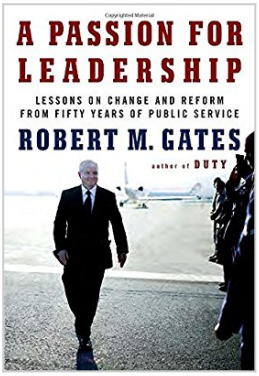

A Passion for Leadership: Lessons on Change and Reform from Fifty Years of Public Service

By Robert M Gates

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From the former secretary of defense and author of the acclaimed #1 best-selling memoir *Duty*, a characteristically direct, informed, and urgent assessment of why big institutions are failing us and how smart, committed leadership can effect real improvement regardless of scale.

Across the realms of civic and private enterprise alike, bureaucracies vitally impact our security, freedoms, and everyday life. With so much at stake, competence, efficiency, and fiscal prudence are essential, yet Americans know these institutions fall short. Many despair that they are too big and too hard to reform.

Robert Gates disagrees. Having led change successfully at three monumental organizations—the CIA, Texas A&M University, and the Department of Defense—he offers us the ultimate insider's look at how major bureaus, organizations, and companies can be transformed, which is by turns heartening and inspiring and always instructive.

With practical, nuanced advice on tailoring reform to the operative culture (we see how Gates worked within the system to increase diversity at Texas A&M); effecting change within committees; engaging the power of compromise ("In the real world of bureaucratic institutions, you almost never get all you want when you want it"); and listening and responding to your team, Gates brings the full weight of his wisdom, candor, and devotion to civic duty to inspire others to lead desperately needed change.

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Editorial Review

Review
Selection, *Huffington Post* 5 Political Books for Insight This Election Season (2016)
Selection, *Publishers Weekly* Business & Economics Top 10 for Fall 2015

"The book [politicians] should all admit to reading--and actually read... Refreshingly nonideological... Mr. Gates preaches the value of civility, internal transparency, and work-life balance." —*The Wall Street Journal*

“[Gates] brings [his suggestions] to life through stories of his own powerful and critical leadership roles.” —*The Washington Post*, Nine Leadership Books to Watch for in 2016

"Characteristically direct, informed and urgent... [Gates] offers us the ultimate insider’s look at how major bureaus, organizations and companies can be transformed, which is by turns heartening and inspiring and always instructive... Gates brings the full weight of his wisdom, candor, and devotion to civic duty to inspire others to lead desperately needed change." —*Long Island Weekly*

“*A Passion for Leadership* is a book that takes a pragmatic and powerful look at leadership and is a must-read for people who want to bring about a significant transformation within an organization… Boldly demystifies the view that it’s difficult to bring about an effective reform mainly in US institutions since they are either too big or excessively onerous… The ultimate insider’s perspective.” —*Project Management.com*

"Refreshingly free of managerial jargon, Gates' directness, practicality, and palpable optimism will prove encouraging to his audience." —*Booklist*, starred review

"Advice that should be passed on to leaders at any season of life and particularly helpful to those new to such responsibility. Highly recommended for public and academic leadership collections." —*Library Journal*, starred review

“[Gates] takes a powerful and pragmatic look at leadership in this book, a must-read for anyone who wants to be an agent of change… Readers will be struck by Gates’s humility, humor, and undeniable expertise. This practical, non-nonsense look at leadership will not only provide a useful guide but also serve as an inspiration.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“Informative, entertaining, and useful… The author’s real-life examples… show a side of bureaucracy and of upper-level leadership not often revealed to the public… A concise distillation of more than five decades of leadership knowledge—good reading for all of the 2016 presidential candidates.” —*Kirkus*

About the Author
ROBERT M. GATES served as secretary of defense under both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama. He was also an officer in the United States Air Force and worked for the CIA before being appointed director of the agency. A member of the National Security Council staff in four administrations, he served eight presidents of both political parties. He was president of Texas A&M University from 2002 to 2006, is currently chancellor of the College of William & Mary, was named president of the Boy Scouts of America in 2013, and has served on several corporate boards of directors.

1

Why Bureaucracies So Often Fail Us

Everybody hates bureaucracies, even those who work in them. Yet in twenty-first-century America, apart from a handful of hermits and survivalists living off the grid, dealing with impenetrable, impersonal, infinitely complex, obdurate, arrogant, and often stupefyingly incompetent bureaucracies is an everyday travail for everyone. Think about it: Social Security. Medicare. Local, state, and federal taxing agencies. Getting a driver's license. Obtaining documents for business, remodeling your house, or getting a building permit. Any federal department or agency. Dealing with the phone company, your credit card issuer, a credit bureau, a billing error by a big chain store. Navigating airport security, health-care insurance, university and public school administrations.

Hardly a day passes in the life of any American without his or her having to confront one or another bureaucracy, standing in line, dialing a telephone number, only to enter an automated labyrinth seemingly devoid of humans and humanity, being placed on indefinite hold, trying to access a bad government or business Web site, or being shuffled from one office to the next to find that one person, the anomaly, who can fix a problem. Encounters with a bureaucracy almost always have stress and frustration as by-products. And finding someone in a bureaucracy who is pleasant *and* can solve one's problem quickly is so unusual as to be very nearly a life-altering experience. President Lyndon Johnson once said, "If the first person who answers the phone cannot answer your question, it is a bureaucracy." Don't we all know it.

Despite political paralysis in Washington and elsewhere, bureaucracies inexorably—day by day, year by year—intrude ever more pervasively into our daily lives. They influence our health, our safety, our economic well-being, our children, what we eat, what we drive, and every business, farm, and educational institution in the land.

Yet even as bureaucratic tentacles extend their reach into every nook and cranny of America, the litany of their incompetence and arrogance grows exponentially. Many of these institutions are now indispensable, but their repeated and highly publicized sins of omission and commission have shaken the public's confidence that they—that government in particular—can do *anything* right. Just a sampling of lapses and failures in recent years regardless of who was minding the store in Congress or the White House is profoundly disturbing: 9/11 itself, a failure of intelligence and law enforcement of monumental consequence; the failure of virtually all our financial regulatory and administrative bodies to anticipate and prevent the abuses that led to the financial meltdown in 2008–9; the Federal Emergency Management Agency's handling of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and other disasters; the lack of planning for post-invasion Iraq in 2003; the scandalous treatment of outpatient wounded warriors at Walter Reed Army Medical Center; the multiple failures of the Veterans Affairs Department; challenges to the integrity of the Internal Revenue Service; lapses and scandals of the Secret Service; the initial handling of the Ebola crisis by the Centers for Disease Control; the botched rollout of the Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare); the ever-changing and inconsistent rules relating to airport security; the extraordinary waste of development dollars in Iraq and Afghanistan; underperforming public schools; the inability to control our southern border; and so much more. The institutions—the bureaucracies—responsible for these disasters and embarrassments are crucial to us. Some of them have previously been among our most respected organizations. Now they are failing us.

One of my favorite sayings about government—attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte, of all people—is "Never mistake for malice that which is easily explained by stupidity or incompetence." No one set out to make bureaucracies the enemy of ordinary people, resistant to change, impervious to new realities, and

incompetent. Few if any individuals choose public service as a career because they want to make life miserable for people or to work for some hapless bureaucracy. Indeed, I can attest from decades of working with talented and dedicated public servants, the opposite is often true. And yet the humorist Will Rogers could say decades ago, “I don’t make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts.”

The world of business—the private sector—as I have observed it both as a customer and from the corporate boardroom has its own issues with bureaucracy. While the obstacles to cutting costs and becoming more efficient are more onerous for the public sector—local, state, and federal—leaders in both the public and the private sectors face multiple barriers to innovation and reform to cope with new and changing circumstances. For example, leaders in both sectors often encounter entrenched cultures that make real change difficult, as well as lower-level organizations resistant to guidance from the top, determined to preserve their piece of the cake and their status. Trimming organizational deadwood can be as challenging in the business world as in public institutions. It is a rare soul who has not been frustrated and maddened by multiple business bureaucracies—not to mention disastrous business decisions that cost jobs and create economic turmoil and heartache.

But for most businesses, success and self-preservation require that leaders and employees work hard every day to innovate and change with (or before) the times, to overcome sluggishness, poor customer service, and the stifling effect of layer upon layer of management that inevitably delays and complicates decision making. As a rule, companies that do not promote innovation, strive to reduce overhead costs and managerial layering, and become more customer-friendly don’t do well in the long term.

The public sector, however, faces multiple unique obstacles to reform, whether it’s cutting costs, becoming more efficient, encouraging innovation, or changing to cope with new challenges or changed circumstances. And no matter how different in purpose or size, for nearly all public bureaucracies those obstacles are the same.

The everyday experiences of Americans make a compelling case that bureaucracies do not work and cannot be reformed, that we are stuck. After so many highly visible failures, public opinion polls show that, as I’ve said, a majority of our citizens have lost confidence in our institutions and in government itself. The political Left is too often indifferent to obvious bureaucratic incompetence and failure because it believes that whatever the problem, government is the solution. It’s tough making the case for more government when what we have works so poorly. The political Right welcomes bureaucratic incompetence as proof that government rarely does anything well, and thus it reinforces its belief that whatever the problem, government involvement will probably only make things worse.

We can—and will—continue to argue endlessly about the proper role of government in the United States, but the fact is we have a bunch of it and most of it doesn’t work very well. Because we actually do need government, failure to fix it imposes huge financial costs in terms of incompetence, time wasted, and inefficiency, not to mention the cost in public cynicism and the loss of credibility of both government and those who lead it.

In truth, virtually every bureaucracy needs to reform: to modernize, get rid of paralyzing procedural and operational barnacles that have accumulated over decades, reduce waste, and become more efficient and effective. When in 2010 we could find $180 billion to cut (over a several-year period) in bureaucratic overhead in the Pentagon in just a few months, you have some idea of the “opportunity” offered by far-reaching reform. Defense is far from alone in this regard.

I believe bureaucracies can be fixed: changed, made more cost-effective, user-friendly, efficient and

responsive, and shaped to meet new problems and challenges even in an age of austerity. I know because, with the help of some great colleagues, I did it at three very different institutions I led—the Central Intelligence Agency and the other dozen or so U.S. intelligence agencies; Texas A&M University, now the nation's fifth biggest; and the Department of Defense, the largest and most complex organization on the planet. All three, and virtually all other public institutions, have similar challenges to change and reform. And my colleagues and I at all three places showed that a dysfunctional political environment is not, in itself, an overriding impediment to bureaucratic reform.

You may fairly ask what three apparently unique organizations—the CIA, A&M, and Defense—have in common and what lessons they offer for leaders at all levels of government and in business as well. Let me suggest just a few examples. While everything I did at the CIA was supposedly secret, everything at the university was public, and Defense was a mix, in reality I had no secrets from any of my overseers—the White House, the governor's mansion, Congress, the state capitol. And between aggressive media and leaks, I had few secrets from the public either. I had to do much of my business at all three in the public eye. This feature is common to virtually all public-sector bureaucracies. The influence of elected officials on Pentagon programs and funding was far more prevalent and political than at either the CIA or A&M, but even at the latter two every dollar the institution spent had to be approved by elected officials, who were not shy about making clear their priorities and preferences. The role of politicians in the everyday life of any public organization is significant; it's just that their influence is applied differently depending upon the agency or department.

Also, at the CIA and Defense I supposedly could tell people what to do, whereas persuasion was my only recourse at A&M. However, while I could give orders at the CIA and the Pentagon, no successful leader of either ever did so; on the big issues, like the budget, the list is long of directors and secretaries whose ambitious plans crashed and burned because they failed to consult and persuade the intelligence professionals and the uniformed military to go along with their plans. In sum, when it comes to the fundamentals, these three organizations have much in common.

Similar traits can be found in most other institutions. I entered government nearly fifty years ago and, working for eight presidents, had the opportunity to observe the federal government at close hand—including many departments and agencies not associated with national security. As president of Texas A&M, I had a ringside seat to watch how state government and bureaucracies operate. And over the last twenty years, I have served on the board of directors of ten companies, where I had ample opportunity to observe the challenges of bureaucratic bloat, turf protection, empire building, and resistance to change facing their CEOs. And now I am national president of the Boy Scouts of America, which, like any big, century-old organization, has its own bureaucratic problems. Despite vastly different roles and missions, all these institutions have characteristics—and challenges—in common.

Few leaders will ever run the CIA, the U.S. military, or a huge university (or, fortunately for most, deal with Congress). Even so, I will make clear in these pages how the lessons I learned in those institutions are broadly applicable for, and useful to, leaders in nearly all bureaucracies. In external appearance, people are infinitely diverse, yet beneath the skin our anatomy and the way the body works are pretty much the same. So it is with bureaucracies. Each shares a lot of DNA with its kin, even distant cousins. You will see that despite the vast variety of bureaucracies in both the public and the private sectors, their cultures, organizational structures, and both internal and outside influences on their operations and behavior are remarkably similar. And thus the strategies and techniques for changing them—reforming them—are remarkably similar.

In the pages to come, I will dwell often on my experiences in government. Mainly, that is a manifestation of my belief that they offer considerable insight into what works well or badly. Partly, though, I hope that

recounting those experiences will provide—as a bonus, if you will—information about our government that is worth the reader knowing as a citizen.

Despite the many frustrations and very real shortcomings associated with government, I believe Americans have, at every level, the most dedicated, capable, and honest public servants anywhere. In my long career in government, I saw in U.S. political appointees and career civil servants, university faculty and staff, men and women in uniform, and intelligence officers in mufti—public officials all—an extraordinary number of people of the highest quality serving with steadfast integrity and love of this country and what it stands for. They want to be proud of the organizations they work for; they want the admiration and esteem of the citizens they serve. They, too, are often frustrated by the shortcomings of their institutions.

So, what gets in the way of reform? Why is reform of public institutions particularly difficult?

For openers, virtually all public bureaucracies report directly or indirectly to elected officials, whether Congress, state legislatures, presidents, governors, mayors, or city and county governing boards. Their political interests (getting reelected usually foremost among them) are often in direct conflict with efforts to streamline or reform the institutions they oversee. For example, despite all the congressional rhetoric about waste and inefficiency in the Department of Defense, any effort to cut unneeded programs or facilities (and the related jobs) in members' home districts or states invariably provokes howls of outrage and adamant opposition. Despite congressional demands for greater integration of American intelligence agencies, members deny intelligence executives (and the president) the authority to actually make that happen. At the same time state legislators rail against tuition increases at public universities, they slash state funding for those same institutions—and continue to impose inefficient state bureaucratic procedures that waste taxpayer (and student) dollars and inhibit cost cutting at those same universities. They don't want to relinquish political control even as state funding levels plummet to 10–20 percent of operating budgets. In short, politics—both local and national—is a significant obstacle to reform and adaptive change.

But it's not just politics that is the problem. Elective bodies with oversight responsibilities also are unreliable, unpredictable, and even irresponsible when it comes to the lifeblood of public institutions—funding. How can any organization do long-range planning when it never knows from one year to the next how much money will be available or, in the case of federal agencies, when the money will actually be approved and can be spent? Not once when I was secretary of defense did Congress approve our Defense appropriations before the beginning of the fiscal year in which the money was supposed to be spent. In a couple of instances, we didn't know how much funding would be available until midway through the year, and once (and several times since I retired) Congress never did approve our annual appropriation. And when you toss in mindless acts of congressional misgovernance—such as shutdowns, furloughs, and sequestration—and micromanagement masquerading as oversight, just keeping the doors open is a challenge. Even on the state level, funding levels from one legislative session to the next are usually crapshoots.

To draw a vivid contrast between leadership in business and that in government, imagine a company with a board of 535 directors, each of whom has as his or her principal objective personal self-interest and political self-preservation as opposed to a responsibility to the institution he or she oversees. Further, unlike a corporate board, Congress draws no distinction between strategic direction—providing big-picture guidance on operations and long-range priorities—and trying to manage the day-to-day affairs of the institution despite its proven incompetence to do so. Leaders in business by law are supposed to focus narrowly on what is in the best interest of the company and its shareholders. In the public sector, broader considerations—especially political—come into play in ways that make reform or change more difficult.

Another unpredictable factor in the oversight of institutions—mainly public ones but a lot of businesses as well—is the uneven quality of the individuals elected or appointed to fulfill the role. Members of Congress, state legislators, and (especially for business) regulators, for example, vary dramatically in expertise, diligence, understanding, and just plain smarts. Too often, it is the members who fall short in one or more of those categories who create the most problems, block reforms and appointments, oppose constructive change, and try to impose unworkable or costly policies, rules, or programs. In universities, too many individuals elected or appointed to oversight boards (regents, for example) know virtually nothing about higher education in general or the issues facing a given institution. The quality and qualifications of individual regents vary widely, from micromanaging, ill-informed, arrogant, self-serving cronies of a governor to independent, thoughtful, and open-minded appointees who add value and work hard (and selflessly) to make an institution better. Similarly, to a much lesser degree but in still too many businesses, one can find a wide range of quality in leaders, both in the boardroom and in the executive suite. Such wide variation in the quality of those charged with oversight is well-known to every public servant at every level of government—and to employees in more than a few companies. This, too, is an obstacle to bureaucratic reform and change.

Another big problem is that, at least at the most senior levels, many bosses in public institutions (again, at all levels of government) lack managerial or leadership experience. Even when the appointments process is working well in terms of focusing on qualifications rather than political loyalty or persuasion, too often senior government positions are filled with people—academics, lawyers, financiers, consultants, contributors, members of legislatures or their staffs—who may have reputations for expertise in a particular function or field but who haven't got a clue about how to run anything. Moreover, many appointees hope or expect to be in the position for a relatively short time, and a significant number see the public sector executive job as a stepping-stone to something more exalted. As a short-term steward, a boss who is a political appointee too often thinks short term and primarily in terms of how his personal performance will be perceived externally—including by the person who appointed him. Thus, he avoids controversial moves, fails to prioritize, and underinvests, especially in areas that only matter in the longer term. In short, most political appointees measure success by a yardstick other than effective management or successful institutional reform. Indeed, too many of these folks view change and reform as bad risk-reward trade-offs because such steps can create internal as well as external opposition and often bad press.

When a businessperson appointed to lead a government department falls on her face, it's often because nothing in her corporate experience has prepared her for the complexities of running an organization with the "help" of the president or governor, Congress or state legislature—much less a raft of lower-ranking political appointees in her organization whose loyalty as often as not is primarily to the political operatives and politicians who got them their jobs and not their day-to-day boss.

Another reality would-be reformers face in the public sector is that almost every career employee has some form of job security. While most think of tenure as lifetime job security for university faculty, in truth, except in dire budgetary circumstances, the uniformed military and civil servants have significant job protection as well. While firing people has become more difficult in the private sector, it is still relatively easy (especially if incompetence, mistakes, or misbehavior have been documented) compared with the public sector. Unlike in business, those opposed to an agenda for change or reform cannot easily be fired or even moved out of the way to another job. As a result, most civil servants who are opposed to change or reform can simply outwait the reformer. They were there when he arrived; they will still be there when he leaves.

In contrast, there is usually no job security at or near the top of public bureaucracies. In the executive branch of the federal government, about the only senior officials who have a term of office specified in law are the president, the vice president, and the director of the FBI (ten years). Every cabinet officer and all political

appointees serve “during the pleasure of the President of the United States for the time being,” as their commissions read. That is not exactly reassuring or conducive to pursuing risky and difficult change. There is significant turnover among such officials, and anyone coming in with a mandate to make changes has no idea how much time he or she may have to do so. The average tenure of an assistant secretary in a cabinet department is about twenty-one months, and it takes most people six to twelve months to get their feet wet. Officials’ uncertainty about how long they will be in office is yet another impediment to reform and change.

In my very limited experience with unions in the public sector, at the federal level, they were not a particular obstacle to change. Most of the sclerosis that impedes change in terms of hiring, firing, work rules, pay, and personnel is generally hardwired into law or regulations. Union activity or leverage is usually aimed at legislators, not within the bureaucratic institution itself. This was certainly the case at the Department of Defense, where part of the civilian workforce is unionized. The unions there were an obstacle to only one change I wanted to make—an attempt to alter the pay structure and, in particular, to provide incentive pay for civilians. The unions did play a part in killing that reform, but it was through powerful allies in Congress rather than through direct action internally. Their influence is, I imagine, more pronounced at the local level. Still, I believe that when it comes to reforming the *way* business is done and the *organizational structures* for doing so—in contrast to pay and benefits—with the right approach, unions can be partners, not obstacles.

If you think removing *people* in a government bureaucracy is difficult, just try eliminating an agency or office once created. Talk about nine lives! In the Pentagon, if you stamp out an organization one day, it will likely spring up in another form and under another name—sort of like crabgrass—somewhere else. Senior Defense officials have eliminated organizations to reduce costs, only to discover later that no one lost his or her job—people just got shuffled elsewhere. It’s the old “find the pea under the walnut” scam, and the boss is the sucker. I was the yokel more than once.

Business also does not have to take seriously the influence of retirees or alumni as do a number of public institutions, including virtually every university and college, the military, and at least some civilian organizations (for example, charities and foundations, police and fire departments). I found it ironic that students or employees who bellyached constantly about the shortcomings of an organization while they were still there, upon graduation or retirement decided the place was, in fact, nearly perfect. And thus they opposed any change as undermining the foundations, culture, and traditions of the organization. Perhaps an exception to this is in the uniformed military, where, upon retirement, some senior officers suddenly become much smarter and strong advocates for change, coming up with ideas for reform that somehow eluded them while they were in positions of responsibility and had the authority to make those changes themselves (or at least push for them). At the same time, most military retirees continue to advocate for their own service (army, navy, marines, air force) and for programs near and dear to them and their service. Pro-reform or against, military or civil servant, spy or student, the voices of the departed demand to be heard by the leaders of many public institutions—and are.

Bureaucratic reform, ironically, must also overcome the growing demand for transparency in decision making. Imagine corporate executives having to devise strategy, internal restructuring, personnel policies, and marketing plans entirely in public. Or a chief executive officer of a company meeting with his or her board of directors on future strategy in a town hall. What is unthinkable in the business world is everyday practice in the public sector. Granted, some businesses—especially very large ones in politically sensitive arenas such as finance and banking, aerospace and defense, communications and social media, the Internet, pharmaceuticals—are subject to intense public scrutiny and their own form of congressional or other oversight. But the number subjected to unrelenting public attention and exposure is relatively small compared with the entire universe of companies.

However, for the would-be reformer in a public institution, plans for change are publicly aired by leaks, regulation, or state law—no matter how preliminary or immature—making her a rich, inviting target for advocates of the status quo. While the reformer is still developing a battle plan, opponents of change have ample time to deploy their forces and counterattack. Public scrutiny is constant, and the willingness of subordinates to create bold or controversial plans for change is undermined by the likelihood those plans and the identity of the author will be leaked, publicized, and meanly criticized. In states where legislation mandates open meetings, like Texas, almost nothing can be kept confidential. As an example, a university president there cannot meet privately with the board of regents to discuss strategic plans or direction; a gathering of more than three regents is considered a public meeting and must be announced in advance and opened to the public. While the CIA and the Defense Department operate under very different rules of confidentiality, the reality is that a culture of pervasive leaking of information in Washington, D.C., has nearly the same effect as open records and meetings laws. Without draconian measures by the CIA director, defense secretary, or other senior officials, any and all plans for institutional or budgetary reform soon find their way to Congress and the media. The reform leader of any public institution—even in the areas of intelligence and defense—must assume that everything she does or says will quickly be in the public domain, making the development and execution of reforms difficult in the extreme.

The culture of public bureaucracies and all too many private sector organizations is also a serious obstacle to change and reform. Fundamental to bureaucratic culture is risk avoidance: It is almost always safer for the public bureaucrat—and too often the business bureaucrat as well—to say no than yes. In a public environment of exposés, recrimination, faultfinding, and investigations both by officials and by the media, not acting is usually safer than acting—especially if the action involves something new or different. Common sense, and sometimes even doing the humane thing for someone, are set to one side out of fear of incurring a cautious supervisor's displeasure or being disciplined—or even fired—for not going "by the book."

This problem has been mightily aggravated by the more intrusive role of new forms of media that provide detailed coverage of what used to be minutiae below the threshold of major media interest. Blogs now specialize in widely distributing what was once office gossip and watercooler talk about officials under pressure or programs facing challenges, often even before senior management is aware or has had a chance to act. All this affects behavior and makes everyone more cautious. Further, the proliferation of investigative bodies, inspectors general, quasi-independent evaluation entities within traditional bureaucracies, together with the steadily growing propensity among politicians over the years to look for someone to hang for every single problem or hiccup, has contributed not just to risk aversion but to inaction. This is replicated to one degree or another at every level of government. Fear of making a mistake and being placed in the public dock keeps already cautious bureaucrats—and their political appointee overseers—looking over their shoulders.

Also fundamental to bureaucratic culture both in business and in the public sector is the "not invented here" defense mechanism. Almost any idea for improvement or reform or just doing something more efficiently that originates outside the affected organization automatically generates antibodies of opposition to repel the invading idea, especially if it comes from a known critic. Even more personally, a supervisor all too often rejects his own employees' ideas for improvement simply because they were not his ideas. Further, it is in the nature of bureaucracy for the boss at each level to want more people and more resources: each often measures her personal success not by customer satisfaction but by the size of her "empire." The idea of willfully shrinking one's empire to make the overall enterprise more successful and more efficient borders on heresy. And there is no financial incentive, personally or institutionally, to do so in a public bureaucracy.

Public institutions are often not served well by their culture of insularity—the conviction that no one outside

the institution can possibly understand what those in it do, how they do it, or why they do it. In the private sector, the marketplace demands a far greater openness to new ideas. The near-total absence of competition to public bureaucracies enables and strengthens a fortress mentality. There is, in many bureaucracies, a pervasive sense of uniqueness and, implicitly, superiority. This is best captured by the mantra at Texas A&M about being an Aggie: “If you’re on the outside looking in, you can’t understand it. If you’re on the inside looking out, you can’t explain it.” That sentiment is widely shared among the military and intelligence officers and, I’m sure, by law enforcement and many others. A sergeant in Afghanistan once told me in a town hall meeting that the values and character of those in uniform were far superior to those of the American public. The strong belief in the “oneness” of those inside and a common defensiveness against those on the outside are both great strengths and great weaknesses. They are strengths in that traditions and the feeling of being part of a special family are central to the success of such institutions. They are weaknesses because such a spirit is an intangible but powerful barrier to change and to outside ideas. In all cases, they make the job of reformer or “change agent” much more difficult.

The formidable barrier to reform represented by institutional culture and traditions was well captured by the great historian Jacques Barzun in his book *From Dawn to Decadence.* After spending nearly half a century at Columbia University and the University of Cambridge, he wrote, “Institutional self-reform is rare; the conscience is willing, but the culture is tough.” Amen.

Business and public bureaucracies have in common many obstacles to change, but the final obstacle to reform unique to public institutions is simply the absence of any economic incentive to do so. If a public sector organization is pretty much guaranteed some basic level of funding year in, year out, what is its economic incentive to change or reform? More narrowly, unlike business, the public sector cannot use compensation as either reward or punishment of employees at any level. Management has almost no authority to affect the pay of those working for them, except through promotions and even those are governed largely by minimum “time in grade” (normally, a certain number of years must elapse for someone even to be eligible for promotion), the availability of positions at the higher grade, and institutionalized promotion processes. At the federal level, the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act provided for performance bonuses at senior levels (up to $20,000), but the number of recipients has always been severely limited, and only a small number of civil servants are even eligible. At times, even those bonuses have been suspended for budgetary reasons. Small, onetime performance awards are available (usually a few hundred to a thousand dollars or so), but not much used by supervisors. How, then, to motivate people to work harder or smarter?

When I was interviewed to be president of Texas A&M, I told the search committee that if they were looking for someone to maintain the status quo, they had the wrong guy. “I don’t do maintenance,” I told them. My interest, I continued, was taking on the challenge of making a good institution better. I would be “an agent of change” while preserving the core values and traditions of the university. This was, I had discovered, my “core competency.” I loved all three institutions I led, but part of that love was the conviction that each could be better.

My first (probably presumptuous) essay on how to improve the CIA—specifically, its analysis of the Soviet Union—was published in 1970, just two years after I finished training and reported for work. A little over a decade later, in late 1981, the CIA director, William Casey, and deputy director, Admiral Bob Inman, advanced me over many more senior officers to head all of the CIA’s analytical effort—several thousand people—because I had specific plans (based in part on nearly six years on the National Security Council, or NSC, staff at the White House) on how to improve the quality of that analysis. (More on that later.) And when I became director of central intelligence (DCI) a decade after that, I faced the need to completely

reorient the CIA and the U.S. intelligence community away from their decades-long preoccupation with the Soviet Union, which was collapsing. With the help of a talented team and some two dozen task forces, that reorientation was well under way by the time I stepped down in 1993.

Texas A&M University is, as I often described it, "a unique American institution." An all-male military college of a few thousand students until the 1960s, it now has more than fifty thousand students on its main campus. Regents, alumni, faculty, staff, and students in 1999 joined together in setting the university on a path to even greater excellence, producing a report— *Vision 2020*— with a dozen major aspirational goals. It fell to me to lead implementation of that effort beginning in 2002.

President George W. Bush asked me to become secretary of defense in November 2006. The wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan were going badly; troops and commanders weren't getting the equipment they needed; outpatient care of our wounded was a scandal waiting to break; the Pentagon bureaucracy in all the military services remained focused on planning for future wars while seemingly incapable of fighting the two we were already in (or preparing for those we would be most likely to fight in the future); dozens of major equipment and weapons programs were overdue, overcost, and, often, no longer relevant; and bureaucratic overhead had swollen dramatically in the years since 9/11. Stewardship of our strategic nuclear forces had deteriorated, as repeated crises would demonstrate. I dealt with all these— and many other— problems.

Drawing on my experience leading transformational change in diverse organizations over many years, I aim in this book to offer leaders in bureaucracies— public and private and at all levels of leadership— specific ideas and techniques that can enable them to successfully reform and improve their organizations. Rather than create endless hypothetical situations and offer step- by- step action plans for those situations, I believe the principles of leading reform and examples from my experience are easily customized for and applicable to extraordinarily diverse situations. Some of what I have to say is just plain common sense, but you probably would not be surprised by what a rare commodity that is in bureaucracies. While my focus is primarily on public institutions, what I have written about leading reform of bureaucracies is broadly applicable to organizations of every size and kind: business for sure, and volunteer organizations, civic and service groups, schools, and churches as well. We need leaders up and down the organizational ladder with vision and purpose who can mobilize the willing and bring productive change.

At a time when so many Americans are frustrated and angered by government gridlock, political paralysis, and expanding government bureaucracies that intrude ever more into our daily lives, I am an optimist. I believe that with the right strategies and the right skills leaders can—whatever direction politics takes us—reform and change these institutions. Reform is not a luxury but a necessity. Failure to fix our institutions, and to do so urgently, can have catastrophic consequences for our way of life, our financial security, our national security, our freedoms, and, at times, our very lives. By showing that things *can* change, *can* get better, I hope in some small but significant way to convince Americans that the institutions that too often fail us can be reformed and to show that leaders at all levels can be involved in making that change come to pass. With skilled leadership, things can be made to work so much better.

This book is about people and how to lead them where they often don't want to go. It is about how a leader can make an institution better, both for those who work there and for those they serve. It is about improving people's lives.

I have an ulterior motive as well in writing this book. It is a sad truth that, broadly speaking, public service as a calling has been in disrepute for a number of years. The tone has been set from the top as, for decades,

successive presidential and congressional candidates in both parties have run for office campaigning against the very government and public servants they hope to lead. Year after year, it becomes more difficult to persuade capable young people to enter the public arena. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the percentage of federal employees under thirty was just 7 percent in 2013. It was nearly three times that percentage in 1975. Political paralysis and its consequences—government shutdown, bitter partisanship that blocks commonsense solutions to important national problems, and other irresponsible actions, not to mention the government's long-standing reputation for red tape and hierarchy—discourage young citizens with desirable and needed talents from entering public service. If, through this book, I can demonstrate that despite the politicians public institutions and other organizations can be reformed, made more efficient and more responsive to the needs of our people, perhaps more young people will be encouraged to consider devoting some portion of their lives to their fellow citizens.

I hope that this book will be of value to young people who aspire to become leaders: first, by demonstrating to them that public service organizations can be worthy of their talents; second, should they choose that path, by offering them, early in their careers, some of the tools and personal attributes for leading change that they can begin to develop and strengthen. After all, today's new recruits will be tomorrow's senior leaders.

John Adams, our second president, wrote to his son Thomas, "Public business my son, must always be done by somebody—it will be done by somebody or other—If wise men decline it others will not: if honest men refuse it, others will not." My fervent hope is that this book will encourage the wise and honest among us, especially young people, to consider serving our fellow Americans—with confidence that public institutions can be reformed and shaped to succeed.

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