

PROVIDING CUTTING-EDGE
KNOWLEDGE TO
GOVERNMENT LEADERS

The Business of Government

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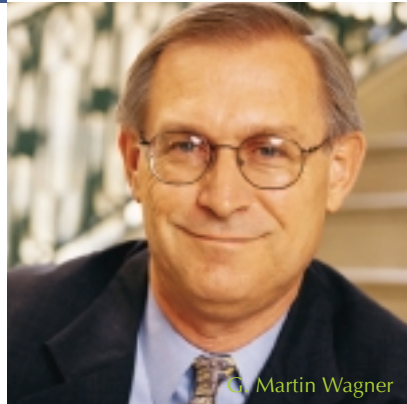
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G. Martin Wagner



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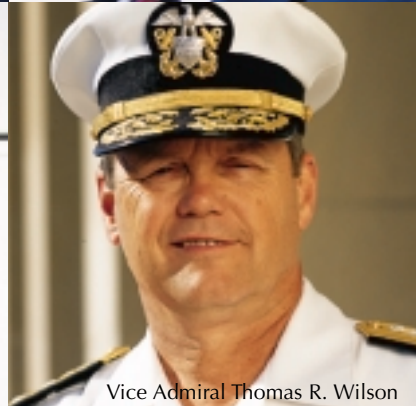
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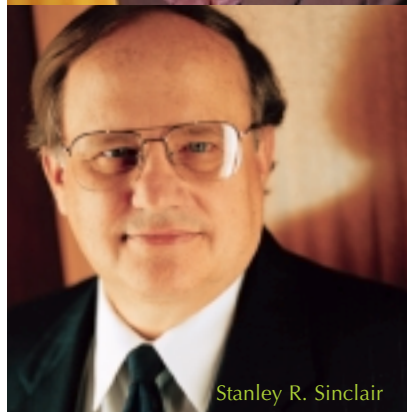
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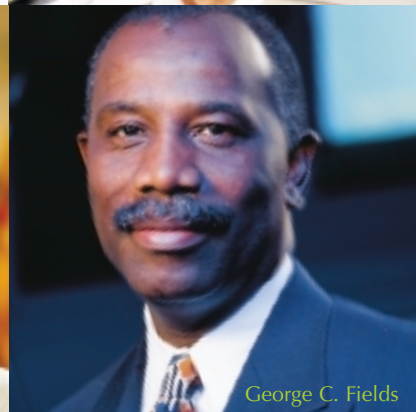
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[FROM THE EDITOR'S KEYBOARD]

By Paul R. Lawrence



I'm always impressed by how much there is to learn from others. Today, we have a fancy name for it—benchmarking. But in the old days (not that long ago), it was simply learning from others. Several years ago, Peter Senge popularized the concept of the “learning organization.” Everybody wanted to become “learners.”

Whatever you call it, the concept of learning from others is still important. In reading this issue of *The Business of Government*, I was struck again by how much there is to learn from both individuals and organizations. The entire world has become our classroom—provided one is paying attention and attempting to learn from what others are saying and doing.

From the academic community, I learned about the need to rethink the concept of accountability. Harvard University's Robert Behn taught me that we need to expand our concept of accountability to include accountability for performance. While it may be easier to hold people accountable for keeping a good set of books and running fair processes, the next major challenge facing government is to bring accountability for performance to the forefront.

From the New York City Police Department, I learned that it is possible to manage an organization day-to-day on the basis of relevant, real-time, and accurate data. The CompStat story, as described by Frank Straub and Paul O'Connell, demonstrates that organizations can use data to hold their managers accountable for performance. Another key part of the CompStat story is its diffusion to both other police jurisdictions and other government entities. The city of Baltimore studied CompStat and concluded that the city needed a new way to manage all of its departments—not just the police department—and created CitiStat. Government organizations can clearly learn from each other.

From Dan Goldin, administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, I learned a key lesson in leadership: the right to fail. At an Endowment seminar, Administrator Goldin told us organizations that don't have failures are not taking enough chances. They are playing it safe. By not taking chances, organizations too frequently set mediocre goals. “It's like Babe Ruth, instead of pointing to the stands for a grand slam, he says, ‘I'll try for a bunt,’” Goldin explained.

From Tommy Thompson, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, I learned about the need to rethink the historical relationship between the federal government and state governments. Based on his experience as governor of Wisconsin for 14 years, Thompson described the increased capability of state governments over the past 40 years. Based on this increased capacity, the federal government needs to find new ways to collaborate and partner with states—a challenge that Secretary Thompson is working to implement at HHS.

From Mitchell Daniels, director of the Office of Management and Budget, I learned about the Bush administration's Management and Performance Agenda. For all of us involved in government in some way, we learned that the next several years will not be “business as usual.” We need to explore new ways in which government can manage its workforce, competitively source, improve its financial performance, and move increasingly toward e-government.

While there is much to learn from leaders at the top, there is also much that can be learned from leaders at all levels within government. I have the unique opportunity to talk with an outstanding federal executive each week on the Endowment's radio show, *The Business of Government Hour*. In that hour, I explore new ideas and new ways of doing business with government executives who are on the frontier of changing government.

While I always intuitively knew that our government was large and diverse, my recent radio guests—profiled on the following pages—brought the point home even more clearly to me. I spoke with federal executives who were protecting the president, supporting the development of websites for classroom history teachers, providing state-of-the-art professional services to government agencies, ensuring safer skies, clothing our military, protecting our lands, providing distance learning to government health professionals, setting work-life policies for our civil servants, and providing intelligence to our nation's military leaders. From each, I learned about their quest to do things differently and to seek new ways of doing business. No one was advocating the status quo. While I'll never hold any of these important positions, I did learn about a “spirit” and “attitude” toward change that I aspire to bring to my own organization.

There is much to learn out there. One need only look and listen.

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