GATEKEEPERS

By Chris Whipple

Lessons for Managers & Administrators from White House Chiefs of Staff

Most significant none elected and none confirmed position in American Government
(28 since 1953)
GOALS

- Gain some perspective on management in a political environment.
- Cover some cautionary tales – especially when transitioning to new position.
- Help you coach your elected officials through presidential examples and events.
AGENDA

- Why study the role?
- What are the responsibilities of the Chief of Staff?
- Who were major figures to serve as Chief of Staff?
- What lessons can managers learn?
1. WHY STUDY WHITE HOUSE CHIEF OF STAFF

- Position requires a skill set valuable to municipal managers.
- Responsible for keeping everyone focused on priorities in a political environment.
- Manages employees not always of his/her choosing.
- Policy role is facilitative.
2. Responsibilities of Chief of Staff

(Pioneered by Eisenhower and Nixon)

- Select & supervise key White House staff. SOB
- Control the flow of people & info into the Oval Office.
- Negotiate with other power centers to implement the president's agenda.
- Tell the president what he does not want to hear to protect his administration.

SOUND FAMILIAR?
3. MAJOR FIGURES TO SHAPE CHIEF OF STAFF’S POSITION

Sherman Adams

H.R. Haldeman

Don Rumsfeld & Dick Cheney

James Baker III

Leon Panetta
Most Admired & Consulted by Successors
Other Noteworthy Chiefs of Staff

Jack Watson

Andy Card
Additional Resources
Least Effective
(Perhaps Destructive)

Common Theme – Either campaign holdovers or personal friends.
Little executive branch or legislative experience.
President Eisenhower (Sherman Adams)

- Modelled after army. “President needs an SOB.”
Presidents Kennedy & Johnson

- Organized presidency on more personal terms.
- Did not see the White House as just a shrine for high level dignified policy development.
- More directly engaged with cabinet.
President
Nixon
(Eisenhower’s VP)

- Nixon liked Eisenhower’s model. Actually promoted SOB role.
- Haldeman reorganized the White House staff to a "funnel" model still followed in the White House today.
President Ford

Chiefs of Staff

• Don Rumsfeld
• Dick Cheney

This experience had far reaching impact on the George H.W. Bush administration.
President Carter

- Spokes in wheel management philosophy
President Reagan

Chiefs of Staff

1st Term – James Baker

2ND Term – Don Regan (Iran-Contra)
   Howard Baker
   Ken Duberstein (Berlin Wall Speech)
President Bush

Chiefs of Staff

- John Sanunu
- Sam Skinner
- James Baker
President Clinton

Chiefs of Staff
• Mack McLarty
• Leon Panetta
• Erskine Bowles
• John Podesta
Overly influenced by observations of father’s chief.

Count not counter balance influence of VP.

Joshua Bolten
President Obama had a strong White House staff, and marginalized cabinet.
President Trump

Chiefs of Staff
Reince Priebus
John Kelly
4. Critical & Informative Events & Lessons for Manager’s
“I’ll tell you this, I believe it about Baker and I believe it about Reagan: The most successful managers are those that are secure enough to surround themselves with extremely strong-willed, talented people.”

Margaret Tutwiler (Cheney Aide)
Card understood that George W. Bush—like his father—did not want a chief who would be perceived as the real power behind the throne, as Baker had been with Reagan.
“power and influence, he had knowledge and experience, he had the total trust of the president, and he was the last guy in the room. In my opinion, Cheney was the chief of staff.” If so, Cheney was a de facto chief with a difference: **He couldn’t be fired.**
Clinton Chaotic Start

His initial public opinion polls were based on:

1. Expensive hair cuts (just because you can explain, doesn’t mean you should do it)
2. Travel office controversy (friend of the press)
3. Gays in the military.
4. Hillary’s health care plan.
LESSON 2
BE CAUTIOUS W/ CAMPAIGN HOLDOVERS & FRIENDS

THE VALERIE JARRETT POWER MATRIX

F.B.I. Questioning the Jordan Party on Studio 54 Visit

BY EDWARD T. POUND  AUG. 29, 1979

WASHINGTON, Aug. 28 — The Federal Bureau of Investigation is interviewing several persons who accompanied Hamilton Jordan, the White House chief of staff, to the New York discotheque Studio 54 in June 1978, Justice Department sources said today. Mr. Jordan has been a target of some of the agents’ questions.
Spouses

• They hear your conversations with your elected officials.
• They often just hear the officials side of the phone.
• They talk to their friends and neighbors.
• Nancy Reagan.......
LESSON 3
DON’T FORGET YOU ARE NOT ELECTED

Who Speaks to the President of the United States That Way?

SUNUNU IS ORDERED TO CLEAR FLIGHTS WITH BUSH LAWYER
“The people who don’t succeed as White House chief of staff are people who like the *chief* part of the job and not the *staff* part of the job. You have got to remember that you are staff even though you are powerful.”

*Jim Baker*
LESSON 4
BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR ROLE AND THE SITUATION
Baker:

1. Clarified Roles
2. Ever the pragmatist
“Mattis, McMaster and Dunford (as well as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson) were concerned enough about the conduct of foreign policy to work together to convince a skeptical Kelly to become chief of staff. Their argument: unless someone else takes over, this White House cannot handle a real crisis. Which means that when Trump asked Kelly for the third time to be his chief-of-staff, it wasn’t just a job offer. It was a call of duty.” - Time Magazine, August 2017.
Kelly’s Priorities

1. Make sure the President has good information. Not a bad strategy when your Council changes control.
2. Nod to Marine Credo “God, Country, Corps” Kelly told White House Staff to focus on “Country, President, Self” to reduce infighting and leaks.
3. Shut Oval Office door and send hangers-on back to their desks.
4. Told all staff to report to him.
5. Listens in on all meetings with Cabinet members.
Manager’s should assess and be aware of their ability to complement elected officials.
“He (Reagan) did not know one missile system from another and could not explain the simplest procedures of the federal government, but he understood that the political process of his presidency would be closely linked to his acceptance in Washington. In this he was the opposite of Jimmy Carter, who knew far more and understood far less.”
LESSON 6
LEGISLATION = POLICY = SUCCESS

• Be ultra prepared for Council meetings

Baker called it, “The key to my success.”
Legislative Strategy Group

Great idea for local government executives

Baker called it, “The key to my success.”
Carter directed that anyone wishing to use White House tennis courts needed his direct permission.
Six months later, the director of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, would resign under fire. But McDonough says the fault was his own: “The buck was with me. Implementation of major projects like that? Even if it’s in one agency? It’s on me.”
“And then I remember being surprised,” Card says, “when Paul Bremer announced from Baghdad what the policy would be. And that was a big decision. But it hadn’t been decided inside the White House yet.”

Powell vividly recalls “the horrible day when suddenly Bremer reversed everything that had been agreed to and disbanded the Iraqi army. And then threw out all the Ba’ath Party members, which went down to schoolteachers, nurses, you name it.” The secretary of state was stunned and furious. “I immediately called Dr. Rice. ‘Condi! Do you know about this?’ Her answer was no. ‘Did the president know this was going to happen?’ The answer was no. I said, ‘This is horrible!’ ” It was, says Powell, “a catastrophic, catastrophic strategic decision.”
LESSON 8
LET BOSS BE HIS/HER OWN PERSON
Avoid “Wimp Factor”

• Bush wanted did not want it to seem like every move of his was scripted as he felt Baker and others had done for Reagan.

• He was called Reagan’s “Lap dog” by George Will. Bush wanted to but some distance between the administrations, and be his own person.
In his eagerness to assert his independence, Bush did not run his VP pick past Baker, his campaign manager.
And therefore, did not prepare Quayle for his initial introduction.
LESSON 9
Don’t let staff gang up on bad decision

• James Baker and Don Regan ambushed President Reagan to authorize change that moved Baker & Regan to Chief of Staff
LESSON 10
Master how organization inter-relates
LESSON 11
BE TRUSTED & GUARD YOUR TERRITORY

• HAVE POWER TO ORGANIZE WORKPLACE
• DO NOT BE OVER-RIDDEN IN YOUR MANAGERIAL ROLE
“The power of the chief is derived,” says Bowles. “If you have the trust and confidence of the president, you have all the power you need to get what you need done. If you’ve lost the confidence of a president, people smell it, feel it, know it within seconds – and you become an overblown scheduler.”
LESSON 12
BE FIRM BUT TREAT STAFF WITH RESPECT
After telling his environment staff they did not know what the fxxxK they were talking about, he told Andy Card, they will go back to offices and tell everyone “That Sununu is a tough SOB.” Card replies, “They’re going back to their offices and tell everyone ‘That Sununu is a fxxgg asshole!’”
LESSON 13
Satisfy Your Instincts

• Powell accepted information from the Vice President’s office on Weapons of Mass Destruction in lead up to war and presented it at UN. It was not accurate.
Colin Powell on UN Presentation

I regret it. I will always regret it. It was a terrible mistake on all our parts and on the intelligence community ... I wish it had been different, I wish I had more time. Maybe if I had another week or two my instincts would have seen through this or been able to do double-checking, but I didn’t have more time. But I’m not looking for an excuse. I gave that presentation. I gave it believing that everything I had said had been double-sourced, triple-sourced, and was accurate, but it was not.”
LESSON 14

Don’t make empty threats

Obama makes a threat, he’d better be damn well prepared to carry it out,” says Baker. “You don’t ever walk away from that.”

Panetta and James Baker piled on. “Once everybody said that it was a red line that had been crossed, I just think the president’s credibility was very much on the line,” says Panetta. “And to suddenly back off and send it to the Hill was the wrong message to send to the world.”
OTHER LEADERSHIP CONCEPTS
• Baker and Panetta – Understand the importance of telling President what he did not want to hear. President needs a “Reality Therapist.”

• CoS must control the flow information to President. I remember when Manager’s played that role. Internet and social media have diminished that role (and apparently cable TV for our President).

• CoS must always be in the room to prevent end runs by people pushing their own agenda.

• Robert Reich – “A great president can get away with a mediocre chief; a mediocre president can’t possibly.” Same with Governing Bodies?
MIIND YOUR BODY LANGUAGE
Executive (Command) Presence Matters
Robert Reich – “A great president can get away with a mediocre chief; a mediocre president can’t possibly.”

Same with Governing Bodies and Managers?
“Baker charmed the jaded press corps by telling them everything he could on “background.”
Focus Boss on the Big Picture

Reagan to Watson at pre-inauguration party, “You know, Jack, my people tell me that if you’d been the chief of staff from the beginning, I wouldn’t be here.”
Summary

• Be clear on responsibilities prior to starting the job (Baker & Haldeman). Nixon was very explicit as was Eisenhower.
• Know about conversations with bosses (Card)
• Be as influential as the other power centers or don’t take the job otherwise (Priebus vs. Bannon) and (Card vs. Cheney/Rumsfeld)
• Make up for your bosses blind spots (Carter/Jordan vs. Carter/Watson)
• Be known as an expert in at least one area
  • Panetta on budget.
  • Baker on foreign policy.
  • Kelly on defense.
  • Emmanuel on congress
• We are not elected and have no policy mandate. We are not Prime Ministers (Sununu and Regan).
• Stay out of the spot light (Kelly). You will only become a target for opposition.
• Don’t let talent intimidate; welcome it.
• Be realistic, when people have a long standing relationship, they are not going to stop talking just be there is a new manager.
• Develop good relationship with press.
• Know how organization inter-relates (Card and Cheney)