

Probation and Pretrial Chiefs Can Learn From the Leadership Styles of American Presidents

Michael Eric Siegel, *The Federal Judicial Center*

MANY MANAGERS AND leaders, including probation and pretrial chiefs, fantasize about having more power—power equivalent, say, to that of the president of the United States or a federal judge. These wishful thinkers believe that if they had more power they could overcome obstacles and move their organizations forward the way a president can move the nation forward.

Introduction

There is no doubt of the president's power. Though the office was created by men who "had their fingers crossed," hoping that it would not become too powerful (Koenig, 1981), it has evolved into a substantial institution of considerable power, overseeing an enormous budget and a personnel system of some three million people. The president is able to shape the nation's agenda, gain regular access to the airwaves, command a huge military operation, and even oversee a nuclear arsenal. It is no wonder that Americans sometimes have a "John Wayne" image of the presidency—the notion that a man can ride into town on a white horse and correct all of the nation's problems (Smith, 1988).

And yet, those who have served in that office have quite a different view of the extent of the president's actual power.

- A frustrated Lyndon Johnson remarked, "The only power I have is nuclear, and I can not use it."
- Harry Truman talking about Eisenhower said, "Poor Ike. He'll think it's like the military. He'll say do this or do that, and nothing will happen."

- And a realistic John Kennedy said, "The president is rightly described as a man of extraordinary power. Yet it is also true that he must wield these powers under extraordinary limitation."

The limitations on power are painfully obvious to presidents; they include the constitutional provisions of separation of powers and checks and balances. The limitations on power also include political realities of Congressional power, interest groups, the media, and the electorate itself. Recent examples include the Supreme Court forcing Richard Nixon to surrender the Watergate tapes and the Monica Lewinsky incident almost bringing about the political demise of Bill Clinton.

Given the constraints, the question essentially becomes: How can a president exert a powerful, positive influence and lead effectively?

In answering this question, I will draw upon a framework developed by two executives of the Carter presidency, Ben Heinemann and Curtis Hessler. In their book, *Memorandum to the President* (1980), Heinemann and Hessler develop four components of a strategic presidency. I will use the Heinemann-Hessler framework to:

- Compare three recent presidents regarding their ability to conduct the office in a "strategic" fashion.
- Extend the "lessons" of the presidents to leadership generally, including managers and leaders in probation and pretrial services.
- Illustrate the critical role of context for leadership—how a leader's behavior is powerfully influenced by the behavior of the person he or she is replacing.

First a caveat. I do not intend this essay as a partisan document in any way. I will praise and criticize Republican and Democrat presidents. The effort is not intended to enhance or detract from the reputation of any recent president but rather to educate managers and leaders about strategic and effective leadership. There is, after all, a widespread interest in improving the quality of leadership, which, according to James MacGregor Burns, is one of the "most often observed and frequently misunderstood phenomena on earth" (Burns, 1985:3). Heinemann and Hessler agree that to be a "strategic president" an occupant of the White House must master four things:

Policy (Vision)

The issue of "vision" gets at the heart of a president's objectives and goals. Questions a presidential candidate might ask under this dimension include: Why am I running for president anyway? Where do I want to lead the nation? What do I want to accomplish during the next four years? What are my most important goals? Values? Once elected, a president must continue to ask these questions, as he can otherwise easily lose control of his agenda and, by extension, his purpose.

Readers familiar with the recent plethora of management and leadership books on vision will immediately recognize the theme embedded in these questions. The literature is voluminous, but the point is simple and expressed eloquently by Warren Bennis: "The first ingredient of the effective leadership is a guiding vision. The leader has a clear idea of what he wants to do—professionally and personally—and the strength to persist in the face of setbacks, even failures" (Bennis 1989).

Vision is a powerful instrument of political leadership—consider the force of John Kennedy’s vision of “sending a man to the moon and returning him safely to the earth”—and an equally powerful contributor to corporate success. According to the excellent research of Porras and Collins, visionary companies that are clear on their “core ideology” consistently outperform their competitors (1997).

Probation and pretrial chiefs have been hard at work developing mission/vision statements for their offices. Consider this one from the Probation Office, Middle District of Florida (US Probation M/FL Office Annual Report, December, 1999):

“Our mission is the protection of society through submission of comprehensive reports to the Court and improvement of the conduct and conditions of the offender. We accomplish this through the contributions of all those who perform or support investigation and supervision services.”

“Our vision is to be an agency which:

Shows respect to all offenders and recognizes their ability to change;

Values each staff member and shows appreciation for his or her contribution to our shared work;

Responds to changing needs and opportunities with flexibility, responsiveness, and responsibility;

Earns systematic feedback regularly to guide our work...”

Politics (Strategy, Political Savvy)

“Politics” captures the leader’s ability to transform vision into reality, to get things done. Mario Cuomo once said, “You can campaign in poetry, but you must govern in prose.” This aspect of leadership requires the leader (in this case, the president) to develop a strategy. Management expert Peter Block asserts, “We become political at the moment we attempt to translate our visions into actions” (Block, 1991: 58). According to a 1999 report published in *Fortune* magazine (June 21, 1999), the reason many CEO’s fail in the corporate world is due to “bad execution...not getting things done, not delivering on commitments.”

Relevant questions a president must ask here include: Who will I rely on to relay my message? Who will work with the congressional leadership? What strategy will I use to

influence members of the opposition party, or even members of my own party who may have their own political agendas? How will I lead the executive branch of government? How will I manage the complex world of lobbying and influence pedaling? How will I work with the media? Will I rely on amateurs or professionals, friends or experts to get the work done? How will I stay true to my agenda, fulfill my campaign promises, and still have time to reflect on and assess what I am doing? How many issues will I tackle at one time?

Again, those who toil in the vineyards of organizational management and leadership or are familiar with recent literature will quickly appreciate the value of the political skills suggested here. For example, persuasion and negotiations skills must be used effectively by any leader to get things done. This is especially true in an era when the command mentality has fallen by the wayside. In their book, *The Manager as Negotiator*, authors David Lax and James Sibinius contend that, “Negotiating is a way of life for managers, whether renting office space, coaxing a scarce part from another division, building support for a new marketing plan, or working out next year’s budget. In these situations and thousands like them, some interests collide. People disagree” (Lax and Sibinius, 1986:1).

Negotiating, influencing, building coalitions, enlisting the support of competent deputies—all of these are critical skills of a strategic leader. Any chief of probation or pretrial services will agree about the importance of negotiation as a leadership tool in daily organizational life and in the special moments when change management is required (Vernon and Byrd, 1996).

Structure (Management–Organization)

This aspect of leadership deals with issues of organization and structure. The best leadership intentions can go awry when frustrated by cumbersome organizational structures.

Questions here include: How will I organize the White House? Who will manage? Will I have a chief of staff? Will I have an open or closed White House operation?

Here again, there is much current discussion about organizational design. Starting in the 1970s and continuing through today, management consultants, professors, business leaders, public administration practitioners, scholars, and even government commissions have sounded a louder and louder drumbeat for the improvement in the way we

manage organizations and people. What was a fairly lonely cry by Tom Peters and Charles Waterman in their 1982 pathbreaking book, *In Search of Excellence*, has become a deafening critique of the slow, plodding, confused, and inefficient bureaucracy that we allegedly serve in all our organizations today. In their 1980 *Harvard Business Review* article, “Managing Our Way to Economic Decline,” authors Robert Hayes and William Abernathy said:

American management, especially in the two decades following World War II, was universally admired for its strikingly effective performance. But times change. An approach molded and shaped during stable decades may be ill suited to a world characterized by rapid and unpredictable change, scarce energy, global competition for markets, and a constant need for innovation (1980).

This same critique of government bureaucracy underscores a good deal of the work of the more recent National Performance Review launched by President Clinton and Vice President Gore in March 1993 to help reshape and rethink our approach to public administration (Siegel, 1996).

In probation and pretrial services, chiefs and their colleagues have begun aggressively exploring alternative management structures for their operations, structures built around total quality management concepts or team-based management views (See Hendrickson, 1996).

Process (Decision Making)

This dimension relates to the methods a president or a leader uses to make and announce decisions. He must consider whether he wants a great diversity of opinion, or a more narrowly drawn range of options. Relevant questions include: How will I make and announce decisions? Will I deliberately encourage dissenting opinions? How will I handle conflict among my own advisers? How will I apply “damage control” when needed?

Again, there are many compelling management and organization dynamics studies in the general area of management and leadership around these themes. The fascinating research on “group-think,” about how groups can quickly form consensus and block out any dissenting opinions, has actually been applied to presidential decision-making by psychologist Irving Janis (1982). Robert Kennedy’s

account of the Cuban Missile Crisis, published in the book *Thirteen Days*, provided a compelling description of the deliberation of the 13 members of the Executive Committee during the Cuban Missile Crisis. A technique employed by President Kennedy was to leave the room so the other members could have an open and honest debate.

Chief probation and pretrial services officers have sought assistance from The Federal Judicial Center in developing sound decision-making processes in their offices, at times seeking ways to diversify the sources of input they consider in reaching decisions and at other times seeking means to verify the viability of alternative options presented to them.

With these four aspects of presidential leadership in mind, let us review the performance of four recent presidents to derive “lessons” of leadership.

Jimmy Carter

First a word about context, which is one of the points I mentioned. It is my contention that the leadership style of a president (or a manager) is in some important ways a reaction to the leadership style of his predecessor. Thus, President Carter’s style was strongly influenced by the experience of Richard Nixon and Watergate (Gerald Ford only had a short time in the office, though he undoubtedly contributed a great deal in a calming manner to the nation). In the same way, Reagan was a reaction to Carter, and Bush to Reagan, and Clinton to Bush!

Policy

In 1976, we elected a former Georgia governor named Jimmy Carter. A year earlier, Democratic activists would not have named Carter as their presidential candidate. In fact, the popular refrain at the time of Carter’s announcement was “Jimmy who?” Carter was considered a “woodwork” candidate, meaning he came out of the woodwork and suddenly appeared on the national scene. How/why did he become the Democrats’ choice?

Because of Watergate. Carter was the perfect candidate to attract voters in the years following Watergate. He was an outsider, not part of the Washington Establishment; he was a man of the people, not an elitist; a farmer, an engineer, and most important, a person of integrity. Pollster Patrick Caddell persuaded Jimmy Carter that these were outstanding qualities for a presidential candidate to project in the wake of Watergate. Ameri-

cans wanted a political leader who would not lie to them, who would not spy on them, who would not develop an enemies list, who would not, could not become an “imperial president.” Jimmy Carter fit the bill perfectly.

Carter’s 1976 campaign for presidency echoed the themes suggested by Caddell. He campaigned heavily and effectively on the themes of “honesty,” “integrity,” and giving America a “government as good as the people.” He raised issues of unemployment and related economic affairs; however, his campaign was largely “thematic,” based mostly on Carter’s lack of Washington experience and his honesty and openness. He did not truly elaborate a “programmatic” campaign of action that he would implement if elected (we will see how Ronald Reagan did precisely that in his 1980 campaign for the presidency). Of course, we will never know if Carter would have been elected in 1976 had President Ford not pardoned Richard Nixon. But Ford did that, and Carter did achieve a victory in 1976.

Politics

“Now what?” is the last line of the movie “The Candidate,” a film that depicts Robert Redford as a candidate without a real vision who manages to get elected due to the savvy of his campaign managers and political consultants. While the analogy is not perfect, the same movie could be written about Jimmy Carter.

Without a guiding vision, without an animating purpose for his presidency, Jimmy Carter never established policy priorities for himself or for members of his staff. A former White House aide in the Carter years described the early meetings of Carter’s senior advisors as follows: “We all looked at each other and asked, who should lead the first meeting? Maybe Bob Lipshitz because he is the oldest among us” (Smith). James Fallows, Carter’s speechwriter, described Carter’s presidency as “passionless,” due to the president’s lack of devotion to any single issue or set of issues and his resulting inability to inspire passionate commitment among his staff (Fallows, 1979).

Carter surrounded himself with Washington amateurs. The Georgia Mafia, Carter’s political colleagues from his days as governor of Georgia, did not really understand how to influence Capitol Hill. Carter, a Democratic president, had considerable trouble getting his legislative program approved by a Democratic Congress for several reasons. He did not establish priorities. Carter was personally in-

involved in as many as 35 issues. His involvement was intense in terms of studying the issues and mastering the details, but not in terms of convincing others to go along. No one has the capacity to lobby Congress on 35 issues at one time. Heinemann and Hessler suggest that a president should not be involved *at the presidential level* in any more than three to five issues at any one time. Carter’s 35 also lacked a hierarchy of priority.

He personally undervalued the importance of persuasion. A telling example comes from a book by Speaker of the House Tip O’Neil. O’Neil recounts the 1977 energy speech that Jimmy Carter delivered on national television in a cardigan sweater. Carter eloquently explained to the nation how the energy crisis demanded sacrifices of all Americans and that the White House was no exception. He told Americans that he had ordered all the thermostats at the White House to be set at lower temperatures, and that was why he was wearing a sweater. He also mentioned that he had an energy bill before Congress and that he would appreciate Congress acting on it. It was a great speech.

Five minutes after the speech, Carter’s phone rang and Speaker O’Neil was on the line. The Speaker complimented Mr. Carter on his speech and then asked the president to call all the chairpersons of the committees who would be dealing with the energy bill. Carter responded that he did not feel that was necessary, as all the committee chairs had heard the speech. This missed opportunity was symptomatic of the president’s style (O’Neil, 1988).

Carter’s White House aides were mostly from Georgia, lacked Washington experience, and were not respected by the congressional leadership. Carter’s director of congressional liaison, Frank Moore, was a novice in dealing with Congress. He and his colleagues were ineffective at persuading a Congress still controlled by the Democratic Party.

Structure

Carter was determined to eschew any appearances of being an imperial president. He greatly reduced limousine service for White House aides and other perks for White House staff. He enrolled his daughter Amy in public school, and he walked down Pennsylvania Avenue after his inauguration. Carter stopped the playing of “Hail to the Chief” when he made public appearances, thinking this too regal a practice for the American democracy.

In managing the White House, Carter decided not to have a chief of staff. Again, he felt that eliminating that position would make the president more accessible. Mr. Carter had been influenced by Stephen Hess' book on the presidency, which argued for a "spokes-of-the-wheel" management style—the president in the center and his staff radiating out from the center as spokes on a wheel. No hierarchy, just access would typify the Carter presidency. Unfortunately, the lack of hierarchy resulted in the president being inundated with requests for visits by all kinds of staff members. Carter's proclivity for micromanagement exacerbated the situation even more, and the story is told that Mr. Carter even got himself involved in the scheduling of the White House tennis courts!

Process

In an unusual attempt to build diversity into his foreign policy apparatus, Jimmy Carter named two wildly different men to the highest foreign policy posts in government. Cyrus Vance, an accomplished Wall Street lawyer, a conciliator and mediator by temperament and training, was appointed Secretary of State by Carter. And Zbigniew Brzezinski, irascible by nature and tempered by a horrific personal experience with the Soviet Union, was appointed National Security Adviser.

On almost all policy decisions that arose during the Carter Presidency, Vance and Brzezinski took diametrically different positions. Typically, Vance favored negotiating with the Soviets, working out compromises in international conflicts, relying on the United Nations and other international organizations to resolve regional disputes.

When a boss is confronted with two aides who constantly disagree, he or she must find ways to resolve tough issues; frequently this means having to side with one person over the other, or at least with one idea over the other. Not so with Jimmy Carter. He tried to blend both positions—Vance and Brzezinski—into a compromise position. Out of this amalgam, Carter presented numerous schizophrenic proclamations on foreign policy issues; the speeches and pronouncements were half Vance and half Brzezinski. Only when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan did Carter finally decide to side with Brzezinski, and shortly thereafter, Vance left the administration (after opposing the Iranian hostage rescue mission).

Overall, then, we can say that Jimmy Carter was not a strategic president as con-

strued here. He did have his accomplishments. He was directly responsible for mediating a peace process between Israel and Egypt and for getting those adversaries to sign the Camp David Peace Treaty in 1978. Carter was successful in negotiating the Panama Canal Treaty, a feat that several presidents prior to him had failed to accomplish. He definitely placed the issue of human rights on the international agenda, and perhaps his influence led to the release of political prisoners in Argentina and other countries. Carter was responsible for nominating more women and minorities to the federal bench than any other president before him. But this Democratic president had trouble leading a Democratic-controlled Congress, did not establish clear policy objectives, presided over a huge economic downturn (interest rates reached 17 percent), and failed to rally the nation in many respects. His practice of telling the nation the truth—that there was a "malaise" in the nation and our children's lives might be worse than ours—was unsuccessful.

Ronald Reagan

With Ronald Reagan, things were almost totally different, at least in his first administration (1980-1984). In terms of context, the public perceived Reagan as Carter's opposite. Where Jimmy Carter was seen as vacillating—one member of Congress described him to the author as having both feet "firmly planted in mid-air"—Reagan was seen as resolute. Where Carter was seen as incapable of executing even a relatively minor military operation, to rescue the hostages from Iran, Reagan was seen as a competent defense advocate who would be willing to use force where necessary. Overall, the public perceived a sense of consistency in Reagan's policy pronouncements and little equivocation on the issues of the day. They found these traits admirable in a leader. He won a decisive victory over Jimmy Carter in 1980.

Policy

Reagan had been a tireless advocate for the conservative movement in American politics ever since he made the 1964 Republican nomination speech for Barry Goldwater. The major pillars of "Reaganism" were solid: government needed to cut taxes, cut domestic spending on social welfare and "entitlement" programs, increase military spending, and deal with moral decay in American society. Government also needed to cut itself, to shrink its role and its encumbrance on Ameri-

can business and productive enterprise. Reagan was effective in articulating these themes using his talents as the "Great Communicator," uniting disparate constituencies to whom each pillar had a different appeal. He succeeded in getting elected and showed impressive coattails, as six liberal Democratic senators were defeated in their re-election bids in 1980.

Though Ronald Reagan was not sophisticated in understanding all of the details of his own policy recommendations, he was passionate about the general ideas and more than willing to fight for the implementation of these ideas (tax cuts, increases in military spending, cuts in social welfare spending, etc.). Americans admired him for being resolute and for the ease and comfort with which he communicated his belief in these ideas.

Politics

Because his aides knew what Reagan's priorities were, they were prepared to sell his program to Congress even before the president was inaugurated. David Stockman, former congressman from Michigan who would be named the director of the Office of Management and Budget, had thoroughly prepared a plan to cut domestic spending. In the months between Reagan's election and inauguration, Stockman raced around Capitol Hill soliciting congressional approval of cuts in domestic social welfare spending and increases in defense spending. Reagan appointed Max Friedersdorf, an experienced Washington politico representing the Rockefeller wing of the Republican Party, as his director of congressional liaison. Jim Baker, the chief of staff, was another seasoned Washington politician (and not an ideologue). Ed Meese, the president's counsel, would represent the purity of the right wing, but would also be a team player.

Unlike Carter, Reagan was able to focus on a few key issues and avoid becoming distracted from his agenda. The president's staff pursued Reagan's objectives—cutting social welfare spending, cutting taxes, and increasing defense spending—vigorously and almost single-mindedly. The president's energies were focused on these major initiatives. Threats to the agenda, such as Secretary of State Alexander Haig's efforts to get the United States involved in El Salvador, were muffled through a deliberate strategy of damage control.

With the focus and resolve on three or four key issues, Reagan and his staff were able to

mount an efficacious congressional persuasion strategy. A Republican president convinced a Democratic House (and Republican Senate) to pass most of his legislation, accomplishing a seven percent cut (in real dollars) in spending on domestic welfare programs, a 30 percent tax cut, and a ten percent increase in military spending.

The Reagan team was consistent in claiming to have gained a “mandate” for these kinds of policy changes from the American electorate. Even Tip O’Neil, the Speaker of the House, told his Democratic colleagues, “We better give this guy what he wants; he’s so popular!” A closer look at the election results, however, reveals the fact that only 27 percent of the eligible voters voted for Ronald Reagan! This situation adds meaning to the concept that perception is more important than reality. It also gives us another insight into leadership strategies—people respond well to positive interpretations of events!

Structure

Reagan was not interested in making significant changes in the structure of the White House the way that Jimmy Carter was. He kept things fairly simple and somewhat traditional. As mentioned, he had a highly competent chief of staff in the person of James Baker. He routinely deferred to his staff in the development of policy initiatives and in the completion of legislative details. Reagan presided over a more traditional White House operation characterized by energy and efficiency among the president’s deputies. Reagan ran a “9-to-5” presidency and was able to enjoy a relaxing horseback ride or other leisurely activities while his aides slugged through the details and morass of policy-making.

Process

We find a more limited amount of diversity among the Reagan appointments. Characteristically, Reagan delegated a great deal of power to his deputies and senior staff to manage brewing conflicts or to quell policy debates before they reached the press. The troika of Meese, Baker, and Deaver was adequately representative of the differing factions that competed for the attention of the president for him to feel that his constituencies were satisfied. One particularly daunting need in any presidency is that of “damage control.” Things are bound to go awry. A president is in constant danger of losing control over his agenda. We find that in his first administra-

tion, President Reagan was able to exert this kind of damage control by putting a lid on the pronouncements of Secretary of State Alexander Haig about U.S. intervention in El Salvador.

Overall, the first Reagan administration may be judged successful by the criteria used here. Reagan articulated a clear vision, worked hard to get the vision implemented as policy, limited himself to a few key issues and goals, exercised “damage control” when needed, surrounded himself with highly capable political operatives, and managed big picture issues capably.

Of course, damage control did not work perfectly for Ronald Reagan, and in his second administration (1984-1988) there were several policy and political failures, including Budget Director David Stockman’s damaging revelations about the economic program to William Grieder of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Stockman confessed that Reagan’s economic program promising that we could cut taxes, increase defense spending, cut social spending, and still balance the budget was based on notably optimistic assumptions about economic growth. Stockman thought these discussions with Grieder were “off-the-record.” However, his comments were printed in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Although President Reagan took Mr. Stockman “to the woodshed,” the damage was done, and serious doubt had been cast upon the viability of the Reagan economic program. Then the Iran-Contra episode heated up, throwing the second Reagan administration into a tailspin (See Mayer and McManus, 1998 for a summary of the second Reagan administration).

George Bush

Policy, Politics, Structure, and Process

Mr. Bush was cynical about vision, referring to this idea sarcastically as “the vision thing.” In his campaign against Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, Bush represents another candidate who did not really understand the importance of vision. Mr. Bush campaigned largely on the strength of his resume, and a great resume it was. He had held almost every important position in American government: vice president, ambassador to the United Nations, ambassador to China, member of the House of Representatives. He knew government inside and out and clearly possessed the competence needed to be president. Yet he lacked a vision, a purpose, a rallying cry for the American public. Like Jimmy

Carter, George Bush resorted to a thematic campaign; however, in this case, it was largely a negative one. Bush accused his opponent, Governor Dukakis, of being “soft on crime.” The state of Massachusetts had a furlough law (which ironically had been enacted under Republican Governor Frank Sergeant). The law enabled convicted felons serving life sentences to have weekend passes (furloughs) away from prison. Willie Horton, serving a life sentence with no chance of parole, traveled to the state of Maryland and viciously raped Angela Barnes and beat her husband at gunpoint (Germond and Whitcover, 1989).

The Bush campaign developed a TV ad depicting prisoners leaving jail through a revolving gate while a narrator described the Massachusetts furlough experience:

Governor Michael Dukakis vetoed mandatory sentences for drug dealers.

He vetoed the death penalty. His revolving door prison gave weekend furloughs to first-degree murderers not eligible for parole. While out, many committed other crimes like kidnapping and rape and many are still at large. Now Michael Dukakis says he wants to do for America what he has done for Massachusetts. America can’t afford the risk (Germond and Whitcover, 1989:11).

Bush conducted a thematic campaign that highlighted him as “tough on crime” and his opponent as “soft.” He presented himself as an experienced government official who could be trusted with the stewardship of the nation. He never truly enunciated a vision of what he would do if elected president (Rockman, 1991: 30-31). Largely due to the inadequacy of the Dukakis campaign on many levels, Bush was elected by a solid majority.

Because of his long years of government experience, Mr. Bush was able to bring professionals to the White House and to the agencies. He included seasoned professionals like James Baker, Richard Darman, and others in his administration. But his lack of vision hampered him in leading the nation. Let us look at a telling example.

While Bush was in the White House, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and threatened not only to take over that country but to endanger vital American interests by controlling as much as 40 percent of the world’s oil supply. President Bush reacted quickly and

decisively, stating on national television that Hussein's actions "will not stand." Indeed, in this instance President Bush's resume did work for him. He was able to call world leaders and on a personal basis align them with the cause of resisting Mr. Hussein's aggression against Kuwait. So adroit was Bush in the diplomatic process that he aligned Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Syria on the same side of this conflict, against Saddam Hussein. He was also able to convince the Israelis not to intervene, in spite of the Iraqi Scud missiles being launched into their population centers and cities.

Our military intervention proved successful, and we achieved quick and certain victory in a high-tech war effort displayed on national television. American casualties were lower than predicted, and the operation to drive Hussein out of Kuwait was over in a matter of days.

At the end of this episode, George Bush had an approval rating of 90 percent, a level of approval that most leaders, managers, and presidents can only fantasize about. Yet, because Mr. Bush lacked a vision, an animating purpose for his administration—especially in the domestic policy arena—he squandered this unusual groundswell of popular support and did virtually nothing in terms of a policy agenda. He lost a golden opportunity to build on the momentum of his "victory" in the Gulf War.

What It Means for Chiefs

The comparative descriptions of these presidents, along the adumbrated leadership dimensions, suggests the following lessons for probation and pretrial chiefs:

Be Clear About Your Purpose

It does not matter if you consider yourself a "visionary"—most leaders do not. Yet your position requires that you have purpose, and that you find ways to inspire those who work for or with you to strive to achieve that purpose. Without a vision or a guiding purpose, your staff members will feel adrift and lacking direction. Consider this apt analogy from Kouzes and Posner's outstanding book, *The Leadership Challenge* (1997: 110):

...Imagine watching a slide show when the projector is out of focus. How would you feel if you had to watch blurred, vague, and indistinct images for an entire presentation?

We've experimented with this in some of your leadership programs.

The reaction is predictable. People express frustration, impatience, confusion, anger, even nausea. They avoid the situation by looking away. When we ask them whose responsibility it is to focus the projector, the vote is unanimous: "the leader—the person with the focus button." Some people get out of their chairs, walk over to the projector, and focus it themselves, but this doesn't change how they feel: they're still annoyed that the person with the button—the leader—wouldn't focus the projector.

Whether your office is small or large, in transition or not, vision helps set the agenda and give purpose to the enterprise. Many probation/pretrial services offices debate whether they are in the business of "law enforcement" or "social work," whether they have independent authority or exist at the mercy of the whims of a chief judge. You may not be fully in control of all the answers to these questions, but you should try to imagine a future that can excite and animate your staff and the public. A good place to start is the article titled "Guiding Philosophies in the 21st Century," published in the June 1994 issue of *Federal Probation* (Sluder, Sapp, and Langston, 1994).

Have a Political Strategy

You may not consider yourself a politician, and you may have never read or even heard of Machiavelli! Nonetheless, you will have trouble succeeding as a leader in the absence of a political strategy. A newly appointed chief pretrial services officer, for example, will need to lobby for her vision, to sell it, to convince others to go along with it. She will need to consider the important people whose support she needs—like the chief judge—and the methods available to persuade those people. She will need to learn the agenda of these important people and determine which parts overlap with her own agenda and where there are differences. She will need the courage to confront the differences, and perhaps the patience to wait for better times.

Leadership will be easier for the new chief if she knows her purpose clearly and can focus on the accomplishment of five or six major goals, not 25 or 30 at one time. She will be better off doing five or six things well, like President Reagan in the early days of his presi-

dency, instead of pursuing 25 goals haphazardly, the way Mr. Carter tried to do. By limiting the number of goals she pursues at one time, the chief will be able to maximize her resources more effectively and set clearer expectations for her staff.

The new chief will also need to enlist her own staff in the implementation of her programs and policies. She will need to have open, honest discussions with them about things that will be the same and things that she would like to change. It's important at this stage in a leadership transition for the new leader to be open to hearing concerns and anxieties among staff members about potential changes. All too often managers and leaders misinterpret tough questions as resistance. Sometimes those asking the toughest questions are the ones who will be the strongest supporters.

Another part of implementation or execution is that the leader might have to have what are called "difficult conversations" with organizational colleagues. In a recent book titled *Difficult Conversations* (1998), authors Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton (from the Harvard Negotiation Project) and Sheila Heen discuss the inevitability of having difficult conversations in our lives, but the availability of better techniques than we usually employ to have these conversations. They stress the importance of learning from the other side about alternative perceptions, ideas, and approaches to a subject before imposing your own view.

Finally, in this area, you will need to consider how to recruit, retain, promote, or reassign staff within your office. While central administrative policy limits your options to some extent, you can display creativity and imagination in the way you carry out the staffing situation in your office. Give careful consideration to the human resources you have to carry out your vision, and do not become caught up in the less impressive questions of who your "friends" are or who is owed a favor.

Be Deliberate about Your Management Style and Structure

You have more choices than you think about how you manage your office and structure your operation. Be aware of a temptation to simply implement "management fads" without adequate attention to the workability of these schemes in your own environment. Like Jimmy Carter's easy embrace of the "spokes-of-the-wheel" concept of management, yours may be overly influenced by recent books or

even conversations with colleagues. While these activities are invaluable, they should influence but not dictate the direction you choose for your own operation.

You do need to consider the positioning of your staff, your own accessibility, and how you want to be perceived by all of your staff up and down the hierarchy. Facile pronouncements about an "open-door" policy or about "participatory management" will not do the trick, because staff will not really know what these phrases mean....until they see them in action.

Use All Resources to Make Decisions, Anticipate a Need to Manage Conflict

Finally, as chief you need to understand your own decision-making style and the available resources to help you make the best decisions possible. You need to resist the temptation to surround yourself with "yes" men and women who will not and even cannot challenge you at appropriate times. There will, of course, be times when your best advisers, your closest confidants, are deadlocked. This is a lonely position to be in, but you will have to be the one to make the decisions.

Leadership is not easy. But by using these four areas of performance, we can all learn from the experience of American presidents and from our own colleagues past and present.

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