

Getting to Know You: Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees and Career Executives



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2004 PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION SERIES

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January 2005

IBM Center for
**The Business
of Government**

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F O R E W O R D

January 2005

On behalf of the IBM Center for The Business of Government, we are pleased to present this report, "Getting to Know You: Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees and Career Executives," by Joseph A. Ferrara and Lynn C. Ross.

This report is the fourth in our 2004 Presidential Transition Series. The series is aimed at providing useful advice for new political appointees as they arrive in Washington to serve in the second term of President George W. Bush. The series aims to speed up the legendary "learning curve" of political executives as they face the dual challenges of managing in government and getting a "running start" on achieving the policy and program objectives of the second term.

Ferrara and Ross provide a valuable service by analyzing and dispelling common myths held by political appointees about careerists and by careerists about political appointees. In place of the myths, Ferrara and Ross offer constructive "rules of engagement" in which political and career executives can form successful and productive partnerships in achieving the administration's program and policy objectives. The report is based on numerous conversations conducted by the authors with both political and career executives.

Other reports in the 2004 Presidential Transition Series provide valuable advice to new political appointees. In "Becoming an Effective Political Executive: 7 Lessons from Experienced Appointees," Judith Michaels presents lessons learned by political appointees who served previous administrations. Like Ferrara and Ross, Michaels emphasizes the importance of an effective working relationship between political and career executives. In "Performance Management for Political Executives: A 'Start Where You Are, Use What You Have' Guide," Chris Wye offers advice on how political executives can use performance management to improve the delivery of government programs to the American public. Finally, in "Government Reorganization: Strategies and Tools to Get It Done," Hannah Sistare provides advice to new political appointees interested in exploring ways in which they might reorganize their organizations.

We trust that this report by Ferrara and Ross, as well as the other reports in the 2004 Presidential Transition Series, will be useful to new political appointees as they arrive in Washington to serve the nation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At least since the passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883, which established the modern American civil service system, a certain level of tension and wariness has characterized the relationship between career civil servants and political appointees. Before Pendleton, the system of selecting officials for governmental positions was strongly driven by partisan politics.¹ The view was that rotation in office was democratic—as Andrew Jackson said in 1829, “No man has any more intrinsic right to official station than another.”

But over time the “spoils system” approach to government staffing could not be sustained because it was a highly ineffective and inefficient way to run a country. Not surprisingly, presidents wanted their patronage appointees to devote time and energy to political affairs and party building. The more routine yet important functions of government suffered. After elections, politicians were overwhelmed with ambitious office seekers. At the same time, particularly after the Civil War, the size and scope of the federal government was growing and its activities becoming more complex and sophisticated. Something had to give. Finally, in 1881, President James Garfield was assassinated by a frustrated job seeker, and Congress had no choice but to act.

By the time William McKinley became president in 1897, nearly 90,000 government jobs had been classified as civil service positions. Today, with the exception of a few thousand political appointments, most federal government positions are full-time career. At the very top of the civil service are the career senior managers and executives who have the most frequent interaction with the political appointees who come in with each presiden-

tial administration. How well these two groups get along has a huge impact on how effectively the nation is governed and how successful the president is at accomplishing his policy agenda. This report is devoted to improving the working relationship between political appointees and career civil servants.

First, we examine the mythology surrounding political appointees and careerists. Anyone who has spent any time inside the beltway working in or with agencies of the federal government knows how powerful this mythology can be. The thing about myths is that they are more often based on exceptions than norms. It is not the boring, mundane, day-to-day reality that powers and feeds mythology; it is the fantastic and remarkable exception that gives rise to and sustains this kind of “conventional wisdom.” Political appointees often cling to myths about career employees, just as the careerists believe in certain myths about the political executives, especially before they get to know each other.

What are some of the myths? In this report we identify certain myths about career civil servants, including:

- Careerists are loyal to the previous administration.
- Careerists are not passionate about their work and they don’t work that hard.
- Careerists are mostly interested in job security.
- Careerists always say no to new policy ideas.
- Careerists don’t want their political bosses to succeed.

And we identify some myths that careerists tend to hold about political appointees, including:

- Political appointees are just interested in their ideological agenda and don't really care about being good organizational stewards.
- Political appointees are not really competent to do their jobs.
- Political appointees don't want careerists to give them information that contradicts their agendas.
- Political appointees (historically Republicans) don't like government employees.

We discuss these myths in some detail and then try to show that the reality is usually far more positive and affirming than the mythology would imply. Based on focus groups and numerous individual interviews with current and former political appointees and senior career civil servants, we develop some "rules of engagement" that each group can use to improve the working relationship and achieve more effective government.

Some of the rules for career civil servants include:

- Be an expert in your field.
- Understand and embrace your role.
- Be patient during the transition period and cognizant of the political calendar.
- Learn about the professional backgrounds of political appointees.
- Be aware of the bigger political picture.

Some of the rules for political appointees include:

- Engage careerists and listen to their advice—even if you don't heed it.
- Treat careerists with respect.
- Learn the policy and organizational details of your agency.
- Set clear and achievable goals.
- Be willing to compromise on your agenda and admit your mistakes.
- Don't forget about the organization you lead.
- Communicate, communicate, and communicate with careerists.

We complete the report by offering a few key findings and recommendations. An important aspect of our research process was to tease out the myths themselves (mostly through interviews), and then to debunk those myths by explaining where they come from in the first place. The "rules of engagement" are our recommendations for improving relations between careerists and political appointees. These recommendations came from the conversations we had with executives about what works and what doesn't, and they are intended to help government executives of every stripe avoid the kind of misunderstandings and missteps that can lead to less-than-optimal governance.

The report should offer a new lens through which political appointees and careerists can look at each other, and thereby understand each other. We hope it will also serve as a reminder of Miles' Law: Where you stand on any given issue depends upon where you sit. If the information in this report makes the "getting to know you" phase of political transition more productive and more rewarding, we will have succeeded.

Introduction

Every four years in the United States, a new presidential administration enters office or an existing administration starts its second term. Either way, new political executives assume a variety of positions throughout the federal government. Indeed, new political appointees² are constantly coming in and out of government service, not just immediately after elections. This approach to government management is somewhat unique to the American system—few other nations put so much power in the hands of a relatively small number of people, none of whom is a career government employee.

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the average tenure in office of presidential appointees is just under three years (other reports calculate a somewhat lower number).³ In his 1987 study of political appointees, G. Calvin Mackenzie referred to them as the “in-and-outers:”

From the earliest days of the United States as a nation, the highest-ranking administrators of the federal government have been drawn largely from a category of people known in federal parlance as “in-and-outers,” individuals for whom government service is neither a profession nor a career (p. xiii).

The “in-and-outer” system serves some very important political purposes, such as giving the president an opportunity to reward loyal political supporters with plum assignments and to bolster his position within his own party by appointing people who represent key ideological constituencies. But the key significance of the appointee system is that it gives the president the crucial ability to shape his leadership team as he assumes power over the federal government.

Since the passage of the 20th Amendment to the Constitution, which moved Inauguration Day from March to January, presidential transitions in the American system have been notoriously brief (and the contested election of 2000, of course, put even more pressure on an already tight schedule). Election Day occurs on the first Tuesday in November; about 11 weeks later, the president is inaugurated as chief executive. The president must quickly assemble a governing team. Explicit in the president’s considerations is the notion that his appointees are people he can trust to faithfully articulate and implement his political agenda. But there are implicit considerations, too. These include the belief that the president’s appointees will be responsible stewards of the public trust and competent managers of the federal departments and agencies they are asked to lead.

But of course the president does not just rely on the political executives to run the government—the administrative state is just too big and complex. Once the appointees take office, they assume control of agencies staffed by career government employees.⁴ These careerists⁵ perform an incredibly diverse array of tasks; civil servants are economists, lawyers, doctors, air traffic controllers, scientists, policy analysts, budget examiners, regulators, administrative assistants, sociologists, construction workers—the list goes on and on. Overall, there are about 1.8 million career civilian employees throughout the federal government (not counting the U.S. Postal Service). Over 120,000 of them are senior managers.⁶ At the very top of the career pyramid are about 6,000 members of the career Senior Executive Service (SES).⁷ These two groups of senior career civil servants interact most frequently with political appointees, and therefore make up the population we

focus on. (Tables 1 and 2 show the number and type of senior career officials and political appointees.)

Both senior careerists and political appointees are highly educated. More than 90 percent of each group has at least a college degree—more than half of political appointees have an advanced or professional degree, and two-thirds of senior career executives have this level of education. Careerists tend to be about eight years older than political appointees, and unlike their political counterparts, most of their career has been in the federal government. (Tables 3 and 4 provide demographic profiles of the two groups.)⁸

In many ways, careerists represent the institutional memory of American public administration. They are public administration's cartographers, drawing the maps for new administrations that connect the administrative present with the past. For political appointees interested in the future, such policy maps can be an invaluable resource.

So the president must rely on two groups of people to run the government: political appointees and career civil servants. It is not an exaggeration to say that, perhaps more than anything else, effective governance in the American political system depends critically on whether and how these two groups develop a healthy and productive working relationship. They must get to know each other, learn to trust each other, and figure out how to communicate clearly with one another. This can be difficult because political appointees and career civil servants, while they both share an overriding commitment to public service, are very different in many other respects.

An important challenge is reconciling different conceptions of public service. There is no question that most political appointees and careerists are intensely committed to the public service. But their conceptions of public service differ in important ways. The vast majority of careerists have no political aspirations (indeed, many of the career executives we interviewed went out of their way to avoid "politics"). This does not mean that they are not ambitious; in fact, many careerists work hard for promotions and want to have some influence in the public policy process, particularly within internal agency debates. It simply means that their conception of public service does not include, or at least emphasize, politi-

Table 1: Type and Numbers of Senior Career Employees*

Rank	Number
GS-14	76,866
GS-15	39,579
SES	5,962
Total	122,407

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management Fact Book (<http://www.opm.gov/feddata/03factbk.pdf>; accessed 10/25/04) and <http://www.opm.gov/feddata/02paystru.pdf>; accessed 10/25/04)

* We include GS-14s and GS-15s in this table for the sake of completeness. While most of our career interviewees were members of the SES (either current or former), it is true that senior GS employees also interact with political executives, albeit not as frequently. Also, the nature and structure of the interaction can be somewhat different. For example, while career SES members may in fact report directly to a political appointee, most senior GS-14s and GS-15s will not.

Table 2: Type and Numbers of Political Appointees

Type	Number
PAS	1,203
PA	223
NA	648
LA	169
SC	1,287
Total	3,530

PAS: Presidential appointments requiring Senate confirmation
 PA: Presidential appointments without Senate confirmation
 NA: Senior Executive positions filled by non-career appointment
 LA: Limited term SES appointments (some of which can be career)
 SC: Schedule C Excepted Appointments

Source: The 2000 Plum Book (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/plumbook/2000/index.html>; accessed 10/26/04)

cal and ideological advocacy. Rather, a civil servant's notion of public service is typically more centered on issues like ensuring that policy makers benefit from technically competent advice and managing fair and open processes of government. As one of our career interviewees said, "Our job is to help make sure that political appointees don't make uninformed decisions."

Political appointees have a different conception of public service. Unlike their careerist counterparts, they are much more openly political. They declare

allegiance to one of the two major parties.⁹ They align themselves with the political and programmatic agenda of a particular president. They advocate for particular policy outcomes. While it might be said that careerists are more focused on the *means* of government, political appointees are more focused on its *ends*. Careerists are there to do the nation's business; political appointees are there to determine what the nation's business should be. To the extent that these differing conceptions of public service can be reconciled to establish a productive working relationship, the more likely it is that an administration will be successful in implementing its agenda.

Part of reconciling these different conceptions of public service is acknowledging that they exist in the first place, which is another way of saying that political appointees and careerists need to understand their respective roles in the policy process. But this is not enough. Political appointees and career employees must also overcome the myths that they each tend to have about the other. What gives myths their power is that they tap into strong beliefs that people already hold about the way the world works—or ought to work.

But quite often myths are based on exceptions or what linguists call “synecdoche.” A synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part is substituted for the whole, and its use in political rhetoric is legion.¹⁰ Thus, the \$400 hammer comes to represent wasteful military spending and the “welfare queen” comes to represent wasteful domestic spending. Similarly, a political appointee's encounter with a sleepy or inattentive career employee at a staff meeting might reinforce a pre-existing belief that careerists are low-energy workers more interested in job security than high performance, and a careerist's encounter with an incompetent political appointee whose main qualification for office seems to be his or her prolific campaign contributing might confirm an assumption that appointees are just political hacks uninterested in the details of policy and governance. But just as the \$400 hammer and the “welfare queen” do not represent what actually happens in most defense and social programs, the stereotypical lazy government worker and the ambitious but unqualified political appointee are more myth than reality. That such myths exist is undeniable; the challenge is overcoming them so that effective working relationships can be formed.

Table 3: Profile of the Career Senior Executive Service (2002)

Average age	53.8
Average length of service (years)	25.5
Education	
Not college graduate	5%
College graduate	29%
Advanced degree	66%
Gender	
Men	75%
Women	25%
Minority	14%
Occupation	
Scientist or engineer	21%
Other professional	22%
Administrative/technical	57%
Geographic location	
Washington, D.C. area	76%

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management Fact Book (<http://www.opm.gov/feddata/03factbk.pdf>; accessed 10/25/04)

Table 4: Profile of Political Appointees*

Average age	45.9
Government service (years)	9.14
Education	
Not college graduate	6%
College graduate	41%
Advanced degree	52%
Gender	
Men	73%
Women	27%
Minority	18%

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Source: In the Web of Politics: Three Decades of the Federal Executive, Aberbach and Rockman, 2000, pp. 58-79.

** These data were gathered in 1992, and thus do not directly reflect the current cadre of political appointees. It is assumed, however, that they are representative of, or at least similar to, the current demographics for political appointees. While OPM keeps current statistics on the federal career workforce, it unfortunately does not do the same for political executives. And, beyond Aberbach and Rockman, there are not many other extant profiles of political appointees. In 1999, the IBM Center published a survey of federal executives that included 47 non-career respondents. These results track pretty closely with the Aberbach-Rockman data. For example, in the IBM survey, non-career respondents were, on average, 48 years old, mostly men (64%), and had spent about nine years in government.*

Political appointees and career civil servants are different in other ways, too (some of the key differences are summarized in Table 5). Political appointees come in and go out of government service far more often than career civil servants. Political appointees serve, on average, about two to three years in any one office and average about nine total years of government service. The average length of government service for senior career executives, by contrast, is over 25 years.¹¹

Given the significant variation in tenure in office, it is not surprising that political appointees and career civil servants also have different time perspectives. Political executives tend to be much more focused on the short term; they cannot assume that the president they serve will be in office for more than one administration; and even if he is, they cannot assume they themselves will be in office that long. Career executives, on the other hand, tend to have a longer time perspective; they have worked in their respective agencies far longer than the political managers they work for.

Another area of difference is professional experience. Political appointees, by definition, come in and out of government. Many of them have worked in government before, but they have also worked outside the public sector, including in academia, nonprofit think tanks, and for-profit firms.¹² Career managers, by contrast, tend to build their professional careers in the public sector.

Research Process and Structure of the Report

Over the last half of 2004, we interviewed numerous political appointees and careerists, including people still serving in government, as well as former officials. We talked to them in one-on-one interview meetings¹³ where we could explore one person's perspective in depth, and we have held focus group sessions where groups of political appointees or civil servants were able to exchange ideas and share their personal experiences and reflections on public service. In addition to these interviews,¹⁴ we reviewed relevant books, articles, and reports that deal with the subject of political/career interaction.

The structure of the report is as follows. First, we explore the myths that each group sometimes holds about the other (or, perhaps more accurately, that each group *thinks* the other holds about them). For example, at the beginning of a new administration, careerists often say they feel that the incoming political appointees automatically assume the careerists are loyal to the previous administration, regardless of whether any evidence to suggest such loyalty actually exists. We try to look behind the mythology to see what drives such perceptions and how widespread they really are.

Second, we develop some "rules of engagement" for political appointees and career civil servants. Our

Table 5: Political Appointees and Career Civil Servants

Factor	Political appointees	Careerists
Role perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Determine the nation's business" • Focused on achieving policy outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Do the nation's business" • Focused on ensuring a fair, open, and sound decision process
Partisanship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affiliated with a political party • Serve a particular president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonpartisan on the job • Serve various presidents
Professional experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often a mix of government, academic, and private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government has been their main career
Tenure of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Come in and go out • Average about two years in their positions, about four years in their agency, and about nine years of government service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In for the long term • Senior executives average four years in their positions, 19 years in their agency, and more than 25 years of government service
Time perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to have a shorter-term outlook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to have a longer-term outlook

goal is to develop a common-sense approach that both groups can use to begin (and sustain) their relationship on a positive note that emphasizes their joint commitment to public service. Included in these sections are two case studies based on recent events that illustrate the consequences of failure to heed these rules. The first deals with former National Park Police Chief Teresa Chambers. The second case involves Medicare Actuary Richard Foster.

Finally, we offer some key findings and recommendations that summarize the myths and rules of engagement broadly and synthesize our research findings with other findings from the literature.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Mark Abramson and Jonathan Breul of the IBM Center for The Business of Government for their support and assistance during this project. Their comments and suggestions were very useful in helping us develop our approach to this project.

And, of course, we would like to thank the political appointees and career civil servants who agreed to spend some of their valuable time, sharing with us their insights and reflections about government service. To the extent that this report contains any wisdom for future officeholders, career or political, it is the wisdom of the people we interviewed.

Myths about Career Civil Servants

In this section, we highlight some of the myths that are most detrimental to a political appointee's ability to hit the ground running. Perhaps here we can short-circuit some preconceived notions, thus allowing political appointees to get right to the business of governing. The myths and the corresponding realities are summarized in Table 6 on page 15 at the end of this section.

Myth 1: Careerists are loyal to the previous administration.

The career executives we interviewed expressed some frustration with having to prove their trustworthiness each time a presidential administration changes. Having been through many transitions, however, most career executives expect this "dance." This particular element of distrust stems from politics. Specifically, appointees sometimes assume careerists' personal political beliefs and loyalties influence the way they do their jobs.

Questioning the political loyalty of the career civil service is not a new phenomenon in American politics. Presidency scholar Richard Neustadt, who advised John F. Kennedy on his 1960 transition, warned that "incomers" tend to have the impression "that their inherited civil servants could be covert enemies, planted on them by their predecessors (whose party just lost the election)."¹⁵

But Neustadt argued that such suspicion is a bar to knowledge because it prevents appointees from using one of their most valuable governing resources—the "lore" or institutional memory of the civil service staff.

The evidence suggests that career executives focus more on the policies and the nuts and bolts of the

work than on the politics. In many cases, careerists told us that the political affiliation of the appointees for whom they worked actually mattered a lot less than the appointee's personal style. As one focus group participant put it, "[the] challenge is simply that you have a new boss to get used to ... it's not necessarily a career/political thing."

Careerists also have a strong sense of the role they are supposed to play in the federal system. "We [civil servants] understand the Constitution," said one of our interviewees. Many careerists spoke of the administration (whatever administration it is) as having the right to make its mark on the government by virtue of its electoral legitimacy. There is a sense among careerists that an important part of doing their job is serving the agenda of the current president *because* he is the current president and regardless of his party.

In general, we found that careerists check their personal politics at the door because they view their role in the political process as technical, not partisan. Another high-level careerist echoed these sentiments:

[Career employees] know the job. If you're not in a position to do what your political masters want you to do, then you shouldn't be working in that kind of a high-level policy job to begin with. You know that administrations are going to change. You know that at least half the time you'll have a boss whose political philosophy is different from your own. If you can't cope with that, you ought to go and do something else. I think that's the way most people behave.

When a new administration is from a different political party than the previous one, the problem of mistrust is exacerbated. One interviewee said of

the George W. Bush appointees, “When we [civil servants] talked, all they heard was Clinton-Gore.” Careerists are dismayed by this mentality because they view their role as technical advisers to all administrations, helping to guide appointees through the policy process, not setting political agendas. Because of their role, careerists value their technical credibility. When political appointees assume careerists have a political bent or misplaced loyalty, it undermines careerists’ sense of having credibility.

Again, this issue is not new to American politics. In fact, since presidential transitions were shortened more than 50 years ago, the political loyalty of the civil service has been questioned.¹⁶ Richard Neustadt reported that:

Mistrust of the civil servants in 1953 was understandable, considering that many of their agencies had come into existence in the generation since Republicans had held the White House. Actually Washington bureaucrats, like their fellow countrymen, voted for Ike in droves and keenly anticipated his arrival. But that was not instantly apparent to incomers who had been brought up hating Roosevelt....¹⁷

One interviewee captured the overall sentiment we heard from many we talked to about where careerists’ loyalties lie: “Career employees try to carry out the policies of whatever administration is in office. If they feel strongly against a policy, they would be more likely to change jobs. If there’s something that is against your moral fiber ... you don’t sabotage [the policy or the appointee], because your first obligation is to the government of the United States.” Another said that careerists would tend to speak up against policies they didn’t like, but once a decision is made, “they would salute and do their best to implement and enforce the policies.”

Myth 2: Careerists are not passionate about their work and they don’t work that hard.

The careerists we interviewed expressed a strong degree of dedication—to their organizations, policy arenas, and to public service more generally. They also expressed their willingness to work hard, and pointed out a history of working long hours under

What Political Appointees Said about Careerists

First Impressions

“[At first,] they were skeptical of me and our agenda.”

“Very risk averse.”

“Seemed tentative and afraid to give their real opinions.”

“Too much focus on process.”

“I was at a research organization, and the staff was highly knowledgeable and motivated.”

“I valued their input.”

“They seemed very eager to please.”

“Some of the careerists thought we were crazy!”

Later Impressions and Insights

“They wanted to play in the policy process.”

“The civil servants really trained me.”

“They really responded to good management.”

“Most of them understood that I belonged at the table to fight for certain policies.”

often stressful conditions. According to some of the careerists, appointees often assume that civil servants will not go the extra mile to get the job done. This perception may stem from the difference in perceived time frames between careerists and political appointees.

One career interviewee told us about his experience working on a major policy review commissioned by the incoming George H.W. Bush administration in 1989. The review was led by political appointees but largely staffed by senior career officials (SES and GS-15 levels). It was expected, although never verbalized explicitly, that the review staff would work whatever hours were required to make sure the process was comprehensive and to meet the deadline for submitting a final report to the White House. “We worked long hours, including weekends and federal holidays. No one complained. Everyone was excited about being part of a major policy review at the beginning of a new administration.”

One career executive said, “They [political appointees] are running a sprint and we [career civil servants] are running a marathon.” Another careerist characterized an important difference by calling civil servants “WEBEHWYGS” (which he pronounced “WEE-BEE-WIGS”) or “We’ll be here when you’re gone.” Although this characterization implies that civil servants would feel less than compelled to follow a political appointee’s directives, this is not what the evidence shows. The vast majority of political appointees we talked to found careerists competent, responsive, and dedicated to the work.

Myth 3: Careerists work in government service because of the security their positions offer.

Many of our career interviewees said that public service was an important factor in keeping them on the job. When careerists are cut out of decision making or prevented from playing a role in the management of programs and the formulation of policy, their job satisfaction is diminished because they feel impeded from playing the public service role they value. Interestingly, several of the political appointees whom we interviewed found it very surprising that careerists did not behave as advocates of certain policies. One former appointee said, “I don’t know how they [careerists] remain so neutral when decisions are made that run counter to their recommendations. I couldn’t do it.” This is a perfect characterization of the different role perceptions that each group holds.

Understanding what motivates careerists is as important as understanding what *doesn’t* motivate them. “My [political boss] took me to the Hill for high-level meetings and this was a real motivator,” said one focus group participant. Another career interviewee talked about his experience attending a bill-signing ceremony at the White House: “We all had worked very hard on this legislation, and it made me feel good to be invited to the ceremony.” Similar sentiments were expressed in our interviews where careerists reported greater satisfaction when they worked on key initiatives that they knew were important and meaningful.

Having said this, there is no question that senior careerists understand the value of their civil service protections. While the Civil Service Reform Act

of 1978, which established the Senior Executive Service, gave political appointees more power to move SES members around from position to position (and even, in theory, from agency to agency), Title 5 of the U.S. Code still prohibits a new administration from dislocating a career SES member during the first 120 days of its term of office. Several of our SES interviewees mentioned this legal protection as an important part of ensuring a productive political/career working relationship. The 120-day “waiting period” in effect forces new political appointees and career executives to get to know each other, because it does not allow incoming appointees to simply begin arbitrarily or capriciously moving careerists around.

Thus, while job security is a consideration, as it probably is for most people, career executives are not preoccupied with it. One high-level careerist said that the motivations of most of her colleagues are a combination of “wanting to do their best work and having a strong interest in the field they’re working in.” Although she also mentioned that “stability is essential for living” and “you can’t do the job for free,” she argued that so-called extrinsic rewards (like money) are not the main reasons for staying on the job. Instead, it’s the intellectual stimulation, dealing with other people, and solving problems that are the most important motivators for service. Another career interviewee, a senior official working at the notoriously drab Pentagon building, said, “If they took my window away at this point, I think I’d retire, but the extrinsic stuff is not the prime motivator [for doing this job]. I think stimulation and dealing with other people, solving problems, is the prime motivator.”

Myth 4: Careerists want to obstruct change—they are naysayers.

Careerists tend to be well steeped in the details of the policy areas and programs on which they work. Career executives in particular have risen within the merit system of their organizations because of their technical expertise.¹⁸ They are likely to have substantial organizational expertise (knowing who is who and how the component parts interact); understand the historical background of policies and programs; and possess a long and deep institutional memory.

These traits can be very beneficial to organizations in transformation because these employees have

thought about and often personally experienced the hurdles associated with making change. One careerist said, “[Appointees] are well intentioned but often naive. They are not aware of the real limitations—[we] had to educate them as to their limitations.” Another said that appointees sometimes come to office with “a lot of breathless ideas.”

Unfortunately, appointees sometimes see this detail-oriented perspective as small-picture thinking and inertia. Careerists, for their part, see limitations and details as an important part of the policy formulation and implementation processes. This disconnect between roles and perceptions of careerists and appointees often creates the misperception among political appointees that careerists prefer the status quo or say no for its own sake, which can cause tension between the two groups.

One of our career interviewees offered a novel approach for building trust with political appointees. Rather than pester the political executives with all the reasons that a particular approach has not worked successfully in the past, this careerist suggested the following: “Political appointees are like teenagers. Sometimes you have to let them make their own mistakes.”

Political appointees, at least initially, tend to see the bureaucracy as a barrier to getting their job done. From an appointee’s perspective, it makes sense to translate “we’ve tried that before and it didn’t work” into “I’m not going to help you implement your agenda.” Unfortunately, the message that careerists send is often misread. The career executives we interviewed were sensitive to being perceived as naysayers when political appointees propose ideas for change. Many of our career interviewees argued that they try to give appointees a realistic sense of the limitations that exist given the organizational, political, technical, or policy-related problems. This cautious posture is often an effort to prevent political appointees from setting themselves up for failure. One career executive said, “You have to walk a fine line. You can’t come out and say [to an appointee] that this [idea] just won’t work.”

Perhaps the lesson in this misunderstanding cuts both ways: Careerists need to be sensitive to how they deliver “the bad news” about the practical limitations of certain proposals, and political appointees need to assume that the careerists’ warnings are delivered with the best of intentions. In short, careerists want their political bosses to succeed, and pointing out the potential pitfalls is one way they add value to that endeavor.

Table 6: Myths (and Realities) about Career Civil Servants

Myth	Reality
Careerists are loyal to the previous administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most careerists check their politics at the door and define their role in terms of the policy process, not the administration’s political agenda. • Most careerists see their role as technical, not partisan.
Careerists don’t work hard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most careerists work extremely hard under tight deadlines and often stressful conditions. • Careerists are “running a marathon”; political appointees are “running a sprint.”
Careerists are mostly interested in job security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most careerists are motivated by a strong sense of public service, mission dedication, participation in the policy process, and intellectual challenge.
Careerists always say no to new ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most careerists are not “against” new policy ideas but are sensitive to the various implementation challenges. • Careerists’ many years of experience have conditioned them to see change in very pragmatic terms.
Careerists want their political bosses to fail.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most careerists want their political executives to succeed because they believe in the system and because they want their agencies to succeed.

Myth 5: Careerists do not really want their political bosses to succeed.

Presidents have always recognized the importance of having successful political appointees who enjoy good reputations. Shortly after he became the nation's first president, George Washington said, "If injudicious or unpopular measures should be taken by the Executive under the New Government with regards to appointments, the Government itself would be in the utmost danger of being utterly subverted by the measures."

Careerists also want the political appointees for whom they work to succeed. There are several reasons for this. First, careerists tend to care about their organization's reputation. Nothing tarnishes an organization's reputation faster than an unsuccessful appointee (recall the severe image problems that controversial appointees like Ann Burford at the Environmental Protection Agency and James Watt at the Department of the Interior caused for their agencies during the Reagan administration). Perhaps careerists care about their organization's reputation because it reflects on them personally and professionally, but nonetheless, they seem to have a strong stake in it.

Second, careerists care about adding value to the process. If a careerist's political boss does not accomplish his or her goals, this diminishes the careerist's perception that he or she is contributing. In this sense, the failure of the political agenda becomes the failure of the career agenda.

Third, an unsuccessful appointee is probably an unhappy appointee, and an unhappy appointee is probably an unpleasant manager, which erodes the quality of work life. Ultimately careerists, like most people, want to please their bosses. This gives them a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. If they are dismayed by the direction the political appointee is going, they likely will leave that particular organization and find some place where they fit in better.

Myths about Political Appointees

Just as political appointees sometimes make unwarranted assumptions about the career managers they supervise, careerists sometimes assume certain things about political appointees that are usually more mythology than reality. This section explores the roots of these myths. The myths, and corresponding realities, are summarized in Table 7 on page 20 at the end of this section.

Myth 1: Political appointees care only about ideology and don't really worry about organizational stewardship.

We asked the careerists we interviewed to recall their first impressions of the political appointees they had worked with over the years. One persistent impression—often disproved over time—was that the incoming political appointees did not really care about the organization they were taking charge of, particularly in the sense of leaving the agency a better place than they found it. Rather, careerists often sense that the new political executive is worried mostly, if not exclusively, about achieving the ideological agenda of the administration. In this view, the agency itself and the careerists who populate it are just tools political appointees can use to achieve their objectives.

This is a powerful myth because it seems to fit with the objective reality. After all, political appointees do come in and out of government with great regularity and quite often they do not stay very long. Some appointees return to private life while others move on to other jobs within the administration. And, simply by virtue of their political connection with the party currently occupying the White House, there seems to be little doubt that appointees are more focused on achieving a set of policy objectives than on maintaining and enhancing the agency they lead.

One careerist told us that while he had worked with many conscientious political appointees over the years, he had more than once encountered an appointee “who seemed very political—always watching out for the interests of the groups he used to work with before he came into government.” Another careerist who has worked in several transitions, including the most recent from Clinton to Bush, said that the “getting to know you” phase of transitions is normal, but that some of the transitions he had worked in were complicated by incoming political executives who “were too ideological and did not want any help from the career staff.”

Of course, political executives must worry about the policy agenda of the White House. In a very real sense, that is exactly why they are in their jobs in the first place. But truly effective political appointees understand that they must earn the trust of the career managers they lead. One way of doing this is by taking on the role of organizational steward. Many of the political appointees we talked to seemed to understand this. Worrying about organizational maintenance, in their view, is more than just good management—it also sends a powerful message to the career staff that the political leadership understands their value, the value of the larger organization, and the value of government as a whole.

Myth 2: Political appointees are not really competent to do the jobs to which they're appointed.

Another powerful myth about appointees is that they are simply political hacks who have gotten their jobs because of their party connections or campaign work.¹⁹ According to this myth, political appointees are not really qualified or competent to lead

the agencies to which they are appointed. Rather, they enter office naive, ill-informed, and unrealistic about what can be accomplished in a brief four-year presidential term. This mythology explains the sense of tension and mutual wariness that often characterizes the initial period as political appointees and careerists get to know each other.

Again, the general conclusion of many of the careerists we interviewed was that highly competent political appointees were much more often the rule than the exception. But, of course, the exceptions are what help stoke the mythology. One careerist talked about an assistant secretary appointee who took over a very technical research and engineering staff but had no academic or practical training in the subject matter. There was a great deal of cynicism about this appointee among the staff, and the skepticism was heightened by the appointee's political connections. According to this careerist, "This guy was nice and easy to work with, but it was pretty clear that he was a politician and not a technocrat. He had been a big contributor to the presidential campaign and had served as an elected official himself earlier in his career."

Are there appointees who are not competent for the jobs they take? Surely there are, just as there are people in every line of work who sometimes are hired into jobs for which they are not really qualified. But the vast majority of presidential appointees are very competent for their positions.²⁰ In some cases, appointees come from academia, where they have been researching and teaching a particular policy area for years before assuming office. Sometimes appointees arrive from senior positions in the private sector, where they have overseen large government contracts or worked with the government on regulatory enforcement and managed large organizations. And, of course, many appointees have served in government before.²¹

Several of the political appointees we talked to not only had prior policy-specific experience but also had direct experience working with the agency they were now leading. In some cases, their prior experience was as a customer of the research services produced by the agency. In other cases, we interviewed political appointees who had previously served as career civil servants in the very same agency to which they were appointed. As people who had

What Careerists Said about Political Appointees

First Impressions

"[During the transition] the transition team seems to be still in campaign mode, not governing mode."

"In some cases, their résumés did not match the job they were taking."

"Initially, there seemed to be a lot of tension and suspicion, on both sides."

"They [the appointees] weren't sure who to trust at first."

"[Political appointees] didn't understand the real limitations of what they could accomplish."

"Some appointees don't understand the culture or the politics of the department they are entering."

Later Impressions and Insights

"The person really grew into the job."

"They were more moderate in their opinions than I first thought."

"I was struck by how some of our appointees came to see the career staff in a positive light."

"Feedback is tough because many appointees do not want to make policy in an open forum."

been on both sides of the relationship, these individuals have a particularly interesting perspective.

One political appointee who previously served as a careerist told us that his perspective completely changed when he took on the political job. For one thing, he was struck at what he called "the cynicism of the career staff"—"they seemed to assume that all policy and programmatic decisions were being made for political reasons; any deviation from their analytical recommendations was immediately taken as a political compromise." This interviewee admitted that he himself had harbored such thoughts during his days as a careerist, but once he assumed the role of political executive, he realized that he

had a much wider view of issues than he did as a careerist. Yes, compromises did sometimes have to be made, but not just for “political” reasons. Many times, there was new information brought to bear on the decision that was not accessible to his career analysts. He went on to note that this example illustrates why it is so important for political appointees to provide good feedback to their career partners. In the absence of feedback and good information, it is natural for careerists to assume that “behind closed door” politics is at work, not rational decision making.

In addition to our interviews, several studies bear this out. For example, a prior examination of a National Academy for Public Administration presidential appointee database showed that, as a group, most political appointees tend to be very well educated and enter office with prior public service credentials.²² (In fact, more and more appointees come from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, having previously served as congressional staff members or even career civil servants. This is significant because it is more evidence that, contrary to the mythology, political appointees are typically very well versed in the workings of government.)²³

Myth 3: Political appointees do not want to hear information that contradicts their ideological agendas.

This myth is closely linked with the notion that political appointees care more about ideology than organizational stewardship. In this view, because political appointees are mostly focused on narrow policy agendas, they do not want to hear any information that might contradict their ideological position. Thus a Defense appointee who comes into office arguing that there are too few people in the military does not want to hear that the real problem might not be the overall number of recruits as much as it is the types of skills the recruits bring with them. In this hypothetical example, Defense careerists might decide that they should keep their data to themselves and not raise arguments against the political executive’s stated position.

Many of the careerists we interviewed had encountered such ideologically driven appointees at one point or another. But, again, this was the exception and not the rule. Moreover, several of our political interviewees argued that they encouraged their careerists to, in the words of one appointee, “dis-

prove my hypothesis.” This appointee argued that the decisions he makes are far too important and consequential to be decided solely on the basis of political ideology. His approach is to state his working hypothesis for how to solve a particular policy problem and then ask the career staff to try to “disconfirm” this hypothesis with hard data. In his view, there are two important elements here. First, he is showing the careerists that he wants and values their advice, and wants to promote a working atmosphere where people feel comfortable expressing dissent. Second, he is also telling them that he welcomes debate as long as it is buttressed with empirical evidence and not just “arm-waving.”

As noted earlier, most political appointees come into office possessing advanced degrees and substantial professional experience in government and the private sector. They have survived and thrived in professional life in part because they have learned to listen to their advisers before making a decision. No appointees want to make the wrong decision. Not only could such a decision have disastrous consequences for the agency they lead, but it could also spell the end of their political career. The White House wants its political appointees to pursue the “right” ideological agenda, but it also wants its people to be competent executives who run effective organizations.

Myth 4: Political appointees (historically Republicans) don’t like government employees.

Many careerists initially assume that political appointees arrive in office with a disdainful attitude about the career staff. Since appointees, by definition, have not chosen to make government their full-time career, the assumption is that this must mean that appointees tend to hold very negative beliefs about career employees. And, at least since the administration of Richard Nixon, many careerists have tended to assume that Republican appointees, in particular, are antagonistic toward careerists. In part, this myth arises from the ideology of the Republican Party, which stresses smaller government and the advantages of “running government more like a business.” It is natural for civil servants to assume that if Republicans are skeptical about bureaucracy, then they must also be skeptical about the bureaucrats themselves.

Table 7: Myths (and Realities) about Political Appointees

Myth	Reality
Political appointees care only about ideology and not about organizational stewardship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most political appointees care about leaving the agency a better place than they found it and want to have a positive impact on the organization.
Political appointees are not really competent for their jobs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political appointees are highly educated. • Many political appointees have worked in government before. • Many political appointees have worked in or with their specific agency before. • Many political appointees have expertise in policy-relevant subjects.
Political appointees do not want to hear information that contradicts their ideological agendas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most political appointees want to make sound decisions based on facts. • Most political appointees are interested in “getting it right.”
Political appointees, Republicans in particular, don’t like government employees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How smoothly the political/career relationship evolves rarely has anything to do with party affiliation. • Managerial and interpersonal factors are far more important.

Retellings of this myth also often point to the excesses of the Nixon administration, which of course was headed by Republicans. Some civil servants are old enough to remember the infamous “Malek Manual,” in which Nixon’s personnel director, Fred Malek, laid down various means for dealing with recalcitrant civil servants. And Nixon’s federalism initiatives were widely seen as a way to weaken the federal bureaucracy by moving power and money from Washington to the states.

Our interviews suggest, however, that this belief is more myth than reality. Many of our career interviewees have served under both Republican and Democratic administrations, and their complaints—and compliments—about the political executives they have worked with transcend political party.

We talked, for example, to careerists who identified themselves as lifelong Democrats who had spent their entire federal career working in social policy agencies—organizations that, according to the myth, are unpopular with Republicans. And yet many of these same career managers said that the most effective appointees they had worked with had been Republicans. For every careerist we interviewed who complained about Republicans not liking bureaucrats, there was another career official telling us a horror story about being unable to work with a Democrat who was “too ideological.” Whether one is an effective political appointee seems to have little to do with political party; it is more about personal management style.

Rules of Engagement for Career Civil Servants

Based on our research, we offer some rules of engagement for career officials. We have tried to distill the collective wisdom of our interviewees, who among themselves have hundreds of years of experience working in the federal government and dealing with political executives. These rules are summarized in Table 8 on page 24.

Rule 1: Know your job and develop your expertise.

A clear conclusion from our interviews with appointees is that political executives value careerists more for their technical expertise than their political opinions. As a careerist, the more knowledgeable you are about the policy issues at hand, the more valuable you will be to the political leadership. Remember that a key role of the career civil servant is to speak truth to power. As a career employee, odds are that you probably know more about the relevant policy and the institutional history than the political executive you serve. Most political appointees understand this and want your advice and counsel. Like most executives, political appointees want to make good decisions, and part of making good decisions is getting good advice. That is where the technically proficient careerist comes in.

One political appointee told us, “You really need to trust the staff; otherwise you will drown.” Another said, “The in-box can eat you alive. You have to trust and delegate to the staff.” Effective political executives understand this and will be more likely to delegate substantial work to their careerists if they perceive the career staff to be on top of the policy and programmatic details.

One of our political interviewees said that in her view, the most effective careerists were those who were “comfortable with data and analysis, not just opinions and anecdotes,” and were “willing to change their minds and their direction based on what the data were telling them.” Other political appointees told us that the least effective careerists were people who “shoot from the hip” and are “anecdote based.”

Rule 2: Understand (and embrace) your role.

Political appointees and careers play different roles in public administration. Political executives shape and deliver the policy message to the public, the media, and the Congress, while careerists work largely behind the scenes during the formulation and implementation stages of the policy process. Several political appointees we interviewed said that problems sometimes arose with their careerists because of role confusion.

One political appointee told a story about a careerist who decided that he would not only help craft a press release on an important policy initiative but that he should be the one to deliver it to the media. The appointee had to rebuke the career employee and explain that she, not he, was the person to play the role of public spokesperson. She went on to explain that this careerist was not a bad employee—indeed, she found him to be one of the most competent staffers on her team—but simply someone who had blundered into the wrong territory and was trying to do the job of the political leadership.

Of course, a strong and continuing sense of role confusion may be a sign that you, as a careerist,

Role Confusion: The Case of Former National Park Police Chief Teresa Chambers

In December 2003, the Department of the Interior placed National Park Police Chief Teresa Chambers on administrative leave because it alleged that she had discussed budget and staffing shortfalls with the media and improperly lobbied the Congress. Later, in July 2004, the department fired Chambers, a career employee and 27-year veteran of law enforcement. As this is written, Chambers has fought her dismissal in court and in the press, and has lost her latest attempt to be reinstated to her former position.²⁴

On October 7, 2004, a federal administrative law judge from the Merit Systems Protection Board ruled that Chambers was not a whistleblower but rather a problem employee with a history of defying her superiors and ignoring established agency procedures. Among other things, the judge ruled that Chambers circumvented the official chain of command by directly approaching the deputy secretary of the Interior about an employee transfer.

What happened? Federal employee advocates see the Chambers case as a textbook illustration of heavy-handed political manipulation of the career bureaucracy. After she was initially put on administrative leave, for example, Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) praised Chambers for being honest and said he was worried that other government managers might be discouraged from speaking out because of the disciplinary actions taken against her. Of course, her superiors at Interior see it as an unfortunate situation brought on by an uncooperative career employee who overstepped her bounds.

Based on the research for this study, we might argue that the Chambers case is, in part, a cautionary tale for careerists. The moral of this tale is twofold. First, understand your role and know the boundaries of your position. Second, transgress those boundaries at your own peril. In speaking to the press about the budget and personnel problems at the Park Police, and in going around her chain of command to talk to the number two political executive at the department, Chambers was perceived as acting more like a political appointee herself than a career manager. In trying to agitate public opinion to influence the budget process for her agency, Chambers was perceived as moving from the realm of career manager to would-be political executive. Of course, Chambers is not the first career manager to take such actions, nor will she be the last, but her case illustrates the potential perils of role confusion.

are in the wrong line of work. We also interviewed former career government employees who now work for political action committees or lobbying firms. These interviewees said that what drove them to leave government service was that they found themselves constantly longing to be more involved in policy decision making and advocacy; they did not feel content with their role as policy analysts and formulators. They came to the realization that they would be more effective (and happier) if they left government service and took on more political work. Similarly, many of our political appointees explained that they could not conceive of working for a leadership team whose ideology differed from theirs.

Rule 3: Be patient.

Anyone who has ever worked in government knows that change does not happen overnight. Sometimes it does not happen at all. A key to surviving in the bureaucracy, therefore, is to be patient. It is human nature to expect rapid change when a new leader-

ship team enters office. Career civil servants are certainly prone to this expectation as the presidential election season gives way to the transition to governance. But patience is important. New political appointees need time to learn their way around the organization.

During the transition and (for Senate-confirmed officials) the preparation for their confirmation hearings, incoming political appointees will be bombarded with briefings about countless policies and programs. And, quite often, the list of issues that is “teed up” during the initial transition briefings does not necessarily become the working agenda once the administration settles in. So, part of patience is learning that it may take time before you even get an opportunity to present issues in your area to the new political team. But part of it is also knowing that an issue must “ripen” before a window of opportunity opens for meaningful action. Knowing the technical aspects of your policy is important, but so is staying aware of the political calendar.

Rule 4: Learn something about the new political leadership.

Many of our career interviewees recommended getting to know something about the new political leadership—well before the first face-to-face meeting. As soon as the presidential nomination is officially announced (or even before—it is not too difficult for a connected senior careerist to figure out who is on the short list), it makes sense to get a copy of the nominee’s résumé. What is his or her most recent position? What is his area of expertise? Has she served in government before? Has she served in your agency before? Has he written books or articles or even editorials that might give you some sense of his policy positions or what he might advance as his key issue agenda?

Doing some research along these lines will help you in several ways. First, it gives you some sense of the person who is assuming a leadership position. Of course, even extensive background reading about the nominee does not guarantee a totally accurate picture, but it is probably better than approaching your new boss completely unaware of her background. Second, knowing something about the new political executive will help you more effectively market your policy ideas. Several of our career interviewees described themselves as having the job of marketing ideas to the political leadership. Success is partly dependent on presenting an idea that is well-thought-out and thoroughly researched, but success is also dependent on knowing what will sell.

One interviewee told us about his experiences in proposing various efficiency initiatives. In this case, a new political appointee was very interested in such initiatives but also very much a proponent of competitive sourcing. Knowing this, the careerist made sure to incorporate contracting and outsourcing proposals into his overall efficiency presentation, and felt that it made a stronger impression on the political appointee.

Rule 5: Be aware of the bigger picture.

As a careerist, there is no question that you bring a lot of passion and enthusiasm to your area of policy expertise. But there is also no question that, on any given day, your political superiors are worried about many more issues than just yours. Moreover, political appointees may not simply look at your issue

What Political Appointees Said about Careerists

On Effective Career Civil Servants

“Comfortable operating with data—not just opinions and anecdotes.”

“Ability to move between the big picture and the tiny details.”

“Willing to change direction based on what the data shows.”

“Smart, engaged, and analytical in their approach.”

“Willing to step out front and take a risk.”

On Ineffective Career Civil Servants

“They shoot from the hip—don’t really have the data to back them up.”

“Overprotective of their image—trying so hard to be ‘neutral’ that they don’t really do the job.”

“Did not understand that their job was not to present the message or speak to the media.”

“Some of them were just too averse to risk.”

Political Appointees’ Advice to Career Civil Servants

“Realize that most political appointees are very interested in public service.”

“If you come in with anecdotes not backed up with data and analysis, then you are not going to get very far.”

“Remember that political appointees need to be responsive to the White House and the president’s agenda.”

“You may think that the answers don’t often change, but when new political appointees come in, the questions definitely will change.”

from your technical perspective, but may have to incorporate, and accommodate, a variety of other perspectives in the process of fashioning a political compromise. For you as the technically savvy career expert, the best answer is the “right” answer. For the political appointee, the best answer may likely be the “achievable” answer.

One political appointee we interviewed explained it this way: “I need to temper the career input with politics.” Another political interviewee said, “Sometimes I may have to make a decision based on the politics that goes against the technical recommendation, no matter how sound that recommendation was.” It is important to note here that these political executives are not talking about “politics” in its lowest, most narrow sense, as if making decisions “based on the

politics” means brazenly ignoring good technical advice to perform a political favor for some interested party. Rather, what they mean is that the career technical input is one input among many—an important input, to be sure, particularly if it is rigorous and highly analytical, but still just one input that must be balanced against other considerations.

It is also important to note that many of our political interviewees stressed the importance of the president’s interests. After all, as political appointees, they serve at the pleasure of the president and have been appointed to their positions in large part to fulfill the president’s wishes and advance his policy agenda. One interviewee put it this way: “At the end of the day, I have to make decisions in the president’s interest.”

Table 8: Rules of Engagement for Career Civil Servants

Rule	Illustration
Know your job and develop your expertise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an expert in your policy area. • Give the political leadership high-quality analytical products.
Understand and embrace your role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the role of the careerist in the American political system. • Take pride in your contributions to an effective policy process. • Avoid acting too “political.”
Be patient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid pushing too hard for action, particularly with new political leaders. • Understand that decisions cannot be made on all issues and that certain topics take priority.
Learn something about the new political leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read their résumés. • Get to know something about their policy expertise and their positions on key issues. • Talk to people who have served with them in previous positions.
Be aware of the bigger picture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realize that political appointees sometimes have to accommodate other perspectives, not just yours. • Understand that political appointees see their role as protecting the president and advancing his agenda. • Know what else is going on in your department and in your overall issue area.

Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees

Political appointees in the federal government have a lot on their plates. They are often responsible for millions, if not billions, of taxpayers' dollars. They often manage programs or policy areas that affect thousands, if not millions, of lives. They often have supervisory responsibility for hundreds of federal employees. And they must worry about carrying out the public interest at the same time they focus on the issues that are important to critical political coalitions, interest groups, Congress, the press, and their boss (the president). Theirs is a complicated world. Managing the bureaucracy is perhaps the least of their worries, but if they can figure out how to do it well—to marshal the resources of the civil service—they will undoubtedly improve their chances of success.

Along with soliciting opinions about the misconceptions that political appointees had about careerists, we also asked careerists to tell us what successful appointees did that worked well. Conversely, we also asked them to characterize not-so-successful appointees. Since most careerists had extensive experience working with different appointees through numerous administrations, many were able to see patterns in terms of what works and what doesn't work in Washington. Based on these interviews, we developed the following "rules of engagement." The rules are summarized in Table 9 on page 29.

Rule 1: Engage the career staff and listen to their advice—even if you don't heed it.

Most careerists understand that their advice cannot always be followed. In cases where it is not, one political appointee told us that he often had information (and pressures) that the careerists did not

know about. As a result, he knew that careerists would not like some of the decisions that he made, but he felt compelled to make them anyway. Although appointees may not always be able to share sensitive information about the foundation for their decisions, oftentimes having a hearing is enough to satisfy careerists that they are contributing to the process and that they add value. Feeling as if they've been heard encourages them to give appointees important information and advice the next time.

In her report for the IBM Center for The Business of Government on what successful appointees do, "Becoming an Effective Political Executive: 7 Lessons from Experienced Appointees," Judith Michaels also stressed "turning to career staff." There are many reasons for doing this—tapping their expertise and experience, delegating workload, ensuring that there is buy-in during implementation—but the issue we found careerists focusing on was related to management and motivation. That is, careerists want to feel like they are contributing to the mission of their organizations. If political managers cut them out of processes or if their advice is rarely sought, they suffer from a sort of professional identity crisis. Such an identity crisis negatively affects their job satisfaction and motivation. Ultimately, the productivity and the effectiveness of the organization will be negatively affected, too.

Careerists are the institutional memory of American public administration. As noted earlier, they draw the policy maps that connect the past, present, and future. They are the keepers of the institutional "lore" and can tell political appointees the stories that explain what has and hasn't worked before. As Richard Neustadt once wrote, "What makes lore invaluable is the sad fact that no institutional sources of memory exist as substitutes, save patch-

Not Listening to Careerists: The Case of Thomas Scully, Richard Foster, and the Medicare Program

While the Teresa Chambers case offers an example of a career manager overstepping her bounds and acting too “political,” the case of Richard Foster, chief actuary of the Medicare program, shows how political appointees can run into trouble when they do not listen to their career technical experts.²⁵

During the development of the president’s budget for Fiscal Year 2005, one of Foster’s key responsibilities was to estimate the costs of the administration’s proposed new Medicare prescription-drug bill under consideration at that time by the Congress. While the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) had estimated that the new program would cost about \$395 billion, Foster’s internal estimate was much higher, nearly \$534 billion. President Bush was having trouble convincing conservatives to support the program, and many of these legislators said they would only endorse the bill as long as the total price tag did not exceed \$400 billion. While legislators naturally had access to the CBO estimate, some members were asking the Department of Health and Human Services to release their internal estimates as well. But these requests were denied.

Congress voted for passage of the president’s program but later became aware of Foster’s higher estimates. In testimony before Congress in March 2004, Foster alleged that Thomas Scully, former head of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, had threatened to fire him if he responded to congressional requests for his cost estimates. According to Foster, he reminded Scully that the language in the 1997 Budget Act that created the actuary position called for an independent office charged with providing Congress prompt and impartial information. Scully dismissed this argument.

What happened in this case? The White House argues that Scully was acting unilaterally and without administration guidance in suppressing Foster’s cost estimates. Foster, in his testimony before Congress and various media interviews, has said that Scully was in fact suppressing his estimates.

Based on our research, we would argue that this case shows the risks that political appointees run when they fail to trust their career staffs and, worse, actively work to suppress their analyses. Unlike Teresa Chambers, Foster did not circumvent his chain of command, even though he was clearly uncomfortable with being ordered not to respond to congressional requests. He did what a good career civil servant is supposed to do: He spoke truth to power. But in this case, power did not listen. Some might say that it would have been politically inept to release the internal estimates to Congress, given the fact that conservative members were openly complaining about the price tag. But it is entirely possible—and plausible—that had Foster been permitted to share his numbers with Congress, the bill would still have passed. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas, for instance, said in interviews at the time that he supported Foster and that his estimates were just that—estimates. “I support you now,” said Thomas. “It does not mean that I’m going to agree with your estimates.” In other words, Thomas, an influential committee chair, would not have seen Foster’s estimates as the death knell for the proposed bill but rather as just another set of estimates. Suppressing Foster’s analyses may have paid some short-term political benefits, but at the longer-term cost of sparking a nasty dispute with Congress and demeaning the role career experts play in bringing forth technical advice to policy makers.

ily, by happenstance, at higher executive levels of American government. Lore is almost all there is. Without it, available documentation tends to be ambiguous, misleading, or perverse.”²⁶

Rule 2: Show the career staff that you respect them.

Several careerists mentioned that political appointees don’t tend to understand or appreciate the resources they have at their disposal. It would save many false starts if appointees read their new staff’s

résumés. Knowing the expertise and skills of the career staff helps appointees effectively use those resources. Also, given career executives’ relatively long tenure in their organizations, they tend to know what the organization’s management issues are and what the internal politics are. Careerists are anxious to team up with appointees to improve management. Less successful appointees paid little attention to the staff resources they had; more successful appointees harnessed staff resources effectively. And in order to harness the resources, you need to know what resources are at your disposal.

According to our career interviewees, the best appointees are also good managers. While careerists understand that appointees have a political mission they are trying to accomplish, appointees are also usually expected to manage various components of an agency or department. Successful appointees tend to manage by walking around and making an effort to inject fun into the work. Those who were characterized as ineffective or “making critical mistakes” were abusive and rude to subordinates. One focus group participant characterized one appointee he worked for as “tyrannical and intimidating.”

Two career interviewees offered vivid portraits of these different management styles. On the positive side, one interviewee told us about the deputy secretary of his department who would often eat lunch in the employee cafeteria. “It was like he was saying that I am on your team. I am no better than you.” At first, career employees noticed the deputy secretary going through the lunch line but did not feel comfortable approaching him; after a while, though, it became common for careerists to take their lunch trays over to the deputy’s table and join him for lunch.

Another career interviewee painted a darker picture. This person worked for an assistant secretary who was often rude and dismissive of others’ opinions. Rather than an opportunity for information exchange, staff meetings became ordeals to be survived. At briefings, the assistant secretary would seemingly go out of his way to exhibit disinterest in the information and recommendations being presented. At one such briefing, our interviewee told us that the assistant secretary actually rose from his seat, strode to the front of the room, and unceremoniously flicked off the overhead projector that a senior career employee was using to present transparencies. Needless to say, this is not a management style that will win over the career staff.

Rule 3: Be willing to be educated about the programs and policies.

Even the most well-seasoned appointees can’t know the program and policy detail (and history) as well as a lot of careerists. Careerists are anxious to teach appointees about the important issues in their programs. Take advantage of being new on the job by asking a lot of questions and soliciting information

What Careerists Said about Political Appointees

On Effective Political Appointees

“Considered analysis when making decisions.”

“Was a rational decision maker.”

“Knew how to delegate.”

“Got to know the career staff.”

“Treated people decently and with respect.”

“Had good relationships with the White House and Capitol Hill.”

“Involved me in high-level meetings.”

“Consistent and honest.”

“Willing to find out what programs and strategies have worked in the past.”

“Did not assume the career staff was wedded to the prior administration.”

On Ineffective Political Appointees

“Never developed a real working relationship with the career staff.”

“Did not have a specific, doable action agenda.”

“Never really knew what they wanted to accomplish.”

“Just refused to compromise.”

“Insecure, and afraid to make decisions.”

“Abusive and rude to people.”

“Managed by intimidation.”

“Unwilling to say, ‘I made a mistake.’ ”

“Too focused on a narrow political agenda.”

Careerists’ Advice to Political Appointees

“Most civil servants want to help.”

“Realize that it will take time to implement the administration’s agenda.”

“Make sure to give the career staff good feedback—let them know what happens at the big meetings.”

“You have to trust the staff—you cannot do everything by yourself.”

from the career staff. Appointees who learned their programs were more able to take action when they needed to, according to career executives. Lack of program knowledge also fosters a lack of confidence in some appointees, which makes them less effective bargainers within the organization.

Careerists also pointed to the importance of context in decision making. Careerists are in a unique position to provide most political appointees with the historical, legal, and organizational context they need to understand complicated policy and program issues. Appointees who “did not listen” to this context were more likely to fail, according to career executives, because the proverbial devil is often in the details.

Rule 4: Have a clear and limited set of objectives.

Successful presidents are known for having clear and limited agendas. Similarly, appointees need to have clear and limited objectives if they expect staff to focus their energies appropriately. Careerists want to understand the priorities of an appointee. When they don’t know the agenda, careerists feel as if they’re operating in the dark: playing a guessing game about what the appointee expects from them and perhaps directing their attention to the wrong priorities. Of course, the appointee must *develop* clear and limited objectives. This is the threshold issue. One interviewee said that “governing is more of a focus on principles than politics.” What she means is that once the election campaign is over, political appointees must choose priorities and make hard decisions. To be successful, political executives have to be careful to set goals that are ambitious, but not so lofty that they end up being unachievable.

Rule 5: Be willing to compromise on your agenda and admit mistakes.

Successful appointees are pragmatic about the need to compromise. In our interviews, careerists argued that appointees who dug in their heels on every issue ended up achieving none of their agenda. Although careerists are not always privy to the political issues appointees face during decision making, they can often provide expertise, advice, and workable alternatives in the face of failing initiatives. Careerists are anxious to provide this kind of service to political appointees.

Mid-course corrections are inevitable during the policy-making process. Careerists expect political appointees to make mistakes like everyone else. Ill will is created when appointees refuse to admit mistakes—or, worse yet, when they blame mistakes on career staff. According to the careerists we talked to, they have the most respect for managers who take personal responsibility for their mistakes and are willing to make necessary changes to their agendas.

Rule 6: Don’t forget about the organization.

Political appointees have a lot to worry about on any given day, but they must remember that they are also stewards, albeit for a limited amount of time, of the agencies they lead. Successful appointees understand that being serious about organizational stewardship pays dividends in several ways. It shows the career staff that you care about more than just achieving short-term policy goals. And leaving the organization in better shape than you found it is a real service to the American taxpayer.

How can political appointees be good organizational stewards? Our political interviewees shared several ideas. One strategy is to be willing to take on bureaucratic roadblocks and perform bureaucratic “miracles.” One appointee told us about her experience in taking on a long-festering regulatory problem within her agency. Prior administrations had not been able to get a particular regulation through the clearance process; in recent years, many of the career staffers had lost interest, figuring it was an impossible task. But some senior careerists still saw this regulation as important. The appointee decided to take it on and make it one of her top priorities; eventually, her dedication paid off and the regulation was approved. By doing this, she not only had solved an administrative problem but also had won the respect and trust of the career staff.

Paying attention to human capital issues is another way to invest in organizational stewardship. One of our political interviewees, for example, told us that he tries to focus his attention at both ends of the human resources life cycle. At one end, he makes a point of attending new employee orientation events and job fairs. In his view, this sends a powerful message not only to the new employees and interns but also to the career staff that as a political executive,

he is interested in more than just promoting new policies. At the other end of the spectrum, our interviewee said that he invests time in the overall workforce planning of the agency and has not shied away from dealing with thorny personnel issues, including making a serious effort to hold people accountable for their performance. This includes both rewarding high performers with choice assignments, awards, and promotions, as well as taking tough action when warranted for those who are not performing adequately.

Rule 7: Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Frequent and substantive communication between careerists and political appointees is the key to a productive working relationship. Although political

appointees have severely limited time, communicating with career staff improves efficiency in the long run. For example, communicating the agenda, objectives, and priorities allows career managers and staff to direct their resources appropriately. Communicating expectations of the career staff—how appointees see them contributing to the stated objectives—gives careerists a sense of direction and a sense that they are partners in the process. Providing consistent performance feedback allows careerists to provide the kind of service and information that is most useful to an appointee. In summary, frequent communication is an important key to good management. Good management makes the workforce more productive and more motivated and, in the end, makes for better government.

Table 9: Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees

Rule	Illustration
Engage the career staff and listen to their advice—even if you don't heed it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve the career staff in agency deliberations. • Actively solicit their analysis and recommendations.
Show the career staff that you respect them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read your careerists' résumés. • Understand their skills and what they bring to the table. • Make it clear that you are the decision maker, but treat them as a partner.
Spend some time learning the details.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask lots of questions—particularly as you enter office. • Find out why some initiatives have worked and others haven't. • Knowing the details gives you stronger credibility within the agency and improves your chances of achieving your agenda.
Have a clear and limited set of objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivate the career staff with ambitious but achievable objectives. • Make sure the careerists know where you're going. • Make sure <i>you</i> know where you're going.
Be willing to compromise and admit mistakes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realize that sometimes you have to give a little to gain a little. • Be strong but pragmatic. • Take responsibility for your mistakes.
Don't forget about the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to organizational stewardship. • Take on bureaucratic and administrative problems within the agency. • Make an effort to attend job fairs and new employee orientation events. • Don't shy away from tough human resource management issues.
Communicate, communicate, communicate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constantly communicate your goals. • Constantly give the career staff feedback about ongoing agency deliberations. • Make sure that the staff understands why decisions have been made the way they were. • Give the staff feedback on their performance.

Findings and Recommendations

Both political appointees and career civil servants are critical to the success of any president's agenda. Working together, these two groups are responsible for executing and maintaining the federal government's myriad programs. These programs touch millions of lives. If relationships between political appointees and careerists are strained, their work naturally suffers. If their work suffers, the American people are not well served. Thus, our contention is that the quality of American governance is highly dependent on the ability of political appointees and careerists in the executive branch to work well together—by understanding and honoring each other's perspectives; by committing themselves to good management in the organizations of which they are a part; and by communicating with each other about roles, priorities, and objectives.

In this report, we provided lists of myths that can undermine a positive start to the political/career relationship. We also offered some rules of engagement for both groups. Here we provide our main findings, with related recommendations for establishing and maintaining effective working relationships in the future.

Finding 1: Myths are counterproductive.

- Myths about both political appointees and careerists are powerful, but they are based on exceptions rather than rules.
- Myths drive counterproductive behavior like distrust and secrecy.
- Myth-based beliefs inhibit communication between political appointees and careerists.

Recommendations

Having preconceived notions about anyone is not only unfair, it is also counterproductive to forging a productive working relationship. Suspend your suspicion and your belief in myths until you get to know each other. Assume the best until proven otherwise. Research shows that when political appointees and careerists settle into a working relationship, they usually have a very positive view of each other. Contrary to the well-worn proverb, when it comes to political appointees and careerists, familiarity breeds respect, not contempt. Given this, we recommend skipping right to the respect and forgoing the potentially myth-laden "getting to know you" phase.

Finding 2: Good management is important, and lacking.

- Both political and career executives care about good management, but both groups are critical of each other on this score.
- Both political and career executives want to partner on management issues, but that doesn't happen very often.
- Careerists want political appointees to be leaders; political appointees want careerists to show them the management ropes.
- Political appointees have a shorter-term perspective than careerists, but both groups care about the long-term health of the organizations for which they work.

Recommendations

Management should be an explicit priority and should be a team effort between careerists and

political appointees. Collaboration should start with specifically defining management roles, setting management objectives, and talking about management philosophy (bearing in mind that actions will ultimately speak a lot louder than words). Political appointees should rely on the specific assets of career executives—for example, knowledge of the organizational politics and experience with the federal personnel rules. Careerists should rely on the expertise and experience political appointees bring from managing other organizations. Both groups should view themselves as organizational stewards, even as their time horizons are quite different.

Finding 3: Cultural clashes are inevitable but not fatal.

- Careerists tend to arrive at their positions through a system that values expertise, experience, and technical ability. They care about fair and open processes and the “means” through which things get done.
- Political appointees behave more like entrepreneurs, valuing innovation and quick action. The entrepreneur cares about the kind of change that is being made, or the “ends” of what gets done.
- Political appointees and careerists both value public service, but they define it differently. Careerists are there to do the nation’s business; political appointees are there to determine what the nation’s business should be.

Recommendations

Means and ends are both important to the American system of government. The ends represent the “what” (the substance) of public administration and the means represent the “how” (the process). The substance of public administration has its roots in electoral legitimacy, bestowed on each administration by the American people. But if substantive change is formulated or implemented without fair processes, it will not be considered legitimate.

The different perspectives of careerists and political appointees derive, in part, from the different systems in which they have matured. These systems define their roles, and role perceptions drive behavior. Both roles are critical, but they are also clearly different. The differences can

only be reconciled by acknowledging their existence. Political appointees and careerists should make an effort to understand and respect the other’s contribution to our system of government. Problems arise when one group misunderstands its role, usurps the other’s role, or shuts the other out of decision making.

Finding 4: Communication is the key to success.

- Suspicion and distrust inhibit communication and learning.
- Unclear or unlimited goals, objectives, and priorities set the organization up for failure.
- Speaking truth to power serves everyone well.

Recommendations

Suspending preconceived notions facilitates more open communication, which is essential in forging a productive working relationship between careerists and political appointees. Each should make a concerted effort to get to know each other: Political appointees should read staff résumés so they know what skills and abilities the careerists bring to the work; careerists should learn about appointees’ backgrounds so they can focus their efforts on filling in substantive gaps. Political appointees should communicate their goals, objectives, and priorities early and often. Similarly, political appointees should give careerists frequent performance feedback so mid-course corrections can be made.

Finally, we recommend that careerists continue (or start, if they don’t already) to challenge political appointees’ assumptions and hypotheses. This kind of dialogue is critical to good decision making, it personifies the role of the civil service, and most political appointees value the input.

Appendix: Study Methodology

Our methodology focused on three main tasks:

- Reviewing the relevant scholarly literature.
- Conducting focus groups and personal interviews with appointees and high-level careerists.
- Synthesizing lessons learned from political appointees who manage or who have managed within the civil service (primary and secondary sources).

Literature Review

We reviewed several theoretical and empirical studies by academics and government agencies. The academic literature focused on bureaucratic politics, public administration, public policy, and management. Government reports focused on demographics and employee attitudes. All sources are cited within the report, and a complete list can be found in the bibliography.

Focus Groups

We conducted two focus groups—one with current and former political appointees (six participants) and a second consisting of current and former career executives (eight participants). Although data gathered from this methodology are not generalizable, there are important advantages to using this methodology. First, it allows researchers to gather many opinions at one time. Second, because of the conversational atmosphere, it sparks ideas and thoughts among participants that they may not have had in a one-on-one interview. And third, it fosters group synergy—the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The technique used was based on Richard Kreuger’s method of conducting focus groups and the questioning routes used are provided in Table A.1.

Interviews

We conducted 12 in-depth interviews with current and former political appointees, 25 with current and former career executives, and three with people who had served in both capacities. Like focus group data, data from interviews are not generalizable. What they offer are interesting illustrations, texture, and rich description based on the research questions. The questionnaires used during the in-depth interviews are provided in Table A.2 on page 34.

Lessons Learned

Using a combination of the information from the literature, the focus groups, and the in-depth interviews, we developed lessons learned and summarized them by category.

Table A.1: Questions Used in Focus Groups

Questioning Route— Careerist Focus Group	Questioning Route— Political Appointee Focus Group
Think back to the transitions between various administrations you've worked through in your federal career. How would you describe most of the appointees who came in to fill political slots?	Think back to when you first started working as a political appointee in the federal government. What were your first impressions of the career civil servants who worked for you?
How would you describe the relationship between careerists and political appointees?	How did your impressions change (if they changed) over the course of your tenure, and what caused those impressions to change?
What are the key factors in determining the character of that relationship?	How would you describe the relationship between careerists and political appointees?
When you think about effective political appointees, what actions did they take that made them successful in your eyes?	What are the key factors in determining the character of that relationship?
What about political appointees who weren't so effective? What critical mistakes did they make?	When you think about effective careerists, what kinds of things do they do that make them successful in your eyes?
What should political appointees know about the career civil service before they start working in the federal government?	What about careerists who aren't so effective? What critical mistakes do they make?
What specific misconceptions do you think political appointees tend to have about the career civil service?	What specific misconceptions do you think careerists have about political appointees?
What specific misconceptions do you think careerists have about political appointees?	What specific misconceptions do you think political appointees have about careerists?

Table A.2: Questions Used in Interviews

Interview Questions for Careerists	Interview Questions for Political Appointees
During transitions between administrations, how would you describe your first impressions of most of the appointees who came in to fill political slots?	When you first began working as a political appointee, what were your first impressions of the career civil servants who worked for you?
Did your impressions of them tend to change over time? If so, how?	How did your impressions change (if they changed) over the course of your tenure?
What caused those impressions to change (if yes to question 2)?	What caused those impressions to change (if yes to question 2)?
How would you describe the relationship between careerists and political appointees generally?	Given your experience, how would you describe the relationship between careerists and political appointees in general in the federal government?
What are the key factors in determining the character of that relationship?	What are the key factors in determining the character of that relationship?
When you think about effective political appointees, what actions did they take that made them successful in your eyes?	What are the major misunderstandings between career civil servants and political appointees?
What about political appointees who weren't so effective? What critical mistakes did they make?	When you think about effective careerists, what kinds of things do they do that make them successful in your eyes?
What should political appointees know about the career civil service before they start working in the federal government?	What about careerists who aren't so effective? What critical mistakes do they make?
What specific misconceptions do you think political appointees tend to have about the career civil service at the beginning of their working relationship? What are the misconceptions they continue to have even after they work with civil servants?	What specific misconceptions do you think political appointees tend to have about the career civil service at the beginning of their working relationship? What are the misconceptions they continue to have even after they work with civil servants?
What specific misconceptions do you think careerists have about political appointees at the beginning of their working relationship? What are the misconceptions they continue to have even after they work with political appointees?	What specific misconceptions do you think careerists have about political appointees at the beginning of their working relationship? What are the misconceptions they continue to have even after they work with political appointees?
Given the topic of our research, are there other critical points that you'd like to make? Are there issues we've neglected? Are there other people you would recommend that we talk to?	Given the topic of our research, are there other critical points that you'd like to make? Are there issues we've neglected? Are there other people you would recommend that we talk to?

Endnotes

1. This section is based on various sources. See, for example, Van Riper, 1958, and Mackenzie, 1987.

2. In this report, we use the terms *political executives*, *political appointees*, *politicals*, and *presidential appointees* interchangeably. A more detailed summary of the various categories of political executives is provided in Table 2.

3. The GAO calculated this figure by examining the tenure of all federal government political executives appointed after October 1, 1989, who left office before September 30, 2001. Other reports have put the average tenure at about 24 months. See, for example, “Strengthening Senior Leadership in the Federal Government,” the report of a National Academy of Public Administration panel issued in December 2002.

4. In this report we use the terms *career government employees*, *careerists*, *careers*, and *civil servants* interchangeably.

5. It should be noted that career government employees includes not just civilian federal employees but also military personnel. However, this report does not attempt to address the special case of the military but rather focuses on career civilian executives.

6. Senior management being defined here as General Schedule 14–15.

7. These figures are drawn from the Office of Personnel Management website, which includes several sections describing the demographics of the federal workforce. See, for example, <http://opm.gov/feddata/demograp/table1-5.pdf>.

8. The numbers in this paragraph refer specifically to members of the career SES.

9. Occasionally there are exceptions when prominent members of the opposition party are appointed to a high position within the president’s administration; recent examples are Republican Bill Cohen’s appointment to be Secretary of Defense in the Democratic Clinton administration and Democrat Norman Mineta’s appointment to be Secretary of Transportation in the Republican George W. Bush administration.

10. See Stone, especially chapter 6.

11. These data come from the Office of Personnel Management workforce summaries.

12. See Mackenzie, 1987, and Aberbach and Rockman, 2000.

13. Or “two-on-one” sessions, when we were both present at an interview.

14. To promote candid and open discussions, we promised not to identify any of our interviewees by name or organizational affiliation.

15. Jones, pp. 167–68.

16. The 20th Amendment to the Constitution (1934) eliminated the lame-duck session of Congress, which previously met from December to March 3rd, the day before the new president was sworn in. Now the new Congress meets on January 3rd, 17 days before the swearing in, which is now specified as January 20th of the year after the election. The effects of this change were not felt until Eisenhower was elected in 1952 because FDR and Truman were both Democrats. Every change of president since that time has been a change of party except the George H. W. Bush administration in 1989.

17. Jones, p. 167.

18. Aberbach and Rockman, 2000, refer to the guild versus entrepreneurial systems to describe the differences in career paths between civil service executives and political appointees. This description aptly reflects some of the differences in motivation and performance on the job between the two groups, and is consistent with our findings.

19. It should be noted that, as with all these myths, there are small kernels of truth that help give the myths their staying power. In this case, it is true that many political appointees have in fact contributed money to the candidate’s campaign. The Presidential Appointee Initiative at the Brookings Institution found in a 2001 study of Clinton and George W. Bush appointees that more than half of the 640 politicals they studied contributed money to the campaigns of the president who later appointed them.

20. See especially Aberbach and Rockman.
21. See Mackenzie, chapter 1.
22. See, for example, Mackenzie, chapter 1.
23. See, for example, Mackenzie, chapter 1.
24. There have been numerous articles on this subject. See, for example, David A. Fahrenthold, "Hoyer Calls for Return of Police Chief," *The Washington Post*, December 11, 2003, p. B-05; and Henri E. Cauvin, "Judge Lambastes Park Police Ex-Chief," *The Washington Post*, October 9, 2004, p. B-01.
25. There have also been numerous articles about the Foster case, including Emily Heil, "Medicare Actuary Details Threats Over Estimates," *Government Executive Magazine*, March 25, 2004 (see www.govexec.com); and Amy Goldstein, "Foster: White House Had Role in Withholding Data," *The Washington Post*, March 19, 2004, p. A02.
26. Richard Neustadt in Jones, p. 167.

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