

PROVIDING CUTTING-EDGE
KNOWLEDGE TO
GOVERNMENT LEADERS

The Business of Government

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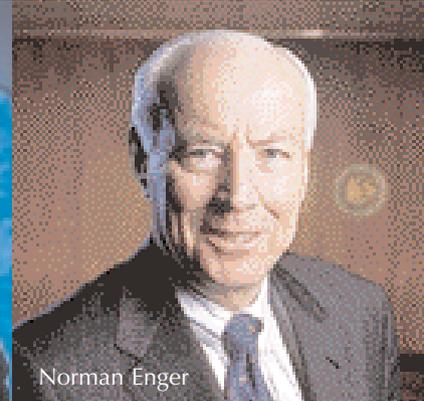
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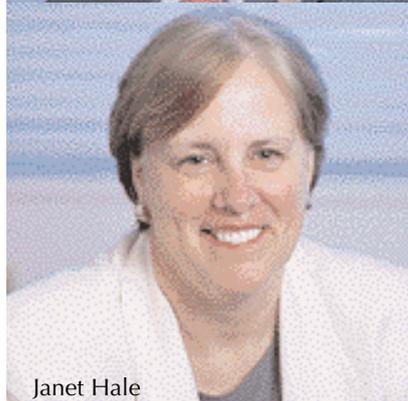
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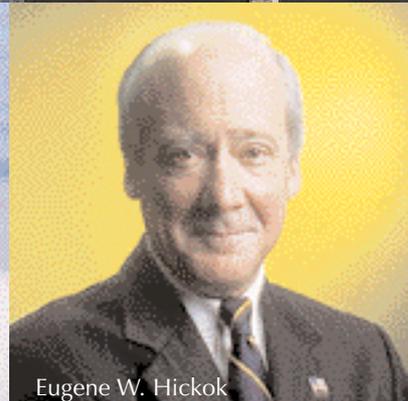
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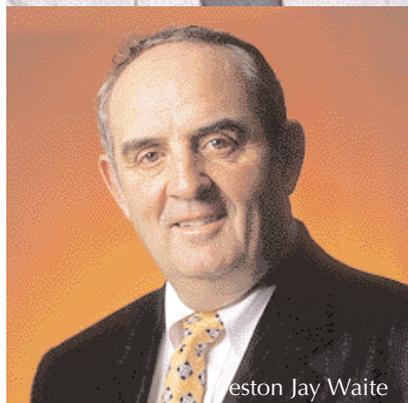
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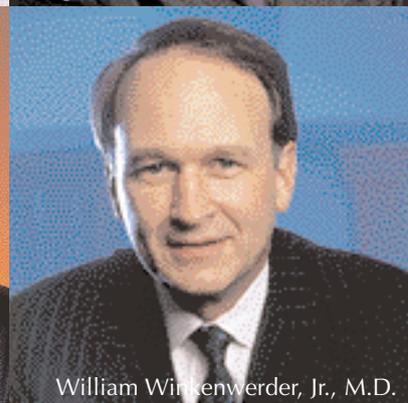
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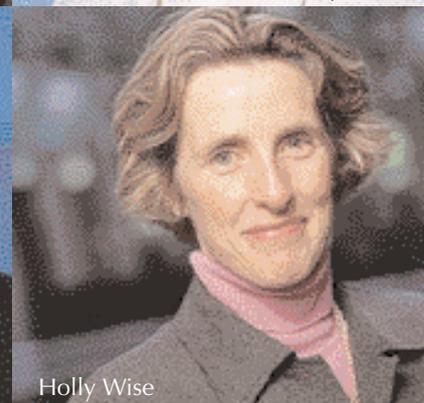
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What Steve Spurrier Taught Me About Management

My father introduced me to sports. As a Massachusetts native, he taught me the championship history of the Boston Celtics and was pleased when I adopted them as my favorite basketball team. For much of my early life, I grew accustomed to the Celtics' annual trip to the finals. My father took me to my first Boston Red Sox baseball game. He warned me that the Red Sox would break my heart, but I became a fan anyway. And he was right about the heartbreak. Like many military families moving in and out of the Washington area, my favorite football team became the Washington Redskins.

As I pursued my career as a management consultant, I found myself increasingly reading management books and magazines. *Sports Illustrated* gave way to the *Harvard Business Review*. But my lifelong interest in sports has continued. Occasionally, these two interests come together when I find a sports figure from whom I can learn much about management. And these management insights include learning from bad examples, as well as good ones.

Steve Spurrier, former coach of the Redskins, provided me with ample opportunity to see the relevance of management to sports. As did many Redskin fans, I watched with anticipation the arrival of Spurrier from the University of Florida. During his two years in Washington, I learned much from Coach Spurrier about what *not to do* when running an organization. It has been fascinating to analyze the contrasts between Spurrier and the new coach, the renowned Joe Gibbs, during the Redskins' three-day mini-camps.

Watching Spurrier and Gibbs has taught me the following:

Lesson 1: Get to know your team. The *Washington Post* reported that at the end of his second year of coaching, Spurrier still had not learned the names of many of his players. In contrast, Coach Gibbs was reported to have known all his players' names by the end of his first mini-camp. When working with my own team of consultants on a project, I want to emulate the relationship-building Gibbs, not the aloof Spurrier. Clearly, one gets better performance from a team that realizes their leader knows them and understands their hopes and career aspirations.

Lesson 2: Recruit experienced staff. Both the number and importance of assistant coaches have grown dramatically in the National Football League in recent years. The contrast between the coaching staffs of Spurrier and Gibbs could not be greater. Spurrier put together one of the least-experienced staffs in recent NFL history. Gibbs opted to hire staff with extensive experience at the professional level. While we will have to wait until the fall to see whether Gibbs' hiring approach will contribute to a winning Redskins season, we know that the Spurrier approach did not work. In assembling my own team, Gibbs reminds me of the importance of recruiting experienced staff. We frequently forget that there is often no shortcut for experience.

Lesson 3: Hire people who will say "no." All leaders need people around them who will tell them, "You can't do this." Because they appear not to have placed a high enough value on pass protection, Spurrier's team constantly had quarterbacks injured. To explain this, I imagine a meeting early in Spurrier's tenure, when he announced that strong and agile offensive linemen were not necessary, because his offensive system was so sophisticated that it would dominate NFL defenses. He must have pointed out that that is, after all, how he did it in college. If he had someone on his staff with enough knowledge and self-confidence to tell him this approach made no sense, it might have prevented two years of ineffectiveness and made Spurrier a more

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Departments and agencies are making important progress with their underlying data and management systems. The integration or “matching” of costs and performance information is fast becoming the standard to achieve in federal budgeting and accounting. Documents that show cost *or* performance are giving way to documents that show cost *and* performance. Databases that show cost in budgetary *or* accounting measures are giving way to databases that *match* cost with program outputs and outcomes, and aggregate to strategic outcomes.

What Is Next?

OMB and the agencies now need to reach out to congressional committees early in the PART selection process to gain insight about which program areas and performance issues congressional officials consider warrant PART review. Engaging Congress early in the process may help target reviews with an eye toward those areas most on the agenda of Congress.

To make further progress on performance budgeting, agencies must also work with their appropriations committees in Congress, other key congressional contacts, and agency stakeholders so that these key actors understand the usefulness of this additional information to inform the authorization, appropriations, and oversight processes. Agencies must consult their appropriators about the outline and sample justifications. They should reassure their appropriators that all of the information and tables they use will still be included and show them where the data can easily be found. Any proposed changes in accounts or sub-accounts must be discussed in advance, with technical support to show that the intent of the appropriations language will be fully carried out and tracked in Treasury accounts.

Representative Todd R. Platts (R-Pa.), chairman of the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Efficiency and Financial Management, held a hearing on the PART on February 4, 2004, titled “Should We PART Ways with GPRA?” and a “Hearing on the President’s Management Agenda” on February 11, 2004. Shortly thereafter, he introduced legislation that would amend GPRA to require regular evaluations of all federal programs. The bill would ensure that future administrations complete some type of program-level reviews by requiring OMB to assess each federal program’s performance at least once every five years.

Conclusion

The attention of the federal government to strategic planning and the supply of performance information has increased substantially in the last 10 years. GPRA is doing exactly what

was expected—it has laid the foundation for the use of performance information. As a consequence, the federal government has never been in a better position to make decision making more informed by considerations of performance.

Going forward, a wide range of very serious challenges, including changing security threats and a long-term fiscal imbalance, will require reexamining existing programs and policies. The PART review has advanced the use of performance information for program and budget analysis by OMB and government agencies, and stimulated further interest in budget and performance integration. Disciplined review of program performance and results—whether through the PART or by other means—will continue to be a useful tool to help inform management and funding decisions. ■

Editor’s Keyboard

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successful professional coach. Spurrier’s experience made me appreciate even more the importance of the strong-willed members of my team, who argue with me and point out where I might be wrong, even when I don’t want to listen. By preventing me from erring, these team members make me a better manager.

Lesson 4: Assemble an executive team that complements your own shortcomings. Joe Gibbs may be the greatest offensive mind in football, but his team still needs to play defense. To field a successful defense, Gibbs’ first hire after his return to football was an outstanding defensive coach. Prior to jumping to professional football, Spurrier was one of the greatest offensive minds in college football. Upon joining the professional ranks, his first hires were other offense-minded assistant coaches. The contrasts between the Gibbs and Spurrier approaches remind me how hard it is to deal with one’s own weaknesses. But successful leaders deal with themselves truthfully and address these areas directly by seeking out and hiring those with complementary skills to make up for their own shortcomings.

I believe you can learn much about management by observing other leaders. The management literature typically discusses what you can learn from great, or not so great, private sector chief executive officers. But I’ve learned that you can also learn a great deal about management from reading the sports pages. Coach Gibbs, welcome back to town. I look forward to watching you *manage* the Redskins. ■