

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 12, 1971

To: Students in PP 240  
FROM: Richard E. Neustadt

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Subject: Operational skills

The instructors of this segment of the course (spring, 1971) proceed on three hypotheses (subject to change once we see what happens here!).

① The first hypothesis is that we cannot teach you in the classroom to be operationally skillful on the job. Skills are acquired by doing; learning takes place on the job. Classroom simulations are poor substitutes for working situations.

② The second hypothesis is that we may be able in the instance of some skills to reduce time required for your learning-on-the-job by classroom exercises which acquaint you in advance with what there is to learn. A "nodding acquaintance" might give you a head-start; at least it would spare you surprise.

③ The third hypothesis is that in using course-time (a scarce resource) for this purpose we should give priority to skills particularly relevant for staff-work, especially the sort that we have labelled "planning". This is work you all have done as students and are almost sure to do, in one guise or another, your first years out of school (even if you staff only yourselves).

As the Course Outline indicates, we plan four classroom exercises during this segment of the course. The arrangements for each exercise are summarized in your Reading List.

These four exercises are intended to "introduce" you to some seven skills. (That is, we consciously selected seven and have case-material to suit; other skills no doubt show up in the material regardless of intent). All seven skills are found to an extent in every exercise, although each exercise is meant to stress some over others, thereby aiding your acquaintance with particulars. Which exercise is meant to stress which skills we shall not say in advance. Look for all skills in each exercise; improve your acquaintance with those you find. (They may surprise you. You may surprise us.)

As a starter, we offer you the following brief characterizations of those seven skills. Their order has no significance except for being the way Lance Liebman remembers them: b,b; c,c; d,d; M:

1. "Orienting", (alt. "Mapping", or colloquially "Bathrooming": short for "finding your way to the . . .").

This is a matter of locating yourself, on the job, in relation to the "organization chart" formal and informal, the distribution of authority and influence (and over what), the twists and turns of action-channels (and for what), the operating styles of your associates, the network of their interpersonal relations, the expectations centering upon your job and you (if any) -- all as relevant to your responsibilities, objectives and pet projects, in whatever detail these warrant.

2. "Briefing"

This is the art of informing your "client" (employer or associate as the case may be) after first informing yourself. It thus involves two tasks and these are not the same. Briefing yourself is bound to be different from briefing others (to say nothing of differences among them). Moreover, both tasks involve at least three means of communication -- written, oral-face-to-face, oral-telephonic -- separate or combined. These, together with their combinations, are susceptible to a wide range of variation suiting individual tastes and talents. Choosing effective variations for oneself, and for one's client, case by case, is the heart of the art.

3. "Clearing"

To clear is to seek an expression of assent from others for something you propose. The others are colleagues, constituents, subordinates, "opposite-numbers", or still more distant players, as the case may be. The case depends upon your reason for the effort. Commonly there are five reasons, variously combined. First is compliance with procedures binding your position. Second is cover for you in case the proposal backfires. Third is record-building, the formal commitment of others. Fourth is trial-ballooning, an effort to uncover both support and opposition. Fifth is coalition-building, a search for viable consensus among allies. Associated with each reason is a set of skills (with parochial variations from place to place). These are not all the same. Woe betide the "clearer" who does not know why he clears or what the skills associated with his reason(s).

4. "Corner-cutting"

A law clerk is supposed to view each pending opinion as in principle worth his best effort, no distinction among them on that score unless imposed externally by time or by his judge's word. Theoretically, a student views assignments the same way. By contrast, a political official and his aides, beset routinely by far more demands than they can fill, must withhold their best effort from most of their doings and give the rest less, down to least: the "brush-off", the "walk-through", the "once-over-lightly". When it is "best" to do "badly", and how, and when it is time to change standards on what are matters of moment in all such jobs.

5. "Deadlining"

This means manipulating deadlines, an art with many aspects. Deadlines are requirements for given sorts of action at set times. Their sources may be dates established in a statute, or agreement, or a promise. Another source is "heat" caused by expectations of performance in a context of events. Since deadlines help to force actions through channels they are to be ridden by those seeking action and ducked by those seeking the opposite. Some deadlines, not all, can be brought into being at will; some can be advanced in time, some can be postponed, some can be strengthened, some weakened, some cancelled, some evaded. Both those who would ride and those who would duck need figure out when, where, and how these apply.

6. "Drafting"

Public affairs move on paper: memoranda, letters, speeches to constituents, statements to the press, messages to legislatures, bills, testimony, reports, regulations. These among others. Each is an art with conventions (and proportions) to be learned; some general, some parochial. Part of the art in each instance, expressed quite differently from one to another, is fitting the form to the audience (whether client or crowd). Another part of the art applies especially to ghosts who draft for use under another's name: fitting the form to the other's style. (Recall what Harry Truman's writers learned from John Hersey.)

7. "Motivating"

It is a sadness that the one who wants an outcome rarely can achieve it on his own. His desire is another's doing, often many others. The same can be said for most way-stations, even simple actions. "Motivating" thus becomes a crucial matter of inducing those who have the doing of what one wants done to do it. This means giving them cause in their terms, moving them to want it, too. There are three aspects: first what moves those others to want anything; second how is your thing to be fitted in; third what changes in it make a snugger fit (when it is snug enough will you still want it)? These questions are not perjorative.

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The seven skills above are not the only ones to be learned on the job, or necessarily the only ones with which it pays to be acquainted in advance. Other instructors might produce a different set; so might you fresh from Spring Exercise; so might we another year. For us these are a starting-point -- considered, but no more than that -- from which to probe, with you, the teaching implications of our three hypotheses.

R.E.N.

From: Richard E. Neustadt

Subject: Power-in-Positions, "Orientation," and Steel Seizure: An Introduction for May 6.

The steel seizure case affords rich illustrations of virtually all the analytic concepts and operational factors treated in this course. Also we are relatively wealthy in the depth and detail of available materials. We want you to master the case in as much detail as we've been able to assemble. You'll need that mastery in the final examination for this course.

The case provides you common ground from which to deal with questions testing theory and practice alike. We intend to use it as such. But we don't expect you to read everything at once with equal attention. What follows is a guide to preparation for next Thursday (May 6).

The May 6 session is intended to stress two aspects of orientation not previously emphasized (although certainly encountered) in our current series of exercises. These are:

1. Gauging the power built into positions with which you'll have to deal.

To illustrate we'll take the rough typology of power-as-effective-influence in Presidential Power (convenient, not conclusive) and apply it to a number of positions from the steel case which seem characteristic of positions found throughout American public life.

Step One: break power <sup>effective influence</sup> down into components:

- (1) "Bargaining advantages" from formal authority:

- a) statutory
- b) administrative
- c) customary, and accompanying status

- (2) Professional reputation (as applicable)

- (3) "Public Standing" (as applicable)

(4)... *not exhaustive eg. kinship (as in Boston); old school tie — even of previous agencies*

Step Two: Apply to such positions as Arnall's, Baldrich's, Clark's, Emerson's, Feinsinger's, Goldberg's, Lovett's, Murphy's, Pine's, Putnam's, Rosenberg's, Sawyer's, Steelweir's, Vinson's, Wilson's, etc.

Step Three: Think of illustrative counterparts at lower levels, closer to your own experience or to your inquiries during Spring Exercise. Consider especially "classic" positions: those you'd expect to encounter, under one title or other, at almost every level of almost any organization. Make the same application (and prepare to testify on call in class).

2. Gauging the impact of operating styles on power -- enhancing, diminishing, neutral -- in characteristic situations. To illustrate we'll take some "classic" situations from the steel case, e.g., press conferences, meetings-with-bosses, interagency negotiations, and estimate how players' styles affected use of the ostensible power in their positions.