

Advice to an Incoming Leader

By Justin Pinkerman

As President Barack Obama takes office, he enjoys a significant advantage over other incoming leaders: he can stock key positions with friends and loyal allies. Unlike the President, most new leaders must play the cards they are dealt; they do not have the luxury of choosing their hand. Like a single passenger on a full flight, a new leader must sit in his or her assigned seat, even if it's located beside a screaming infant or sandwiched between two behemoths.

As an incoming leader walking into a position of authority, how can you best setup yourself up for success? Here are a few suggestions on what to do as the new kid on the block.

1. Heed the Step-Parent Effect

Recognize the existing loyalties your people may still have for your predecessor. Like an incoming step-parent, you will have trouble exerting leadership until you establish a relationship of trust founded on respect. Upon arrival you must initiate the relationship. Seek to comprehend the primary motivations of those you lead, but first share your story. Give people access to your journey. Be personable; don't jump too quickly into laying out long-term strategies and vision. Appeal to those you lead as a fellow human, not as the new sheriff in town.

2. Prioritize Japan over Djibouti

Picture yourself as an American diplomat. Although you'd like to forge friendly alliances with every nation, a powerful nation like Japan deserves infinitely more attention than a tiny country like Djibouti. Likewise, incoming leaders must scan the power structure of their new territory and focus the bulk of their time winning buy-in from the main players. Although every person has value, not everyone shares equal influence.

3. When in Doubt, Over-Communicate

People are apprehensive of change and resistant to it. Pour the fuel of uncertainty on top of change, and you're in for some fireworks. Be sensitive to change-aversion. Use every opportunity to paint a picture of where you're headed, and be intentional about reassuring key players of their value to the team. Your ability to communicate clearly and consistently will defuse some of the tension surrounding your arrival.

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