

Reflections

of
Presidential Distinguished
Rank Executives



*Past awardees reflect on their success, the next generation
of leaders, and career/political relations*

**Senior Executives Association Professional Development League
in cooperation with
John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University**

R e f l e c t i o n s

of
Presidential Distinguished
Rank Executives

Copyright ©1999
Senior Executives Association
Professional Development League
P.O. Box 44808
Washington, D.C. 20026

(202) 927-7000
www.seniorexecs.com

All rights reserved.

Warning! Federal law provides severe civil and criminal penalties for the unauthorized reproduction of copyrighted print materials. Copyright infringement is investigated by the FBI and may constitute a crime with a maximum penalty of up to one year in prison and/or a \$25,000 fine

The Senior Executives Association is a non-profit professional association incorporated in the District of Columbia. SEA's mission is to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of the federal government; to advance the professionalism and advocate the interests of career federal executives; and to enhance public recognition of their contributions.

The SEA Professional Development League is committed to advancing the professionalism of career federal executives through the sponsorship of training, communications and research activities.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
The First Morning of Reflections.....	5
<i>Ingredients of Executive Success and Grooming the Next Generation</i>	
The Second Morning of Reflections.....	13
<i>Career-Political Relations</i>	
Conclusion.....	23

Acknowledgments

This monograph was prepared under the direction of **Carol A. Bonosaro**, President, Senior Executives Association and SEA PDL. The principal author was **Travis Perry**, SEA Issues Coordinator. Design and production work was completed by **Daryl Richard**, SEA Director of Communications.

SEA PDL is indebted to **Peter Zimmerman**, Senior Associate Dean for Executive Education and Program Development at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, for leading each year's sessions and reviewing this monograph.

The League is also grateful to **Kenneth Pusateri**, General Manager of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, for providing the Board's meeting facilities as the site of the "mornings" in both 1997 and 1998.

Cover Photo: Courtesy of Jake McGuire, professional photographer. McGuire is known for his striking photos of Washington, D.C., and has created one of the largest collections of photographs of our nation's capital. His photos appear in private collections and exhibitions, and are often found in airline and travel magazines.

Introduction

The Senior Executive Service, established by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 to “ensure that the executive management of the Government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the Nation and otherwise is of the highest quality” (5 U.S.C. 3131), consists of managerial, supervisory, and policy-making positions at the highest levels of the federal government. The objectives of the SES system are: to provide greater authority to agencies in managing their executive resources; to attract and retain highly competent executives, and to assign them where they will be most effective in accomplishing the agency’s mission and where best use will be made of their talents; to provide for the development of managers and executives; to hold executives accountable for individual and organizational performance; to reward the outstanding performers and remove the poor performers; and to provide for an executive merit system free of prohibited personnel practices and arbitrary actions.

In 1980, the Senior Executives Association was formed to improve the federal government’s efficiency, effectiveness and productivity; to advance the professionalism and advocate the interests of career federal executives; and to enhance public recognition of executives’ contributions. By 1981, SEA’s founders recognized that special attention had to be focused on promoting executive education and heightening public awareness of federal executives’ achievements. As a result, SEA created the Professional Development League. PDL sponsors training events, communications activities and research programs designed to advance federal executive professionalism and enhance public recognition of career

executives' accomplishments.

There is no more revered accomplishment for a career federal executive than achieving the Presidential Rank of Distinguished Executive. Annually, a maximum of one percent of SES members are eligible for this pinnacle of executive achievement.

At the beginning of each fiscal year, the Office of Personnel Management requests that agencies nominate individuals for their "sustained extraordinary accomplishment." (The second Presidential Rank-Meritorious Executive-is awarded for "sustained accomplishment" and limited to five percent of the SES.) Following the receipt of nominations, the Director of OPM, with the aid of representatives from private-sector corporations, academic institutions, and public interest groups, conducts a lengthy and stringent review of the nominees. This panel forwards their recommendations to the President, who makes the final selection. A monetary award (currently 35% of base pay) is given in recognition of the Rank, as well as a gold pin and a certificate signed by the President.

Distinguished Executives are also honored at an annual black-tie banquet hosted by SEA PDL, with the cooperation of the Department of State and the Office of Personnel Management. Since 1986, SEA PDL has hosted the banquet at the United States Department of State Diplomatic Reception Rooms amid priceless early American antiques, furniture, and paintings, with a majestic view of Washington. In celebrating the exceptional achievements of the winners of the Presidential Distinguished Rank Award, PDL recognizes the contributions of the entire SES.

After years of hosting this annual banquet, SEA PDL realized that, while the Rank Award winners are publicly recognized at the event, they had never been brought together to reflect upon their careers and experiences. On the morning following the 1997 banquet, SEA PDL, in partnership with Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, held the first annual "Morning of Reflections." In contrast to the celebratory nature of the banquet, the Morning of Reflections was convened for the purpose of permitting the Rank Award winners to consider the challenges to and experiences of career executives in an environment

of downsizing, cost-cutting, and reinvention.

The first event, held on April 11, 1997 at the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board's Conference Center in Washington, D.C., focused on recruiting the next generation of government leaders. The second Morning of Reflections, conducted on May 8, 1998, was devoted to advising new recruits on a topic which many consider the trickiest part of career leadership-their relationship with political appointees in the federal government.

The First Morning of Reflections

Ingredients of Executive Success and Grooming the Next Generation

April 11, 1997

Peter Zimmerman, Senior Associate Dean for Executive Education and Program Development at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, presided over the first session. Meeting in small groups, the executives discussed what factors contributed to their development and success. After reconvening as a whole to examine each team's findings, the same small groups met to discuss the grooming of the next generation of leaders in the federal government. The morning concluded with a final large group discussion to share and refine the small groups' conclusions.

Zimmerman laid a foundation for the session by describing the low level of public trust in government, and in institutions in general. This distrust only exacerbates the difficulties facing a government executive because he or she is not embraced or appreciated by the Federal government's constituency - the American public.

This distrust is not a new phenomenon, but has been growing since the Nixon Administration. Further, neither age, race, sex, nor income level seem to change an individual's perception - that government and its processes cannot be trusted to fulfill their duties in a proper manner.

The other important change is that public service is no longer equated with government service. As one executive observed, "[T]he idealistic impulse to serve and to contribute, to give something back to the

community..." is there, but the vision of government service as the vehicle is no longer compelling.

With this as a backdrop, the executives turned to the question of what factors they believed had been important in their progress and success.

One overriding element cited was *internships*; one half of the session's participants were products of internship programs. This suggests that the aggressive recruitment of young talented people into the work force cannot only revitalize an agency, but can plant the seeds of future leaders - leaders with loyalty and a sense of mission.

Some noted, however, that an agency must follow through on the commitment implicit in the internship programs by moving successful interns into challenging positions. Yes, but with some reservation, another group observed. While they support recruitment of interns, they did not believe there should be the promise of a fast moving career. Once in federal service, interns have to earn their way under the same procedures as everyone else. The group remarked that "the recruitment should be based on the opportunity that exists in the federal service for responsibility, for accomplishments, and not so much that, in 30 years, you're going to be 'fat and happy' and never have to work again."

The group agreed that an infusion of young talent not only helps to lay the foundation of an agency's future success, but can also aid the current work force. As individuals mature, creativity naturally decreases as a single-minded nature grows. This is to be expected because, as people spend their lives solving problems in a manner that they have found successful, alternative viewpoints and solutions increasingly fall by the wayside. A confident, talented intern can open up new avenues of problem solving to the agency.

The executives reported that *early job responsibilities* demonstrate an agency's faith in its young employees and afford them the opportunity to gain a second success factor cited by the executives - an early career achievement. An individual faced with challenging responsibilities early in a career may be rewarded, both materially and emotionally, if those early challenges are met. Executives noted that quick promotions and the

realization that their work really mattered were often springboards to a motivated and successful career in government. Many executives sought early challenges. "The people in our group. . . all talked about the opportunities they had, which other people walked away from, didn't want, or didn't take."

A third aid to achieving early career success - *mentors* - was cited by the executives. Many participants affirmed the importance of mentors

in their success, primarily resulting from informal relationships. Most present agreed that formal mentorship programs invariably fail, but informal mentors often developed into long-term advisors and friends.

While internships, early responsibility, and mentors provide a strong foundation for executive leadership, the executives cited other important ingredients that must be developed by both individuals and agencies.

The participants were near unanimity in identifying several skills and traits essential for executive success. Specifically, in order to achieve executive excellence, an individual should be highly motivated, while demonstrating keen problem-solving abilities, interpersonal skills, and flexibility. These individual factors were noted separately by the attendees, but they often overlapped, as each relates to the other.

Motivation was described as a personal "spark," or as individuals who are committed to a sense of mission and to the identity of an agency, who are willing to go the extra mile and to take the tough jobs. These tough jobs bridge to another factor, *problem solving*. The executives characterized difficult assignments as fortuitous growth opportunities. If an individual demonstrates a willingness to step up in a crisis, that person is recognized as a problem solver and a team player. Everyone agreed that not all challenges will result in a positive outcome and that, in fact,

there are frequently negative results. These, too, can be advantageous. An individual able to accept setbacks and learn from them is a step up on the competition. Being able to draw upon diverse experiences allows one to see things in a different context, frequently resulting in new insights and true professional development.

In order to adapt to change, executives cited *flexibility and interpersonal skills* as essential. We will resist change for the most human of reasons, but in the modern world, change is inevitable. Thus, an executive who is adaptable and able to articulate a vision while inspiring unity in an agency of varied personalities is often chosen to lead these changes and can ensure that the changes are positive and true to the agency's mission.

It was observed that federal hiring practices do not seem to identify these professional traits in either recruitment or selection. Nonetheless, if agencies would commit to developing these traits in their current employees, the benefits would be undeniable.

At present, however, the onus for developing these traits rests solely with the executive. The *pursuit of lifelong learning* is vital, but it must invariably be driven by the executive, due to ever-shrinking training budgets and a lack of awareness. One group noted, "You can say, 'I never made it to GS-14 because nobody trained me to be a manager,' or you can figure it out yourself, whether it's... learning something from the budget or going to graduate school at night."

A *variety of assignments and experience* is an unequalled development tool for executives. According to one group, "seeing other organizations with exposure to varying ideas is an essential investment." Yet, today's government does little to facilitate mobility and often, in fact, hinders it. Meanwhile, executives must pursue their own growth opportunities because, as one mobile executive said, "I have this big bag like Santa Claus where I put all the good ideas I've picked up. I can take this bag full of good ideas anywhere and take them out and share them with other people."

These myriad traits were not the only important factors mentioned by the Distinguished Executives. *Striking a balance between one's*

personal and professional life is also essential. Additionally, being surrounded by talented coworkers is an indisputable aid to executive success, for, as one award winner so succinctly states, "success is not a solo venture." Of course, *working in cooperation with the political leadership* is imperative because the career Senior Executive Service operates in a political environment.

Finally, several participants added that it doesn't hurt to be lucky. However, after further discussion and examination, these executives

"I have this big bag like Santa Claus where I put all the good ideas I've picked up. I can take this bag full of good ideas anywhere and take them out and share them with other people."

concluded that luck was not truly a genuine factor since what is perceived as luck is really a result of preparation (a motivated, flexible problem-solver) meeting opportunity (a tough assignment).

The second portion of the morning was devoted to a discussion of developing the next generation of leaders in government. The traits and skills necessary for executive success had been delineated, so the participants shifted their focus to the future of the federal government. When talented young people dismiss government service as a career, fueled by a society that doesn't appreciate or trust its government institutions, the forecast for the civil service is, indeed, rather bleak.

The participants believe *it is imperative to revitalize public service as a noble pursuit*. The executives believe that the government must begin to market itself by communicating the value, utility, excitement, and opportunity available in a career with the federal government. Perhaps there is no stronger evidence of that than to simply reflect upon some of the award winners' accomplishments and their impact on Americans' lives.

Triumphs in national security abound. One Distinguished Executive served as on-the-scene commander in the Oklahoma City bombing investigation, which led to the capture of the perpetrators. Another

developed an enzyme pretreatment to provide protection against toxic and lethal effects of chemical warfare nerve agents and pesticides. Another developed a scrambler, which totally disrupted Iraq's internal communications during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. One awardee played a key role in the effort to identify and apprehend the notorious Unabomber, personally taking charge of the investigation and directing his arrest and the exhaustive search of his residence.

Services to citizens were enriched by these executives' efforts as well. One manages the Social Security Administration's 800 number, which answers 60 million calls annually and is rated the best in the country, a service which has been benchmarked by IBM and which outscores companies famous for service, such as L. L. Bean and Nordstrom. Another winner is responsible for the day-to-day operations of 172 medical centers, 126 nursing homes, and 356 outpatient clinics. In total, the 68 1996 Distinguished Rank Award winners accumulated savings and cost avoidance to the government of over \$27 billion. If these accomplishments and the individuals' accompanying dedication were known, the public's mistrust of government would certainly be alleviated.

The group agreed that a marketing effort by the federal government, featuring these and other success stories, would open up government service as a potential career. The executives cited the Postal Service and the military as two government entities that effectively market themselves. However, simply having young people consider a government career is not enough. There must be further commitment from the agencies. *Formal executive development programs* are unquestionably beneficial, yet they are endangered because of training budgets, which are inevitably slashed in budget-cutting exercises. The results of this will become "painfully obvious to agencies in the near future." A reversal of this trend would signal agencies' interest in and commitment to developing skilled, dedicated career leadership.

One participant noted that, "Something we (SESers) don't do well, and I personally feel SESers have to take a better lead in, and which should be up at the front of our agenda is how do we work and worry

about succession planning all the way down to the entry level to make sure that people have an opportunity to make it to the top, particularly the people that deserve to make it to the top."

Finally, the Distinguished Executives agreed that today's executives are not without duty to the future. They, too, can facilitate the development of the next generation of leaders by participating in informal "*mentoring*." If every career Senior Executive took the opportunity to mentor three or four of his or her successors, particularly those willing to take risks or those with a different perspective, the mutual benefits would be substantial. Senior Executives, by providing a sense of direction, can set off a spark in a future Presidential Rank Award winner and pave the way for the 21st century's civil service. This future generation is important, because as society changes and government culture evolves, executive leadership in the federal government will continue to be the guiding force. Future executives who will someday face these challenges will find few better information resources than those who have met the inherent challenges on the perilous, yet rewarding, path of a career executive in the federal government.

The Second Morning of Reflections

Career-Political Relations

May 8, 1998

Realizing the dynamic created by gathering Distinguished Rank Executives in one room for open discussion, SEA PDL organized a second “Morning of Reflections” for May 8, 1998, again held in conjunction with the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. While the 1997 session focused on recruiting the next generation of government leaders, the 1998 gathering was devoted to advising these new recruits on a topic which many consider the trickiest part of career leadership - their relationships with political appointees in the federal government.

Peter Zimmerman, Senior Associate Dean at the Kennedy School, again presided. Zimmerman characterized the federal government as potentially “treacherous waters” for career executives due to the intense political environment at the top ranks of government. Yet, the executives gathered in the room had obviously achieved extraordinary success in this environment and could offer valuable insight and advice to fellow careerists facing this unfamiliar milieu. As Zimmerman noted, “many federal officials’ first encounter with the political process is an eye-opening experience. It can be a challenging or even threatening experience.” Therefore, the goal of the morning was to determine the most important factors for career executives interested in building a strong working relationship with their political leadership.

Discussion began with the observation that both careerists and politicals “come in all shapes and sizes,” which can be beneficial to both

cadres. For example, speaking on the mobility of executives, Zimmerman said, "There is much to be gained by carrying skills and perspectives from one organization to another, but there is also much to be gained by investment, sinking down roots and building depth and capacity in one area." Similarly, political appointees may face a stereotypical dim view of their abilities as seen through the eyes of career executives when they come into an agency, but may have "substantial experience, . . . and decades of significant professional accomplishment."

Therefore there can be no single model of either a career executive or a political appointee. However, there are distinctive skills and competencies that each group can (or should) offer to government service. The executives divided into two small groups and discussed what value careerists and politicals bring to the table in establishing successful professional relationships.

"There is much to be gained by carrying skills and perspectives from one organization to another, but there is also much to be gained by investment, sinking down roots and building depth and capacity in one area."

something that is good, moving."

In the same vein, careerists, in most cases, tend to have more *functional expertise*. They understand all of the systems - budgets, procurement, personnel and so on - that are essential to move organizations into action. Many also possess *deep 'subject matter expertise'* in their professional domains.

Many politicals come into the government with either little managerial

experience or have a background in fields like law, where management skills are not a top priority. Yet, in many federal agencies, the management of a large staff is mandatory. As one executive observed, "it's a real skill to keep people focused, and make sure that planning is done . . . and to ensure that it is followed up on."

Many career executives have a *strong historical perspective*. This "perspective" has two distinct stems. First, careerists usually have a strong commitment to an agency's history and mission. Second, they are often aware of methods that did, or did not, work in the past.

Careerists' devotion to their agency's long-term success and survival can, of course, run counter to a new political appointee's goals. *Careerists usually stress continuity and fidelity to traditions, practices and policies. Appointees come in with short-term goals, often requiring substantial agency changes.* These differing time horizons and perspectives can be a source of contention and misunderstanding between the two groups, and must be reconciled in developing a relationship. The dichotomy was best described by one Distinguished Executive who said, "if a political and a careerist were both told to get ice, we'd go get a glacier, slow moving and large. They'd go get a hail storm."

This "*quick strike*" *mentality of many politicals* breeds another important skill of careerists - serving as the buffer during wild swings of policy ideas. One executive said that appointees tend to lurch from one crisis to another, and if a career executive simply transfers a request that stems from political overreaction, chaos results down the line. Another executive said, "My single biggest job is to act as a dam to keep it from getting further down the line." Frequently, in the haste to meet a political agenda, large organizational changes are initiated without anticipating the results as they ripple down through the ranks.

However, while modulating these swings, *careerists have a duty to accommodate the political program*. "We are loyal to the government of the day," said one. "A lot of times they (political appointees) have sort of a vague vision, but when you ask them, 'what do you mean by this?' or 'how are you going to get this done?' that's when you lose their attention.

When you go in and say, 'it sounds like you're going this way and here are three ways we can get it done,' they love it." Executives must keep an administration's agenda moving by designing and implementing appropriate agency actions. One executive termed it, "turning the boat as opposed to capsizing it."

Finally, one group believed that today's career executives have a duty to mentor the next generation of leaders, because they will soon represent the civilian workforce to the political leadership.

These award-winning executives recognize important skills and competencies that most political appointees bring to government service.

"If a political and a careerist were both told to get ice, we'd go get a glacier, slow moving and large. They'd go get a hail storm."

While one defense executive joked that some politicals "couldn't find a battleship among a bunch of Jeeps," another quickly added that he had worked with some who came in from industry and had much to offer to the functioning of the agency.

First and foremost, *political appointees are the vehicles of each administration's political goals*. With each change in administration, an agency's policies and direction may shift. Its mission may be redefined. An appointee gives expression to

these changes and is the vital link between the career work force and the administration. Because of the short-term nature of most administration directives, political appointees frequently demonstrate an acute focus when tackling issues.

Another important skill of appointees, in the view of careerists, is their *political verve*. Careerists expect that appointees are able to build political coalitions and work Capitol Hill, while garnering support for agency objectives. Similarly, careerists work within the organization to make sure changing agency missions are well understood, while political appointees "manage the message" to outside stakeholders. This "*organizational representation*" includes an ability to fight the necessary political battles

within the administration and outside. For some, however, this can be problematic. During the Reagan Administration, Harvard conducted interviews with over 100 political appointees. When asked what had surprised them most about their careers in Washington, they overwhelmingly noted the invasive presence of Congress. Zimmerman said, "A lot of them literally did not understand that Congress sees itself as a real and equal partner." These appointees often were poorly prepared to undertake this hard political work.

After the executives had gathered as a large group to discuss these skills and competencies, they again broke off into two small groups to consider what careerists expect from political appointees.

Overwhelmingly, *open and honest communication is expected, as both careerists and appointees seek to build trust, confidence, and understanding of one another*. Without this, the relationship will falter, and agency goals will not soon be met. Careerists hope that, through open and honest communication, politicals come to see them as partners in leadership.

Again, careerists cited the expectation that appointees provide effective external leadership by projecting a positive image of the agency. Further, politicals must carry agency issues forward, both in the media and on the Hill. They are, in effect, the "change agent" outside the agency.

The importance of seeing change to completion was illustrated by one executive who cited a painful experience at his agency that remains problematic. Reinvention advocates directed the agency to drastically overhaul itself, including aggressive downsizing in critical administrative areas, with the promise that statutory changes and vast technological improvements would be authorized to improve efficiency. However, those statutory changes were never made, the improvements were never delivered, and today it costs the agency more to do its job than it did before the downsizing.

Finally, *careerists appreciate appointees who are willing to "learn the business."* Nothing pleases a career executive more than having a political appointee who is willing to listen and be educated, because that

appointee is then better prepared to offer “operationally painless solutions” to agency issues. It is the career executive’s job to disseminate agency directives and offer a multitude of politically feasible courses of action.

One executive believed that political expect “subservience, or maybe compliance, which is a little less harsh.” All of the executives did agree, however, that they are expected to execute the appointee’s agenda and to keep the “business” processes of the agency moving. In so doing, political rightfully expect their career executives to involve them, by educating them on the issues and presenting options for courses of action. Finally, political look to careerists for support after leadership decisions have been made.

Finally, the group addressed the next generation of career leadership on how best to engage political in building an effective, professional relationship.

These Distinguished Executives offered an abundance of practical lessons to their successors for prospering in the political environment of federal government. For example, one group suggested that an executive drop a note of congratulations to a new appointee, just to “plant a seed that you’re on the team.”

Developing relationships with an appointee’s key advisors is also essential to successful interaction. One executive said, “It is important because some Schedule C appointees act as ‘Praetorian guards’ to keep you from direct communication to the top.” Another added, “If you can get their advisors to reinforce what you’re saying ... they’ll probably trust what you say.”

Both groups also stressed the importance of *projecting a professional image*. If a careerist emits confidence, he or she may gain more authority and freedom. But, as one executive quipped, “If you look like a clown, you’ll be treated like a clown.”

Two other fundamentally important tasks are *researching an appointee’s background and evaluating one’s own strengths and weaknesses*. Often, an appointee may have a common area of interest or background, which can open the door to constructive dialogue. Also, in building this working relationship, it is vital for a careerist to be aware of

his or her own strengths and weaknesses. One executive noted, “Knowing yourself . . . where you can add value, is important because that is your ‘currency,’” going into a meeting or project.

These executives were able to offer the most advice on dealing with *the true backbone of career-political relations - advising*.

Both groups termed it imperative that you prepare well in planning a meeting. The time of appointees is typically very precious, and an ill-prepared briefing is a direct assault upon that time. Careerists, in preparing, should recognize the differences between themselves and political. Each group has different stakeholders to consider; hence, it is important to provide political - and operationally - acceptable solutions to any problem.

There was some dissension and debate over how a careerist should present options to an appointee. Some believed that full disclosure is essential, even those solutions that may be ill-advised, because, if an appointee is ever blindsided, he or she will never trust you again. Maintaining trust is important for those occasions when you truly must strive to influence a decision.

Conversely, another group felt that an appointee is more appreciative if, in advance of a meeting, the career staff takes into account the goals and objectives of both the appointee and the agency, and narrows the range of options.

Perhaps, observed one executive, it depends on having established a degree of trust with the political. “If you lay out all the possibilities, including some that are anathema to the administration, they may appreciate it, but they may also misread the situation and think you are not on the team.”

After discussing the issue further as a large group, the executives agreed on a few strategies. Appointees must be well informed, because no one likes surprises. One executive offered two key advantages of a well-informed appointee; “It engenders and keeps their trust in you, and it makes them a smarter consumer of your advice. If they understand what you’re trying to get across, they will probably buy into your answer easier,” he said.

However, executives must walk a fine line between informing and over-informing. As one executive stated, “you have to selectively cultivate their ignorance. We need to decide what is important for them to know and also decide what we don’t want to burden them with.”

It is also important, when presenting alternatives, to do so in an honest manner. While a careerist should feel free to offer an opinion on which way a decision should swing, he or she must present all sides of the picture fairly.

The executives also agreed that an appointee should be provided both an executive summary and a detailed paper. While some individuals

“We need to decide what is important for them to know and also decide what we don’t want to burden them with.”

prefer a briefing, and some want to soak in all the details, others prefer face-to-face consultations. This is something that a careerist should pick up on over time, and adapt to the appointee’s style accordingly.

Being able to read body language is certainly an aid to determining the progress of a meeting. It can also be a tip off to an appointee’s “hot buttons.”

Sensitivity to these puts an appointee in the best possible position to make a good decision.

Another fine line must be walked in evaluating when to fight a battle with an appointee. Careerists significantly weaken their positions by simply serving as a “yes” person. Conversely, being saddled with the tag of “obstructionist” is a sure precursor to being left off the “team.”

Finally, it is important for all career executives to know the stark realities of both career-political relations and government as a whole today. In a time of downsizing and reinvention, coupled with an ever-growing cadre of political appointees, uncertainty is the coin of the realm. As one award-winning executive frankly stated, “you’re Distinguished Rank today, but dog meat tomorrow.”

Yet, while a career federal executive may often describe his or her job as tenuous and frustrating, the benefits and importance of that job are

undoubtedly far-reaching and deeply satisfying. No one has ever captured the significance of these unsung heroes better than Walter Lippman who once said, “Those in high places are more than the administrators of government bureaus. They are more than the writers of laws. They are the custodians of a nation’s ideals, of the beliefs it cherishes, of its permanent hopes, of the faith which makes a nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals.”

Conclusion

During preparation of this monograph, several conclusions became inescapable. SEA PDL's decision to host the first-ever gathering of Presidential Distinguished Rank Executives to share their views and experiences was clearly well justified by the result. The insights that these Distinguished Executives shared were sometimes expected and sometimes stunning, and the candor with which they were offered was refreshing. We were reminded, once again, of the depth of knowledge, experience and commitment throughout the career federal executive corps.

In an era of government reinvention and downsizing, the particular demands placed on these executives are often extraordinary. Yet, just as they were throughout their careers, their accomplishments continue to be notable. While it is important that we continue to honor such exemplary performance, it is imperative that we cultivate these career executives for their knowledge and the guidance they can offer.

As challenges to effective, efficient, productive government - and to the career executive service - continue unabated and as change remains a constant, there can be no greater source of wisdom than the Presidential Distinguished Rank Executives.

Cendant Mobility

As the world's largest relocation company, Cendant Mobility is a leading supplier of relocation services to the federal government and a leading manager of household goods shipments. Cendant delivers a broad range of programs to support transferring federal employees/military members and their families, including flexible programs for both domestic and international moves. Through Cendant's services, their government clients realize aggressive cost management, a mobile and productive work force, "top block" service and unparalleled experience and past performance.

Cendant Mortgage

A wholly owned subsidiary of Cendant Corporation, Cendant Mortgage is a full service lender and a leader in relationship-driven mortgage banking, serving real estate brokers, affinity groups, credit unions, financial institutions, corporations and government agencies. In 1998, Cendant provided more than \$25 billion in mortgage financing for American homes. Cendant Mortgage is currently ranked as the sixth largest retail lender by *Inside Mortgage Finance*.

GEICO

Founded in 1936 as Government Employees Insurance Company, GEICO was established to offer low cost auto insurance to federal employees. Today, with nearly 63 years of experience, GEICO has risen to the sixth largest auto insurer in the nation. GEICO offers a full range of auto insurance products and markets especially to federal employees through their government program. GEICO's auto insurance rates are extremely competitive and Senior Executives Association members may qualify for additional savings. To compare rates, call GEICO toll free at 1-800-522-4688. or visit www.geico.com.

This publication was made possible through the generous financial support of

