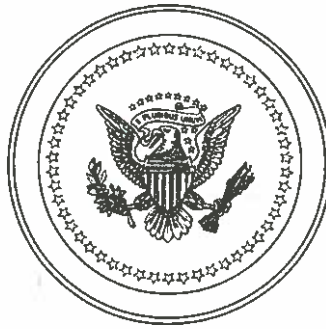


*Center for the Study
of the Presidency*



*Issue Papers
For the New Administration*

**#3 “Advice to Senior Political Appointees on the
Management of Bureaucracy”**

The Honorable Richard T. McCormack

Former Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs
And Former Ambassador to the Organization of American States

“The best source of information is unquestionably those who have held your position in the past. Wise people therefore draw on this experience, and often create unofficial advisory relationships with the best of the past incumbents. The Office of Management and Budget is another place with a central view point that is in a position to advise new incumbents....Similarly, the oversight committees in Congress have both deep knowledge and past history, and the ability to help you execute changes if they have confidence in you.”

In *Report to the President-Elect 2000: Triumphs and Tragedies of the Modern Presidency*, the Center analyzed Presidential leadership through the lens of more than seventy-six case studies. These **Issue Papers** are a forward looking complementary series of short, single-author papers that frame and briefly analyze key issues that the next President must address during the early months of his Administration. Views expressed in these papers are those of the authors.



1020 19th Street, NW Suite 250
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-872-9800 202-872-9811
www.thePresidency.org

Advice To Senior Political Appointees On The Management Of Bureaucracy

FORMER UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

RICHARD T. MC CORMACK

How can a few hundred top short-term political appointed administrators, some with limited experience in managing large organizations, cope with a permanent bureaucracy numbering in the millions and make a useful contribution to government and the public interest?

Respect and knowledge are the two keys to power in a bureaucracy. What follows are suggestions for maximizing both.

Because of the short-term tenure of the average political appointee--two years is the usual length of service in specific jobs--what impact you hope to have must be planned and executed quickly. It is therefore of crucial importance that you rapidly learn what is really going on in your agency--who does what, and the problems and opportunities for change.

The mass briefings prepared for new appointees are of limited value. The best source of information is unquestionably those who have held your position in the past. Wise people therefore draw on this experience, and often create unofficial advisory relationships with the best of the past incumbents.

The Office of Management and Budget is another place with a central view point that is in a position to advise new incumbents on what is happening in your agency, and where opportunities for change exist.

Similarly, the oversight committees in Congress have both deep knowledge of past history, and the ability to help you execute changes if they have confidence in you.

STAFFING

The first thing to do is find out for yourself who can be depended upon in the organization and start using them. It is also important that you identify a few key slots, and fill them with first-class talent so that you can influence events, and not merely be absorbed into the existing bureaucracy.

It is particularly important that people in whom you have special confidence be placed in charge of congressional relations, the budget or comptrollers office, and the legal office. It is also important that someone you trust handles your personal mail and appointment scheduling, as well as the legislative program development, and the hiring and placement of higher personnel.

Over time, some of your key people will depart from various reasons. If you personally do not devote the time necessary to recruit their successors, you will soon be presiding over a far weaker agency. Few strong-minded

subordinates really welcome strong new competition. You alone benefit from it, and must prevent its extinction through attrition.

Appointing friends with little relevant experience will cost your team the respect of the system, and greatly limit your effectiveness.

Make it your business to get to know the people you are working with from the career ranks. If they understand what you are trying to do and why, you will find them much more effective. Those few who will not support your efforts normally will find jobs elsewhere in the system if they are quietly asked to do so, and given a little time. Only rarely is outright dismissal necessary. When dealing with other people's careers, it is worthwhile to remember the Golden Rule. It is more relevant than you may think, even in Washington.

Respect for you personally and professionally is the currency you have for dealing with the bureaucracy. Cooperation comes from respect.

BUILDING AN INFORMATION SYSTEM

Knowledge is power in any bureaucracy. Narrow vertical reporting systems sometimes have a way of ensuring that only the lowest common denominator of ideas and proposals survive the filters to reach the top, and arrive there slowly.

A large regular staff meeting is your first line of defense, particularly if people are encouraged to say what they really think. A young personal assistant or two who act openly as your eyes and ears also is important. Such

aides, however, need to be restricted to personally advising you. Otherwise your line structure will soon be demoralized and less effective.

Sometimes it takes a smaller organization to control a larger one. That is the value of policy planning systems that are organized separately from the line structure.

In building an information system, a careful balance has to be struck between trust and verification. Extremes in either direction will prove costly to an administrator.

Putting all directives in writing greatly facilitates execution and avoids the misunderstandings that sometimes flow from oral instructions.

Keep close tabs on how you spend your time, so that this most valuable of all resources is widely allocated.

PRESS POLICY

Wise administrators normally make it their business to keep the press informed of their intentions and concerns, consistent with the press guidelines of their agencies and the President. Otherwise, you may be confronted by press stories leaked by individuals with special axes to grind, the damage from which may be difficult to overcome.