provide most of these leadership roles.¹⁵

In addition, for some years the OMB career leaders have been layered in by the political program assistant directors (PADs), and the president-appointed and Senate-confirmed OMB heads of the Office of Procurement Policy, the Office of Financial Management, and the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, who reduce the opportunity for the career staff to interact directly with the White House and cabinet members.¹⁶ This change has diluted the influence of professional, non-partisan advice that used to be available to the president and his aides in addition to the political advice that came from his political appointees.

We need to revisit the issue of what management needs could be best met today by strategies in addition to, or in lieu of, the current budget-focused approaches. What type of institutional structure would need to be established to provide leadership for these strategies? Should it be established within an OMB as originally contemplated, perhaps through a modernized OEM, or do we now need a separate structure in the Executive Office of the President?

However it is structured, a person with considerable prior government operating experience should head it. Similarly, departments should have either assistant secretaries for administration or undersecretaries for management, headed by individuals with extensive prior government experience, to provide cabinet members with effective leadership within the department for both administrative and program management. Ideally, these should be filled with SES members with high levels of success in several different agencies, having demonstrated skill in both leading career personnel and working effectively with agency political leaders. The next

best arrangement would be for these posts to be filled with political appointees with prior government experience, combined with SES deputies. Filling the top two positions in the offices of either an undersecretary for management or an assistant secretary for administration with political appointees new to government would be an irresponsible act. The unusual amount of secrecy surrounding the operation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) undersecretary has made a full assessment of its operation virtually impossible thus far, but its apparent ineffectiveness resulted from questionable initial leadership and failure of either OMB or DHS to understand the role of the office.

Crisis Management

Special attention must be given to how well we utilize our career leadership in dealing with crises of this new century because they may be of devastating magnitude. The limited extent to which career leaders were in a position to quickly meet the challenge of Hurricane Katrina is disheartening. So are stories coming from Iraq concerning the constraints placed on career leaders in important operational decision-making positions, especially with respect to the extremely difficult task of so-called nation building. Underutilization of professional career people in times of crisis can cost many millions of dollars and contribute unnecessarily to suffering and loss of life. Conceivably, it could make the difference between success and failure. Because of the high visibility of how we respond in times of crisis, failure to utilize career leaders undermines the confidence of the American people in their government, as Katrina demonstrated.

Two basic approaches to management of recovery from natural disasters have been used. First has been the traditional approach in which the president relies on a permanent agency for leadership such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), now located within the current DHS. When well managed, this approach has worked in most natural disaster recoveries. However, in a few highly complex recoveries requiring extensive utilization of resources from other departments and interdepartmental decision making, it has been difficult for such an agency to secure the degree of rapid and wholehearted cooperation needed from sister agencies, especially after the initial response phase.

A second approach has been the less-well-known action of a president creating a temporary, overarching coordinating mechanism led by an experienced government manager reporting directly to the president and empowered to draw upon the total resources of the federal government without time-consuming negotiations or clearances. Although capable of extremely fast action and streamlined interagency and intergovernmental arrangements, this second approach places a premium on visible presidential commitment and professional leadership having extensive knowledge of federal agencies and Congress.

Utilizing the first approach effectively, James Witt is justifiably credited for remaking FEMA into a far more effective agency than had existed before. One of

the reasons for his success most often advanced was the care with which he developed and motivated career leaders, giving them major responsibilities and then equipping them to move quickly and effectively in those positions. Among other things, he demonstrated the value of political-career teamwork and mutual trust in dealing with disaster recoveries. Very important, the president had confidence in Witt, giving him leverage with other agencies.

President Johnson gave even greater emphasis to the use of career leadership by appointing a career person, the author, to head the Alaskan earthquake recovery operations after the devastating 1964 earthquake, using the second approach of a temporary overarching arrangement to direct the recovery.¹⁷ While directly impacting only about 200,000 people, between the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and Hurricane Katrina, it was the most complex natural disaster recovery we had experienced in the United States, and also the most urgent because of the short Alaskan construction season. Nixon followed a similar path to straighten out the recovery problems of the Harrisburg flood from Hurricane Agnes by appointing Frank Carlucci, deputy director of OMB, who had been for many years a career foreign service officer.¹⁸ In the case of both Alaska and Harrisburg, no political appointee was given direct operating responsibilities, although they played essential roles in policy making and in supporting the career staff directing operations.

I stress that had I been required to work through political appointees in directing the operational aspects of the rebuilding of Alaska, or struggle with an unwieldy organization such as DHS, we would have failed, and tens of thousands of families would have been forced to abandon the state for the Lower Forty-eight. Yet we now expect the much weaker, more complicated DHS arrangement to provide successful leadership for future crises that are likely to be much larger than the Alaskan earthquake and even more urgent. One thing is very clear: Regardless of whether we organize along the Witt lines or use the Johnson-Nixon approach, we must remove the current limitations on the role of career leaders in times of crisis. Operational decisions must be made by experienced career leaders as was done in Alaska and Harrisburg. These leaders need to have firsthand knowledge of the role of various agencies and how they work. They need to understand agency headquarters/field relationships as well as intergovernmental relationships. They should understand how to work with Congress, hopefully having established close relationships with key members before taking on their disaster-related assignments. These leaders must understand how to arrange immediate collaboration with the many agencies on whose human and dollar resources a successful recovery will depend.

In times of crisis, every hour counts in responding to disasters or terrorist attacks. Even the longer-term major rebuilding and economic development decisions cannot wait for the usual administrative processes to work their way through the system. Many of these processes have to be dramatically simplified within the first several weeks, requiring greater reliance on the knowledge and expertise of those directing the recovery. It is the career men and women who best understand how

to operate in the absence of the customary slow-moving processes that cannot be tolerated in times of crisis.

We all agree that military operations should be led by professional career officers within the policies determined by civilian leadership. Likewise, I believe that defending our homeland requires our recovery operations to be led by professional men and women. Why should we be satisfied with less skilled protection from attacks at home than we demand in the case of overseas warfare?

Presidential Transition

One seldom finds career people in the transition headquarters of the president-elect. It is exceedingly difficult for the winning candidate and his or her campaign team to make the mental transition from campaigning to governing during the few weeks of the presidential transition. This leads to the failure to recognize the need for involving career leaders during this critical period. In fact, many transition leaders view career people as slow, unimaginative creatures they take care to exclude from their plans to change government and remake Washington. Contrary to this conventional political wisdom, I suggest that effective use of career SES men and women in planning how to translate campaign promises into presidential actions and proposed legislation would make a huge difference in the quality of transition planning, the speed with which a new president could advance the agenda, and the effectiveness with which initiatives could be implemented.

Further, the presidential transition is the ideal time to begin reversing the trends discussed in the previous sections that are unduly limiting the effectiveness of career leaders. Helping the transition team lay the foundation for effective relations with Congress, for example, is an area where the career experience and their long-standing relationships with the Hill could be invaluable. Utilizing career leaders to help guide the design of new initiatives along lines that reduce unnecessary congressional objections, and are workable in application, would have helped past presidents avoid a variety of early embarrassments and delays. Any thoughts the president-elect might have concerning government-wide improvement in operations, a favorite topic of most incoming presidents,¹⁹ must involve career men and women in leadership roles to be truly successful. Yet too often they are brought in as an afterthought and at too low a level to have much impact.

This early involvement of career leaders should also lay the groundwork for improved political appointee-career relationships as the new presidency moves forward, helping a new president throughout his or her term.

Revitalizing Career Leadership

The trends discussed earlier that limit effectiveness of career leaders are so deeply ingrained in federal government that not many believe it is realistic to reverse them. Difficult, yes, but not impossible. Iraq, Katrina, and other recent events have given

greater visibility to the unfortunate consequences of failing to fully utilize the potential role of career leaders. I believe there are enough nonprofit organizations interested in effective government that the foregoing issues could attract serious consideration from several of them. These groups developed several very significant proposals for the 2000 presidential transition.²⁰

I suggest that in their planning for the next transition, these organizations include consideration of ways in which career men and women can recover a stronger leadership role in government operations, relating the topic to the need for effective implementation of presidential initiatives.

Groundwork for this effort should begin as soon as the respective campaigns for 2008 begin to get organized and well before the election. Otherwise, the subject of policy implementation, including the need for involving career leadership, has almost no chance of garnering attention during the hectic days between the election and inauguration, a period when the development of presidential initiatives critically needs career input. Ideally, a person in each campaign headquarters with past government experience can be persuaded to help ensure an awareness of the relationship of the career service to successful implementation of the president-elect's policy agenda. This person will not be one who is handling the fast-moving tactics of the campaign, but he or she should be one of the few members of the candidate's team concerned about governing after election day. Two transition suggestions are offered: developing a transition management unit, and review of the role of political appointees.

Transition Management Unit

Each campaign should be urging to plan, in the event of winning, the establishment of a small management unit in the transition offices of the president-elect, as was done by President-elect Reagan in 1980 at the suggestion of Ed Harper and approved by Ed Meese. That three-person team of experienced career government managers focused much of its attention on reorganization issues such as proposing the elimination of the antipoverty agency, the Community Services Administration (CSA), and reorganization of the Department of Energy.²¹

It might be wise for the new management unit to be charged with focusing on managing policy implementation, rather than the more general term of *management* used in 1980. The subject matter would be much the same, but this linkage to policy would be easier to relate to the political instincts of most transition figures and would have a greater chance of surviving the pressures and near-chaotic conditions of a transition environment. It is also a sufficiently broad concept to include both program and administrative management in developing and implementing new presidential initiatives. It would be the ideal place to begin integrating career leaders and political leadership in the early stages of a presidential transition, rather than waiting until after inauguration.

Each of the areas discussed in this chapter should be on the agenda of this policy

management unit. This will be the best time for prospective political leaders of the new administration to learn the value of the career service and how to work with career professionals.

This management group should also facilitate the difficulties faced by a new president in shifting from campaigning to governing. There is widespread recognition of the importance of a new president moving his or her agenda quickly after inauguration, but few do. And when they try to act quickly, the efforts often fail for lack of sufficient planning and/or failure to lay the groundwork with the Congress. On the other hand, we recall Nixon's New Federalism in which he drew heavily on career leaders, enabling him to move forward with sweeping implementation of executive orders within two months after inauguration. And by July, his director of the Bureau of the Budget was already asking the agencies for status reports on outcomes they had achieved. By contrast, with most career leaders used only in lower leadership roles, Clinton's Reinventing Government took much of the first two or three years just planning what was to be done, and similarly the Bush Presidential Management Agenda had little departmental action the first two years of his presidency.

Political Appointee Review

One especially important management suggestion for key nonprofit groups and, if established, also the transition management unit to consider for the next presidential transition is a long-overdue bipartisan review of the role of political appointees. For too long, we have failed to address the enormous impact, positive and negative, that political appointees have on the extent to which the career service is utilized effectively, especially with respect to the career leaders. Although I argue that it is the career service that should be held accountable to political leadership for implementation of policies, the political leaders have much to do with the environment within which career leaders operate and the extent to which career personnel are equipped to carry out their operational role.

Think for a moment about the extent to which outstanding political leaders such as Elliot Richardson, Jim Webb of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and James Witt each provided such effective leadership for the career service and relied heavily on professional career leadership in accomplishing great things that brought credit to their organizations. We complain a good deal about political appointees who fail to provide good leadership but seldom give them credit when they do. We almost never examine carefully what might be done to improve the general effectiveness of political appointees. We think of these appointees almost entirely from the standpoint of their policy roles and not at all with respect to their impact on the effective functioning of government agencies. There are numerous reviews of various aspects of the career service, so why is it not appropriate to occasionally review the other portion of government service, that of political appointees?

The aforementioned nonprofit groups and the recommended transition manage-

ment organization should include in their agendas the desirability of establishing a statutory bipartisan commission to review the roles of political appointees in federal departments and agencies. It would undertake a broad study of the political appointees' portion of the federal government public service somewhat similar to the extensive study of the career service on which the Civil Service Reform of 1978 was based, including (1) the roles that political appointees can best play in the government agencies, (2) roughly what percentage of the workforce is needed to fulfill that role, and (3) what White House Personnel Office capacity is required to handle that many appointees.

The scope of this review should include ways in which effective political appointees have been able to energize and motivate career men and women over the years in advancing the agenda of a new president. Steven Kelman's recent book, *Unleashing Change* (2005), describes in some depth how effective one appointee found the career service was in bringing about change when "unleashed" from undue constraints and encouraged to innovate.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified some of the ways in which career leaders are unduly limited in providing the leadership that could help new presidents and department heads advance new initiatives quickly. Simply preaching the value of good government to the newcomers, including generic comments about the virtues of career men and women, will have little or no impact on a new administration. In order to demonstrate the potential contribution of the career service to a presidential team and to make headway in reducing the current limitations on what the career leadership can accomplish, the next transition agenda has to link the career service and operational success of the policy initiatives advanced by the new president. This linkage has to be portrayed in plain language with concrete examples, something we do not do well. The transition team should gather a few concisely written case studies of past experiences in which both Republicans and Democrats have benefited from career leaders helping to advance presidential agendas when free of constraints that typically limit their effectiveness.

We need to give visibility to the price we pay for the declining role of federal career leaders and to its negative impact on federal government effectiveness. Our failure to fully utilize our impressive career talent has enormous potential consequences, and it must be corrected if we are to serve our citizens well and meet the global competitiveness of the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. The distinction between *adopt* and *adapt* is key to this discussion. Latin America and postwar Europe were very different in many respects, but the need to eliminate unnecessary internal red tape in our economic assistance programs, especially Washington micromanag-

ing, was common to both situations. It turned out not to be difficult to discern which Marshall Plan processes could be adapted, while recognizing that none could be fully adopted.

2. Some cabinet members have expressed similar concerns to the author.

3. In *Thickening Government*, Paul Light (1995) points out that between 1960 and 1992, the number of "top jobs" in the Department of Agriculture increased from 81 to 242; in the Department of Commerce the increase was from 29 to 217; in Interior from 50 to 160; in HEW from 27 to 339, despite the loss of Education. Most of these are filled by political appointees. Lower-level appointees do not show up on charts as layers, yet even a modest Schedule "C" title such as "special assistant" to an assistant secretary (that is not even on the chart) can decrease the role and operational flexibility of a top member of the SES accountable for a project or program.

4. In assuming leadership of the independent agency, the Community Services Administration, I found that no career person was permitted to even make a recommendation on the awarding of a grant or significant contract—this role was reserved for political appointees. There was no concept of non-partisan administration of laws or agency programs.

5. Several big-city mayors, such as Mayor Daley of Chicago, who were accustomed to direct access to cabinet members and felt it demeaning to work through a regional administrator did not share this popularity. However, Secretary Weaver backed career leaders to the hilt, telling the White House he would resign rather than compromise on politicizing these positions. Johnson was not close to Weaver, but he did not want to lose the first black cabinet member in our history, and the regional administrators remained career until the Nixon administration.

6. There were notable exceptions. One was the strong effort to remove a career assistant secretary of administration in DOT, Alan Dean, because of his earlier Democratic activities in local government. The DOT secretary, John Volpe, who regarded him as extremely able, vigorously opposed this pressure. Ironically, a key member of the White House staff, Fred Malek, knew of Dean's ability and arranged for him to be transferred to the management staff of the new OMB, much to the consternation of other White House staff. Dean's outstanding performance in OMB quickly earned him high marks where he quickly became highly valued by the Nixon leadership. He was an outstanding example of the career perspective of dedicated service to the presidency rather than to the president as a person, in this case a man for whom Dean never would have voted. After the elimination of the intergovernmental staff in OMB, and before Nixon left office, the top field office positions began to revert back to political appointments as a matter of policy, a trend that continued under President Carter.

7. One of the more comprehensive discussions of political appointee-career leaders' relationships is found in Hecl's *A Government of Strangers* (1977).

8. Political-career teamwork will nearly always improve agency relations with Congress and strengthen the ability of a president to gain congressional approval of the principal portions of his agenda.

9. Nixon's New Federalism, as well as Johnson's response to the Alaskan earthquake disaster and Carter's broad-based Civil Service Reform are examples of presidential initiatives that moved very quickly and also very successfully, at least from the presidential perspective. Each was designed primarily by career leaders working closely as a team with supportive political leadership and pursuant to a presidential policy.

10. In a review the author conducted for President Nixon in late 1970 of ten bills last enacted, it was found that most cabinet members counted implementation as having occurred when the secretary issued an implementing document, generally within a month or less. In fact, the median time elapsing from the president's executive order until the frontline career employee in the field received his or her operating instructions, a more meaningful measure of implementation, was about eighteen months. Disconnects between political leaders and

career implementers were a major reason for the delays. As a result of the survey, OMB and cabinet members began monitoring the whole implementation cycle, not just headquarter's initial steps in the process.

11. See Yong Lee's *A Reasonable Public Servant* (2005) for an exploration of the constitutional basis for public service, which is fundamentally different than private-sector employment.

12. This distinction does not necessarily place government ethics at a higher level than those in private business. Some features are, but others simply grow out of the different nature of government and business. In this era of global competition, it would make no sense to require corporations to follow federal government-type regulations to assure checks and balances embedded in our Constitution or require open competition for supplying the company with goods and services or the competitive merit-based employee systems we require for public service.

13. The trend toward disaggregation of the SES, resulting from different agencies being given greater flexibility in their personnel systems, will also likely work against career mobility.

14. The Bush Presidential Management Agenda has included some useful efforts to lessen this emphasis on efficiency rather than effectiveness. For example, it has linked the budget with program outcomes, actions for which OMB deserves considerable credit. The A-76 outsourcing circular, as another example, no longer contains cost as the only measure for decision making, though it gives more attention than effectiveness in how most agencies apply the circular.

15. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) presents a painful example of this failure. At the time DHS was launched, the OMB no longer had any expertise to provide it with experienced advice. There was no one, for example, to explain to the new department the critical role of the undersecretary for management, because the one person responsible for its inclusion in the legislation had left OMB by the time the department was organized. Consequently, the undersecretary role has never been developed. No assistance was provided the new DHS regarding the critical need for interagency and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms and the need for experienced career personnel in operational positions. The tragic price paid for this serious OMB deficiency was all too visible in the Hurricane Katrina debacle.

16. Despite concern about this added layer, and its filtering role, on the average the PAD appointees have been of high quality and have deflected some political flack from the career OMB personnel.

17. Also critical to the Alaskan success, Johnson reconstituted most of his cabinet as the Federal Reconstruction and Development Planning Commission for Alaska, chaired by a powerful senator, Clinton Anderson from New Mexico. This Commission developed policy within which the operating official worked, having a dual reporting responsibility to both President Johnson and to Senator Anderson in his second role as executive director of the Commission.

18. Nixon did not establish a policy body comparable to the cabinet commission established by President Johnson, but a highly respected OMB deputy director, Frank Carlucci, was in a position to easily call on agencies for prompt assistance.

19. The most recent such efforts have been Gore's National Performance Review and the Bush Presidential Management Agenda.

20. These organizations might include the Brookings Institution, the Council for Excellence in Government, the American Enterprise Institute, the National Academy of Public Administration, the American Society for Public Administration, and the Heritage Foundation, as well as others.

21. The CSA was closed as of September 30, 1981.

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