

## **RUMSFELD'S RULES**

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Many of these rules, reflections and quotations came from my role as Chairman of the “transition team” for President Gerald R. Ford and my service as White House Chief of Staff. Others came from experiences as a U.S. Naval Aviator, a Member of Congress, Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Secretary of Defense, Presidential Middle East Envoy, business executive, Chairman of the U.S. Ballistic Missile Threat Commission, and other experiences.

These reflections and quotations have been gathered over the past 40 years. Credit is given where known. As the quotation has it, “If it’s not true, it’s still well founded.” (Unknown)

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**SERVING IN THE WHITE HOUSE**  
(for the White House Chiefs of Staff, and senior staff)

- Don't accept the post or stay unless you have an understanding with the President that you're free to tell him what you think "with the bark off" and you have the courage to do it.
- Visit with your predecessors from previous Administrations. They know the ropes and can help you see around some corners. Try to make original mistakes, rather than needlessly repeating theirs.
- Don't begin to think you're the President. You're not. The Constitution provides for only one.
- In the execution of Presidential decisions work to be true to his views, in fact and tone.
- Know that the immediate staff and others in the Administration will assume that your manner, tone and tempo reflect the President's.
- Learn to say "I don't know." If used when appropriate, it will be often.
- If you foul up, tell the President and correct it fast. Delay only compounds mistakes.
- Walk around. If you are invisible, the mystique of the President's office may perpetuate inaccurate impressions about you or the President, to his detriment. After all, you may not be as bad as they're saying.
- In our system leadership is by consent, not command. To lead a President must persuade. Personal contacts and experiences help shape his thinking. They can be critical to his persuasiveness and thus to his leadership.
- Be precise. A lack of precision is dangerous when the margin of error is small.
- Preserve the President's options. He may need them.
- It is easier to get into something than to get out of it.
- Don't divide the world into "them" and "us." Avoid infatuation with or resentment of the press, the Congress, rivals, or opponents. Accept them as facts. They have their jobs and you have yours.
- Amidst all the clutter, beyond all the obstacles, aside from all the static, are the goals set. Put your head down, do the best job possible, let the flak pass, and work towards those goals.
- Don't say "the White House wants." Buildings can't want.

- Leave the President’s family business to him. You will have plenty to do without trying to manage the First Family. They are likely to do fine without your help.
- Make decisions about the President’s personal security. He can overrule you, but don’t ask him to be the one to counsel caution.
- Being Vice President is difficult. Don’t make it tougher.
- Don’t automatically obey Presidential directives if you disagree or if you suspect he hasn’t considered key aspects of the issue.
- The price of being close to the President is delivering bad news. You fail him if you don’t tell him the truth. Others won’t do it.
- You and the White House staff must be and be seen to be above suspicion. Set the right example.
- The role of White House Chief of Staff is that of a “javelin catcher.” (Jack Watson)
- Don’t speak ill of your predecessors or successors. You didn’t walk in their shoes.
- Remember the public trust. Strive to preserve and enhance the integrity of the office of the Presidency. Pledge to leave it stronger than when you came.
- Don’t blame the boss. He has enough problems.

### **KEEPING YOUR BEARINGS IN THE WHITE HOUSE**

- Enjoy your time in public service. It may well be one of the most interesting and challenging times of your life.
- Don’t think of yourself as indispensable or infallible. As Charles De Gaulle said, the cemeteries of the world are full of indispensable men.
- Let your family, staff, and friends know that you’re still the same person, despite all the publicity and notoriety that accompanies your position.
- Have a deputy and develop a successor. Don’t be consumed by the job or you’ll risk losing your balance. Keep your mooring lines to the outside world -- family, friends, neighbors, people out of government, and people who may not agree with you.
- When asked for your views, by the press or others, remember that what they really want to know is the President’s views.

- Most of the 50 or so invitations you receive each week come from people inviting the President’s Chief of Staff, not you. If you doubt that, ask your predecessor how many he received last week.
- Keep your sense of humor. As General Joe Stillwell said, “The higher a monkey climbs, the more you see of his behind.”
- Be yourself. Follow your instincts. Success depends, at least in part, on the ability to “carry it off.”
- Know that the amount of criticism you receive may correlate somewhat to the amount of publicity you receive.
- If you are not criticized, you may not be doing much.
- From where you sit, the White House may look as untidy as the inside of a stomach. As is said of the legislative process, sausage-making and policy-making shouldn’t be seen close-up. Don’t let that panic you. Things may be going better than they look from the inside.
- Be able to resign. It will improve your value to the President and do wonders for your performance.
- If you are lost – “climb, conserve, and confess.” (U.S. Navy SNJ Flight Manual)

### **DOING THE JOB IN THE WHITE HOUSE**

- Your performance depends on your people. Select the best, train them and back them. When errors occur, give sharper guidance. If errors persist or if the fit feels wrong, help them move on. The country cannot afford amateur hour in the White House.
- You will launch many projects, but have time to finish only a few. So think, plan, develop, launch and tap good people to be responsible. Give them authority and hold them accountable. Trying to do too much yourself creates a bottleneck.
- Think ahead. Don’t let day-to-day operations drive out planning.
- Plan backwards as well as forward. Set objectives and trace back to see how to achieve them. You may find that no path can get you there. Plan forward to see where your steps will take you, which may not be clear or intuitive.
- Don’t “over control” like a novice pilot. Stay loose enough from the flow that you can observe, calibrate and refine.

- A President needs multiple sources of information. Avoid excessively restricting the flow of paper, people, or ideas to the President, though you must watch his time. If you over-control, it will be your “regulator” that controls, not his. Only by opening the spigot fairly wide, risking that some of his time may be wasted, can his “regulator” take control.
- If in doubt, move decisions up to the President.
- When you raise issues with the President, try to come away with both that decision and also a precedent. Pose issues so as to evoke broader policy guidance. This can help to answer a range of similar issues likely to arise later.
- See that the President, the Cabinet and staff are informed. If cut out of the information flow, their decisions may be poor, not made, or not confidently or persuasively implemented.
- Don’t allow people to be excluded from a meeting or denied an opportunity to express their views because their views differ from the President’s, the person who calls the meeting, or your views. The staff system must have integrity and discipline.
- When the President is faced with a decision, be sure he has the recommendations of all appropriate people, or that he realizes he does not have their views and is willing to accept the consequence. They will be out of sync, unhappy and less effective if they feel they are or are seen as having been “cut out.”
- Don’t be a bottleneck. If a matter is not a decision for the President or you, delegate it. Force responsibility down and out. Find problem areas, add structure and delegate. The pressure is to do the reverse. Resist it.
- If the staff lacks policy guidance against which to test decisions, their decisions will be random.
- One of your tasks is to separate the “personal” from the “substantive.” The two can become confused, especially if someone rubs the President wrong.
- Test ideas in the marketplace. You learn from hearing a range of perspectives. Consultation helps engender the support decisions need to be successfully implemented.
- If a prospective Presidential approach can’t be explained clearly enough to be understood well, it probably hasn’t been thought through well enough. If not well understood by the American people, it probably won’t “sail” anyway. Send it back for further thought.
- Many people around the President have sizeable egos before entering government, some with good reason. Their new positions will do little to moderate their egos.
- Move decisions out to the Cabinet and agencies. Strengthen them by moving responsibility, authority, and accountability their direction.

- Control your time. If you're working off your in-box, you're working off the priorities of others. Be sure the staff is working on what you move to them from the President, or the President will be reacting, not leading.
- Look for what's missing. Many advisors can tell a President how to improve what's proposed or what's gone amiss. Few are able to see what isn't there.
- Think of dealing with Congress as a "revolving door." You'll be back to today's opponents for their help tomorrow. Presidential proposals will need a Member of Congress' support on some issue, at some time, regardless of philosophy, party or their positions on other issues. Don't allow White House links to Members to be cut because he or she may disagree on some or even many issues.
- Work continuously to trim the White House staff from your first day to your last. All the pressures are to the contrary.
- Don't do or say things you would not like to see on the front page of *The Washington Post*.

### **SERVING IN GOVERNMENT**

- Public servants are paid to serve the American people. Do it well.
- Congress, the press, and the bureaucracy too often focus on how much money or effort is spent, rather than whether the money or effort actually achieves the announced goal.
- It is very difficult to spend "federal (the taxpayers') dollars" so that the intended result is achieved.
- Beware when any idea is promoted primarily because it is "bold, exciting, innovative, and new." There are many ideas that are "bold, exciting, innovative and new," but also foolish.
- The Federal Government should be the last resort, not the first. Ask if a potential program is truly a federal responsibility or whether it can better be handled privately, by voluntary organizations, or by local or state governments.
- As former Missouri Congressman Tom Curtis said, "Public money drives out private money."
- Strive to make proposed solutions as self-executing as possible. As the degree of discretion increases, so too does bureaucracy, delay, and expense.
- Presidential leadership needn't always cost money. Look for low- and no-cost options. They can be surprisingly effective.
- Include others. As Senator Pat Moynihan (D-NY) said, "Stubborn opposition to proposals often has no other basis than the complaining question, 'Why wasn't I consulted?'"

- Watch for the “not invented here” syndrome.
- “The atmosphere in which social legislation is considered is not a friend of truth.” (Pat Moynihan (D-NY))
- If in doubt, don’t.
- If still in doubt, do what’s right.
- Treat each federal dollar as if it was hard earned; it was – by a taxpayer.
- “Try to analyze situations intelligently, anticipate problems and move swiftly to solve them. However, when you’re up to your ears in alligators, it is difficult to remember that the reason you’re there is to drain the swamp.” (Unknown)
- “In Washington, D.C., the size of a farewell party may be directly proportional to the honoree’s new position and their prospective ability to dispense largess.” (D.G. Cross)
- “Every government looking at the actions of another government and trying to explain them always exaggerates rationality and conspiracy, and underestimates incompetency and fortuity.” (Silberman’s Law of Diplomacy, U.S. Circuit Court Judge Laurence Silberman)

### **POLITICS, THE CONGRESS, AND THE PRESS**

- First rule of politics: you can’t win unless you’re on the ballot.  
Second rule: If you run, you may lose.  
And, if you tie, you do not win.
- Politics is human beings; it’s addition rather than subtraction.
- The winner is not always the swiftest, surest or smartest. It’s the one willing to get up at 5:00 a.m. and go to the plant gate to meet the workers. (Unknown)
- In politics, every day is filled with numerous opportunities for serious error. Enjoy it.
- The most underestimated risk for a politician is overexposure.
- When someone with a rural accent says, “I don’t know much about politics,” zip up your pockets.
- If you try to please everybody, somebody’s not going to like it.
- Don’t necessarily avoid sharp edges. Occasionally they are necessary to leadership.



- “The oil can is mightier than the sword.” (Senator Everett Dirksen, (R-IL))
- Arguments of convenience lack integrity and inevitably trip you up.
- Remember where you came from.
- Members of the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate are not there by accident. Each managed to get there for some reason. Learn what it was and you will know something important about them, about our country and about the American people.
- With the press there is no “off the record.”
- There are only three responses to questions from the press: (1) “I know and will tell you”; (2) “I know and I can’t tell you”; and (3) “I don’t know.” (Dan Rather)

### **FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

- The Secretary of Defense is not a super General or Admiral. His task is to exercise civilian control over the Department for the Commander-in-Chief and the country.
- Reserve the right to get into anything and exercise it. Make your deputies and staff realize that, although many responsibilities are delegated, no one should be surprised when the Secretary engages an important issue.
- Manage the interaction between the Pentagon and the White House. Unless you establish a narrow channel for the flow of information and “tasking” back and forth, the process can quickly become chaotic.
- Normal management techniques may not work in the Department. When pushing responsibility downward, be sure not to contribute to a weakening of the cohesion of the Services; what cohesion exists has been painfully achieved over the decades.
- When cutting staff at the Pentagon, don’t eliminate the thin layer that assures civilian control.
- Avoid public spats. When a Department argues with other government agencies in the press, it reduces the President’s options.
- Establish good relations between the Departments of Defense, State, the National Security Council, C.I.A. and the Office of Management and Budget.
- Be sure key U.S. ambassadors are informed on Defense activities in their countries.
- Develop a personal relationship with the Chairman and each of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They are almost always outstanding public servants. In time of crisis, those relationships can be vital.

- If you get the objectives right, a lieutenant can write the strategy. (General George Marshall)
- Napoleon was asked, “Who do you consider to be the greatest generals?” He responded saying, “The victors.”

## **ON BUSINESS**

- When you initiate new activities, find things you are currently doing that you can discontinue -- whether reports, activities, etc. It works, but you must force yourself to do it. Always keep in mind your “teeth to tail ratio.”
- Watch the growth of middle level management. Don’t automatically fill vacant jobs. Leave some positions unfilled for 6-8 months to see what happens. You will find you won’t need to fill some of them.
- Reduce the layers of management. They put distance between the top of an organization and the customers.
- Find ways to decentralize. Move decision making authority down and out. Encourage a more entrepreneurial approach.
- Prune -- prune businesses, products, activities, people. Do it annually.
- Know your customers!
- Develop a few key themes and stick to them. It works. Repetition is necessary. “Quality.” “Customers.” “Innovation.” “Service.” -- whatever!
- That which you require be reported on to you will improve, if you are selective. How you fashion your reporting system announces your priorities and sets the institution’s priorities.
- People do better in staff jobs if they have had operational experience. It helps to look at things from others’ perspectives.
- Reduce the number of lawyers. They are like beavers -- they get in the middle of the stream and dam it up.
- Beware of the argument that “this is a period for investment, improvements will come in the out years.” The tension between the short term and long term can be constructive, but there is no long term without a short term.
- Too often management recommends plans that look like Bob Hope’s nose or a hockey stick. The numbers go down the first year or so and then up in the later years. If you accept hockey stick plans, you will find they will be proposed year after year.
- The way to do well is to do well.

- Don't let the complexity of a large company mask the need for performance. Bureaucracy is a conspiracy to bring down the big. And it can. You may need to be large to compete in the world stage, but you need to find ways to avoid allowing that size to mask poor performance.
- “No plan survives contact with the enemy.” (Old military axiom)
- Remember: A's hire A's and B's hire C's.
- “The advantage of a free market is that it allows millions of decision-makers to respond individually to freely determined prices, allocating resources – labor, capital and human ingenuity – in a manner that can't be mimicked by a central plan, however brilliant the central planner.” (Friedrich von Hayek)

### **ON LIFE (and other things)**

- “You can't pray a lie.” (*Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain)
- “It takes everyone to make a happy day.” (Marcy Rumsfeld, age seven)
- “The most important things in life you cannot see -- civility, justice, courage, peace.” (Unknown)
- “Persuasion is a two-edged sword -- reason and emotion -- plunge it deep.” (Professor Lewis Sarett, Sr.)
- “The art of listening is indispensable for the right use of the mind. It is also the most gracious, the most open and the most generous of human habits.” (Attributed to R. Barr, St. John's College, Annapolis, MD)
- “In writing if it takes over 30 minutes to write the first two paragraphs select another subject.” (Raymond Aron)
- “If you get the objectives right, even a lieutenant can write the strategy.” (Gen. George Marshall)
- “In unanimity there may well be either cowardice or uncritical thinking.” (Unknown)
- “If you're coasting, you're going downhill.” (L.W. Pierson)
- “What's the difference between a good naval officer and a great one? Answer: About six seconds.” (Adm. Arleigh Burke)
- “First law of holes: If you get in one, stop digging.” (Anonymous)

- “Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out.” (James B. Conant)
- “When drinking the water, don’t forget those who dug the well.” (Chinese proverb)
- The harder I work, the luckier I am. (Unknown)
- “If it doesn’t go easy, force it.” (G. D. Rumsfeld’s assessment of his son Don’s operating principle at age 10)
- “But I am me.” (Nick Rumsfeld, age 9)
- “You learn in life there are few plateaus; you are either going up or down.” (Unknown)
- Perspective: Maurice Chevalier’s response when asked how it felt to reach 80 – “Pretty good, considering the alternative.”
- “For every human problem there is a solution that is simple, neat and wrong.” (H.L. Mencken)
- Simply because a problem is shown to exist doesn’t necessarily follow that there is a solution.
- “If a problem has no solution, it may not be a problem, but a fact, not to be solved, but to be coped with over time.” (Shimon Perez)
- “If a problem cannot be solved, enlarge it.” (Dwight D. Eisenhower)
- “Most people spend their time on the ‘urgent’ rather than on the ‘important.’” (Robert Hutchins)
- “If you think you have things under control, you’re not going fast enough.” (Mario Andretti, racecar driver)
- “Victory is never final. Defeat is never fatal. It is courage that counts.” (Winston Churchill)
- “Intellectual Capital is the least fungible kind.” (Unknown)
- “The better part of one’s life consists of friendship.” (Abraham Lincoln)
- “When you’re skiing, if you’re not falling you’re not trying.” (Donald Rumsfeld)
- “The test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.” (F. Scott Fitzgerald)
- “It is seldom that liberty of any kind is lost all at once.” (David Hume)

- “History marches to the drum of a clear idea.” (W. H. Auden)
- “Demographics is destiny.” (Scanlan)
- If you think you have things under control, you’re not going fast enough.” (Mario Andretti)
- If you develop rules, never have more than ten.