THE WHITE HOUSE TRANSITION PROJECT
1997–2017

RICE UNIVERSITY'S BAKER INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

SMOOTHING THE PEACEFUL TRANSFER OF DEMOCRATIC POWER

Report 2017–02

MEETING THE FREIGHT TRAIN HEAD ON

PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION TO POWER

Martha Joynt Kumar, *Towson University*
George C. Edwards III, *Texas A & M University*
James Pfiffner, *George Mason University*
Terry Sullivan, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

and the White House Transition Project

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WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

The White House Transition Project. Established in 1997 to provide information to incoming White House staff members so that they can hit the ground running, The White House Transition Project includes a group of presidency scholars from across the country who participate in writing essays about past transitions and the inner workings of key White House offices. Since its creation, it has participated in the 2001, 2009 and now the 2017 presidential transitions with the primary goal of streamlining the process and enhancing the understanding of White House operations. WHTP maintains an important, international dimension by consulting with foreign governments and organizations interested in improving governmental transitions. http://whitehousetransitionproject.org

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Presidential candidates must plan now for how the winner and his staff will make effective use of his early days in office, according to present and former White House staff members interviewed for The White House Interview Program. It is a project designed by presidency scholars to smooth the path to power by furnishing incoming staff with substantive information about White House operations.* Seizing early opportunities eases confirmations, furthers the President's agenda, and affords a new team a valuable reputation for competence. That is the consensus of people who have worked in top White House positions over the course of the Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations. In interviews for the project, many of the 69 staff members expressed a common frustration over the difficulty of organizing an administration when the White House they enter is whistle clean. It contains empty desks,

* The interviews were conducted during 1999 and 2000 for the White House Interview Program principally by Martha Joynt Kumar. The interviews, averaging around two hours, will be made available to the directors and deputies coming into the seven White House offices we are studying. Some material will also be made available to the transition team. Depending upon the release conditions governing the interviews, the transcripts will be made publicly available beginning in midyear of 2001 through the White House Interview Program website [whitehousetransitionproject.org] and by the Office of Presidential Libraries in the National Archives. The project was developed through the board and members of the Presidency Research Group, a section of the American Political Science Association. The board of the White House Interview Program oversees the project.

no files from their predecessors, and a figurative in-box containing expectations the President will deliver on his promises beginning the moment he enters the Oval Office as Chief Executive. In order to surmount these difficulties and get a fast start as well, both candidates and their teams need to plan early for governing.

EARLY OPPORTUNITIES AND HAZARDS

A new President coming into office runs headlong into a series of challenges and deadlines critical to the definition of the new administration. "You have a series of action-forcing deadlines that come up against you like freight trains," observed **Harrison Wellford**, a veteran participant in the preparation of Democratic presidential candidates. "There are a whole lot of things that happen right there and for a brand new administration that hasn't done any of this before, these are intimidating challenges." Indeed the deadlines are daunting. In the 75 days between the November 7th election and the inauguration on January 20th, the next President will need to form his White House team, designate fourteen Cabinet secretaries, deliver his inaugural address, present his agenda to the nation, and send to Congress a budget of around $1.8 trillion.

If George W. Bush or Al Gore fails to use the transition interregnum wisely, he will risk committing some of the same mistakes that set back the new Clinton Administration in 1993. "They didn't know who they were going to be working for," commented one Clinton aide about the White House staff. "They didn't know what they were supposed to be doing and, frankly, they were not even clear on the common agenda for the White House and the administration." Early missteps haunted the new Clinton Administration well into its first term: a slow start on personnel recruitment, delayed designation of the White House staff, poor vetting of some nominees, failure to set priorities, lax handling of FBI files, mishandling of the firing of career employees of the White House Travel Office. If you do not put together a good team during the transition you are losing a valuable opportunity to effectively govern, observed **Roy Neel**, who began the administration serving as Chief of Staff to Vice President Gore. "You're going to stumble and you'll have huge lost opportunities because your first administration, the whole administration, is often defined by your mistakes and your successes in the first year." The Bush Administration, for example, found right off their momentum was slowed by problems associated with the nomination and failure to confirm John Tower to be Secretary of Defense. "That was a serious bump in the road for us," commented a member of the Bush White House staff. "It was something, first of all, we hadn't anticipated. It preoccupied senior staff attention at the White House for probably two weeks when we couldn't afford to give it attention." It placed in jeopardy their policy initiatives. "If we had stumbled after the Tower problems, I think it would have taken us a long time to recover and it would have jeopardized any momentum we had on the policy side," he said.

The challenge for a President is to take advantage of the early opportunities within the narrow window from the election to the presentation of his budget. The expository period in a presidency is a time when the Washington political community comes together to welcome its new leader and learn about his people and programs. **James Baker**, Chief of Staff to

Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, described the atmosphere and opportunities of those early days. "There is to some extent a cessation or minimization of the press's adversarial approach to what's going on," he said. "They're more interested in finding out and reporting on what the new administration has in mind. And you don't have people on the other side attacking you. You're pretty free to name your people, make your choices, set your priorities and your objectives. That ends after a hundred days."

Fairly soon the period of cooperation gives way to what has become a hostile relationship between the administration on the one hand and the opposition party, interest groups, and often the press on the other. "The interest groups, whether it's advertising on radio or television or taking out ads or issuing press releases, from day one, from minute one, they launch an attack," observed **Kenneth Duberstein**, White House Chief of Staff at the end of the Reagan Administration. In order to fashion a system of institutional support, a President needs a team in place that can make the proper connections with the institutions and individuals who form the Washington political community.

How can a new administration avoid a foreseeable train wreck? In our interviews with them, White House staff members who spoke about the transition identified the following as the important elements to getting off to a successful start.

THE LESSONS LEARNED

1. Focus Now on People and Process

The first order of business in preparing the take over of the government is to analyze the jobs a President can fill, to establish the procedures by which the transition team will collect names of appropriate people to fill them, to determine the priorities they should observe in naming people for the posts, and to collect names of possible appointees. The process used to make decisions is critical to the results garnered.

In order to take over the government a President needs his people in place. Early personnel planning can lay out an infrastructure that will allow the President-elect's team to handle efficiently the thousands of resumes that will pour into transition headquarters beginning the day after the election. The transition personnel director, preferably the director-designate of the Office of Presidential Personnel, should set up a process that involves everyone who ought to have input on appointments and will give the President the range of choices and levels of detail he wants. Since according to the Office of Personnel Management there are 7,303 noncompetitive appointments to be made, 1,119 of which are political appointees requiring Senate confirmation, priorities should be set concerning which positions to fill first. [see www.opm.gov/fedlist/data.htm]

In the case of the Reagan transition, personnel was the early focus for those preparing for office. **Pendleton James**, with experience as a Nixon personnel office staff member and as a professional headhunter, directed the personnel operation for candidate Ronald Reagan during the summer and fall prior to the 1980 election and later for President Reagan through the first year and a half of his administration. According to James, planning and preparation are

essential. "The guys in the campaign were only worried about one thing: the election night. I was only worrying about one thing: the morning after the election," he said. "There is no start up and there is no learning for Presidential Personnel. It has to start its operation the morning after the election." He continued, "Presidential Personnel has to be functional on the first day, the first minute of the first hour."

Establishing priorities in personnel placement begins with the perceived problems the administration must deal with and the positions taken during the campaign. In Ronald Reagan's case the economy was the key issue and was center stage in the appointment process. **Pendleton James** detailed how they used the appointment process to focus on the issue. "So we came up with what I called the key eighty-seven. This is going through a planning process and comes out in the planning stage. Obviously, you know you're going to do the cabinet. Obviously, you know you're going to do the White House staff. Then in what order are you going to do the other? So I and my group went through and said, what are the key economic policy-making jobs? Those are the ones we want to address first because, until that person is sworn in, confirmed or appointed, that desk is empty over at Treasury or over at Commerce. Economic policy goes from State Department, Commerce, Treasury; it goes through everybody. It's not just Treasury Department. You want to make certain in the early days to work filling those appointments crucial to your initiatives of the first hundred days."

Handling the processing of names of appointees includes the consideration of the technology the personnel team will use for the handling of resumes coming from every direction. In order to manage the flood, there needs to be a system set up appropriate to dealing with the anticipated volume. In order to stay current with the volume, the electronic technology must be in place to meet the tsunami of resumes hitting the President-elect on November 8th. Processing of names also requires a timeline of what appointments should be made by what points during the transition. Generally the names of Cabinet appointees are released in full before Christmas with the key posts of State, Defense, Treasury, and Justice attended to shortly after the election. They are sworn in shortly after the inauguration.

The personnel area is the one where the difference is greatest between a "friendly" and a "hostile" transition. When there is a change of party, the White House staff and those serving in political posts throughout the administration all understand they will almost certainly leave office when the new President comes in. The question is who fires them, not whether they will be asked to leave. At the request of the newly elected President, sometimes an outgoing administration will send out notices to those he appointed letting them know the incoming one wants them to vacate their offices. President Bush did that for President Clinton. When there is no change in party, a difficult situation arises as appointed officials must be convinced to leave. When President Bush took office, there were people in the administration who did not want to leave as they believed they had worked for the Reagan – Bush team. Yet the Bush team wanted to appoint their own people loyal to the President. "There was a lot of hard feeling between the Reaganites who felt 'Wait a minute, we got you guys elected; why are you being so rude to us and mean to us?'," said one observer of the transition. "They were deeply antagonized by that process. One of the Bush people told me, 'They've had their time in the sandbox; this is our sandbox now.'" When there is a change in party, there is no disagreement over who controls the sandbox.

Personnel planning during the campaign must be carried on in a low key manner and coordinated with the head of the campaign. Otherwise, campaign workers may become suspicious that people in a back room who are busily dividing the spoils of victory while they are working hard trying to win the campaign. This kind of resentment can be disruptive to a transition as it was in Jimmy Carter's case. The Reagan team learned the lesson well and, according to James, prior to the election their personnel operation was "behind-the-scenes, not part of the campaign and certainly not known to the public." It also was coordinated with Ed Meese, the campaign manager, who daily met with the personnel team at 6:00 am and at 10:00 pm.

The decision-making process must have the confidence of the whole team. Richard Cheney, who served as Chief of Staff for President Ford, explained the consequences when people believe the decision-making process to be an unfair one: "If you don't trust the process you're going to start looking for ways around it, try to find a friendly congressman who has a good relationship with the President, maybe the chairman of the committee, who can come down and maybe have lunch with the President one day and get him back on track," he said. "All of a sudden you have people freelancing trying to get around the decision-making process because they feel the process lacks integrity. So it's very, very important when you set up the shop to make certain that you have a guaranteed flow—you know what's going in; you know what's coming out. You know when it goes in that it's complete, that everybody's got their shot at the decision memo. You know if there's going to be a meeting, the right people are going to be in the meeting, that the President has a chance to listen to all of that and then make a decision." If the process is not perceived as a fair one, people make end runs around the decision-makers. "To the extent that you get advocates for a particular point of view running that process, then the process breaks down." That process is established during the transition and the first place it comes up is in sifting through the appointment process.

2. Avoid Constraining Commitments

The rhythms of the transition are strongly influenced by the commitments the President-elect made during his campaign. In the months running for office, the candidate can ease his passage to power by establishing a clear agenda. At the same time, he can burden himself by making commitments that haunt him after the inauguration. Several recent presidents have found their commitment to cut the White House staff to be a constraint once they came into office, including Bill Clinton who promised to cut the White House staff by 25 percent. "Frankly the only persons who cared about that in 1992 were a handful of people that populate the House Government Operations Committee on the other side," indicated a member of the early Clinton team. "It never made any sense to do that." Other presidents, including President Carter faced similar experiences. The effort it takes to fulfill such a promise is seldom worth the small political pay off, but failure to keep the promise can be a large embarrassment.

The ethics pledge made during the campaign by Bill Clinton when he promised to have a more ethical administration than that of his predecessors proved to be a problem that followed him throughout his administration. According to one Clinton staffer, "Short-sighted is definitely the most diplomatic word I can use for that because you're going to have people in

your administration who have made mistakes, you're going to be burned, people are going to have ethical problems and it just makes you a bigger target. The only person who cared was Ralph Nader and I'm sure he didn't vote for us." The same person observed: "To a certain extent you could say that a successful transition is rooted in a campaign that is discreet in its promises because those things can come back to bite you."

Likewise, optimistic promises about political appointments can complicate early months in office. "You don't want to make promises about diversity, for example, in appointments that you can't keep," said one observer of the process. "The problem is not with having a diversity goal; the problem is that you need to have people's expectations calibrated to when you can deliver on that goal," he said. "There's a tendency sometimes to try to deliver on all those promises right way, right in the first two or three weeks, to show that you have made progress in delivering on the symbolic promises that are supposed to define your administration." Fairly soon, however, the new staff realizes it takes a long time to appoint a range of people that reflects the winning coalition and the diversity of America. The easiest way to avoid the problem is during the campaign to tone down appointment promises.

In the campaign, a candidate also needs to be mindful of promises to share influence with the Vice President or with the First Lady. Those promises too can be ones causing difficulties once the candidate takes office. While "two for the price of one" was an attractive promise of making use of a talented First Lady, once President Clinton came into office and Hillary Clinton took a West Wing office some new staff were confused about her place in the decision-making process. Promises made during the campaign or in the transition about the role of the Vice-President may need to be rethought once they take office. While President Ford initially gave Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller control over the Domestic Policy Council, in the long run that was a decision the President and his staff walked back on.

3. Top White House Staff Come First

The White House staff is the key to an effective presidency, and having a team in place is crucial to an effective transition. Key designations should be made early in the transition, even before Cabinet appointments are determined, as the Clinton team learned during its transition. The White House staff extends the reach of a President and increases his capacity to handle the crushing responsibilities of those early weeks and months. "It's crucial in terms of how he's going to function as President, whether or not he's effective," observed **Richard Cheney**. "A President can do a lot just based on his own personal skills but there's a limit. His reach, his ability to sort of guide and direct the government, to interact with the cabinet, to deal effectively with the Congress, to manage his relationship with the press, all of those are key ingredients to his success."

As the President-elect considers the role of his White House staff, he will need to think through the general structure of his operation. If the new President reinvents the wheel, adds layers, or jettisons an office, he and his team should have a good rationale for why they are doing so. With the exception of the National Economic Council, the major White House offices have been in place through several cycles of both Democratic and Republican administrations. Before altering the White House structure, the team will want to have an understanding of what

each office brings to the table. An awareness of the different ways in which White House offices have been structured is an important starting place for those coming in.

In order for the new administration to effectively fill the posts necessary to developing and implementing its policies and budget as well as articulate its programs, the President needs to give highest priority to six White House positions. These positions can be filled at the same time as the important posts of National Security Adviser and Director of the Office of Management and Budget. These two posts are crucial ones as the President-elect will hear almost immediately from heads of state with their queries about his policies and, at the same time, he will need to move immediately on shaping the new administration's budget priorities.

When choosing people for the six White House posts identified here, former staff members believe the President needs to be aware of particular characteristics of the posts and the people who have successfully filled them. In addition to having the Chief of Staff as an early choice, the President-elect needs to appoint at approximately the same time the White House Personnel Director, Counsel, Legislative Affairs Director, the director of Management and Administration, and his Press Secretary. The Chief of Staff comes first.

Chief of Staff: Personnel, Process, Decision-Making, and Implementation. Literally nothing comes together in a new White House without a Chief of Staff. **Mark Siegel**, who served as a deputy to Hamilton Jordan in the Carter White House, described the first meeting of the senior staff following the inauguration of the new President. "So when we all got in to the Roosevelt Room and sat down there was literally no one to convene the meeting," he said. "You can only imagine sitting around this table. It's 4:00; we're all really new and very excited. It's 4:00; it's 4:01; it's 4:02. People are coughing. Literally there is no one to convene the meeting. Finally this guy named **Robert Lipshutz**, who was counsel, said in this very Southern accent, 'Well, I'm the oldest person in this room so maybe I'll just get us going.'" Without a Chief of Staff, a new operation literally cannot get off the ground.

If a President doesn't choose a Chief of Staff in the early days following the election, there will be continual jockeying for position and power. In the White House, personnel selection, political strategy, and operational matters all flow from the Chief of Staff. The Chief determines who sees the President, what papers are presented to him, and how decisions will be implemented. In addition, the Chief of Staff sets the tone and the style influencing the ways in which the White House offices do their business.

The position is difficult to fill because the person must have the respect and confidence of the President. The job is so stress-filled and challenging that traditionally the people who serve in the post hold office no more than two or three years. "Everybody wants something from the President and your job is to say 'no' or to say 'yes, maybe, but'," observed James Baker. "It's really a tough job because you are at the heart of the political centrifuge and you're subject to all the pulls and tugs. When people can't get at the President they're going to try and get at the chief of staff which is the next best thing." At the same time it is a hard job to hold, it needs someone to fill it whom the President will listen to. While the kind of relationship James Baker had with the two presidents he served was different, in both cases he worked for presidents who listened to his advice and respected the process he created to gather and sift information, to make the most effective use of people surrounding the President, and to craft decisions.

Personnel Director: Recruitment, Job Descriptions, and Appointment Priorities. If there is a White House official who is under the greatest pressure he will receive at the very point when he assumes office, it is the Personnel Director. In order for a President to fulfill the pledges he makes during the course of his campaign, he needs to staff up his administration and get underway with his program. He cannot do that unless he has people holding positions where policy is developed and then later implemented. Since so much of the preparation for the selection of appointees takes place during the transition, past practice has demonstrated there are strong advantages to having the person who later heads the Office of Presidential Personnel be the person who sets up the process during the transition. In the cases of both **Pendleton James** and **Chase Untermeyer**, who headed personnel for Presidents Reagan and Bush for approximately the first two years of each administration, their early involvement in the process led to a smooth transition into the White House with no time lost following the Inauguration. In addition, their success was based on their commitment to stay in the post for at least the first year and a half of the administration. They and their deputies need to be in place for at least that amount of time. Otherwise they can be tempted by other opportunities that come their way.

When hiring a Personnel Director, the President needs a battle-tested person to fill the post with whom he is comfortable letting loose to identify candidates who meet his criteria. A strong relationship with the President legitimates the process used to choose appointees and thwarts end runs around the Director. In order to weather the storms caused by disappointed supplicants, the Personnel Director needs to have strong backing from the President he serves. Anything less will compromise the process. **Chase Untermeyer** spoke of the nature of the Personnel Director's relationship with the President. "The Personnel Director must be somebody whom the President knows personally and has that degree of confidence not just so that the Personnel Director can go forth knowing the President has that kind of confidence but also so that everybody else in the system, in the White House, in the departments and agencies, in the press, in the Congress knows that the personnel director speaks with that degree of authority." A personnel director who has the confidence of the President can minimize end runs to the President and thus his time and energy. "It is a discouragement to game playing if it is known that the Personnel Director has that degree of trust in his relationship to the President that the tendency or the natural force of Washington politics to get around the roadblock and get at the issue through the chief of staff or the legislative liaison or somebody else is lessened."

Legislative Affairs: Prepare the Way for Confirmations, the Policy Agenda, and the Presidential – Congressional Relationship. The President's assistant for legislative affairs needs to be in place soon after the election in order to smooth the path for a President's nominees to executive branch positions and to work with members in creating a favorable climate for the President's program on the Hill. A President-elect traditionally meets with congressional leaders early in the transition. His legislative assistant must be on board in time to arrange the meetings and to work especially closely with the leaders of the President's party. If there is a changeover in power in either the House or the Senate, a President-elect needs to prepare for leaders who are going through the same thing he is: a transition. **Ken Duberstein**, who served as legislative liaison and later as Chief of Staff in the Reagan White House, discussed the importance of passing names through the legislative affairs person before they go up to the Hill.

"You're not looking for a veto; you're looking for pitfalls," he said. "You're saving the President problems because if in fact he goes forward with an intent to nominate and a nomination and then it blows up, you are spending chips that you're going to need elsewhere." With so many nominations going up to the Hill once the President comes into office, the legislative liaison needs to be in place in time to prepare the way. When appointing a person to the position of legislative affairs, presidents often choose people who have worked in the legislative shop in a previous administration who are capable of getting a rapid start. In addition, the legislative affairs person should be in place in the early days following the election because the President-elect needs to meet with legislative leaders in November. Solid relationships established during the transition will be useful when the President's legislative agenda goes over to the Congress in the early days of the administration.

Counsel to the President: Vetting Procedures, Ethics and Record Keeping Guidelines, and Executive Orders. The Counsel should be named shortly after the election for three purposes. First, the Counsel needs to establish and to guide the vetting process for presidential nominees to executive branch positions and, second, the person is responsible for establishing any new ethics and record keeping guidelines the President-elect might want his administration to observe. Third, the Counsel can provide advice on the appropriateness of possible executive orders.

For the Counsel as well as for the Chief of Staff, appointments dominate the work of the transition and of the first year. As was the case in the Bush Administration, having a Counsel on board during the transition eased the vetting process once the President took office and Boyden Gray became the Counsel. On a secondary note, the early days include legal actions a President wants to take, most especially issuing executive orders. The Counsel must be in a position to let the President know what he can and cannot do in the areas of appointments, executive actions, and legislation. He will need to establish guidelines for any ethics rules the President wants to institute and instruct staff on records keeping practices. The President's Counsel will also be required to anticipate and defend against outside legal actions that affect the President and the presidency. That takes a special relationship with the President. **Lloyd Cutler**, who served as Counsel to Presidents Carter and Clinton, discussed the kind of person who needs to be chosen as the Counsel. A person capable of telling the President 'no.' "Clearly you want somebody who has his own established reputation, especially now that presidents are put on the defensive so much about their personal past history and peccadilloes and whatever, and someone who is willing to stand up to the President, to say, 'No, Mr. President, you shouldn't do that for these reasons.'"

Press Secretary: Calibrating Press Expectations and Establishing Presidential – Media Relations. The Press Secretary is important early in an administration because most often the President-elect is taking time off during the transition period and a spokesperson becomes important in representing his interests to the news media and to the public. One of the first orders of publicity business is to calibrate the expectations of reporters and of the public. It is the Press Secretary who sets the stage for the schedule and nature of decisions to be made following the election. Once the election takes place, reporters and news organizations wait for quick decisions reflecting the President-elect's priorities in terms of personnel choices for his administration and his policy agenda. It falls to the Press Secretary to set the stage for the order

of decisions and reduce the expectations reporters inevitably have about the speed of decision-making and the announcement of appointments. In addition, he or she works at establishing a productive relationship between the President and news organizations, most often beginning with an informal meeting of the President with the representatives of news organizations. In early sessions with the President and, more frequently, with the Press Secretary, reporters lay out their news needs as they all make the transition from campaigning to governing and familiarize the staff with the routines associated with coverage of a President.

Nowhere is the difference between campaigning and governing more pronounced than in the words spoken on behalf of a candidate and of a President. The statements of a President resonate around the world. There is no room for error when speaking on his behalf, which requires a sound knowledge of the federal government. The person who becomes Press Secretary needs to have an understanding of the news needs of electronic as well as print organizations. The person's skill and experience should measure up to the modern demands of what goes out of and into a White House. In a contemporary White House, the Press Secretary must deal with a Press Room with approximately 40 reporters continually in place with cameras representing a dozen organizations perched near the driveway ready to roll whenever news breaks. When news does break, the Press Secretary must understand the impact of words spoken on behalf of the President.

Office of Management and Administration: White House Personnel Slots, Salaries, and Office Space. The Office of Management and Administration is a unit that most often gets publicity only when thing go awry, such as the firing of the career staff in the Travel Office in the early months of the Clinton White House. The office covers a broad array of functions, all related to the administration of White House operations. In the words of a former director, **Jodie Torkelson**, the office is "an organization that has all the cats and dogs. It's the non-policy shop. If it's not policy, it fits in there."

The office has an importance all the same. When the new President and his team come into the White House, it is this office that decides what positions there are to be filled in the lower levels of the White House and the Executive Office of the President, the salaries assigned to each slot, and who will get what office. "Those three things, number of slots, salaries and office space, can just drive people nuts," commented **Christopher Hicks**, who directed the office during the middle period of the Reagan Administration. Decisions made there on staff and salary are "real hard to fix after the fact," said Hicks. Once a job has a set salary level, it is difficult to lower the amount the next person will be paid. "My point is that that's one thing that whoever the administrative people are in the transition and the Chief of Staff really ought to hammer out before they move in to the White House because, once they've moved in to the White House, it's too late," he said.

4. Learn From Predecessors

There are several ways a new team can learn from their predecessors. First is learning from the outgoing staff. Second is bringing in people with White House experience. A third way is learning from those career employees who work in the Office of Management and Budget and in the office of the Executive Clerk.

Outgoing Team. One of the most important transition opportunities an incoming President and his team has is the outgoing administration. They are a source of valuable information on personnel positions and can be used to take some actions smoothing the path of the incoming administration. One of the central elements of taking advantage of the interregnum period is to work with those who are in power. They generally do cooperate with the incoming President. Among the people who had the best start were those who took the time to speak with their predecessors as did **James Baker**. That can only happen if the Chief of Staff is appointed directly following the election. Once people come into the White House, they lose the time needed to make those contacts and calls. **James Baker** found the Chiefs of Staff who preceded him to be a useful source of information on how to structure the Chief's office, who might have the needed experience to staff positions within the White House. Filling out the White House staff structure must be done quickly. The position of Chief of Staff is the one post where people consistently speak with their predecessors. Not coincidentally, Chiefs are appointed early enough to have sufficient time to talk to others. Other officials are often appointed with so little time before coming in that they can't speak with anyone beforehand

There is a natural divide between those in the outgoing administration who tend not to listen to the advice the incumbent White House staff would like to deliver. Said **Richard Cheney**: "You really want to help the new crowd. There is an institutional sense of responsibility; you want things to go well. In our case, certainly President Ford, even though he had a fairly bitter battle with Jimmy Carter, felt strongly about having the transition work and that was his charge to us. So you get organized for it to help the new crowd coming in and basically they're not interested. The basic attitude is 'If you're so smart, how come we beat you? Why do we need to take your advice? You guys lost.' There's just a disconnect there in terms of the desire on the part of the incoming party and the outgoing party in terms of how much they want to work together." The scenario Cheney sketches is one that repeats itself in most incoming White Houses, if not at the senior level then with those occupying spots one notch down.

Bringing in a Team with White House Experience. Everyone we have spoken with about transitions has discussed the need to bring in people who know what they are doing, who have a sense of how a White House works, not just how the government operates in Washington. What experience buys is a better shot at a successful start because experienced hands will avoid some of the errors often made by those without such a background of Washington and White House politics. Both Democrats and Republicans have a pool of experienced people around Washington to draw on. Among the Republicans and Democrats on the Hill, there are many who worked in earlier White Houses.

While that means having people serve who have previously worked in a White House or operated close to one, it does not exclude campaign people. They, too, need to be included in a White House as they are the institutional memory of a campaign, which is important as they remind a team why they are there. "You need some people from the campaign involved," commented **David Gergen**, a White House staff member in four of the six most recent administrations. "I think there's a tendency on the policy side for recommending you keep all those campaigners out of there; it's going to wreck the place. I think that's wrong headed. I believe in having policy people sort of coming in and playing larger roles but the campaign

people know what the candidate said, they know the mood of the candidate [and] they know how the policy issues evolved in the campaign. Most of all, they know the guy. They know his rhythms; they know his demands; they know what makes him tick, what drives him crazy. You need a few people around that really know the body and are accustomed to it and how to manage it well. It's really stupid to let those people all go." **Tom Griscom**, who served as Communications Director towards the end of the Reagan Administration, points out that when the Reagan White House lost all of the people from the 1980 campaign was the time when it went off course. In the second term, few remembered first hand from the 1980 campaign why they were there. "I do think you need people who were there almost from beginning because they do understand the fundamentals of what got the person there," he said. Once the changeover took place in the second term, "you lost that institutional memory, what were the core [policies]." That loss worked to the President's disadvantage.

Michael Deaver, who served as Deputy Chief of Staff in the first term of the Reagan Administration, discussed his recommendation to candidate Reagan that, should he win, he bring James Baker into his White House. Deaver went to Reagan in Middleburg, Virginia, three or four weeks before the election to talk to Reagan about appointing a Chief of Staff. "That was the smartest thing he ever did as far as I was concerned because we got a seasoned guy who knew the ropes, knew how to deal with the Congress, knew how to deal with the media in town, was a respected political figure," said Deaver. "It wasn't like Jimmy Carter who came to town and brought all his Georgians. Reagan did bring a lot of Californians but in the middle of all those Californians he put someone who was the first among us who was a seasoned Washingtonian, a guy who knew his way around." Deaver believed having someone heading the staff who knew Washington bought longevity for the new administration. "I don't think Ronald Reagan would have been reelected if that hadn't happened. I don't think he would have been a two-term President," he said. "He had a lot of counsel from Baker and people that Baker brought to the table who had been through other wars, who had been through fights with the Congress, who knew how to work with the Republican minority leadership and knew how you used OMB [Office of Management and Budget] and all these things that Jimmy Carter never figured out."

Retaining and Making Use of the White House Institutional Memory. It also means keeping around some of those people who have made the place work for years. It is a mistake to assume that people who have served from one administration to another are likely to be partisan or instantly disloyal to a new Administration. That would include the Executive Clerk and people at OMB and NSC who know the ropes. They become an important information source as people begin their work and want to find out how things have been previously done. The Executive Clerk, for example, maintains the records for legislation, executive orders, and appointments coming out of the White House. **Andrew Card**, who served as Deputy Chief of Staff for President Bush, noted administrations need to "be careful that everyone doesn't drain out of the White House; you want to have some institutional memory. Yes, in theory they are all there by the grace of the President." To get rid of the people in a White House with experience in performing the tasks associated with its many offices is to invite trouble on several fronts as was the case with the Clinton Administration. "As you remember, they did pull the plug on a lot of those people and it took them some time to get back up to speed and it also

invited distrust," Card commented. Two of the critical places for institutional memory are those who work in the Office of Management and Budget and the career staff who work in the Executive Office of the President. When in one administration a senior political staff member suggested that the deputy associate directors be fired, a person with knowledge of OMB from serving there pointed out it "would be a catastrophically dumb idea both from the point of view of ever having OMB as an institution work very well but also from the point of view of all the institutional knowledge and skill you lose."

5. Develop a Strategic Plan for Policy Proposals

If much is to be accomplished in the hectic and conflicted first few months in office, it cannot be done by inadvertence; there must be a strategic plan. **James Baker** discussed the role of early policy preparation in the successes of President Reagan's first term. "One reason I think that the Reagan Administration succeeded the first term as well as we did was that we had a really definitive, well-thought out, right-here hundred-day plan. We went back and we looked at the plans of everybody all the way back to Truman. What were their first goals, priorities and objectives? We drafted a hundred-day plan and we stuck to it." The first and only priority was the President's economic plan, and "we did not let national security, foreign policy issues that were not absolutely critical to get in the way of a single-minded focus on that plan."

When a President-elect and his team establish their priorities, it is important they choose their battles wisely. "So many demands are coming at you from people that it is easy to commit yourself to actions and initiatives you might regret later on," commented **Harrison Wellford**. "Choose the battles that you first engage very, very carefully because so much disproportionate attention is paid to those." President Carter made early attempts to eliminate water projects that made him expend a great amount of presidential time, energy, and reputation. He never did win on the issue. In the case of the Clinton transition, the gays in the military issue became a lightning rod for his early months. "I always thought there was a different way to do that that didn't make that the defining issue of the first two months because it couldn't have been more perfectly designed to get him off to the wrong start," said one person close to the process. It happened in part because there was not in place a decision-making process emphasizing close scrutiny of initiatives including passing them through a sieve representing policy advocates and those knowledgeable about governmental and public responses. Early planning allows a new team to stave off those importuning them with their agendas.

The benefits are many of having a refined agenda in place well before the President-elect takes office. "Everybody who came in knew where he stood," **David Gergen** said about the White House staff who came in to work for President Reagan. "There were no struggles over the soul of the administration, over the overall direction. You knew what the philosophy was; then you knew what the policy prescription was going to be at least in the domestic area." Along with the agenda, a White House needs to complement it with a communications operation capable of synthesizing and packaging a message for the administration. **Robert Lipshutz**, Counsel to President Carter, discussed the consequences of not having such an operation. "We never had a public relations person really thinking about the various things that would have perhaps allowed the President to do all the things that he wanted to do, or at least

try, or at least have them on agenda and put our best foot forward," he said. "Instead the press, you might say, and the political people outside of the administration set the tone that you're talking about rather than us setting the tone."

A crucial aspect of a successful strategic plan is a comfortable working relationship with those on the Hill. The administrations that have been successful have been ones that worked closely with the Congress from its earliest point, including having people familiar with congressional operations head the team. Upon taking office, **James Baker** sent **Kenneth Duberstein** to the Hill to see the Minority Whip for the House of Representatives, Trent Lott, as his first assignment. **Ken Duberstein** commented: "It was a crucial interview. The President had the prerogative to appoint me anyway, but the person I was going to be working with was Trent Lott in part along with others. So you needed to run it past him." In addition, Duberstein recommends the names of people be run by committee chairs. "Consult with your friends. Consult with your committees of jurisdiction. I don't mean consult with twenty senators but I mean with the chairman and the ranking member; I mean the Senate leader and minority leader."

Howard Baker indicated the length of a honeymoon depends on the relationship of the President with the Congress. "I decided that I was going to be Ronald Reagan's flag carrier in the Senate and worked very hard at trying to coordinate the Senate's agenda with the President's agenda. I think that was a distinctly superior arrangement. But that relationship between the congressional leadership and the White House has a great deal to do with how long that honeymoon lasts, the quality of effort." Convincing the congressional leadership to work with the new President is a task that begins early with the campaign advisers in policy areas informally discussing agendas with the leaders of their party in one or both houses. Once the election is over, the legislative affairs director sets the stage for the preliminary discussions.

CONCLUSION

An appearance of arrogance associated with planning for governing stops most presumptive presidential nominees from organizing their plans for the transition to power until well after the summer conventions. In fact, the greater risk lies with the absence of planning for the assumption of power. Those who have served in White House posts and know the advantages and disadvantages associated with the quality of the start an administration, strongly believe early planning is associated with an effective first year in office. It is during his early months a President staffs up his administration, lays out and marshals support for the top priority items on his agenda, and shapes his relationships throughout the governing community. In a setting where those coming into office can anticipate vacant offices and empty drawers, their planning must be completed and their decision-making processes in place well before they come into the White House. The White House is no place for on the job training.