

Mission is Possible Presidential Transition Mini-Series

Episode 7: “Lessons Learned – Series Wrap-Up”

SASHA INTRO: Welcome back to Mission is Possible. I am Sasha O’Connell and I am thrilled to be introducing this mini-series of the Mission is Possible podcast, a joint project between Guidehouse and American University. This spin off series dives into the world of Presidential transitions and explores what can be expected inside the agencies during this timeframe and how best to prepare for success by talking with the folks who have been there. Thank you for tuning in, and please enjoy.

On this episode, we're pleased to welcome John Saad as our moderator. John leads Guidehouse's National Security Segment, which focuses on transformative, mission-focused work across the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Justice (DOJ), including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the U.S. Department of State, and the Intelligence Community.

JOHN: Thanks, Sasha. Welcome to today's episode of our Mission Is Possible Presidential Transition Mini-Series. In this episode, I'm joined by an esteemed group of individuals who have spent their careers working in the national security sector and have experience with several presidential transitions.

Jumping right in, can each of you introduce yourselves to our audience? Patty, can you start us off?

PATTY: Thank you very much. I am extremely pleased to be here today. I am Patty Cogswell. I am a strategic advisor with Guidehouse. I just completed 24 years in government service, including DHS, from the creation of the department until this past year. While I served in this period, I was at three different components, three different parts of headquarters, and one round at the National Security Council (NSC), most recently retiring from federal service as a Deputy Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

CHRIS: Thanks, John. My name is Chris Cumiskey. I serve as a Senior Advisor to Guidehouse and have the privilege of working with the team. I spent 25 years in Federal and State government. My last job was as the Undersecretary for Management at DHS, and Chief Acquisition Officer. Before that I served in State government for 18 years as a state Chief Information Officer and before that as a state Senator.

SASHA: Thanks, John. My name is Sasha O’Connell, and I spent just shy of 15 years at the FBI. My time there spanned just shy of 20 because of a break in service. And that's relevant because I did have the opportunity to serve under three different FBI directors. And as our audience, I have no doubt is aware, the Director of the FBI is the only political appointee at the FBI. But, because of the way that leadership progression works at the FBI, there's a lot of

turnover internally at the senior level. So, I've had the opportunity to experience that, as well, in a number of capacities.

I currently serve as a Senior Advisor at Guidehouse, and my last role at the FBI was Chief Policy Advisor for Science and Technology.

JIM: Thanks, and good morning, John. I'm Jim Chaparro, and I'm a Partner in Guidehouse's National Security Segment, and I've worked in federal government for about 26 years in various capacities, both in federal law enforcement and in the U.S. Intelligence Community. I served senior roles at DHS headquarters, where I was the Deputy Undersecretary for Intelligence. And I also served senior executive roles at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). I'm thrilled to be here today to talk about my experience with political transition.

JOHN: Great. Thank you all for the introductions. First, let's talk about transitions in leadership. There's always an adjustment period that accompanies a change in leadership, and that adjustment can be particularly acute for career officials who serve under several different administrations. What advice would you give to those who are adapting to new political leadership in their agencies? Patty, maybe we can start with you.

PATTY: Thanks very much. This is an area where I think I want to just start by describing what I've seen over the years of the various types of things a career official might encounter. And it falls into a couple of different buckets.

The first one I like to call, Groundhog Day. The official who's coming back and has substantial significant knowledge in your area, but maybe it's several years out of date. They'll keep raising things that you've talked about five times before and keep trying to push ideas that may have already been fixed.

The second one is the idea fairy. This person has a lot of ideas. Often, it can be quite difficult to figure out which parts they actually want you to build out and implement, and which ones they're just asking you about.

The third one is the person who clearly shows they just want to make their mark. This is the person coming in who wants to be visible very fast. They may immediately look to create a new strategy, or reorganize your organization, thinking that this is a way to bring people together to get through problems. But many times, it comes across to careerists as busy work that distracts or delays from more important activities.

The fourth one is the condescending boss. Unfortunately, I've seen this a few times, where a new person comes in and either tells their staff, or shows by their actions, that they think that they aren't smart or talented enough to solve the problems, and would rather listen to other's views. This can be especially difficult where it's someone who may not have positive views of federal employees.

And the last group is the one that says, "That was the last administration's idea." This is particularly difficult. While all of us understand there are significant policy changes between administrations, we all are concerned that work underway that would support underlying mission work, including through policy shifts, can be dismissed without adequate review.

So, critically important coming forward, is A: find out what intel you can get on the incoming officials and determine what views they might have, what areas they're going to be interested in, and what they might ask. Then think about how to present your information. If they need to hear it from an outside source, think about how you can get validators who are similarly as invested in the path you're on as you are. If they have substantive knowledge, especially if you used to work with them, emphasize it. Proactively highlight some of the issues or concerns you know they have. Describe how you've been working to solve that problem while they've been gone and ask for their help in next steps.

While many officials often want to say, "No," when they hear something they know isn't doable, I recommend you take a very different approach. If you've looked at something before, emphasize why you know it's an attractive approach, but then show the last analysis and describe why it didn't get implemented. Find ways to engage them on that analysis of the underlying assumptions to see if you might come to a different result. Also, offer ideas for where they can make their mark, rather than waiting for them to give you direction. Show that you are appreciative to have a boss who wants to make the mission successful and wants to clear obstacles for those implementations. Most importantly, you want to be seen as a trusted advisor, that you will actively seek ways to effectively support the direction you're given, but that you will also provide valuable information to help them avoid or overcome foreseeable implementation roadblocks, including those areas of technology, cost, regulatory, or stakeholder objections.

JOHN: Great. Thank you, Patty. And Chris, maybe we could take this from a different perspective. Having come in as a political appointee, maybe you can talk about what you've seen to be effective in how the communication styles align to those individuals coming in based on their backgrounds, what's worked, and what recommendations you'd give to people that are career folks in making sure that they're getting those new political appointees in the best position for success that they can be?

CHRIS: Well, that's a great question. Thanks, John. I really do like Patty's categories of individuals that tend to show up in these jobs. Folks often forget that the number of political appointees in these large federal agencies are relatively small. For instance, with DHS, there's about 170 political appointees in a given administration and just shy of 240,000 employees overall that are career individuals.

And so they tend to sit on a spectrum, similar to what Patty was describing, and when I was in the state senate, we used to say, "Where you stand depends on where you sit," and that basically is to indicate that you have to really take a look at where the person who's coming in has been. Do they have experience in the federal service? If so, they're on that piece of the continuum that's going to have a much deeper appreciation for the senior executive service (SES), the GS schedule folks, the career individuals, who are really the glue that hold together, much of the department's operations year to year. If it's an individual that understands what they're getting into, and sees the benefit of working with career professionals, then the communication strands tend to be much stronger and easier to intertwine.

If you sit at the other end of that spectrum, where you're coming from a, a state government, or an association, or the private sector, you may not have as much familiarity with the mechanisms of working with career individuals. And so at that end of the spectrum, it tends to be a combination of hesitancy because they don't understand the federal levels, but also it could be some resistance to utilizing career officials because they just don't know how to use them, or they think that perhaps they don't want to carry out the agenda of the new administration.

So, you've got all these dynamics in play. I think the bottom line is really flexibility, understanding what it is the new appointee is trying to accomplish, whether it's the at the undersecretary level, assistant secretary, or perhaps a non-career SES that you're working with. What is the agenda? There are a lot of different agendas out there. The White House has an agenda. The department leadership does. The area that you're sitting in and trying to weave those together and utilizing the extreme and vast talent that exists out there in the career space is going to help people get to success much faster.

JOHN: Excellent. Thank you, Chris. One of the things that I'm sure that you've all had to deal with over the course of your career is how to adapt to a leader who's fresh off the campaign trail and has many ideas for the agency. Jim, what's the best way to navigate the delicate job of educating them and preparing them to lead their new teams?

JIM: Well, thanks, John. That's an excellent question and, I'll build on what Chris and Patty have both said, by saying first and foremost, change is never easy for federal leaders,

especially career leaders. When changes are brought into an organization, you can't take those changes personally. New political leaders will always come in with an agenda. They'll come in with a list of new priorities. They'll have a strong desire to leave their imprint on the organization, or on a particular policy issue. They will make changes to the organization. They may shift the deck chairs around a bit. They may bring a different leadership style and a different perspective. And senior career officials, they have a responsibility to execute the policies and the priorities of the President and, I'll say candidly, whether you like it or not, or whether you voted for the President or not, your job as a career official is to execute those policies. The voters have spoken, and government institutions need to be responsive to the American public. Otherwise, you become a mindless bureaucracy that just carries on without any responsiveness to the will of the people. As long as those policies are not illegal or immoral, you need to implement them.

So, how do you adapt to a new leader coming in off the campaign trail? Well, first and foremost, I think campaigning is far different than government. Many new political appointees come into an organization with lots of ideas, and then they quickly learn that those problems are not so simple. They're not so easy to fix. If they were easy to fix, it would have been done a long time ago. The world looks a lot different from inside the oval office than it looks from a campaign rally stage in Iowa. So, adapting to new political leaders as a career official, you need to pay attention to the environment. You need to understand the issues, not just from a substantive and technical perspective, but you also need to understand the political and policy context of those issues. You need to understand who your new political bosses are. It's common practice among senior career officials to research incoming political. Chris, I probably never told you this, but when I found out you were coming into the Department of Homeland Security, I did a ton of research on you. Who is this guy? What is he about? What's his background? What are his priorities? And so, when it came time to have meetings with you, I had, or thought I had an understanding of where you'd be coming from and I think it's prudent for career officials to do things like that.

As Patty said, political appointees will vary very widely in their experience. There's no one size fits all, and you need to understand the strengths and limitations of those leaders. Some will have deep substantive expertise on the issues, others will have virtually none. Some will have deep leadership experience managing large organizations and others will have virtually none. Some will have great people skills and others will have zero.

I was once briefing a political appointee on a brand-new issue and she responded by saying, "I'm not asking for your opinion. I want you to shut up and color." That is a true story, and it took every ounce of restraint that I had not to just get frustrated and walk out of the room. On the flip side, I've had very senior political leaders who would reach out to me to have private conversations and discussions along the lines of, "We're considering implementing this policy. What are your thoughts on X, Y, and Z? How would that impact the organization, or how would it impact relationships with the hill, or how would it have impacts on this or that?"

As a career official, when you're helping somebody adjust to their new role, a new political role, you need to really listen carefully. You need to understand your audience, and most of all, you need to be flexible. As Patty said, you don't want to be perceived as a nay-sayer. That doesn't help you, and it certainly doesn't help the organization that you represent. I think above all of that, you need to be honest and forthright with your new leaders. Don't sugar-coat the issues. Don't tell them what you think they want to hear. Always give the ground truth and speak truth to power. And to me, that's good government.

JOHN: Thanks for your insight, Jim. We've already seen a shift towards a more diverse administration with President-elect Biden's proposed appointees. What do you think are the most important elements of supporting a new and diverse group of leaders through the preparation and confirmation process? Sasha, maybe I could get your perspective on that?

SASHA: Absolutely. A quick plug for a previous episode of this mini-series where we dive into this in-depth. There's an organization called, [LCWINS](#), the Leadership Council for Women in National Security, that is really focused leading up to the election on gender parity, specifically in national security appointments. I had an opportunity to sit down with Lindsay Rodman, who is the executive director of that organization. For folks more interested in this topic, we have a [previous episode](#) out I would highly recommend.

But, something that Lindsay and I talked about a lot, that I've been thinking a lot about since then, and I think's really important, is a lot of us are really excited to see increased diversity, particularly in the national security sector at the most senior levels. But what we don't think about all the time is that when we get folks who are different, they're going to be different, right, when they get there. And they're going to act differently and have different expectations, and certainly backgrounds.

But as we bring in maybe non-traditional different more-diverse folks in all kinds of dimensions, we're going to have folks who are a little different than any of those kinds of specific categories that Patty laid out. Again, I think the big buckets still apply, but they're going to have a little different flavor to them, and we have to be ready for that, and frankly, sort of prepare for that, and then see that as a positive. That's the impact of bringing new thought. It's easy to say we want new thoughts and new background at senior leadership level, and then when it happens, I know, as a careerist, I'm like, "Wait. What, what are you talking about, right? You're not speaking my language. You don't understand what we do. You're not doing things the way we do it."

I think after my conversation with Lindsay, I really took away just thinking about how going into this change, is important. And that difference isn't always bad. It can be frustrating when you're knee-deep in an issue for 10 years and folks come in and want to change things up, but really listening and thinking about difference as a positive and seeking to learn new things, and new ideas, I think is an important frame of mind as we seek to increase diversity at the senior levels.

JOHN: Thank you, Sasha, and you raise some excellent points; bringing in diversity is meant to help take a different perspective and not try to conform it to the way things have always been done. So, making sure we're embracing that.

I now want to pivot to the topic of insuring continuity in the day-to-day business. There's a certain level of uncertainty that always surrounds a presidential transition, but despite that uncertainty, officials still need to focus on their agencies' day-to-day business. Chris, what advice would you offer regarding how to manage interim guidance while ensuring continuity in the crucial work that needs to be done?

CHRIS: Yeah. Well, the important thing is that most of the folks I've encountered, almost to a person in the federal government, are really mission centric. And so, they want to make sure that the business of government is being executed faithfully and in accordance with the laws and regulations that govern. And so, most of the career people understand that they've got a job to do regardless of the political folks coming and going. I got good advice from a couple of career individuals when I first got to DHS, that said, "Look, we're here to help you identify the guardrails, particularly on issues like, employment, and procurement, things of that nature. As a political appointee, you can get into trouble really fast if you don't listen to the folks on the ground that are the professionals."

That was good advice. Some political appointees don't adhere to that, and they get into trouble pretty quickly. I think the folks today will know quite a few of them through the years that flamed out because they just didn't listen. It was not good for the individual, and it wasn't good for the department or organization they were serving.

And so, it's recognizing that there is going to be a vast amount of disruption with personnel in the first year of a new administration when the career individuals are there to provide the continuity, particularly the SES members. One of the main purposes of the creation is to make sure you've got senior-level executives that know the job and the mission, who can be there to make sure that everything continues with the critical mission sets that need to be delivered for the American people. So, recognizing that you're going to have political coming in, it's really helping them understand, what those guardrails are, what they can achieve within the construct that's available to them, and then how do you help them get there based on the agenda that they're trying to deliver for the secretary of the new administration?

JOHN: And Sasha, I mean, you talked at the outset, while the FBI doesn't have a significant amount of transition, DOJ itself does. Can you talk about how you've seen this take place from your experience?

SASHA: Absolutely. I completely agree with Chris, and I would just add in that when we think about these guardrails, folks come in and they have a new agenda, or a new idea, and one of the biggest things in my experience, particularly with folks coming in from the private sector is as Chris is saying, they don't understand the playing field. I think, Patty, you talked about this in a different episode on the budget alone, right? It just doesn't work the way it works outside of government.

And so, I usually use three buckets. It comes out of public administration, but it's sort of small p, political, right? Who are the stakeholders, and what are the small p, political parameters, and guardrails you need to think about? What are the legal requirements, as Chris said, right? Sometimes folks coming in from the outside just, just simply don't understand we in government are held to a different set of requirements, legally. And then there's the managerial bucket, how things run in that particular organization. And sometimes there's just guardrails, right? It's just sometimes how things are done. It's not to say those can be changed over the longer term by leaders, but when they walk in the door and say, "Hire a hundred people for cyber tomorrow," you've got to go, "Okay, I feel you and I'm with you from a mission perspective, but let's walk through it." Small p, political, managerial, legal, right? Here's what we're up against. You tell me what you want to do, but again, I think coming to it from that constructive place, where you're saying, "I'm here to serve as, as all my colleagues have said, we're all mission-focused and want to get it done, let me just explain to you what the buckets of guardrails are, and then we can work together to think about what we can either overcome or not, or perhaps what the timeline is to make these things happen.

I think that's the best bet and again, this is just maybe my perspective, a little bit more of an academic perspective when you're talking about it and less personal, which can be hard when you're really vested in the mission work you've been doing, and someone comes blazing in with new ideas. But trying to pull back and take a little bit of an academic perspective and zoom out on it can be helpful, as well, and more constructive.

JOHN: Thank you. That's great advice and a great framework I think to consider as you're approaching this. In terms of consistency across time, and I'm really thinking from that career government officials' perspective, because that person needs to adapt across many administrations. How can they ensure continuity in their projects, in their goals? Patty, I'm sure you've seen this. Do you have some perspective to share on this topic?

PATTY: Absolutely. I would first just note that probably the most difficult places that you see that difficulty in maintaining momentum and maintaining continuity is in areas that are subject to significant policy shifts, or where there is potential for disagreement about who owns, and is charged with implementing an activity. Those are the areas that you often see someone new coming in and wanting to kind of take a step back, rethink the approach, which can look like everything just gets put on hold.

I'd first like to start by saying the negative, which is the bad things I've seen career officials do that I would strongly counsel people not to. The first one in that area is that you absolutely shouldn't tell the incoming political appointee, as Jim said, to sit in a corner and color. Do not discourage them from engaging on the topic and don't try to restrict their ability to move. Don't try to restrict their ability to implement or interact with the material or the direction. Similarly, I've seen officials basically try to say, like, "Don't worry about it. I've got it." That really doesn't work very well. It leaves everybody frustrated, and frankly, it paints the career official as someone who just looks unprofessional. So, I highly discourage you from taking that path.

Instead, I really recommend career personnel do a couple of different things. First one is, proactively prepare for what that change could mean. Develop concise reading materials or other artifacts so that you can engage in a conversation, but also have them walk away with something that's easy to digest. The second thing is, engage the incoming leader on the direction, either the direction that you're already on, so they understand it, or upcoming decisions that need to be made. I don't mean just pop out there with a question without context and see what they say, but instead find a useful way to give them a context so they can make informed decisions.

And the third one is to proactively seek opportunities for them to be the face of the program, or the face of upcoming milestones and decisions. It shows that they are advocating for and supporting the direction, and it also gives them a meaningful role in helping you implement the direction of the activity and supporting the mission.

I'll give one quick example of one of the ones I'm actually very proud of, that's directly in the most controversial area you can have. During the change from the Bush administration to the Obama administration, I was the career official that got to hold onto immigration reform. And taking all of the really important work that the careerists had done, researching every single version of how we would implement the potential legislative proposals that had been developed. What would this cost? Do I need a regulation? How long would it take to implement? Who needs to be part of implementation? All of that important work to try to take it into something very digestible.

We had, across the team, across DHS, all the entities involved in this, distill down key information related to all of those legislative provisions into a relatively easy-to-access set of materials. Then we made a little roadmap upfront so that the incoming team, we weren't saying you should go left, or you should go right, or you should include this, or you shouldn't, but what we were saying is, you have the benefit of all the analysis we previously did, so you can pick up and start from there, as you're having your debates about what you should include or not. It also showed we were ready to jump right in with additional analysis if they came up with a new provision for us to review.

That was one of the harder ones, because frankly, any time you've got a major shift in change, trying to say, "Listen to what the last gang said on immigration," it usually looks at very askance. The fact that we were able to kind of present qualitative material, as well as quantitative material on what it would take to implement, was the key.

JOHN: Thank you, Patty. What we're really talking about here, fundamentally, is managing a major amount of change, whether that's on the organization level or the individual level, and in times of presidential transition, there's so much change that goes on in the government at all levels. As a careerist, how do you adapt to those changes quickly, and in ways that ensure a smooth transition of power from your role? Sasha, maybe you could start us off.

SASHA: Sure. Happy to. It is hard when you're a careerist and you're mission-focused, and you have a decade of experience in a mission area, and you get a new boss with new ideas and not a lot of interest in managerial, political, and legal parameters, right? And there you are, trying to keep the ball moving forward. As everybody has said, trying to be constructive and supportive, but also knowing what you know about the way the world works in your department or agency. I think there's been so much great advice about this already. The one thing I would add, and I do have an example is kind of a willingness to be a little bit patient, take a breath, and translate, or customize.

So, the example I'll give is from a boss who is not a political appointee, but a very senior executive who came into a new role that I was working for at the Bureau. He definitely knows who he is, and we joke about this now, but one of my jobs was to implement the balanced scorecard that the FBI started implementing under Director Mueller. At that time, I wasn't leading the core strategy office, but I was in one of the operational divisions. One of my jobs was to get this new executive to engage with the balanced scorecard, right? It was happening. It is happening. The director was doing it and this person needed to engage. And this person said, "No, I'm not interested. Go away."

As a careerist, you're like, "Okay. Copy, boss. I'm going to go away for a little while and I'll kind of fend off the strategy management office of the director, and we'll see what we could do." So,

instead of sort of coming charging back and saying, you must, this must, the director is. I know we're going to get there. It's not only required, but also helpful for you. I kind of laid back and I bought a little time for the new boss. About two weeks later, this boss called me and said, "Sasha, get in here. We need to find a way to articulate where we're going, how we're getting there, and how I'm going to know when I arrive." And I was like, "Oh, okay. Copy, boss. Let me help you with that." So, we went back to the balanced scorecard tools, which are, of course, designed to do exactly that. We changed the colors and he knows this now, so we can joke about it, put handcuffs on the graphics. We brought it back and he was like, "This is amazing." And I was like, "Great." And so, off we went, and I kept two sets of books for a little while. The content was the same, but the version I used with him was just translated differently. He had to come to it, he had to understand it, and it had to be framed in a way that met his needs.

Meanwhile, my team translated that into the red, yellow, green bubbles and arrows, as they called it, that the director's office needed, and we got there, right? But, take that lesson as just sometimes you've got to just slow down, translate, let people breathe in the new air, understand what they need, and you'll get there, right? So that translation, that customization, I always recommend going through change like this.

JOHN: That's a great story, Sasha. Thank you for sharing that. One of the things we know that administrations do to affect their agenda as quickly as possible, is issue executive orders. We've historically seen a significant number of executive orders in new administrations' 100 days. How do you prepare for those inevitable changes, Chris, having been on that side, and seeing what happens?

CHRIS: Yeah. That's a good question in terms of both politicals and careerists. When you look at the spectrum of change that occurs, Patty made a good point about, where does it fall in terms of the issue sets. For instance, with the immigration set, you often see a much more extreme shift of late between administrations and in terms of the policy adoption. And so, with the first 100 days typically a new president would want to exercise what is now an expansive executive-authority to issue a series of executive orders to undo, or change direction, which is much more sharp in its trajectory than some of the other issue sets that present.

And so, with things like immigration, you're going to see change rapidly. In other areas, like cyber, where I think there's general agreement that there's certain things that need to happen in the federal government, you may not see as much policy change, but arriving political appointees, what they're looking for are a series of guidance related areas which basically look at, okay, I want to make this policy change, are there reasons why I can't accomplish this?

So you're really not having a fight with the new political appointee about what the policy is, if the administration has said this is the direction we're moving, but really about the mechanics of it,

and have it be a data-driven conversation about, this is what it will take to accomplish this. These are the limitations based on the federal acquisition regulations, or the resourcing coming out of the federal budget for this cycle, and really explaining to the new folks that we want to help you get there to the degree that we can, but there are limitations. You're sitting within an environment, as Sasha described, that does have limitations based on what you can accomplish. And if the new politicals can understand that, that the career folks are trying to help them get there and aren't being obstacles to that change, I think that you'll see a coalescing of the team. Those artificial delineations of political and career positions kind of start to fade away a little bit, and you really get much more of a team dynamic.

JOHN: Great. Thanks, Chris. And so, Jim, let's take a look at that same question through the lens of a careerist. Walk us through when you see all these executive orders coming in, how you and your teams have responded in the past.

JIM: Well, that's a good question, John, and to share my perspective. I'll say that executive orders are a really important part of the president's power, and the president's authority. At their very root, they are very bold and broad policy statements, and as a general rule, they don't tend to have a lot of details in them. Those details tend to be worked out at the agency and policy level, policy with a small p.

But, I will say candidly that sometimes executive orders will come out, and you know all about them, and you've been involved in one form or another in helping to craft them, or nuance them as they work through the inner agency process. And in other instances, they come out of the blue and you haven't had a chance to look at them or digest them, and they're basically handed down.

Oftentimes, it's an unfunded mandate, right? It's an executive decision and the Congress is the one who passes the budgets. So as a career leader, your boss, the president, has issued a policy directive and a policy statement in the form of an executive order that I am now responsible for implementing, and oftentimes as I said, they're unfunded.

So, first of all, you need to understand your authorities. You need to understand your budgets. You need to understand what you can do to implement those policies if you haven't had the opportunity to engage in the policy discussion prior to the issuance. And you need to figure out, okay, if this is a major initiative that my program or my agency is going to have to implement, how can I realign my existing resources, or my existing business processes to be able address this new policy directive?

Then, I think the other important piece of that is, how do I communicate these changes to my workforce. Sometimes executive orders are loved and embraced by an agency, and other times, they're at the working level, and other times, they're met with skepticism or disdain. My role as a senior executive in the agency is to execute those policies, and part of that execution is getting the workforce to understand the why, the how, and this is how we're going to do these things. Those aren't always spelled out in the executive order.

So, I think it's really incumbent to work through those details and understand the larger policy context. And when these things are flying out in the first 100 days at a very rapid pace, that's a full-time job, but it's an important one.

JOHN: Great. Thank you, Jim. We've obviously covered a lot of ground in today's discussion, but before we wrap, I'd like to take the opportunity to go around the horn and just see if you have any final thoughts or advice you'd like to share with our audience. Patty, let's start with you.

PATTY: I have two sets of advice. The first piece is for careerists. Try not to let your new leadership be caught off-guard. No one likes being faced with hard choices with no time to think about it. And given that there are many external factors in play, in particular, around upcoming budget deadlines, there are some areas where short turnarounds will be unavoidable. But try to keep those to the uncontroversial topics if you possibly can, rather than forcing your new leadership to make hard decisions, or to take positions with no time to think about it.

For incoming political appointees, I would strongly recommend investing time in your team. Get to know your people. The more time you get to know them early on, respecting their knowledge, knowing their personalities, it really pays off. You need them to be the eyes, ears, the implementing force on the ground at the end of the day. The better relationship that you have with them, the earlier you have it, the more likely that they will follow you off the cliff if need be.

Also, watch for fatigue. In areas of high turnover or controversy, staff are frankly just exhausted by prior rounds of going back and forth, or through the rabbit hole, on topics, especially when they see those priorities continue to get added to the plate, and nothing's dropping off. If you can help them with that, helping them prioritize, find ways to relieve that fatigue, it will pay off for you.

And finally, watch out for, "Yes, ma'am," or "Yes, sir." You need people who will professionally give you the input and advice you need, not just be an echo chamber, reinforcing your ideas. If you're not getting the input you need, see if you can find out why and seek to change the dynamic.

JOHN: Great. Chris?

CHRIS: Yeah. Patty makes excellent points there. I guess from the political appointee perspective, issue one is no surprises. When you come into these jobs, you don't want to have things land on your desk that have short fuses, that have the potential to end up on the front page of the Washington Post. It's bad for the political. It's bad for the career people. That's the kind of thing you want to avoid right from the start, because nobody wants to be embarrassed, particularly a new group of folks that are just arriving. They don't want to feel like they're getting something dropped in their lap that has the potential to be pretty messy.

The second thing would be, build bridges, right? Look for those opportunities to come together and coalesce around issues that are on the agenda, perhaps for the new leadership, and you can say, "Look. We're going to help you get there faster, so that quicker wins can materialize," because new teams tend to like quick wins, because it shows their leadership and other stakeholders that they're actually making progress.

And then the final thing, I think, is just patience, recognizing that the first year is going to be choppy all the way across, because you've got a whole series of middle-to-junior level folks oftentimes showing up before the folks that are going to run the components or divisions in the various departments. So, what happens is you're waiting on a political appointee that needs Senate confirmation in six, nine months, but you've got a series of people that may have come off the campaign that are eager to get started. It's, I think, reining and moderating so that people can be on the same page, moving forward as a unit.

Those are just some of the ideas I think that folks need to watch for.

JOHN: Sasha?

SASHA: Yeah. Thinking about careerists, which is obviously my experience, I think, approaching this time of change positively, sort of taking a breath and seeing it as an opportunity to learn and grow is important. I would always say, on an easy day at the FBI, it's hard. It's challenging and exhausting and complicated. Then you add change like this on top at any of these agencies, it's a lot for careerists who are working hard every day, on really complex issues. I think it's easy going into a time of change like this, to kind of revert to a defensive position, to go back to your crew and what you know and sort of steel yourself for this kind of change and new political. But I think, again, as Jim said, this is democracy. This is what we're all here for, and so to embrace it in that way, look for opportunities for alignment, explain those

parameters, but in a non-personal way. These are people with new ideas. They may not understand those parameters.

And so, again, I just think that it's really hard, because I know folks are exhausted and change is exhausting. But thinking about this as an opportunity, taking, breathing in the democracy of it, and trying to stay positive, I think is a really important piece for the careerists.

JOHN: Great. And finally, Jim.

JIM: Yeah. Going last is always fun, because I get to sum up what others have said. But I would really agree with Sasha, and the advice that I would give for career officials is to really adopt an attitude that political change is healthy. I think it's one of the things that makes our country and our system of government so great. It drives accountability. It holds us and career officials accountable to the American people. It's always change, it's always difficult, but with change comes opportunity. And so, my advice would be, embrace it.

JOHN: Thank you all for joining us on today's episode. I'm incredibly proud to have all of you and your diverse skillsets supporting Guidehouse and our clients, and I want to thank you for your time today. It was also a blast to sit on this side of the mic. Thank you, Sasha.

SASHA: Thank you so much for tuning in to the final episode of the Mission is Possible presidential transition mini-series. If you're interested in hearing more, look out for new Mission is Possible episodes in 2021 and check out our other episodes on Apple Podcasts, TuneIn, Stitcher, or on the [Guidehouse website](#).