



## Out of the Blocks

In the Massachusetts gubernatorial race, winning the election is only the beginning.

BY THOMAS P. O'NEILL III

DEAR GOVERNOR-ELECT,

Congratulations. The campaign is over. Now it is time to govern. Put aside the fights that defined a tough campaign and make the most of the transition period that lies ahead. Over the next two months, while Mitt Romney is still the governor, you will have a luxury you will not possess during the rest of the administration: time. Don't waste it. Having made your case to voters, you now need to give them and the legislature a clear sense of your objectives for the first 100 days. Forge specific, narrow goals that are achievable and, for goodness sake, make them at least slightly interesting.

Keep your eye on the ball. Though President Bill Clinton ran for office on the mantra "It's the economy, stupid," his administration was sidetracked in its very first week by a reporter's question about a campaign promise to allow gays in the military. As lieutenant governor, I was part of an administration that was similarly derailed in its infancy by the issue of legislative pay raises until my boss skillfully deflected this issue by blaming me.

Which leads me, naturally, to the importance of surrounding yourself with a first-class team. As the governor of the greatest state in the union, one with a deep intellectual foundation, you have the best minds in the nation as a resource for your administration. Look beyond Beacon Hill to Harvard,

MIT, Boston College, and our outstanding public institutions of higher education to attract the thinkers and tacticians that will help you solve the problems of today. Recruit the best people from the business world and nonprofit sectors, without regard for partisanship.

As you work to persuade and recruit leaders from a broad range of fields, give them a realistic sense of what is expected of them. Be clear that you will hold them accountable. They are part of a bigger team. That is not harsh. That is leadership. Give these leaders an open-door policy. If they are willing to agree to put the rest of their lives and careers on hold, they deserve the opportunity to be taken seriously. Once you set the tone, you can give your cabinet chiefs their space. Allow them to choose their own teams. You have picked them. Trust your own judgment and let them work. Value those who tell you the truth even when it is not pleasant or easy to hear. People who always agree with you aren't always telling you the truth.

Learn to discern daily problems from actual crises. When I was lieutenant governor, a senior aide once came to me with a "crisis" related to the Governor's Council. First, nothing related to the Governor's Council qualifies as a crisis. I told the staffer, "You'll know a crisis when it hits you, and this isn't it." Three weeks later, when Walpole State Prison erupted in violence and inmates seized control of the facility, we knew a crisis when we saw it.

At the same time, as you focus on your major goals and eschew the story of the day, don't detach yourself from reality. Understand that when something big is happening—and I mean really big—neither the media nor the public is going to care about your agenda. If there's a major snowstorm, you better be there. The ability to nimbly shift gears in response to external variables is the hallmark of a successful chief executive. This doesn't mean that the details aren't important. As part of staffing up your administration, you will need seasoned, skilled, and trusted professionals whom you can rely on to deal with the minutiae of daily governance. You cannot afford to be totally hands off. Check up on them. Have people on your staff whose job it is to double check the details to make sure they are on course. If your governorship is to work, you need a foundation of loyal and trustworthy staffers.

Don't underestimate the importance of the legislature or make the mistake of thinking that they answer to you. Their duty is to their constituents first, but you have the bully pulpit to persuade them. Assign top people to forge relationships with the legislature.

Be wary of thinking of yourself as "Governor" rather than Deval, Kerry, Christy, or Grace. Many of the people calling you governor now are the same people who were there when I served as lieutenant governor. They've survived changes of administrations and parties, and many will outlast you as well. Remember your family and your true friends who were with you before you ran for office. When things get tough—as they surely will—these are the people who will be with you. Tip O'Neill, my father and, in my opinion, the greatest politician who ever lived, was fond of reciting a poem called "Around the Corner" by Henson Towne at his old neighborhood reunion each year. He did it to remind all his friends from Barry's Corner, many of whom had reached great heights in their careers, of the importance of keeping in touch with those most important to you despite the other demands of life. I'm convinced he did it to remind himself as well.

A new administration is the most exciting time in political life, and your administration comes at a crucial time for this Commonwealth. Massachusetts looks to you for leadership. And remember, if something goes wrong, you can always blame your lieutenant governor. ♦