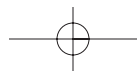
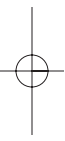
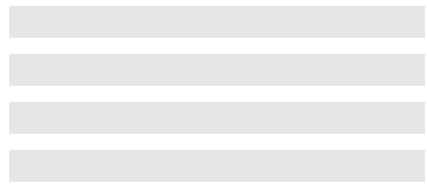
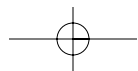
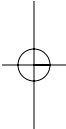
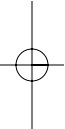




PART ONE

SURVIVAL AND
SUCCESS IN
WASHINGTON





CHAPTER 1

How to Succeed in Washington

Getting Results for the People You Serve

PATRICIA MCGINNIS

Congratulations! You have just been appointed by the president to a top job in government. In years past, political appointments, widely envied and regarded with high respect, were often referred to as “plum jobs.” To describe them as “prune” jobs, as we do in the Prune Books, may be more accurate. A prune, in our lexicon, is a plum seasoned by wisdom and experience, with a much thicker skin.

A thick skin is essential armament in the politically charged environment in which you will be working. Partisan politics can be brutal, especially in the fishbowl created by the media, but politicians or media commentators are not necessarily out to get you; the obstacles that you may encounter are seldom actually about you. For example, a “hold” on the Senate’s vote to confirm a presidential nominee is usually motivated by opposition to a policy or action of the president or another member of the administration, or by an attempt to gain leverage over the president or the administration, and may have nothing to do with you or your qualifications for the job.

So, if it is not about you, what is this very special opportunity really about? The most important answer—the most important single piece of advice in this chapter, from which everything else flows—is that you are here to achieve important results for the people you serve. Who are they? Broadly speaking, the American public; but specifically, they are the people whose lives are directly affected by the work of your agency, your office, and you yourself. If that remains uppermost in your mind, and if you succeed in making a significant difference in the lives of your constituency, you will have gotten it all right.

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Some appointees get sidetracked from achieving their critical priorities by the sheer volume of their in boxes and the requirements that others place on them. You will have to find a way to maintain a focus on getting a few important things done while you are in office, leaving your institution and your team better than you found them.

Elliot Richardson, a founder of the Council for Excellence in Government, talked about what it takes to succeed as a leader in government at the last Council board meeting he attended before his death on December 31, 1999. This great public servant, the only person ever to serve in four cabinet positions, defined two leadership qualities necessary for effective governance in the new century. The first is a sense of history: knowing as much as reasonably possible about the context, the players, the successes, and failures that precede you. The second quality, somewhat antithetical to the first, is imagination: the ability to look around corners, to see a better future and enlist the assistance of others in giving form to that vision.

Richardson, who is a role model and mentor to me and to many who have served in government, often wisely described public service as a public trust, to be carried out with integrity and unqualified devotion to the public interest. His concept of integrity went beyond simple adherence to government ethics rules to encompass the “consistent pursuit of the merits . . . a willingness to speak up, to argue, to question, and to criticize, readiness to invite ideas, encourage debate, and accept criticism.”

Personal Qualities

In the context of a sense of history, imagination, and integrity, several other qualities will serve you well. Teamwork, humility, focus, patience, and a sense of humor are important assets in the management of large organizations; in the executive branch, where so many interests intersect and, too often, conflict, they are essential.

Teamwork

Lone rangers rarely succeed in Washington—certainly not for very long. To succeed, appointees must be good at building their teams, starting with their agencies’ core career staff; they should work with their peers in other agencies, with the White House, with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), with members of Congress and their staffs, with the media, and with the many interest groups and stakeholders that inform every significant federal enterprise. Some will support you from the outset. Some will tolerate you—or at least not oppose you. Others will be

your adversaries. Your adversaries on today's issue might be your allies on tomorrow's. To succeed in your job, you have to work with all of these interests, alienate as few as possible, and forge alliances—or at least détente—with most.

- » There is no single individual, with the exception of, perhaps, the president, who wields great power on his own. I think that's a hard lesson for secretaries and assistant secretaries to learn. Power in Washington is diffuse. One succeeds and survives by building coalitions. [Kerry Weems, principal deputy assistant secretary for budget, technology, and finance, Department of Health and Human Services, George W. Bush administration]
- » Communicate, communicate, and communicate—most of it by listening! Listen to people at all levels in the agency, to constituents, to Congress, and to the White House. [Mortimer Downey, deputy secretary and chief operating officer, Department of Transportation, Clinton administration]
- » Know the key players that you have to work with to get things done . . . then find out what motivates them so that you can build a working relationship that is effective. [Failing to do] this is the single biggest shortcoming of people coming from the private sector. [Colin Blaydon, deputy associate director, Office of Management and Budget, Nixon administration]

Humility

It can be hard to be humble when you have been asked by the president to play a leading role in the government of the United States. Unless you have already served in similar positions, much of what you will face in government will be new to you. You may have been a senior executive of a major company or led an important interest group or served in high-profile positions in Congress or academia; none of these automatically prepares you to succeed in government. As you form your opinions and plan your strategies, take pains to appreciate what you don't know, listen to your predecessors, ask questions of your staff, and listen to what they say.

You will be urged to start off strong, take quick action, and put your personal stamp on your agency and position. That approach can be important, given the traditionally short tenure of most appointees. But a little humility in the beginning, seeking advice, really listening, and thinking through a variety of perspectives can help you avoid some of the pitfalls

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awaiting you and will enable you to achieve the results that will benefit the constituencies you serve.

- » It's important to keep in mind that we all work for the people, and that we need to be responsible and accountable to a variety of parties, not just the executive branch, but also Congress, the press, and the public. [David M. Walker, comptroller general of the United States, appointed by Clinton administration; also served in Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations]
- » Be a little humble. Know that sycophants are not acting in your best interests. You need some people around that are able to tell you bad news. Sometimes they are the most valuable people you have. [Wade Horn, assistant secretary for children and families, Department of Health and Human Services, George W. Bush administration]

Focus

History tells us that most executive branch appointees stay in their jobs for between eighteen and twenty-four months. That is not much time to make a difference or to have a lasting impact. You should identify early on the critical few things that can be done in a reasonable period of time and work with your team and your partners to do them. At the same time, you will need to advance the resolution of longer-term issues that you may not see to completion. That way, your successor will not have to start at zero, and the public will not have to wait years for results.

To energize your team, work with them to articulate a compelling vision of the results you want to achieve and establish an ambitious time frame. If they are motivated to play a role in shaping your strategy, you will be in a strong position to reach out to build ownership and support. The urgency of a crisis causes people to focus and to act in ways that can be productive; in the absence of a crisis, you will have to create a sense of urgency the old-fashioned way—with good ideas, teamwork, and insistence on results.

- » First, name three things you want to accomplish—and never lose focus on those. You want to “do” the job, not “be” the position. [Jack Ebeler, deputy assistant secretary, Department of Health and Human Services, Clinton administration]
- » Crucial actions for appointees include a few compelling goals and aims that will energize the agency for a two- to four-year period,

hopefully consistent with the stated goals of the administration and the constituencies. [Gil Omenn, associate director, Office of Management and Budget, Carter administration]

- » Pick a few doable items and win on them. [Frank Hodsoll, deputy director for management, Office of Management and Budget, George H. W. Bush administration]

Patience

It may sound paradoxical, but as you focus on achieving a few really important results in a short time, you also have to be patient. Your willingness to listen, to learn, to compromise—even to abandon something on your shortlist or to add a new goal, if the opportunity arises and moves your vision forward—will require patience and perseverance. Many strategies can help you define these choices: consult your predecessors, consult your mentors, consult your allies in the administration, and consult your senior staff. But in the end, leadership carries with it the responsibility to act decisively and deliberately—when the time is right.

- » In dealing with the big challenges in government, in addition to having positive leadership attributes and strong integrity, it often takes patience, then persistence, then perseverance, then pain, before you prevail. [David M. Walker, comptroller general of the United States]
- » Don't let the plague of "in-box priorities" cause you to lose sight of the long-term strategy, but do identify every opportunity to link the two together. [Ruth A. David, deputy director for science and technology, Central Intelligence Agency, Clinton administration]
- » If you're making a little progress day after day, you're going to change things. Whereas if you expect to shoot for the moon in a six-month or a year period, more than likely it ain't going to happen. And you end up with nothing. [David Safavian, administrator for federal procurement policy, Office of Management and Budget, George W. Bush administration]

A Sense of Humor

A good sense of humor is a terrific way to preserve your sense of self. Willard Wirtz, President Kennedy's secretary of labor, would often tell the

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story of visiting an elementary school during his tenure. A young girl came up to him and said: "I'm the labor secretary of the fourth grade!"

"That's wonderful! But what exactly does the labor secretary of the fourth grade do?" Wirtz asked.

With great pride, the girl said that she washed the blackboard and clapped the erasers at the end of the day; on Friday, she cleaned up all the mess so that everything was in place to start fresh on Monday. And then she inquired: "What exactly do *you* do?"

Without missing a beat, Wirtz replied: "Pretty much the same."

Washington is a place where the most serious business imaginable, the people's business, goes on every day. Humor is all too rare, but you will find that an appreciation of the occasional absurdities that you will encounter and have to deal with can go a long way in making your hard work and long hours more enjoyable. Think, for example, of what many appointees endure in the appointment and clearance process. A member of the Council for Excellence in Government described an incident that occurred before the formal Senate committee hearing on his confirmation:

- » I was one of several nominees called to talk to members of the committee privately. I went in, and there was some back-and-forth around the table between them and me, the usual thing. I thought it was about over when Senator _____ came in. He plowed around in my record awhile and then said, "Now, I'd like to ask you about this vicious eight-page attack on the Congress of the United States that you authored and was reported in _____. What do you have to say about that?" I said, "Senator, I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about." And then one of his staff leaned over to him and whispered, "Senator, it's not this guy, it's the next one." [*A Survivor's Guide for Government Executives* (Council for Excellence in Government, 1989)]

You will often encounter bureaucratic confusion and you will run into that kind of amusing absurdity. A light touch, when appropriate, will make your time in office more enjoyable and much more productive. Most of the people you deal with will value an even temper and a congenial manner and work all the better with you for it.

- » The first thing to do is to have fun, enjoy what you do, and not get eaten up with your own sense of importance. You are only going to be there for a relatively short time, and when you leave, people

are going to have to struggle to remember what the heck your name was. [Michael Jackson, deputy secretary of transportation, George W. Bush administration]

Combine these many qualities—a sense of history, imagination, integrity, teamwork, humility, focus, patience, and a sense of humor—to think and act strategically, with a view toward achieving results that will have a positive impact on the people you serve.

Resources and Tools You Need to Succeed

Although the personal qualities described above are indispensable, you will also need to make good use of a range of resources, tangible and intangible, to get results. Many come to Washington believing that civil servants, the budget process, information technology, other agencies, even the White House are forces to be tamed and managed. The reality is contrary: these are resources, and appointees need to use them skillfully and sensitively.

The People in Your Organization

Most civil servants have served or will serve in the executive branch longer than you; most are as committed as you are to achieving results for the American people. Political appointees typically devote a short time—eight years at the most—to government service. Civil servants, in contrast, are devoting their entire careers to the government; they have seen appointees come and go.

- » As a political coming into the executive branch, people warned me about the civil service: “You can’t trust them; they’re always looking to push their own agenda rather than the president’s agenda; be very cautious, watch what you say.” The first bit of advice I would give is that the career folks, by and large, especially in the upper executive end, want to help you implement your agenda. They’re there to help. They are not there to interfere. And you have to give them the benefit of the doubt. If you trust them and you build that trust in a relationship with them, you can get things done. [David Safavian, administrator for federal procurement policy, George W. Bush administration]
- » You will find real talent among foreign service officers and career civil servants—use and respect them. [Hattie Babbitt, deputy

administrator, United States Agency for International Development, Clinton administration]

The best civil servants welcome new leaders who bring new ideas, ask good questions, learn the ropes, and are committed to achieving results and strengthening the institution. Look for these people early, especially among the senior executives who report to you or your appointees. Heed their advice when you can; recognize, develop, and promote the best. One way to energize people, especially senior executives, is to offer and encourage mobility, within your agency or across agencies. Mobility broadens management perspectives.

Forging alliances with career staff becomes all the more important in light of the large turnover expected to occur in the civil service over the next few years, especially among senior executives. By 2008, according to the Office of Personnel Management, 52 percent of the current federal civilian workforce and 69.5 percent of all supervisors will be eligible to retire. Roughly 70 percent of all members of the senior executive service will be eligible to retire by 2008.

Cabinet heads may preside over scores of appointees. Subcabinet officials also oversee many appointees, and senior appointees not subject to Senate confirmation often supervise appointed staff. While subordinate appointees are, on paper, accountable to you, they often have their own lines of communication to the White House, Congress, and interest groups—and their own ideas.

You should be the leader of your entire workforce, both career and appointed, and get the best ideas and best work out of everyone, as a team.

Partnerships

In addition to working well with the people in your organization, partnerships with other federal agencies, state and local government agencies, the private sector, and nonprofit organizations will add immeasurably to your impact as a manager. Cultivate your partners, including new ones, strategically. Define the terms of the partnership, not only according to the rules (legal, regulatory, and contractual) but also to increase accountability for specific results.

Be creative about incentives and sharing experience to improve the process of partnerships. Use information technology wisely. For example, consolidating the application process for grants to state and local government has eliminated much redundancy; maybe that can be taken a step further in your area. Some agencies have used share-in-savings

contracts with business partners to improve results and share financial risks. (Under a share-in-savings contract, a vendor pays for developing a product or service for an agency and is compensated from the savings it generates for that agency.) One such agency, the Department of Education, used that procedure to reengineer the management of student financial assistance.

- » I always thought our best work was done in partnerships—among offices and agencies—with private and nonprofit organizations, with the Hill: better ideas, less friction, more efficient, better chance of mustering the resources and momentum to act. [Jamiene Studley, general counsel (acting), Department of Education, Clinton administration]

White House Staff

Each White House has its own personality, which reflects the leadership style of the president and his top advisers. Know who the players are, what roles they play, how decisions are made, and what is expected of you and your team. The president's chief of staff manages the White House staff and is usually very close to the president, from whom the power flows.

At times, you may get conflicting requests from various White House offices; in a fast-moving environment, coordination is not always perfect. The Office of Cabinet Affairs is usually the main liaison to cabinet agencies, but you may also deal with one of the policy shops or councils, such as the National Security Council or National Economic Council. Whatever the structures, know them, know the players, and know the president's agenda, especially in your area. And do not be surprised if the White House chooses to communicate good news coming from your agency and leaves you to communicate the bad news. You are part of the team.

- » Know always that you are there to serve the president and the secretary—and that they are served by wisdom, candor, and loyalty, not blind obedience. [Jamiene Studley, general counsel (acting), Department of Education, Clinton administration]

Information Technology

The rapid advance of information technology, for good or ill, is a fact of life in any complex public or private organization. In the federal government, the advantages are enormous. Information and communications

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technology can gather, organize, integrate, and permit analysis of essential information from your staff, your grantees, and your contractors. It supports your financial management processes and enables you to learn quickly how well your agency is performing and what problems need to be solved. It provides ways for you to communicate with your colleagues, your partners, and the public. It can increase your agency's efficiency and reduce your costs, freeing resources for other priorities.

In the charge toward electronic government transactions and services, it is important to stay sharply focused on the citizens and businesses who are both the customers and owners of government. Public and private sector organizations often tend to approach service delivery from the inside looking out. Active engagement between government and citizens requires the contrary: understanding, identifying, and aligning the government's actions with the priorities of the people being served. The customer occupies the center of the e-government revolution. The next phase of e-government development should focus on breakthrough performance, solving problems, and achieving tangible results. The "gold standard" measures of e-government's performance must include the following, each of which should be measured regularly:

—Improvements in *quality*: delivering reliable, accurate, and user-friendly information, transactions, and services; and integrating them across government agencies and levels of government, using commercial best practices. Customer satisfaction is the key index here.

—Improvements in *cycle time*: delivering information and services in minutes or seconds, not hours, days, weeks, or months. Efficient e-government reduces processing time for transactions, information requests, decisions, and problem resolution.

—*Cost* reductions: raising efficiencies in average and per-unit service delivery costs for government activities and transactions; information technology can avoid duplicative submission of data.

Of course, technology alone is not the final answer. Achieving higher levels of government performance must also involve motivating people and improving processes. Success in government is conditioned on all of these factors.

If you are coming into government as a chief information officer, these guidelines will probably be familiar. If you will be heading an agency, you should get close to your chief information officer. Take the

time to investigate how your goals can be advanced through the strategic, creative use of technology.

The Budget

Virtually all significant public policy initiatives require funding. Decisions about the level of public resources you will get for your initiatives are made in your agency's internal budget process, in the coordination among agencies of the president's budget proposal to Congress, and in the congressional budget, appropriation, and authorization processes. The resources you want will rarely come to you unless you make significant efforts to influence each of these processes. You must know the players, know the schedule, and know when and how to get involved.

Your staff will include budget experts, notably a career budget officer and program managers. These people understand the mechanics of the budget and have been through it many times. If you are a component of a larger department, you will find more key budget players at the department level, both career budget officers and appointees. The program associate director, or PAD, within the Office of Management and Budget who has jurisdiction over your area will have considerable influence in the formulation of your budget. Each program associate director has a career division chief (the head of a resource management office), a branch chief, and examiners who review your programs and your management. These career people have extraordinary influence on the success of your proposals. In Congress, appropriations and authorization committee members and staff have authority to influence and approve your budget. Sometimes a junior committee member will be your key contact. If yours is an "orphan" agency, the sponsorship of a junior member or subcommittee staff can make a large difference in your agency's appropriation. Senators and representatives outside the committees, as well as their aides, may have an interest in decisions affecting your programs. And many interest groups with a stake in your budget issues can be as important as any of the government officers or legislators involved.

This is a very long list, but each person on it has the ability to make your success more or less likely. You should know what each of these players thinks is important and discuss your ideas with them.

For your strategies to succeed, you have to play a lead role in each of the budget decisionmaking and negotiation processes. Modulate your positions to reflect what has worked in the past and to agree with the president's goals (which you help shape). Take into account the frequently conflicting views of Congress and the interest groups. Work out a strategy

for getting proposals through each process. All this takes time and effort, but it is worth it in the end.

The schedules for budgeting can involve three different fiscal year budgets at the same time: (1) the budget funding your current activity; (2) the budget pending in Congress for the current or next fiscal year; and (3) the budget being developed for the president's budget for the year following. Specific schedules change every year, but your intervention can be decisive at several key points:

—The budget that funds current activity does not run on autopilot. You have to take an active interest in how your programs are working or you may miss a key moment to intervene. You have to be the first to recognize and respond to a problem. If OMB, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congress, interest groups, or the media get wind of problems, you will spend valuable time putting out fires instead of getting the best out of your budget resources.

—Once the president's budget goes to Congress, it becomes the pending budget. Both the House and the Senate may schedule multiple hearings on your budget, always before appropriations subcommittees, sometimes before the budget committees, and often before authorizing committees in whose jurisdictional area of the budget you and/or they are proposing changes. Appointees are the usual witnesses, though sometimes career budget officers and program managers also testify. The career officers are in frequent contact with the staff, providing you with key intelligence and helping build support. The congressional process is supposed to end in late spring with enactment of appropriations bills, but negotiations may extend up to—and sometimes well beyond—the end of the fiscal year.

These tasks are difficult—and nearly impossible to do well—your first time around, but your first budget may be the most important. You can get help. Learn from your career staff, from experienced predecessors and allies in the administration and Congress, and from sympathetic interest groups.

—Formulation of the budget for the following year starts in the spring with your ideas. You will have some general guidance from OMB on funding levels for your agency or division. They may not be binding, but most appointees oversee multiple programs and staffs, so here is where compromise and accommodation

begin. The justification to OMB is developed in the summer—on your own if you head an independent agency or blended with your peers' inputs (where more compromises will occur) if you are in a department. Proposals are submitted to OMB in September.

You may be called to testify at OMB staff hearings in the fall or to respond to written questions. Seize every opportunity to make your case with OMB. Unless you get everything you ask for in initial decisions (“the OMB pass-back”)—a virtually unheard-of event—in late fall and early winter you make your case in appeals or seek support from White House aides to influence OMB. For the very biggest issues, you may get to present your case to the chief of staff and other advisers or even to the president in December and January. The budget goes to Congress in February. Before that, you formally or informally brief Congress, the media, and interest groups to gauge support or opposition, perhaps modifying your proposals in response.

- » Nothing actually gets done unless resources are provided in the budget. [Joseph Kasputys, assistant secretary of commerce, Ford administration]

Congress

“The president proposes, and Congress disposes,” so the saying goes. That fundamental principle is set out in the Constitution. And the fact that it is Article I of the Constitution that established Congress and its powers reflects the founders' views of the importance of the legislative branch.

In reality, power has shifted markedly toward the executive branch over the history of the republic, a trend that accelerated with the New Deal, World War II, and the cold war. Nonetheless, few executive branch appointees can be effective without remaining mindful of the role of Congress, its committees, and its key members. The power of the purse and the leverage that Congress has in controlling annual appropriations are a fact of life for every department and agency.

The interaction between the executive and the legislative branch is intricate and convoluted. While not all appointees work directly with Congress, you should learn as much as you can about the committees and the members (of both parties) who will have a major say in your agency's funding and functions.

In addition to the budget, several types of concrete tasks related to Congress await you and your staff. These may include formulating legislative initiatives for the administration; drafting bills, amendments, and explanatory material (often called “report language”) on behalf of these initiatives’ House and Senate sponsors; writing testimony for congressional hearings; and of course, responding to congressional inquiries or investigations. You may work with interest groups to form coalitions before formal legislation surfaces. You will test public reactions to legislative ideas, sometimes following public opinion, sometimes challenging it. You will consult and work closely with your allies in Congress, but also with your adversaries. You will develop long-term and temporary alliances, depending on the issue; remember always that your opponent in a current policy debate may be your partner next time.

Get to know your congressional liaison and others in your agency’s governmental affairs department. Both career and political staff in these departments know the often mysterious and opaque ways of Capitol Hill. Learn from them. Listen to them. Most important, work with them.

Many on the Hill—some even in your party—may disagree with much that you believe. But you must always respect the constitutional roles they have to play, as you hope they will respect yours. Remember that the checks and balances framed in the Constitution were designed to make policy change a cumbersome business.

- » Success in Washington is all about relationships within your shop and with those in other areas with whose work or impact you intersect. It is also about understanding the constitutional assignment of equal roles for the executive and congressional branches. Forget this at your peril. [Bill Brock, secretary of labor, Reagan administration]
- » Pay attention to Congress, but do what is right (even if it is politically unpopular). [Jacques Gansler, under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology, and logistics, Clinton administration]
- » Don’t neglect Congress—that is the usual failing of people coming from outside Washington to take a senior position. In the end, Congress decides your budget and may decide your programs. Go visit and make good links. [D. James Baker, under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere, Clinton administration]
- » Be honest with people on the Hill. They understand that you can’t always be forthcoming, but that’s no excuse for being misleading.

And remember that some of the senior career people in your shop probably have well-established relationships with congressional staff and members that can work for you. Or, if you're not careful, against you. [Rep. David Skaggs (D-Colo.), 1987–99]

The Media

Whether we like it or not, the media have become our modern-day civics teachers. With the advent of twenty-four-hour cable news, the resurgence of talk radio, aggressive marketing and competition among newspapers and weekly magazines, and the explosive growth of the Internet, American news media are by far the most influential voices in bringing ordinary citizens information—and shaping their opinions—about government.

The question for you is simple: do you want the media to work in partnership with you or work against you? The answer is easy; the reality is not. Media coverage of the federal government is changing—and not for the better.

According to a 2003 study conducted for the Council for Excellence in Government by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, there is far less coverage of the federal government than there used to be on evening network broadcasts, as well as on the front pages of national and regional newspapers. Reporting on the federal government is increasingly judgmental, opinionated, and generally negative. The average “news hole” on network television broadcasts—after subtracting time for commercials and promotions from the half-hour time slot—decreased from 22 minutes, 22 seconds in 1981 to 18 minutes, 37 seconds by 2001. It is probably even shorter today.

Despite these discouraging statistics, it is still possible—and even more imperative—to tell your story to the American people through the media. Network television is not the only outlet: local news channels, cable, print, Internet, and other media are powerful. Your agency and its programs are probably covered by specialized newsletters and Washington bureaus. Get to know their reporters and editors. Building relationships will be essential to your success. Your agency's public affairs office (the “press shop”) is the first step; a good working relationship with the career and political staff in the press office is vital. Don't delay your first encounter with these professionals until a media crisis looms. Take the time to get to know them, and give them an early opportunity to get to know you and your programs. Include them when you begin developing policy, and listen carefully to their suggestions. Having a communications component at the start of a project will prevent missteps when the project is

announced or implemented. The public affairs staff usually has its ear to the ground with reporters who are interested in your programs. That intelligence can be immensely helpful to you.

Cultivate relationships—and two-way trust—with the media: reporters from trade publications, beat reporters at major newspapers, cable and network producers and correspondents, and content managers and writers on news websites. Learn to understand their needs and how their game is played. Treat them as equals. Relationships built through trust will serve you well.

What role can you play in helping to reverse these trends? You need to ask yourself some key questions: How can I work more effectively with journalists to foster credible and understandable reporting of complex government issues? How can I use both my expertise and credibility as a government news source to achieve better results not just for reporters, but also for my agency and the people I serve?

- » Officials need to recognize that the people have a right to know what public officials are doing with their authorities, and with the people's money. They need to be responsive to the media and the public. At the same time, we all recognize that the media isn't always going to get it right. And that's life. But it's better to be responsive. It's better to be honest and open than the opposite. [David M. Walker, comptroller general of the United States]

The Public

Public service is a public trust: the people are sometimes your customers, but they are always your ultimate overseers, as the owners of our democracy.

Many leaders in government see the public as distant and not sufficiently informed to be involved in the substance of their work. To be sure, most people will not know much about you or your job, but they know what their priorities are, what they will support or oppose, and whether the administration's policy and practice are relevant to them or their families. Just a few years ago, a Council for Excellence in Government poll found that a majority of Americans—especially young Americans—no longer think of government as “of, by, and for the people.” For them, it is “the” government, not “our” government. The September 11, 2001, attacks changed that temporarily, but the long-term health of our democracy and the vitality of our government depend on greater participation by citizens, not only voting but also helping set priorities and holding government accountable for results.

You can communicate with the public in a number of ways: indirectly, by working with their elected representatives, or directly, in town hall meetings or online. For example, in 2003 the Council for Excellence in Government held a series of town hall meetings around the country to look at homeland security from the citizens' perspective. These conversations, reinforced by expert working groups and national polls, led to tangible changes in policy and practice among the federal, state, and local leaders who participated. Trust the people: they have a lot to offer to help you in responding to their needs.

» I think some people who are having their first run in a senior government job will be surprised at how much time they spend thinking about how to communicate effectively with the public and making sure they do so. [Michael Jackson, deputy secretary of transportation, George W. Bush administration]

Use these resources—build your team; create partnerships; listen and work closely with the White House, Congress, and the media; do your homework; and engage the public in setting your agenda. Choose a few critical priorities, with clearly aligned goals and measures, for individuals, teams, partners, and your agency. Measure performance and communicate progress and results honestly to your team, your partners, Congress, the media, and the public. This will go a long way to building your credibility and restoring trust in government, which you should regard as part of your job.

Effective Leadership

Government boils down to effective leadership, about which much has been written and said. President Harry Truman, who usually got right to the heart of things in a very few words, once said that a leader is “someone who can get other people to do what they don't want to do and like it.”

What does it take to be a leader? John Gardner, a legendary public sector leader who founded Common Cause and won the Presidential Medal of Freedom, cautioned that leadership is not to be confused, as it often is in Washington, with status, power, or official authority. Instead, effective leadership focuses on vision, values, crossing boundaries, thinking into the future, constant renewal, and inspiring and raising trust.

What do leaders do? Gardner said that leaders define what the future should look like, align people to that vision, and inspire them to make it

happen despite the obstacles. Management expert Peter Drucker says that popularity is not leadership: “Leadership is all about achieving results for the people you serve. Effective leaders in government are collaborative, smart, and accountable for results.” In a public survey on attitudes about government leaders conducted by Peter Hart and Bob Teeter for the Council for Excellence in Government in 1997, nearly two-thirds of the respondents said that politicians who pursue their own rather than the public’s agenda are a major cause of reduced confidence in government. Very few respondents said that leaders spend tax dollars wisely (13 percent), tell the truth (14 percent), put politics aside to do what is right (15 percent), or understand average people (20 percent).

To provide context, public trust in the federal government “to do what is right just about always or most of the time” (a formulation frequently used in polls) has declined substantially over the last forty years—from a high of 76 percent in 1964 to 36 percent in 2003, according to a series of University of Michigan surveys conducted since 1958. Public trust in government dropped from 53 percent to 36 percent between 1972 and 1974 (Watergate), increased from 33 percent to 44 percent between 1982 and 1984 (Ronald Reagan’s first term), increased from 27 percent to 40 percent between 1996 and 1998 (Bill Clinton’s second term), increased to 56 percent after September 11, 2001, and then declined to 36 percent in 2003, the level at which it stood in 1974.

You have a role in building trust in government. Improving the performance of your institution matters to the American people.

- » Set high standards for performance for yourself and those with whom you work. [Joseph Kasputys, assistant secretary of commerce, Ford administration]
- » Focus on aligning resource decisions with results. [Mark Forman, administrator, office of e-government and information technology, Office of Management and Budget, George W. Bush administration]
- » It is important to measure performance, because what gets measured gets improved. [Josh Gotbaum, executive associate director and controller, Office of Management and Budget, Clinton administration]
- » Getting the team committed to meaningfully quantified goals is crucial. [Charles Rossotti, commissioner of internal revenue, Clinton and George W. Bush administrations]

- » It's not about how hard you try; it's about the results you achieve.
[David Safavian, administrator for federal procurement policy,
George W. Bush administration]

Three striking examples show how visionary leadership coupled with clearly defined goals, team building, and performance accountability can produce extraordinary results. One is the turnaround in the 1990s of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), now a part of the Department of Homeland Security. Plagued by its belief that it was statutorily unauthorized to act in emergencies until state governments asked it to, FEMA had been spending most of its budget on a program to maintain communications for government leaders after a nuclear attack—well after the end of the cold war. FEMA struggled under the oversight of twenty congressional committees. One representative proposed eliminating the agency altogether.

Taking over as director in 1993, James Lee Witt focused the agency's major departments on its most important responsibilities. He appointed a team of senior career managers to revamp FEMA's mission and develop a reorganization plan. He sought employee comments on what needed fixing. He discussed the reorganization with the chairs of the twenty oversight committees. FEMA was soon actively engaged in disaster response, positioning resources before disasters struck, and nourishing rebuilt relationships with state agencies. Resources previously earmarked for nuclear attack went to hurricane preparedness and other realities. The agency used technology and better communications to improve customer service. Every senior executive changed jobs within the agency. As a result, the House bill to abolish FEMA was withdrawn, and Witt and FEMA employees were commended for dramatic improvements in the agency's performance. State disaster relief officials were also pleased. And in opinion surveys, more than 80 percent of respondents rated the agency's service good to excellent.

One of the points this success story makes is that innovative leaders are not content merely to respond. They look for opportunities to pursue critical priorities, engage their senior career leaders, seek innovative partnerships, and communicate effectively with Congress and the public.

A second example is the response of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to long-standing criticism of the slow pace of its drug approval process. Tasked with evaluating the safety and effectiveness of new drugs and medical products before they are marketed, the FDA is known as the gold standard for review; many other countries rely on its judgments. But

drug manufacturers, who spend huge sums to develop their products, complained that long delays in approval delayed sales. Patient advocates complained that delays in new drug approvals denied important treatments to people with serious diseases and argued that faster approvals would ease or prevent suffering and reduce mortality.

An agreement between Congress, drug manufacturers, and the FDA produced the Prescription Drug User Fee Act, which authorized the agency to charge manufacturers scaled fees for its drug reviews in return for accelerating the approval process. These actions also generated significant operational and cultural change within the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. Using performance evaluation, project management, and peer review mechanisms, the center's leadership made its staff accountable for meeting the targets of the new legislation. By 1997, new drug applications had risen by 45 percent, while the median period for review and approval had fallen from twenty-two months to six for drugs in the priority category and to twelve months for less urgent new drugs. Better communication between manufacturers and FDA staff has produced better-prepared applications. The drug fee legislation was renewed in 1997 for another five years, with tougher review goals and authority for innovations to further speed the review process and the development of new drugs. A senior civil servant led this turnaround: Janet Woodcock, director of the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research.

The final example is the success of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in meeting the exceptional demands generated by the events of September 11. The TSA was born of those terrorist attacks, built under heavy pressure, and intended from the beginning to form part of another new and larger agency. Simultaneously, it faced short deadlines for daunting and unprecedented safety tasks—most important, federalizing and improving security at U.S. airports. This was a start-up story unequalled in the federal government since World War II.

Congress created the TSA on November 19, 2001, and set a one-year deadline for the agency to deploy and train the federal security workforce in all 429 U.S. commercial airports. Ten months later, the agency had hired 32,000 screeners, stationed them at nearly a hundred airports, and assigned 145 federal security directors and deputy directors to manage security at 380 airports. At the one-year deadline, the TSA had screeners working at all 429 airports and was screening all checked baggage. The agency called it the largest peacetime mobilization in the country's history.

Since then, the TSA has continued to improve airport security. In May 2004, the agency issued security guidelines for general aviation (non-

commercial) airports, with federally endorsed security enhancements and methods for implementation and a measurement process that helps define each airport's unique security needs. The tool enables airport administrators to evaluate an airport's security characteristics and decide optimal enhancements for their facilities. It covers the security needs of small, privately owned landing strips in rural areas as well as large commercial airports in major cities. The TSA story is one of collaboration, a strategic approach, unusual partnerships, and accountability for seemingly impossible results and deadlines.

As these three stories demonstrate, your appointment presents you with a great opportunity and grants you the privilege to serve. Despite their many war stories and tales of anguish, most of your predecessors—former appointees who are now in the private sector—say that their time in government was the most challenging, most rewarding experience of their careers: “the best job I ever had.” We wish the same for you and for the people you serve.

