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What America's Next President Is Really Getting Into

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The board room and the Oval Office are more alike than you think.

Corporate takeovers are high-wire acts requiring detailed preparation, an understanding of company cultures and organization, first-rate leaders and a mandate to create added value for stakeholders. Even in the best of circumstances, mergers and acquisitions frequently fail or fall short of expectations.

The same dynamics apply to the transfer of power from one presidential administration to the next—the largest, most complex and consequential takeover of any organization on the planet that will formally take place when a new U.S. president is sworn in on Jan. 20, 2017.

Just think about it. A candidate campaigns day and night for the presidency for more than a year, wins the big prize,

and two and a half months later walks into the Oval Office as the CEO of a government that spends almost \$4 trillion a year and has a workforce of 2.1 million civilian employees and more than 2 million active-duty military and reserve members. Now that is a test for even the most fearless or experienced leader.

The new president will start with empty management chairs in the major departments and agencies, but will have the chance to make 4,000 political appointments that include about 1,000 of the top leaders who will need Senate confirmation. Many will not be on the job for months or even a year or more as the new administration seeks to carry out its agenda, a situation that would be untenable to most business leaders.

Nonetheless, there will be numerous opportunities to move the country forward and improve government effectiveness

even as the president seeks to get the new team in place. At the same time, there will be risks from unexpected domestic and international crises, a fragile economy to steer, and inevitable complications dealing with Congress, that unpredictable board of directors with strong and varied opinions on issues large and small.

While it was once considered presumptuous to begin preparing to govern well in advance of Election Day, the stark reality is that the time between the casting of the votes and the inauguration is insufficient to properly do the job. The candidates must use the months ahead to build robust transition operations, and devote sufficient personnel and resources to ensure readiness for a smooth and effective takeover in the event of victory.

In 2012, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney began planning

in May, and following his formal nomination in August, took advantage of a 2010 pre-election transition law to help set up a transition shop in Washington, D.C., that grew to almost 600 people by Election Day.

Although he never had the opportunity to see it through, Romney's transition team laid out a plan for each department of government; created a roadmap for staffing and running the White House; developed extensive lists of candidates for top agency jobs and a timeframe for getting them confirmed by the Senate; established a budget framework; and set out strategies for implementing his campaign promises.

Passions are running high during this presidential election year, and there are strong disagreements about policy and the direction of the country, yet there should be broad consensus that the nation deserves a competent and high-performing government that will serve the needs of the citizens. Achieving this goal requires due diligence and seriousness of purpose by those seeking the highest office in the land.

Methodically laying the groundwork for governing will offer an increased opportunity for the start of a successful presidency, and help avoid policy blunders and management missteps that have sidetracked past administrations just as lack of preparation has undermined numerous corporate mergers and acquisitions.

It is not only in the self-interest of the candidates to build organized, high-functioning transition operations, it is their obligation to the country to be ready to hit the ground running on the very first day in office. Too much is at stake to start a presidency by relying on good luck instead of on thoughtful and thorough preparation

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