

Commentary: Executive experience will be key to Trump's success

By Stew Bolno It's easy to make the case that no president of the United States has possessed less hands-on political experience than Donald Trump. However, given his vast executive experience, he should be just as capable of excelling in his new role as the 43 individuals who preceded him.



President Donald Trump has lunch with troops while visiting U.S. Central Command and U.S. Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., Monday, Feb. 6, 2017. Susan Walsh/Associated Press

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History teaches us that predictions of presidential effectiveness are a sucker's game. A person's talents as a campaigner are not directly transferable to the job. Sometimes an individual's behavioral strengths

work against success in performing the role of leading the country in a positive direction. External events often occur to challenge the "man with a plan," especially when occurring at the early stages of a presidential term.

Trump's ability to apply his self-promotion and marketing expertise should not be underrated. Prior to throwing his hat in the ring for president, he had already attained celebrity status so he didn't have to spend time on developing name recognition. Unlike any other candidate or political analyst, he visualized an opportunity for victory in the upper-Midwest states that no one else even imagined. His oft-repeated and highly visible mantra was action oriented, easily understood, and resonated with a broad swath of people.

Now that he is chief executive, Trump's overall success will be dependent upon how well he applies his leadership and management expertise. Since Trump has spent more than four decades as the boss, it's safe to say that few previous presidents were more experienced in being the guy on top of the organizational pyramid. That's an advantage for him.

Time management is an essential attribute for effective leaders. Time is the one resource that is not expandable, flexible, or negotiable. Understanding how to gain the greatest return on time spent is an ongoing challenge for any executive. For those of us observing Trump, it's clear that he values time. He requires minimal sleep, possesses an intense work ethic, and knows how to handle multiple projects simultaneously - consider the whirlwind of activity already coming from the West Wing.

Leaders must make choices from data and projections that are always iffy. The future is unknown and that's a challenge. As a businessman experienced in all types of situations, Trump understands the problem-solving process and has had to develop a comfort level with making decisions under uncertain conditions. Knowledge can be purchased, financing can be accessed, and judgment can be honed. However, intuition also plays a part, and people who are successful over long periods of time are usually proud of their gut instincts.

No executive can succeed without competent subordinates and, finally, Trump's cabinet choices are almost through the Senate confirmation process. His selection model - having top contenders trek to New York City and make their way through the media-saturated lobby of Trump Tower - was likely the most transparent in history.

Although those committed to maintaining the status quo have squawked loudly and often, the general opinion is that those chosen for cabinet positions are up to the task. Many of the nominees have been highly successful in their chosen fields, in careers that did not include electoral politics. A few of them have openly disagreed with certain statements uttered by Candidate Trump. This signifies that the new president does not seek a team of sycophants. Once the administration settles in, issues will be discussed with vigor prior to White House decisions. This is likely to benefit citizens in the long run.

By appointing Reince Priebus as chief of staff and Elaine Chao as transportation secretary, Trump understands, unlike his immediate predecessor, that his long-term effectiveness will be determined by his ability to have an active, coordinated, and uncluttered conduit with the Congress. Priebus has a longtime political relationship with fellow Wisconsinite Paul Ryan, the House speaker. And Chao is

married to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. These connections to Capitol Hill, as well as Vice President Pence, a former congressman from Indiana, will prove invaluable in the days ahead.

No one would confuse the bearing and temperament of Trump with that of Dwight Eisenhower. Yet they share one thing in common that is unique among most American presidents. Neither, prior to election victory, was an animal of Washington, D.C., thus owed nothing to politicians, lobbyists, and governmental institutions.

Each man demonstrated competence in leading huge entities outside of politics, over a span of decades. Both were required to lead and maneuver through vast organizational systems where bureaucracy, goal achievement, team conflicts, internal competition, saboteurs, as well as numerous other realities, challenged them as chief executives daily. Obviously, they excelled.

Although unappreciated during his time, and often underrated, it appears that historians and others have come to recognize that likable Ike was quite successful as commander in chief. Trump's areas of expertise are certainly different from Eisenhower's - the corporate world vs. the military - but given the odds he defied in making it to the Oval Office, it seems foolish to bet against the new president's efforts to Make America Great Again.

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